

# 'People power' not the way to remove legitimate govt

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The view put forward by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that street violence begets similar street violence is borne out in the Philippines.

In 1986, President Marcos was overthrown by the so-called "people power". Three months ago, President Estrada was run out of office by a show of force by the people, and now, Gloria Arroyo is facing the same challenge by massive crowds intent on removing her.

In Indonesia, mobs demonstrated and created mayhem to change the government. Suharto and Habibie have fallen and the current president, Abdurrahman Wahid, is confronted with the same thing.

It has become a trend to abandon the democratic process, resort to mob rule and create pandemonium to achieve change. The burning question is whether we can accept this sort of action to bring about a new leadership, based on the whims and fancies of disgruntled persons who find it convenient to whip up a frenzied mob, or do we behave in a more civilised manner and be faithful to the constitutional process?

Leaders may have their faults, but this is not the way to dispose of them, especially when they have not really been tyrants. It shows political immaturity and a lack of culture.

Democracy as it is practised in Asia is not perfect, but that does not mean that it should be thrown to the winds. Ways and means will have to be found to peacefully improve current systems of governance.

The painful fact remains that the newly emerging economies of Southeast Asia can ill afford riots and

demonstrations. Investment demands political stability, and riots are hardly the way to portray that.

In their enthusiasm to destroy a democratically elected leadership, the people who resort to street violence fail to realise the damage they are causing to the economy of their nation. It is they who will suffer in the end.

And let us not be lulled into complacency by claims that such assemblies are peaceful. They never are. Even demonstrations in Seattle, Quebec and Melbourne against the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and globalisation turned ugly, with untold damage to public and private property, not to mention bodily harm.

Then there are democracies in Asia and Africa that took off quite happily at the time of independence, only to be rudely replaced by army coups and consequent military regimes. In some, rule by the people returned, but coups recurred.

The point is, once there has been a precedent, the threat will continue to loom, which is why departures from democracy should never be allowed to occur.

In the Malaysian context, the public are reminded that the current administration has been democratically elected by the people. The Barisan Nasional government may have its weaknesses but it surely deserves a fair chance to show that it can continue to serve the people. In fact, parties that resort to violence and demonstrations should be rejected outright when the time comes to vote.

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