

Rise of unelected ministers

Malaysiakini.com

November 21 ,2011

by Mariam Mokhtar

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's impressive performance in a "popularity poll" conducted by the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), has nothing to do with his leadership qualities or his ability to charm the voters.

His apparent rise in popularity is in proportion to his absence from the country. In short, the electorate is glad he is absent from Malaysia.

The IIUM lecturer who devised the poll may have his own reasons for attributing Najib's enhanced popularity to "his relentless efforts to touch base with the people and steer the country to a promising future".

The PM is besotted with his image as an international statesman and swells with pride when he shakes the hands of the big players like Hu Jintao and Barack Obama. But pride comes before a fall.

Najib (left) has taken several overseas trips since he became PM and it is difficult to keep track of him. Last month, he was in Indonesia, China, Australia, and twice in Saudi Arabia.

One thing is clear. He emulates former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad by being 'out-of-town' during national crises.

Mahathir allegedly 'disappeared' during the nationwide clampdown of Operation Lalang in October 1987. It possibly been pre-arranged that Hanif Omar, the IGP at the time, would take the rap and try to leave Mahathir smelling of roses.

In the last fortnight, our unelected PM was in Hawaii for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) followed by a Bali visit to attend the East Asia summit. He should have stayed at home, to deal with the multi-million ringgit misuse of public funds by the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC).

The unelected Women, Family and Community Development Minister, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, is embroiled in the NFC crisis.

Token official visit

The office of Prime Minister of Malaysia is cheapened by revelations that Najib had arranged a token official visit, during his personal holiday, as an excuse to get the taxpayer to fund, in full, his travelling expenses for him and his extensive entourage.

Last July, after visits to Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom and the Vatican, the PM was forced to cut short his holiday to Italy and return home. He had to respond to mounting condemnation of the violent assault against the rakyat during the Bersih 2.0 rally, and try to salvage his reputation. He also had to deal with an Umno plot to oust him from power, allegedly led by his deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin.

More of Najib's insecurities were revealed in the deportation order placed on William Bourdon who was in Malaysia in relation to the Scorpene case.

Najib was also perturbed that the veteran Umno leader Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (right) was launching Angkatan Amanah Merdeka (Amanah) to revive the Tunku's true spirit of Merdeka.

Najib, the career politician, only knows life in the political fast lane. He has not struggled like most people to find funds for education or with applying for a job. He has even admitted that his trip on a luxury bus in Perak, was his first bus journey.

Even the most hardened and cynical politicians will balk at using someone else's misfortune to boost their image. Not Najib. He cut short another holiday, in Australia to return home, ostensibly saddened by the death of a journalist in war-torn Somalia.

Instead of leaving the family to grieve in private, Najib managed to turn it into a publicity circus by showing his mock compassion.

Disturbing questions

The NFC scandal raises very disturbing questions about our version of democracy. Who benefits from our democratic process?

Why are the unelected ministers given a major say in the running of our country? Why are the chosen few from Umno's political elite manipulating the role of government? Why are the controls to check such impropriety not in place? Where is the enforcement?

Why are the members of royalty who choose to be vocal in some matters, silent when it comes to large-scale corruption and allegations of fraud on a grand scale?

Najib's handling of Umno is rooted in cronyism. How can he speak out against Shahrizat when he has so many skeletons in his own closet?

That is why the Umno businesses and those of their cronies are run like a family-business empire. It is like the mafia, with different sections of the business managed by different branches of the family. No one betrays the other. Anyone who tries is silenced or risks having his livelihood threatened.

Muhyiddin, who has been tasked to deal with the NFC scandal gives the impression of being out of his depth, really he is just covering up a crime, for one of his cronies.

He claims that Shahrizat (left) had nothing to do with the NFC, which is managed by her husband and her children. He did not think Shahrizat had cause to resign. Then he left it for the people to decide.

He is right. The rakyat thinks that Shahrizat should be suspended without any pay whilst investigations are carried out quickly. If found guilty, she should be made to repay every sen, and spend time in jail.

That goes for him (Muhyiddin) too for misleading the public. The project was approved when he was agriculture minister. He was reticent and sparse with information, only giving out the bare minimum when forced. MPs are accountable to Parliament, and Parliament is accountable to the rakyat.

Tighten belts

Interestingly, it was another unelected minister, Idris Jala who flip-flopped between saying that Malaysia was going bankrupt and doing all right economically.

Last year he said we would have to tighten our belts but a few weeks ago, he said we would manage.

Can he be so confident when ministers abuse public funds and treat them as their own bank account?

The IIUM popularity survey concluded that PKR's Anwar Ibrahim, Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Abdul Aziz and Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng (left) declined in popularity, unlike Najib and Mahathir.

The poll asked 1,500 Malay, Chinese and Indian registered voters, how satisfied they were with the leadership qualities of the five.

In October 2008, 35% Malay, 33% Chinese and 41% Indian respondents expressed satisfaction with

Najib. In July 2011, their approval increased to 59%, 45% and 62%, respectively.

This survey has left many members of the rakyat wondering if a representative cross section of the public was sampled. They also wondered if these 1,500 registered voters were "real voters" or "phantom voters".

As the poll suggests that Najib is so popular now, he might want to call the elections soon, despite the scandals, accusations of electoral fraud and revelations of expensive purchases which are surfacing almost every week.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/181947>