

Bersih and the rakyat, come what may
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One is entitled to accuse those who are determined to take to the streets tomorrow of being obstinate troublemakers or even 'fanatics', but the crux of the issue is: is Dataran Merdeka so sacred that any unauthorised use of is tantamount to sacrilege?

NONEI have seen Mat Rempit play with their precious lives there umpteen times, and the police were nowhere to be seen even though these unruly youths pose a far greater threat to the public. So what is holding Dewan Bandaraya KL back from giving the green light to the Bersih 3.0 sit-in protest?

Someone must be trying to pull the government's leg. But if the Najib Abdul Razak administration is truly serious about serving the people and gaining their trust, it must stop dithering over a simple event.

From Wong Chun Wai of The Star to Tay Tian Yan of Sin Chew Daily to the now largely irrelevant Chew Mei Fun (Chew who?), much praise has been heaped on the prime minister as a man of principle and high calibre. But when Najib cannot even rein in a little Napoleon called Ahmad Fuad Ismail, it only shows that his promises on electoral reform and 'best democracy' are nothing but hyperbolic and farcical.

Will any of these 'media professionals' and political has-beens now dare to tell Najib he must not place himself at the mercy of some recalcitrant bureaucrat, who does not even have a popular mandate to sit in his mayoral office in the first place?

Najib's apprenticeship has entered its fourth year, and he has broken a Malaysian record by becoming the longest-serving provisional prime minister in the country.

hussein onnHussein Onn (right) went to the country two-and-a-half years after he took over the administration, while Mahathir Mohamad called a general election within one year of succeeding his predecessor, although his Bersih, Cekap dan Amanah campaign will forever remind him and the Malaysian people of his utter failure as a visionary-wannabe.

Even Abdullah Ahmad Badawi - who is not a leader with a backbone made of steel - did not hesitate to ask for a fresh mandate: he dissolved Parliament barely four months into his premiership, and won rather handsomely on a post-Mahathir positive sentiment.

Given the disastrous results in the last election, Najib naturally would want to procrastinate as much as possible to give himself more time to strategise and, more to the point, to pacify the various factions within Umno by dishing out more goodies. But he should at least see it right to allow the sit-in protest to happen. The fact that he has not been able to do so only proves that he is a mediocre PM who can only ensure victory by all means - be they foul or fair.

Split down the middle

The country is split down the middle now. While the calls for greater democratisation are growing louder by the day, there still remains a sizeable number of Malaysians who remain sceptical and wary of street protest. They may be those who are afraid of chaos, although the past has made it crystal clear that mayhem was almost always the result of an excessive police crackdown and a paranoid government.

Then there are people who are used to all the privileges that they have been enjoying for decades - whether it is the bumiputra status that comes with economic security or the readily available largesse by virtue of being 'the right crony' - and hence refuse to change.

For this group of people, their resistance to peaceful street protest originates more from a deep-down fear of losing their advantages than from any genuine concern for public order.

But there has to be a paradigm shift in Malaysian politics because the nation cannot afford to live forever under political fear. As tax-payers and free-minded citizens, Malaysians have the right to express their opinion even in the form of public action, including claiming back Dataran Merdeka from Umno's and, by extension, Barisan Nasional's monopoly, which has built so much myth of national liberation around it at the expense of the country's future.

One only has to witness the way their leaders are eating high on the hog.

What matters most is that civil society and the general public must not be absent from the meaningful event. The issue is not about Anwar Ibrahim, Lim Kit Siang, Hadi Awang or whether a non-Malay can present a better, alternative government, but about transparency, integrity and justice.

It is also about giving Malaysians a chance to drive out their fear and empower themselves politically. One needs no hero in this endeavour, for everyone can take charge of everyone's own life by being wise, gentle yet bold in demanding a say in national affairs.

When East Germany was experiencing an upheaval in 1989 that would eventually consign the iron regime of the communists to history, many attributed the amazingly speedy democratic process to Mikhail Gorbachev.

President Richard von Weizsacker, West German president at the time, went a step further by crediting both the reform-minded Soviet leader and the brave East German church which had been working behind the scenes to protect political dissidents and provide them with a platform to spread their ideals.

aung san suu kyieven the Lady would be nobody without the faithful and persistent masses in Burma.

If Malaysia was one day to be free of Umno's tutelage, we might one day look back and congratulate each other by saying, 'Well done, Bersih and the rakyat'.

For that to happen, one must stand up and be counted now, come what may.

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