

Political reform has to come from the outside

MalaysiaKini.com

May 04, 2012

By Khoo Ying Hooi

COMMENT The Bersih 3.0 rally was one of the largest-ever political protests Malaysia has ever seen. On April 28, the third Bersih rally took place. This time, people in 10 other states in the country organised their own rallies on the same day. Not only Malaysians at home, those abroad also joined in for a single cause in such force. At this juncture, the rally is considered successful.

What started out as a peaceful assembly turned chaotic when demonstrators breached police barricades to enter the Dataran Merdeka. The rally also witnessed tear gas and water cannons being fired by the police in order to disperse the crowd that had gathered. More than 500 demonstrators were subsequently arrested by police.

NONE On the other hand, critics are questioning Bersih's close proximity with the opposition parties and that it is being used by the latter to achieve their political agenda - regime change. Since the first rally in November 2007, followed by the second one in July last year, it is no secret that the opposition party components had mobilised their supporters to attend Bersih's rallies.

Since then, the blame game starts. So what's next?

Malaysia is at a political crossroads and a great awakening has definitely ensued, notably among the younger generation whereby they are slowly but surely finding their voice. Furthermore, the pattern of the confidence in government is obviously declining. Citizens are cynical and show distrust about their representative institutions, political parties and most of all, their elected politicians.

The belief that the system is capable of solving the basic problems confronting the country appear to be missing.

If the performance of political institutions is inadequate, then it must be improved. Political institutions must be made more accountable, transparent, and responsive to the public will and in particular for the public good. So how does civil society come into picture when it comes to political reform?

Political reform in order to advance or establish institutions of accountability can generally come from four possible ways: from inside, from above, from outside and from below. Typically, effective reform of flawed political systems must be led from outside the system itself, but from inside the country, with civil society as one of the key players.

Decisive factor

The way civil society conveys its message seems to be the decisive factor in determining whether its efforts could lead to democratic reform or the other way round.

The reason for this is crystal clear. On their own, political insiders lack the motive or at least the opportunity for reform. Most of them who are in positions of influence are reluctant to push for change. It is understandable because those with power and privilege will fight to maintain their status quo, and they also have superior resources with which to defend their vested interests.

Thus, comprehensive political reform requires a leading role for civil society. Considering that there is almost a direct relationship between civil society and democracy, it makes sense that without a strong civil society, a democratic regime is unlikely to develop.

This is because this particular segment of the society has the independence to look at the political system critically and conclusively, and subsequently to identify and campaign for the scope of reform that is

gravely needed.

One should bear in mind that at this point, in order to have a lasting political reform, we should not ignore the cooperation of political parties and politicians. Civil society advocates of reform must for that reason be prepared to work together with concerned parties and political leaders, or else to form their own alternative parties for similar purposes.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/196918>