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Tears of joy and sadness during Games period

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IT was impossible not to shed a tear of joy when our girls won the gold medal in rhythmic gymnastics last week. It was too emotional a moment not to. I wish I was at the stadium, but duties kept me in the office. Many of us had to be contented with the live television coverage.

But I could feel the strong bond of affinity with Thye Chee Kiat, Carolyn Au-Yong, El Regina Tajudin and S. Sarina when they did their lap of honour after their victory was announced.

The television commentators remarked that nobody ever did a lap of honour in gymnastics. Then again, Malaysia had never tasted such sweet success in this field.

It was obvious that the girls were the darlings of all Malaysians that night. The cheering, the applause and the tears of joy were all theirs.

They deserve every bit of accolade thrown their way. I haven't seen that display of emotions in other sports where Malaysia participated.

Perhaps, it was because the girls did it under extreme pressure. As I said, Malaysians have not really excelled in international gymnastics before. We've had some success in hockey and more known for our Thomas Cup victories. Which explained why the girls' victory was more meaningful than the rest.

The quartet, too, were obviously overjoyed at their success. And their victory must have been more memorable when it was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who, more than anyone else perhaps, made the Commonwealth Games a Malaysian reality.

To get a better feel of the atmosphere in the stadium, I increased the volume of my TV set. It was electrifying, to say the least. I was sure that the crowd must have been deliriously happy that night, a night to be remembered always, forever.

The Games came to an end on Monday night. There were as much tears of joy as there were of sadness. Joy because everyone associated with the Games saw we had accomplished what many had earlier doubted. We won a lot of praise, from local fans as well as from overseas. Sad because the happy moments had to end as the proverbial saying - all good things must come to an end.

While watching the closing ceremony - again live on TV - a thought flashed through my mind. The Sunday preceeding the Games' closing also had some heart-stopping moment, but of a different kind, and at a different stage. This was the gathering at the Dataran Merdeka of a crowd, claiming to be supporters of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

It was not known how many of them were true supporters of Anwar because some of those in the crowd were the ordinary rakyat on their Sunday family outing. Some were at the Dataran for the nightly concert held in conjunction with the Games to begin.

I suppose the rest had gathered to show their support for Anwar and at the same time demonstrate their open defiance of law and order. They were just as emotional as the crowd at the Games, but their vibes were negative, destructive and definitely unfriendly.

Apart from the ordinary rakyat who were caught among the hostile protesters, I know for a fact that curious on-lookers make for a sizeable number. Some came on foot, some on motorbikes. They were ordinary salaried men who came to see what the fuss was all about.

That the hardcore supporters were there I have no doubt whatsoever. But

I doubt whether they are law-abiding, peace-loving believers of democracy. Many must have lost their ability to rationalise situations and are now operating on the other side of law and order.

I know that many of us are saddened by this defiance, this gross disrespect for harmony in our society. I hope they have time to gather their thoughts and fall back on time-tested formulas for seeking the truth.

Taking an issue to the streets and endangering lives and destroying property is certainly not the best way to seek redress.

A Puan Halimah I met at a sundry shop a few days ago had some telling comments. In her 60s, she was shown posters of Anwar and fliers inviting people to the Dataran this weekend. Puan Halimah had this to say: "I like to be PM one day. I'm sure Anwar wants to be PM too.

"But why choose the hard way, the violent way. Why rile the crowd? Why not wait for a proper election and test your popularity then? Pergi undilah, jangan bikin kacau. Orang mau cari makan pun susah (Go to the ballot box. Don't create trouble, we want to earn our living peacefully)."

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