

Politics of fear and division
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's government is increasingly showing a pattern of tacit support for violence and even threats of "war" by ultra Malay elements like Perkasa as Putrajaya contemplates losing its grip on power after the 13th general election, if not outright capitulation.

NONENot only has a government failed to crack down on extremists' calls to arms against perceived threats to Islam and decades of Malay economic and corporate dominance, ministers, political allies and even the prime minister himself have orchestrated an environment of fear and division, pitting one race against the rest of multi-ethnic Malaysia.

Otherwise, Barisan Nasional and its allies have watched and cheered as the proverbial keris has once again been drawn.

It suits BN today, as it attempts to deflect attention from a cascade of corruption being revealed by multi-racial opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat and ever more strident support for change of government.

Putrajaya's strategy is to portray such assaults on its legitimacy as the beginning of the end to a presumed constitutional privilege for Malays, the relegation of Islam to just-another-religion status in an essentially secular nation and the demise of the Malay sultanate, in whose lineage are the supreme religious leaders of all Malaysian Muslims.

The informed Malaysian can only see it as yet another wayward wayang kulit (shadow play) of BN prevarication, denial of the inevitable and the coalition government's inability to account for economic, social and moral sins.

Most of us in this rainbow fabric of races do not and will not harbour such leanings.

But words are nourishment, even poisonous words, and today's affronts and threats to civil society by groups such as Perkasa may become tomorrow's anything but auspicious dragon that can't be controlled, and we would do well to recognise extremism for what it is, lest the talk becomes the walk.

rela members 241204The most recent and alarming narrative thread from BN is Rela, a largely Malay corps of youth volunteers also known as Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia, or the Peoples' Volunteer Alliance.

Rela will be with this government

To put matters into perspective, Najib himself says Rela entails a federal spend of hundreds of millions every year. It reportedly enjoys a membership of 2.8 million.

Early this month, the PM said in Kuala Lumpur: "When the chips are down, Rela will be with this government to defend the country."

While he was speaking to about 30,000 Rela members, whose umbrella body is already notorious in Malaysia for having shown itself as bearing vigilante colours, even an unarmed militia in waiting, Najib's message was clearly directed at the forces opposed to his government: "Do not cause havoc in this country because the 2.8 million Rela members will not stand idly by and watch the country descend into chaos."

In less than one month, Putrajaya has announced it will draw a new Rela Act, pay Rela volunteers an

additional RM2 an hour and proposed that members could be posted to other countries, in a membership drive for an organisation that Human Rights Watch in 2007 said should be disbanded.

And just in case a force of nearly three million is yet lacking when the chips are down and democracy seeks to rule, Putrajaya announced a RM6 million outlay on a virtual firing range, for Rela cadet practice.

Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein lauded the launch of the centre, saying he hoped young people training there would understand the predicaments police find themselves in.

"I ask those who accuse the police (of wrongful shooting)... to come to this centre. They can see for themselves what they will do when faced with the choice of shoot or be killed."

You could easily draw a line between today's moves on Rela and the weeks before July 9, 2011, when tens of thousands of Malaysians defied a police ban and threats of mass arrests to take to the streets of the capital under the Bersih flag.

NONEThey were demanding sweeping changes to the electoral process as well as its legislative instruments, and essentially telling the ruling coalition, 'your time is up, balik kampung'.

Here is where BN's art of war, in the face of likely defeat, probably began. This is when Najib's administration rolled out its politics of division and fear.

Barely 24 hours had passed since that watershed Saturday in Malaysian history when Najib told the NGO coalition and rally organiser Bersih, "Don't doubt our strength".

Speaking before a crowd of thousands that included martial arts (silat) groups, Najib reportedly said: "If we (Umno) gather one million members, it is more than enough. We can conquer Kuala Lumpur.

"If we want to create chaos, we can. But we uphold the laws of Malaysia, we like peace."

Then, as if dismissing any notion of the conciliatory gesture, he later thundered to the media: "This is just a part of Umno's strength.

"We gathered 6,000 members here today in a short amount of time... they are waiting for a signal, they're willing to do anything.

"If you mention or question Islam, they will rise up."

Bersih seen as threat to national security

Days earlier, as pressure continued to build around a hapless BN over the coming rally, the PM had described exponents of silat and other martial arts forms as a line of defence against such threats to national security as Bersih.

In attendance were Najib's predecessor, Abdullah Badawi, and members of Pertubuhan Seni Silat Lincah Malaysia (PSSLM), an association of Malay martial arts groups that had challenged Bersih's refusal to abandon the rally.

This was the same PSSLM whose leader Omardin Mauju had publicly declared: "We maintain our stand to go to 'war' if they (Bersih) still want to proceed with this illegal rally.

"If it happens, I cannot guarantee I can control the emotions of my members because they have been taught to act when faced with opposition."

The PM had himself set the tone for the heightened invective that sprouted during the Bersih lead-up:

"Who doesn't know Ambiga," he told another gathering of Umno's and their ilk, referring to Ambiga Sreenevasan, the Bersih chair.

"She's the one who threatened Islam," he said, in one fell swoop turning a lawyer, former Bar Council president and campaigner for reform into one who would fight Islam, a traitor to the country no less.

Presumably, the PM was speaking for the benefit of ultra Malays in his audience who would then take up the 'sacred fight'. And he was not to be disappointed.

He was ably abetted by Umno mouthpiece and Malay language daily Utusan Malaysia, which reported that Bersih was swimming in millions of ringgit that had been donated to it by a Christian group and that Ambiga was "angering Muslims and Malays".

Hallmarks of a police state

It would come as no surprise that Perkasa's Ibrahim Ali had taken the cue to refer to the Bersih leader as a "dangerous Hindu woman".

Ibrahim continued in his diatribe and explicitly warned the Chinese community not to participate in the rally. "Anything could happen", he said, knowing his pointed reference to the May 13, 1969, riots would strike home.

Penang DAP's Lim Guan Eng called the statement a "Nazi-like" threat against ethnic Chinese, accused Umno of fuelling racism and ultra religious fervour by not condemning the "Nazi like" threat and denounced Ibrahim's remarks as "vile and malicious... nothing short of seditious".

Since then, there have been bomb plots, death threats, sedition, traitorous citizens, threats of violent state crackdowns on further public rallies, scene after selected scene of sexual allegations that we will not elaborate upon any further - all the hallmarks of a police state.

Lately, pig heads have greeted Muslims at their mosques in acts that have been widely described as deliberate attempts to portray one race and one religion as being under siege by anti-Islamic elements.

Malaysians should be rightly terrified at BN's depth of desperation as Najib & Co, finding themselves caught between a rock and a really hard place, choose to fan the flames of mistrust, fear, hatred and violence among a multi-racial and secular community.

Realising it has gotten nowhere by showing Malaysians it will stop at nothing to deny Pakatan any form of victory at the 13th GE, it has embarked on a narrative on how forces may be marshalled to destroy any such victory, should it eventuate.

This is not Zimbabwe, East Timor, Burma, Iraq or Uganda. This is not Nazi Germany and the Sturmabteilung, the 'brown shirts'. This is Malaysia today.

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