

Bersih 3.0: What matters most and what does not
MalaysiaKini.com
May 03, 2012
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This article will in two parts attempt to examine the following: what matters most about this rally (versus what does not), an analysis of both the police car that ran into protesters as well as the barricade breach incident, and what Saturday tells us about the government, leaders and people of Malaysia.

What matters most

While I cannot resist commenting on the two incidents analysed below, I would like to agree with commentators who observe that harping on these issues are a distraction from what really matters.

What is a distraction is spending hours trying to interpret hand signals. What really matters is electoral reform.

The fundamental principle of democracy is that people should have the full power to decide how their lives are run. When all is said and done, this and only this is the objective of Bersih.

With an electoral system that is dirty and getting dirtier with amendments passed a few weeks ago that actually makes it easier for the ruling party to cheat in an election, citizens are being deprived of the very essence of liberty and freedom.

In short, you no longer control who controls you.

Without a clean and fair electoral system, the powers that be have obtained ways to remain the powers that be forever.

taiwan bersih rally 280412 06After the rally last Saturday, I made my way to KLCC for dinner with my loved one.

Business was going on as usual, nothing seemed particularly out of place despite the mayhem on the streets a few hours earlier.

Should the government continue to cheat its way into power, I think that on the surface most of Malaysia would look more or less the same, just like it did in KLCC.

The insidiousness of the authorities are such that they find ways to cheat, plunder and abuse the powerless while continuing to feed their opiate to the masses, hoping they won't notice.

Bersih is about not letting this happen - and that's what matters.

Violent Bersih supporters?

That said, we are already experiencing no end of spin about how violent these Bersih people are, how the opposition wants to plunge the nation into violent chaos just to gain power, and so on.

In the face of overwhelming video and eyewitness evidence however, lies are exposed, and the truth is laid bare.

In the aftermath, the truth behind two incidents in particular seemed unclear.

Again, while mindful that we shall not fall into the government's trap of getting caught up in red herrings and missing the bigger picture mentioned above, let us just for a moment attempt to objectively examine

what happened.

An important note: where people cannot or have not been identified, I maintain an open view as to who any one individual may be - a genuine Bersih supporter, a party member, a hooligan along for the 'fun', an undercover policeman, and so on.

Without concrete evidence, one cannot as of yet say for sure - thus they shall be referred to merely as individuals.

NONEI came across three videos documenting the incident where a police car smashed into some protesters and ran into a wall.

At first, some of us were suspicious about the confusion that reigned in the immediate aftermath. Some even asked if it was a staged event of some sort, designed to make the protesters look bad.

Only one video shows an aerial view of the moments before the crash. Here, individuals can be seen jumping up and down on the car, and things are thrown continuously at the police vehicle.

It appears that this is in angry response to heavy handed police action the crowd had been experiencing just prior. In my view, attacking the police car as seen just before the crash is still a reprehensible act, whoever the perpetrator.

The police car then swerves off the road to the right, running down what appears to be two or three individuals, and slamming into the wall.

The individuals hit fly into the air like bowling pins, one of which can later be seen unconscious lying on the ground to the right of the vehicle, in an area where blood can be seen on the floor.

alhijrah azri sallah 290412The crowd rushes to the car, including an individual in a grey T-shirt, shorts, motorcycle helmet and video camera. I am fairly certain this is cameraman Azri Salleh, who works for Al-Hijrah.

Azri is often mistaken as the driver of the car, but careful examination of the video footage clearly shows him running towards the car after the crash.

Piecing together the different video angles, it appears Azri approached the driver's window, at which point another individual dressed in yellow approached from his left to do the same.

It is extremely unclear whether this second individual had good or bad intentions. What we can see however is that Azri is for whatever reason extremely agitated and reacts violently, shoving the man in yellow aside angrily.

This seems to set off the surrounding crowd who then proceed to assault Azri briefly, during which he falls to the floor and is beaten and kicked for a few seconds, after which the individuals doing so seem to stop. Azri is then seen walking away slowly completely unaccosted.

The video then shows two more individuals (one of which was later interviewed in a video by Free Malaysia Today), approach the car, open the door, and then carefully escort the single policeman driver inside away to safety. The policeman is identified as Mohamad Kamil Paimin.

Throughout this incident, there is someone off screen who is screaming repeatedly that there is someone trapped under the car. The nearby individuals then decide to turn over the car, which shows that there was in fact no one underneath.

A number of things surrounding this incident appeared odd at first viewing. Some of us poured over it trying to understand what was going on, and whether there were hidden hands at play.

Having watched the videos multiple times and reading the accounts that later appeared from those involved, I am personally satisfied that there is no conspiracy behind what happened here.

My view is that Mohamad Kamil most likely lost control of his car after it was attacked. For reasons manifestly unclear, Azri Salleh got into a fight with and was beaten by individuals around him. The car was overturned because people thought there was someone underneath.

Chaos always leads to confusion, and in times of tension and high strung emotion, things play out in unpredictable ways. I feel there is little more to be said about this incident, an incident that is regrettable all around.

The barricade

The incident moments prior to the breach of the Dataran Merdeka barricade seem equally unclear.

The question on most people's minds seems to be: who was it that was directly responsible for the first few people breaching the barricade?

The theories range from: the police themselves who surreptitiously opened the barricades in an effort to entrap the protesters, Azmin Ali and or Anwar Ibrahim, and random people in the crowd.

NONEI have watched videos, I have read testimonies, and my conclusion is, well, inconclusive.

Political circles now fervently debate the meaning of hand gestures, conspiracy theorists insist the cops planned this all along, and people less than fond of Pakatan Rakyat insist this was hijacking and/or instigation to unruly behaviour.

While it's certainly possible, I am not optimistic we will get to the bottom of this. Proving it was a police trap will be difficult, and Azmin and Anwar have both explained that they made no instigation for the crowd to breach the barricade.

In Anwar's case, there appears to be clear documentation of him asking the crowd to disperse. As for the rest - there are things I perhaps might not put past certain people, but this is really not the same as saying we know for sure that X did Y.

Not having been made in some established sign language, we cannot interpret hand signals for sure.

Not having clear evidence of who it was exactly that opened the barricades, whether police or Bersih supporters, we cannot say for sure one way or the other.

At the end of the day, it basically comes down to who you believe is telling the truth, and who you believe is lying.

I myself tend to find that whether we believe someone is truthful or not probably tells us more about how we feel about that person than it does about whether that person is telling the truth.

People do love to speculate, I've certainly been guilty of that myself.

After the dust settles however, and when most of the evidence that is likely to emerge has emerged, we must try to take an objective view of things.

Thereafter, we conclude for ourselves whatever is fair to conclude, and admit uncertainty where the evidence is contradictory or insufficient.

Having taken a microscopic view, the second part of the article will return to the bigger picture - What are

the implications of violence, whoever the perpetrator, for future rallies?

How does it reflect on civil society and/or Pakatan Rakyat? And my personal favourite, what the hell was Najib Razak doing all this time?

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