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Stop diehards from running amok

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THE Malaysian Constitution is a law for rulers and rakyat (people), and covers with its shield of protection all classes of men and women at all times and under all circumstances.

We do not have to hold another general election until 2004, having had one in November 1999.

To make our democracy work, eligible Malaysians must be participants, not simply talkers and observers. He who does not vote has no right to complain and criticise.

As Churchill said: "At bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man (woman), walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper - no amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of the point."

We are still over three years away from the eleventh general election, yet the political temperature is climbing fast.

The run-up to the polls seems to have already begun. Reading and rereading of the Bumiputera pulse and mood, anticipating and countering the many Chinese demands and the not-so mind-boggling expectations of Malaysian Indians and other Malaysians.

While the ruling coalition parties are busy governing and some of its wayward leaders while away the day deciding which wife or mistress to share the night with or which nightspot to patronise, the Opposition parties hold hundreds of ceramah (political talks) nightly nationwide and hatch plans and select districts and towns to start demonstrations and even create violence in order to topple the democratically-elected government in the last general election in which they participated and made substantial gains.

The Opposition's weakness, I think, is its obsession with causing the downfall of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. It should instead concentrate on preparing for the next general election if it believes in democracy, as it often states it does.

It should vigorously and democratically pursue its political ideals and work to reduce the Barisan Nasional's majority, something more likely to succeed than taking on the Government through violence. Keadilan, the party planning the demonstrations, is jeopardising our peace. I need to caution the party - don't be daft. Malaysia is not Indonesia, nor the Philippines or Serbia.

I hope Datuk Fadzil Noor, Lim Kit Siang and Datin Seri Wan Azizah Ismail and Dr Chandra Muzaffar still have attachment and commitment like that of Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, the Menteri Besar of Kelantan, to democratic process and constitutional means of achieving power.

The election and, more important, the traditional Malaysian values of loving peace, stability and the maintenance of law and order and racial harmony, the spirit of live and let live must prevail until Parliament is dissolved.

For DAP joining hands with Pas and Keadilan, I conclude, was and is a tragic political misjudgment and a betrayal of the Chinese. The Sarawak DAP realises this and has therefore pulled out from the Barisan Alternative. I shall defend DAP's freedom to do what it wants, but whether it was a judicious move is another story.

Lim's good friend, French Socialist MP Didier Bolaud, has told him and

his son, Lim Guan Eng, that he is not happy with DAP's continuing close co-operation with Pas because of its fundamentalist brand of political Islam.

Bolaud was quoted as having said, "I will not hide my concerns over the rise of Pas and its fundamentalist brand of Islam. I am unhappy with DAP's alliance with Pas because their ideologies are so different.

"For us, this is unacceptable, especially when one party wants to set up an Islamic state instead of a secular democratic government.

"I have told Kit Siang this many times: 'You cannot marry a fish and a rabbit. We were convinced that the DAP will end up the loser'."

Kit Siang had told Bolaud after the DAP's disastrous performance in the 1999 general election that he had followed a "disasterous course".

Kit Siang's problem, like his friends in the Opposition, is his obsession to ensure Dr Mahathir's political demise accompanied by humiliation.

In spite of Bolaud's advice, Teluk Kemang, Lunas and Sarawak, DAP appears to have learned nothing. It still wants to help Pas defeat Umno and then deal with Pas. That will then be too late for the nation. Kelantan and Terengganu are not good yardsticks to measure Pas. It will be a different Pas when it gets power at the centre.

I have no doubt whatsoever that Pas will implement Hudud law a la Pas when it comes to power. It might give the Chinese a sweetener in the form of a second deputy prime minister and some concession on culture and language. But on other matters Pas will be very firm. That is the basis of its policy, so non-Muslims should not kid themselves about Pas tolerance.

It may not go so far as the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the inspiration for its policies are derived from the same source.

However, there is a common feature in all Malaysian political parties: the poverty of young talent in the upper echelons, hence hampering efforts for reform. In Umno, even among the second echelon only one is below 40 - Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein and he will be 40 well before the next polls.

Whether Hishamuddin has prime ministerial timber or is a potential Umno leader and bearer of the BN torch is another question.

He told me he has been able so far to construct a wall between himself and his relatives' and other politicians' sleaze. Well, he should be careful where he goes for holidays and with whom.

Hishamuddin should acquire better political instincts if he is to fulfil the expectations of all Malaysians.

I do not believe, though, it is desirable and even ideal to have multi-racial parties, not while Suqiu exists, Pas lives and Umno, MCA and MIC are around. DAP remains an essentially Chinese party, Parti Rakyat Malaysia is almost exclusively Malay, while Keadilan is a Malay-majority based and Malay-led organisation.

Many of the Opposition leaders are not in private what they project in public. They always appear to need to watch their language. I must say they have managed to hold their tongues quite well so far. They are brought together only by their hatred of Dr Mahathir. The PM is their collective responsibility and action.

I would like to impress upon you what Bolaud had said: "It would really be a pity if Pas wins power and overturns whatever has been built. It will be a terrible waste for Malaysia."

He advised the Government to be more flexible to contain Islamic fundamentalists - it has to prevent the young Malaysians and intellectuals from going to Pas, adding, "We have seen how it starts and we fear how it will end."

I am sad the Opposition cannot posture itself as more honourable. What a let-down. I am yet to be convinced the Opposition is a true Opposition

group.

It should show itself as less rapacious for power and instead more interested in upholding a democratic process, not trying to achieve power via violent Indonesian-style street demonstrations which are being planned for April and beyond.

Let me remind Malaysians of what Franklin D. Roosevelt said a year after I was born, "Let no Americans forget that government is themselves and not an alien power over them. "The ultimate rulers of American democracy are not a president and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the Maerican voters."

In the 1999 general election the Malaysian voters determined which parties they wanted. And until they change their minds in 2004 or earlier, demonstrations cannot and must not be allowed to change, whatever the cost, to change their mandate. No Government which has self-esteem will allow the demo diehards to run amok.

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