

The spring of democracy has arrived
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COMMENT There is no doubt that the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28 has succeeded beyond the wildest imagination of anyone. Not only for the immensity of the numbers of participants, but also for their spontaneous expressions of love and devotion for this beloved country.

NONEWhere in the world can you see demonstrators who are packed like sardines from one end of the street to the other, and overflowing from one street to the next?

Among the hundreds of video clips posted on the Internet is one showing a densely-packed procession of demonstrators clad in yellow, streaming endlessly from Masjid Negara (National Mosque).

This spectacle was so overwhelming that one reader was prompted to exclaim: "Unbelievable!", while I quipped: "This looks like the great Yellow River of China, except that instead of flowing to the Pacific Ocean, it is flowing towards our Putrajaya".

NONEThe huge number of participants (in hundreds of thousands) is all the more impressive, because the entire city of Kuala Lumpur was practically locked down with all access to the city centre (58 roads according to police announcement) blocked by police since early morning.

Yet, despite the masses of people flooding the streets, with many camping there overnight, the conduct of the crowd was so exemplary that it won the unreserved admiration of a visiting foreign observer group on Malaysian electoral system who had observed the entire rally.

A member of the group, Pakistani senator Hasil Khan Bizenjo said: "This is really an eye-opener. We who are very familiar with rallies, having them almost every day in my country, But I have never seen such a big and peaceful rally." He expressed surprise at the great difficulties people here have to overcome to get to the rally, while "in other countries buses and other transport are provided to facilitate the movement of participants". Among the many people he talked to were "a group of youngsters who told me that their group of 180 people have walked 20km to come to the city".

Another member of the group, prominent Indian journalist, India Today editorial director Mobashar Jawed Akbar, who was also a one-time member of parliament, referring to the violence in the rally, said: "The crowd had been building up overnight; they had ample time to be violent if they wanted to. There was no sense of violence whatsoever. In fact, it was a festive and celebratory experience of the people, very peaceful, until the very end when..."

Referring to the press coverage the next day (April 29) that highlighted only the violent conduct of the protesters, Akbar believed that the violence was a deliberate police provocation, based on his experience as a journalist and politician.

He said: "One of the oldest tricks is to provoke the victim, in order to blame the victim. I do believe that, after observing the rally for five to six hours, the provocation was perhaps done in order to create images that will play well in the official media."

Deterrent against future rallies

While political propaganda has undoubtedly been a major motivation of the instigated violence, another sinister agenda is the unleashing of cruelty as a deterrent against future rallies. This is evident from the unnecessary and indiscriminate firing of tear gas and acid-laced water cannons on the dispersing crowd, and the wanton beating and arrest of individuals - all occurring far from the prohibited zone of Dataran

Merdeka (Independence Square).

Selangor club arrests BersihThe Malaysian Bar, which has placed 80 lawyers in the rally as observers, has charged that "police had acted not to disperse, but instead designed to attack the crowd, as they have witnessed numerous acts of police brutality".

However, despite suffering media vilification and physical pain at the hands of the callous and corrupt ruling power, the masses that gathered on that historical day have emerged triumphant and jubilant in the knowledge that people power has grown and matured.

This rally has broken many records:

- * The biggest gathering of people with the courage to stand up for a just cause.
- * The highest proportion of youth spearheading a patriotic movement.
- * The best proportionate mix of races that reflect the demography of the nation.
- * The greatest display of camaraderie and solidarity among the participating masses.
- * The greatest expression of joy, optimism and love for the country.

The people have spoken loud and clear: We want nothing less than clean and fair elections and we want democracy to be restored. And in the days ahead, this clarion call will reverberate to reach every remote corner of the country.

Let there be no doubt: the people have finally woken.

And let Barisan Nasional be warned: You will be ignoring the people's call at your peril.

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