

**Agong's gesture can resuscitate monarchy**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 5, 2011**

The Agong, by one of those inspirations in which the heart and mind unite in a unique gesture, has triggered a series of moves that could well end the logjam in which antagonists in the potentially confrontational marches of July 9 are snared.

The striking panache of the His Majesty's gesture, wherein he issued a public statement calling for consultations between the contending parties, is that it can help rescue the concept of the constitutional monarchy from the depredations caused by the constitutional amendments of the mid-1980s and the early 1990s.

If one could say that the country's Merdeka Constitution of 1957 gilded the lily by embedding the concept of the constitutional monarchy, in an age when democracy's inherent egalitarianism would tend to erode monarchy, Malaysian parliaments of the mid-1980s and early 1990s shredded it with amendments that rendered the concept wan and witless.

The Agong now has the chance to resuscitate the concept of the constitutional monarchy, from the vitiations it suffered in earlier decades, by granting the organisers of the Bersih 2.0 march an audience in which they would be bound to follow the advice he gives them.

No doubt that advice would forestall the looming confrontation between Bersih and Perkasa, with the police, in a stance of dubious neutrality, supervening to douse all comers.

Bersih has requested for the royal audience in response to the Agong's statement of Sunday evening where His Majesty, invoking the symbolic power of his office to forge national concord, called for consultations rather than confrontation.

It would be lese majeste for Bersih to ignore the royal overture. In fact, Bersih's almost immediate response of intent to conciliate was powerful testimony of the potency of the constitutional monarchy to initiate concord – evidence, if that were needed, of the office's unique powers in that regard.

**There lies the raison de'tre of the constitutional monarchy.**

From that standpoint, the call by Perkasa's chief, Ibrahim Ali, that the Agong ought to look askance at Bersih's response to his overture displays a meanness of spirit that exposes Perkasa's essential stance: the monarchy is just another instrument to be manipulated for political ends.

Now that the Agong has triggered a concatenation of circumstances that could eventually ease the looming logjam on July 9, he could subtly ease the democratic process in Malaysia towards greater transparency.

That would indirectly help strengthen the concept and relevance of the constitutional monarchy in Malaysia.

That lily, shredded by the constitutional amendments of mid-1980s and early 1990s, was on course for sprucing by the royal house of Perak in the early part of the last decade.

The display of erudition emanating from discourses on a variety of public issues by scions of that royal house raised hopes that the concept of the constitutional monarchy was in for a season of strengthening.

However, those incipient hopes were rudely dashed by events in early 2009 when Perak saw an acrimonious change of government following crossovers by legislators who hitherto were part of the ruling coalition.

The entire episode retrospectively rendered a cynical hue to lofty pronouncements that had come from the very figures that an appraising public had felt would resuscitate the concept of the constitutional monarchy.

Hope, they say, is a good breakfast but a lean supper. But it is also true that in a democracy, hope survives its very withering in that the process gives scope for redemption, for second acts which can rescue earlier mistakes or missed opportunities.

That's one of the enduring appeals of democracy: it does not freeze one in original error.

Thus the situation that obtains today where the Agong has intervened to shift a potentially explosive stalemate towards a negotiated settlement enables a watching public to ponder anew the value and role of constitutional monarchy in Malaysia's evolving democracy.

It is a role that the constitutional amendments of the mid-1980s and the early 1990s have seemingly settled - to the institution's detriment.

But events of the last few days have conspired to throw up the question into sharper relief.

To be sure, there is no precise dictionary of gestures by which His Majesty can signal his intent, since every gesture and expression depends for its meaning on the individual making it and the culture in which it takes place.

Already, there have been conflicting interpretations of the Agong's statement issued on Sunday evening. But the high symbolism of the royal office inevitably entails that noble interpretation is de rigueur.

Bersih has interpreted the Agong's gesture in that vein. It is now for the other antagonists to follow in like vein and like spirit so the looming logjam eases towards a settlement.

In its aftermath, as constructive sequel, pundits and politicians can restart discussion of the relevance of a renewed constitutional monarchy in Malaysia.

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