

Gov't must halt Bersih 3.0 demonisation campaign

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By Lim Kit Siang

MP SPEAKS The Home Minister, Hishammuddin Hussein, started his interview on Bersih 3.0 with the Sunday Star yesterday entitled 'The search for the real story' with the following statement:

"Now that the temperature has lowered and emotions have subsided, we should look at the incident in a more rational manner."

I studied Hishammuddin's interview but could not find any evidence that the government or Hishammuddin (left) at least, is prepared to view the Bersih 3.0 demonstration in "a more rational manner" so that Malaysians, the government, police, civil society and the ordinary citizenry, can learn the right lessons from Bersih 3.0 and reach a closure with Malaysia taking one giant step towards the objective of "the best democracy in the world" - a goal purportedly espoused by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak himself.

In the past three weeks, the government failed to assure Malaysians and the world both by word and deed that there would be an independent, credible, thorough and legitimate investigation to find out the truth of what went wrong on April 28, the facts and causes of the incidents of violence and brutality, regardless of whether the victims were police personnel, media representatives, or peaceful protestors.

These incidents of violence and brutality marred the Bersih 3.0 rally in Kuala Lumpur, preventing it from being the most historic, momentous, unifying and empowering experience for Malaysians regardless race, religion, region, class, age or gender who gathered in peace and patriotism to support a common national cause for clean elections and a clean Malaysia.

Instead, the government embarked on a systematic and concerted campaign to paint Bersih 3.0, the organisers and participants, in the worst and most sinister light as evidenced by:

(i) The wild and irresponsible allegation by the prime minister that it was an anti-national conspiracy which included a coup attempt by the Opposition to topple the government;

(ii) The instant, blind and unthinking support given to this conspiracy theory by the former inspector-general of police Hanif Omar; and

(iii) A most biased, one-sided and tendentious 30-minute documentary entitled 'Bersih 3.0 itu Kotor' broadcast on TV1 on Sunday to poison the minds of viewers.

It is most powerful proof that the government is not prepared to keep an open mind to allow for an objective and impartial inquiry into the Bersih 3.0 violence and brutality.

'Democracy hijacked'

Even Hishammuddin's interview with Sunday Star smacked of a "demonisation" campaign against Bersih 3.0 when he alleged that "democracy was hijacked that day".

Hishammuddin should know that there could be varied and most contradictory answers to the questions "Was democracy hijacked that day?" and "Who hijacked democracy on Bersih 3.0?", which should be the province of an independent, credible, thorough and legitimate investigation of what went wrong on Bersih 3.0

Hishammuddin should realise that the hundreds of thousands of Malaysians who gathered peacefully in Kuala Lumpur in response to the call of Bersih 3.0, and the millions who have direct information of what actually happened on April 28, could not identify or agree with the demonisation campaign of the BN government that Bersih 3.0 was some grand or evil conspiracy to cause violence, unrest and even toppling of the government.

Imagine men and women, even those in the sixties, seventies and eighties, who had gathered peacefully armed at most with salt and water bottles not to combat the police but to protect themselves in case of police tear gas and chemically-laced water cannons, wanting to challenge the might of the powers-that-be and topple the government?

To them, Bersih 3.0 will forever remain a historic, momentous and even liberating experience where Malaysians regardless race, religion, region, class, age or gender came out together in peace and common humanity, out of a deep and abiding sense of patriotism and love for country, in support of the national cause for clean elections for a clean Malaysia.

Impartial inquiry wanted

True, there were deplorable incidents of violence and brutality which marred the great Bersih 3.0 rally - but these deplorable incidents took place after 3pm on April 28.

Before 3pm, there was absolutely no tension in the air, as the hundreds of thousands who gathered in Kuala Lumpur were peaceful, in great harmony and carnival spirit, to celebrate the unprecedented democratic awakening, empowerment and unity of Malaysians.

This is why Malaysians want an impartial, thorough and high-powered inquiry to find out what went wrong on April 28 and who marred the great Bersih 3.0 rally - whether it was caused by a handful of protestors or a small group of police personnel, who took the law into their own hands and started a riot against the peaceful public.

I call on Hishammuddin to end the charade of an Hanif Omar 'independent' probe which is part of the 'demonisation' campaign of Bersih 3.0 as proven by the former IGP's anti-Bersih comments.

Hishammuddin said in his interview: "They are attacking Hanif because he is the former inspector-general of police".

He cannot be more wrong. The so-called 'independent advisory panel' headed by Hanif is completely unacceptable to the majority of thinking and decent Malaysians, not because Hanif was a former IGP but for the simple reason that he had prejudged Bersih 3.0 with baseless and biased views after April 28.

Furthermore, the Hanif panel is now seen and perceived as part of the BN 'demonisation' campaign of Bersih 3.0.

If Najib and Hishammuddin want a closure to the Bersih 3.0 violence and brutality which could initiate the beginning of a process of national healing, it is imperative that there must be credibility and legitimacy for any findings of a Bersih 3.0 inquiry.

This cannot be achieved by the highly-discredited Hanif 'independent advisory panel'.

Form either a royal commission of inquiry of eminent and independent Malaysians, a Suhakam inquiry or best of all, invite the United Nations rapporteurs, like Frank La Rue, on the promotion and the protection of the right to freedom and expression and Maina Kiai on the right to freedom of assembly and of association, to carry out independent investigations and present their report to the Malaysian people and government as well as the international community.

And most important of all, the government should call off the demonisation campaign against Bersih 3.0.

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