

## **Transition of power: Open letter to political parties**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**April 24, 2012**

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With the general election imminent, one key question remains yet unanswered: Will the Barisan Nasional respect the outcome of the polls and ensure a peaceful transition of power?

This is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar sensitive question - unasked in our repressed mass media, largely unexplored by political analysts, never-to-be-publicly wondered but lurking in the minds of many concerned Malaysians.

One exception to the unwritten rule of never posing such a politically incorrect question took place in a private lunch talk organised by the Royal Selangor Club (RSC) for its members early this year.

najib in penang usm dialogue 220412The Jan 12 event featuring Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left) as speaker had attracted an audience of more than 200.

A RSC member (who identified himself as the son of a former long-serving staff of Najib's father, the late Abdul Razak Hussein) asked the following towards the end of the talk:

"Mr Prime Minister, would you make the transition of the government for Pakatan a smooth one if the opposition wins the next general election?"

According to some of those present, after some hesitation the prime minister responded: "I do not have to answer that question" or words to that effect; following which he abruptly left, ostensibly for another function.

Why did the Prime Minister not respond? The PM may have felt that he was not able to answer the question for several reasons.

One, he may have lost his wits after being completely taken off guard.

Two, he may not be able to guarantee a peaceful transition of power despite being personally willing to concede should the electoral outcome favour the opposition.

Three, he himself may not be inclined to permit a peaceful transition of power.

Historical record on power transition

Most people are aware that the BN, and earlier the Alliance parties, have a long, unblemished and unsurpassed record of manipulating the election results through constitutional and other means.

This is why they have remained in power for over 50 years.

Aficionados of the prowess of the ruling coalition in cooking the election results are often rapturous recalling the systematic manipulation of the electoral rolls; malapportionment and gerrymandering of constituency boundaries; control of the media; and a long list of other unfair and exploitative practices, including tampering with the constitution.

NONEven Dr Mahathir Mohamed (left) in 1970 before he became prime minister was moved to write in *The Malay Dilemma*: "The manner, the frequency and the trivial reasons for altering the constitution reduced this supreme law of the nation to a useless scrap of paper."

During several periods of our history of state and federal elections, we have also seen how the Alliance and BN parties had resorted to their trump card of using dubious “constitutional” means to remain in power.

Several months after that disconcerting encounter at the RSC, Najib and his senior BN colleagues again have the opportunity to answer that question and put to rest any doubts about a peaceful transition of power and regime change.

We have seen the latest electoral reform initiative for fair and clean elections has been hijacked for the purpose of scoring political points for the incumbents ahead of the coming election so that true electoral reform still remains a mirage.

Although the odds are in favour of a BN victory, it is important that the ruling coalition provides the assurance - before Malaysians go to the polls - that if the unthinkable happens and they are defeated, Najib and his Umno men will respect the outcome and ensure a peaceful transition of power.

NONE In 1971, following his assumption of power through emergency rule, Tun Razak noted that “ so long as the form (of democracy) is preserved, the substance can be changed to suit conditions of a particular country...”

Whether Najib could possibly tread in his father’s footsteps and we might see history repeat itself in the imposition of some form of emergency rule following (or even preceding) the 13th general election is one which needs to be clarified publicly and unequivocally.

It needs to be stressed that our Federal Constitution is clear on the right of Malaysians to elect a government of their choice in a free and fair election.

Upon the dissolution of Parliament, it becomes the fundamental, legal and constitutional duty of the caretaker prime minister, Najib, to respect and obey the supreme law of the land.

Not providing an answer to assure the public that the supreme law of the land will be respected may be construed as a serious constitutional offence.

Should the reassurance not be provided before the election takes place, Malaysians have the right to question the moral and constitutional fitness of the serving PM and his party.

Finally, it would be doubly reassuring if the head of the military and the police can reinforce the prime minister’s statement on the peaceful transition of power and pledge that they will serve the country regardless of which political party is at the helm.



