

Najib - A retro posing as a reformer

MalaysiaKini.com

Aug 3, 2012

By Terence Netto

For some time before the news broke that PKR's Rafizi Ramli was being charged with offences against the Banking and Financial Institutions Act (Bafia), the fact that Prime Minister Najib Razak is an obscurantist posing as a reformer had the status of an open secret.

Anyone with more than a passing knowledge of his career was in on the secret, but given the way political society is configured in Malaysia, even Perkasa chief Ibrahim Ali can be made to seem a born-again liberal should he, with the connivance of the powers-that-be, so desire.

What more, then, the possibilities of transfiguration - from latent obscurantist to liberal poseur - for someone of Najib's pedigree and manifest destiny?

During the penultimate stage of Najib's ascent to the top of Umno's greasy pole, the Internet-accessing public were privy to covert information, courtesy of a mobile phone conversation between the then deputy prime minister and a friend of his about to be charged with murder, that Malaysian politics does not just have corridors of power; it has subterranean alleyways in which various factors wage their devious battles with a talent for skullduggery that has become de rigeur of those wanting to maintain their grip on power.

With the charging of PKR strategic director Rafizi for disclosing information protected by banking secrecy laws - information that has led to the exposure of a multimillion ringgit scandal of the sort that could lead to the downfall of governments - the cat is out of the bag that the Najib administration is certifiably not reformist.

The next time that crapulous slogan 'Government Transformation Programme' trips off the tongue of a Najib administration flunkey, his or her audience ought to remind the unfortunate spokesperson that a word is not what Humpty Dumpty holds it to be - 'Anything the speaker says it means'.

PM's patina of liberalism

The administration began the year intent on leveraging on the unexpected acquittal of Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim on a charge of sodomising an aide - a development the PM lauded as indicative of the judiciary's independence.

Najib managed to sustain this patina of liberalism by initially signaling a placatory stance towards polls reform advocacy group Bersih's bid to stage a third public demonstration in April to bolster their case for a clean-up of the electoral rolls and fairer practices during the electioneering period.

But a stance not propped up by the requisite attitude is soon revealed to be what it is: a facade.

How flaky the Najib administration's liberal facade was became evident in its eventual response to the Bersih demonstration, the biggest public gathering for a political cause in Malaysia in decades.

The harsh reaction of the police and the knee-jerk responses of the government to the huge throng the Bersih demonstration succeeded in calling out showed that the administration was keener on the rhetorical posturing rather than in the actual substance of liberalism.

This charade became even more tawdry when Anwar and two of his PKR aides were not just charged with offences in connection with their participation in the April 28 demonstration - the charges were augmented and reinforced in a second round of indictments.

This was followed by the filing of the grounds of appeal in July by the attorney-general of Anwar's sodomy acquittal.

It takes a thief to catch a thief

Now with whistleblower extraordinary Rafizi charged with offences under Bafia on an issue concerning misappropriation of public funds for a cattle-breeding project that has already led to the indictment for corrupt practices of personnel involved in its management, you have the farce of a 'Government Transformation Programme' walking on all fours.

Though Rafizi was called in by Bank Negara for questioning on purported violations of Bafia, the prevailing sense on the matter was that someone who had called attention to crimes that had not only taken place but had led to the indictments of an array of suspects should not be impugned on the theory that it sometimes takes a thief to catch a thief.

The speculation is that when Rafizi went on to expose shenanigans that allegedly occurred in the award of the contract for extension works to the Ampang Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, his malfeasance-scouring run of recent weeks had hit a highly sensitive nerve.

There's hell to pay for exposes of that kind, given what the speculation is about who's really in charge where the Najib administration is concerned.

Now it no longer a case of the PM being out-ed as a phony liberal; it's a case of whether he was any kind of liberal at all.