

A M'sian Spring only way to true Merdeka
Malaysiakini.com
September 1,2011

As the nation marches towards its 54th Merdeka celebrations, the Umno-led BN coalition government continues to lead the nation with no accountability. Not even a semblance of it lurking in the shadows. Umno's leadership has failed the people making it unlikely that Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's bruises would disappear anytime soon.

Najib's self-styled unity slogan, 1Malaysia, and public claims of a united nation only go to show the premier's disconnect from ground reality. What is worse is that the simmering racial and religious tension in the country is carefully engineered by Najib & Co.

In Malaysia, stirring racial and religious sentiments have become fashionable ways of ensuring the ruling elite's continued hold on power. Playing up issues of apostasy, indulging in smear campaigns against opposition politicians, openly playing double standards, using the police to instill a climate of fear among the people, engaging in backdoor deals to win the next election are some of the crucial issues gripping the nation.

But just like over the years, we see the government preparing an ambiance of pomp and glamour to usher in the country's 54th year of independence from British rule. Najib has even thought out a costume and colour theme for the celebrations.

It is delusions to believe that a fusion of dances and colourful parade would make brewing discontent on the ground go away. Najib must know, by now, that this is no child's play.

Come Merdeka day, we would watch the Malays, Chinese and Indians taking part in the parade, as a sign of unity and mutual respect for each other. And yet this neat juxtaposition is misleading.

In reality, we have seen some leaders promising bloodshed over unverified allegations of proselytisation by some churches.

These vile-mouthed villains have no qualms reading out statements which stoke racial sentiments outside police stations. While the government acts with lightning speed to nab opposition politicians and human rights activists for alleged illegal gathering, they ignore the ramblings of these political leaders.

Government-owned print and electronic media are given a free hand to further fan racial flames in the country. Opposition newspapers and alternative media have to resort to self-censorship or have their publishing licenses revoked. The online media are constantly harassed for writing the truth.

Government channel, RTM1, has falsely linked myself and my colleagues Ean Yong Hin, Boo Cheng Hau, Tan Kok Wai, and Parti Sosialis Malaysia's Nasir Hashim to a Facebook group called the Murtads in Malaysia and Singapore.

Checks with my Facebook friends have shown that many were added to the group as the administrator of these groups do not need permission before doing so. But the irresponsible reporting by the television station caricatures the extent of dirty politics in the country.

Government leaders certainly know stirring racial sentiments could get out of control. The nation had borne witness to the riots of 1969 and 2001. But potentially damning issues are fashioned by Umno leaders to frighten the Malays and bring them back to the party fold.

After all, Umno and BN leaders are adamant about winning the next general election at all cost.

The government's only concern is about winning the four states ruled by the opposition and ensuring

two-thirds majority in Parliament. In order to see that materialise, government's leaders are injecting venom into our political veins without caring two hoots about the consequences of their actions.

Playing up racial sensitivities is not their only devious plan. It is also registering Permanent Residence (PR) holders and illegal immigrants to shore up its voter bank. The Election Commission is nonchalant about revamping the electoral system and is aligned with the government, raising questions about the integrity of the electoral body.

Although the EC and government are waltzing together, locked in each others' arms, the people are getting fed-up with decades of abuses which are ingrained in the electoral system.

Their dissatisfaction was candidly marked when tens of thousands of people defied police orders and rallied on the streets, despite the presence of stern-looking cops and baton-wielding anti-riot policemen, to call for free and fair elections.

Glitzy decorations and blaring sounds would dominate the Merdeka celebrations. But, in my mind, the festivities would be haunted by Teoh Beng Hock's ghost. It would also be infused with the pain and suffering of Teoh's parents, family members and friends.

It is hard to imagine celebrating victory while the three Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) officers who, according to the Royal Commission of Inquiry, tortured him to commit suicide remain unpunished.

While no one believes Teoh took his own life, it is doubly appalling that some officers have escaped punishment despite the Commission establishing that physical abuse and torture did take place.

We continue to see blatant cover-ups in Ahmad Sarbani's case which also occurred in a MACC building. Meanwhile, deaths in police custody are being swept under the carpet, corruption is rampant, the judiciary's image remains tainted, legitimate dissent is clamped down using various preventive laws, human rights workers are persecuted and opposition politicians are targeted to score brownie points with the people.

Malaysia has many lessons to learn from events unfolding around the world. The rule of dictators is coming to an end like in the case of Libya.

Tens of thousands of people watched Indian activist Anna Hazare break his 13-day fast, which shook the nation. The diminutive man did not budge until the government agreed to implement a strong anti-corruption law.

This is peoples' power, whether it is the Arab spring revolution, the Indian rise against corruption or a change of leadership in neighbouring Singapore.

Umno leaders, therefore, must know that they cannot afford to repeat high-profile screw-ups. And they certainly cannot be foolish enough to believe that open non-accountability, shameless political ploys and unending abuse of power could be made to disappear in the glitz and glamour of a one-day Merdeka celebration.

Charles Santiago is Member of Parliament, Klang