

Don't confuse movement with action
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COMMENT If the court allows the subpoenas on Prime Minister Najib Razak and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, in Sodomy II to be set aside today, it would be the second time the couple is allowed to disconnect from a case they are linked to inadvertently or otherwise.

razak baginda acquitted 311008 12In the Altantuya Shaariibuu murder case, there were undisputed records of a mobile phone communication Najib had with one of the initially accused, Abdul Razak Baginda (left), in which the then deputy prime minister had urged Razak Baginda to stay cool in the teeth of an ongoing police investigation into the Mongolian woman's murder.

The advice was offered just as Najib was going to keep an appointment with the inspector-general of police.

Still, the courts did not find it necessary to call Najib to testify, neither his wife despite members of her security detail eventually being charged and found guilty of the murder.

'Cool' is a word that's now in vogue, given the PM's campaign to win over Malaysia's young voters - reputedly making up 25 percent of the present 12 million electorate - to the BN's side.

'Cool' is not really cool if it seeks to evade pressure. "Grace under pressure," was Hemingway's famously pithy definition of courage. Tweak the description - "Unperturbed in duress" - and you would get an accurate, if less limpid, sense of what is 'cool' is.

The public is now familiar with the PM's affinity for what's in vogue, like liberalising measures towards electoral reform, participatory democracy, and race quota removals.

But it is not sure if he is really knows both text and texture of what he considers to be in vogue.

DPM Musa testified in Merdeka Uni case

Certainly, he is not like the authoritarian Humpty Dumpty - "A word is anything I say it means"; but he could use an understanding of the meaning of some Hemingway advice for a friend: "Don't confuse movement with action."

The PM's moves towards creating the "best democracy" are in danger of becoming merely feints in that direction rather than full-blown forays if he omits to go the distance, like submitting to testimony in a case to which he is linked.

ahmad mustapha book lauch by musa hitam 141107If he does he will become only the third sitting PM, or DPM, or former PM, to submit to due process of law.

The first instance was when deputy prime minister Musa Hitam (right) appeared in court in the case Chinese educationists brought against the government in the Merdeka University controversy in 1982.

Musa, then the DPM, was called to testify because he was the education minister when the move by Chinese educationists to petition to set up a private university where Mandarin would be the main medium of instruction was rejected by the government.

In that case, Musa testified with aplomb, submitting to examination by Michael Beloff, a Queen's Counsel

hired by the Chinese education movement to espouse their brief.

Mahathir's memory lapses

The second instance of when a top political personage submitted to due process was when former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamed agreed to testify before a royal commission in the VK Lingam videotape affair.

It was not a full-fledged court hearing but royal commissions are close to court proceedings because witnesses called to testify do so under oath.

lingam tape inquiry day 4 170108 mahathirIn typically combative style, Mahathir (left) conveyed through his counsel that he was willing to submit to questions, within or outside the RC's terms of reference, and then proceeded, upon testifying, to suffer memory lapses when responding to questions that incommoded him. But at least, he submitted to testimony.

Nobody expects Najib to submit to testimony in Sodomy II the way Musa Hitam did with panache in 1982 in the Merdeka University case.

But at least, he could do 'a Mahathir' vis-à-vis the royal commission on the Lingam tape and that would count as "action" which would not be merely "movement" in the Hemingway sense.

For Najib, it's not enough to be merely in vogue. In order to lead from the front, one must be in earnest.

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