

The follies of Umno and the EC
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On Nov 10, 2007, around 40,000 protestors made their way towards Istana Negara in Bersih's first march for clean and fair elections. Did it make a difference? Yes.

The rakyat experienced change. It galvanised them by reinforcing their belief that together they could prove a point - that Umno is not infallible. That Umno is not great. That Umno has an Achilles heel which will bring it down: Arrogance.

abdullah ahmad badawi pm anti inflation pc 090608After 2007, the promises from both Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (left), the prime minister at the time, and the Election Commission (EC) have all come to nought.

As a result of this, Bersih 2.0 was bound to happen. The rakyat half expected Umno and its loyal and obedient servant, the EC, to break whatever pledges they made. Five years on, have we seen any of the Bersih's demands implemented?

In 2007, Abdullah said that the EC had acceded and would comply with many of the demands of Bersih.

azlan“They wanted a transparent ballot box and the use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting. The EC has agreed to that. Other than that, they can negotiate with the commission.”

The EC now says that ink is only for backward countries. They forget that we are as backward as any other banana republic.

What use is a transparent ballot box when it is alleged that boxes stuffed with BN-only votes are swapped with those from the actual polling station?

'The same body since independence'

In the 2007 report by Malaysiakini, Abdullah thought it incredulous that the opposition kept finding fault with the EC “despite the commission being the same body since independence”.

Umno/BN has also been in power since independence. Could this be significant?

Perhaps, Abdullah is unaware that something that has been around for aeons is no proof that it is sound, or reliable. All he need do is look at the deadwood in his civil service. They have been around for ages, perhaps all their working life and yet they can be the most unproductive and inefficient.

Abdullah also said, “Does that mean that in this country the opposition cannot win? Of course they can. In Kelantan, PAS has formed the government numerous times. Then they won in Terengganu.

“They can win. If we control everything, there is no way they can win. But that is not our way. We want the public to sincerely tell us what they want and we will respect the results of an election.”

Fast-forward to 2011 and various Umno supporters opine the same, when they claim that the EC is fair and that the opposition control of five states after the 2008 GE was proof enough.

Did they ever stop to consider that if there had been no gerrymandering, fraud, vote- buying and other malpractices, then the opposition might have had a clean sweep through most, if not all the states and not just the five?

If Umno and EC needed further reminders, the former European Commission envoy, Thierry Rommel, said that the use of the ISA and violent measures to prevent the 2007 Bersih rally from taking place, meant that Malaysia still lived under a state of emergency.

He cited the short election campaigning period, the media bias towards the ruling party and said, "It's not a secret that elections are not fair."

Many might recall Abdullah's vow to suppress the rally which was also termed illegal and banned because "...there have never been peaceful gatherings."

He instructed the PDRM to quell the march and to make arrests. Bersih organisers were termed "stubborn", "defiant" and law-breakers.

He also said, "Tapi saya mesti kata saya pantang dicabar (Don't dare to contradict anything I say)."

Infantile remarks

Perhaps Umno can recall more of their infantile remarks made after the Bersih 2007 rally.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz called the opposition names such as "pondan" (wimps) and that the "brains of opposition members do not function well."

In an interview with Al-Jazeera, both Nazri and the Umno Youth deputy chief then, Khairy Jamaluddin, agreed that "there was nothing wrong with the system and that it worked well."

Five years later, in the countdown towards the July 9 Walk for Democracy, similar tactics are being used to jeopardise the Bersih 2.0 march.

As before, the government has called the march illegal and using fear as its weapon, said that all protests would end in violence.

In 2007, state television was asked to endlessly repeat scenes of demonstrations around the world which portrayed violence. Today, the same is being asked of the media.

Anyone wearing the yellow Bersih T-shirt and other paraphernalia promoting the rally is arrested. Scores of people besides the NGOs, individuals and opposition politicians have been hounded by the police. There have been accusations of foreign interference to topple the Malaysian government.

In 2007, Abdullah said that the Bersih march would be "an inconvenience to the public as well as shop owners in the city".

His childish effort to deflect attention from proper governance seems to be concentrated on shoppers' comfort.

Today, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin joined the cabinet chorus and described the Bersih rally as politically-motivated and a threat to national security as well as the country's reputation.

The Communications, Information and Culture Minister, Rais Yatim (left), claimed that Bersih was going to topple the government and cause widespread unrest. He also claimed that the Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) had links with communism, to cause chaos.

Umno and the EC have forgotten the original aims of the Bersih 2007 rally and none of the promises have been upheld. Neither Umno nor the EC have learned their lessons.

Why should we believe them when they say they will discuss electoral reform only if we stop marching for Bersih 2.0?

Remember what the Kuala Lumpur chief police officer Zulhasnan Najib Baharuddin said when he was asked about journalists being attacked by his policemen during the 2007 march?

He remarked, "Are there reports? It has not been brought to my attention."

So it appears that Umno, the EC and the police have short memories, or are in denial or simply lie.

And they wonder why the rakyat desires Bersih 2.0?

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