

**Pre-polls warning: Goon squads on the loose**  
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COMMENT Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times, it's enemy action.

Discount the number of occasions and the notion that the targeted must take reciprocal action, but this aphoristic evaluation of a threat by a James Bond adversary, Auric Goldfinger, in the eponymous spy story must be employed by Pakatan Rakyat as cautionary wisdom vis-à-vis the growing number of occasions when goons have attacked and disrupted their public gatherings.

Thanks to videographers, who these days appear to be everywhere and are quick to upload their take on the Net, it is quite clear that lurking out there are marauders who want to impose mob rule on the people.

The incident that occurred in Penang on Sunday evening when an anti-Lynas gathering at the Esplanade turned ugly, with hecklers segueing into goons after an attempt to rattle the protective cordon around Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, is an ominous lesson on how things can get out of hand.

The post-incident pattern of accusation and response is by now plain for all to see.

It is not happenstance, it is not coincidence, it's formulaic: A public gathering is organised. Some of the organisers or attendees are attacked. Their sympathisers upload videos of the incident or phases of it after the attacked have lodged police reports and have denounced the named attackers.

In an Orwellian twist, the alleged perpetrators of the attack are quick on the counter: they accuse the targets of being the provocateurs, this in the face of video evidence of their culpability.

Meanwhile, it transpires that the police were either standing in the background twiddling thumbs, or they were nowhere to be seen.

Consider it lucky the cops play dumb or when they are invisible; things could be worse.

For example, the fuzz could issue statements that fault the organisers of the gatherings for some nebulous flaw in their carriage.

That's when you know the odds on the organisers have risen exponentially.

The entire tableau - after the disruption of an All But Umno (ABU) gathering in Klang a few weeks ago had adumbrated the pattern - is alarming.

One should ask: What's next?

Do the public wait for bodies like that of another Teoh Beng Hock or Ahmad Sarbaini to tumble out of some high-rise office building window or some closet before we know that dastardly conduct, left unchecked, will eventuate in the monstrous?

Or do the concerned just wring their hands in frustration and wait for the general election?

Polls would be the best thing to happen

Come to think of it, the general election would be the best thing to happen because it would, at least, impose a terminal point to the pattern of gathering-incident-disputed aftermath that is now increasingly the case.

Sure, the general election would bring with it anxiety over whether the powers-that-be would be acquiescent if the results do not favour them.

Considering that no less than the prime minister himself has been on record as saying that BN types must be prepared to defend Putrajaya, if need be with their crushed bodies, the worry over whether the incumbents would be irenic in the face of their immiseration is justified.

But at least an election would mandate a pause to the contretemps.  
And in yielding a result - whether it be a rout, a close win for one side or the other, or a hung parliament - the decision of voters would be cathartic.

This would be an amelioration of the present situation of rallies marred by incidents in which the level of violence is mounting.

But there are matters to be sorted out first before a resort to the ballot can be allowed to take place.

Parliament opens for the year in less than two weeks, during which session some sort of electoral reform will be passed, while a proposed new civil service salary scheme is reworked to make it more equable to the lower echelons.

This would mean more time for protraction of the pre-polls fever - time enough for the goons to work their poison into the political bloodstream.

Perhaps it would help for Pakatan Rakyat to meet with the prime minister if only to discuss matters to forestall an escalation of the troubles of recent days.

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