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Time to show political maturity

THE continuing infractions of the law by reformasi supporters following Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's conviction have caused great inconvenience to the public, sowed fear and smeared the country's image. Street violence should be condemned and stopped since unrestrained, it threatens to put the nation into a vortex of turmoil.

Failure to stop it tantamounts to a failure in the Government's basic duty to protect the lives and property of citizens. Certainly, firm and fair action is vital to end the savagery on the streets. The confrontational and provocative posturing of the protesters show they are hell-bent on submerging the Federal capital in chaos. They are emboldened by the opposition's seeming helplessness in stopping their senseless action. Parti Keadilan Nasional's earlier statement to a foreign media that it has no control over whether its supporters will stop demonstrating and chairman Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail's denial that the demonstrators are linked to the party not only sound hollow but offend the sensibilities of the citizenry who saw the party's flags, party badges and the reformasi bandanas and heard the anti-government invective which reflected the party's aspirations.

This is the test of leadership for Keadilan and the opposition parties whose members partake in street action. The inability to control its rowdy supporters suggests effete leadership whose cord to the led is frayed. Wan Azizah's contention that the street violence was "overblown, manipulated and publicised to smear Anwar's reputation and taint her public image" is drivel considering that scenes of the street action become cover stories for foreign magazines such as The Economist. Such publicity led to the presumption by the Washington-based Heritage Foundation that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad "has flouted international human rights standards by cracking down on his country's opposition".

As each and every Malaysian would vouch for, such publicity smears the image of the country and certainly, does not advance the national cause. The present Government does not reap political dividends from such publicity. The ugly scenes have forced many to ask whether the wanton acts are the embodiment of Anwarism. Their action shows a spirit contracted in its views and selfish in its objectives and a conduct hostile to the best interests of the public. Or that Anwarism suffers from schizophrenia as indicated from the shouts for justice, which were accompanied by the disruption of law and order.

As for all the rumours, those accusing the Government of not working for the interest of the common good and waging conspiracies are, in reality, trafficking conspiracy theories. With the general election imminent, the political wrangling will intensify. But the opposition must not insult the competence and the integrity of the voters. The rakyat will decide who will run the country when they go to the ballot box.

The citizenry would like to see the opposition display political maturity and not act as opportunists who nurture street violence. Such acts do not win them the affection of the rakyat or earn their respect. Malaysia has always been seen as a stable country, its electoral process sound and the opposition is allowed to have its say. It is sad that the Government is forced to give a reassurance that Kuala Lumpur is safe and stable.

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