

Political awakening: 55 years of Merdeka

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By Charles Santiago

All we heard and saw the last few weeks heading into Independence Day were squabbles, open spats over Twitter and Facebook and pure disgust. Simply because the government has tried in every possible way to hijack Merdeka Day.

Its 'Janji Ditepati' or Promises Fulfilled slogan is pure propaganda, crafted to send a strong election message to the people as the country gears towards what's most likely to be the most fiercely-fought polls ever.

Dissatisfaction over the government's choice of slogans, logos and song clearly signals the sharp divisions in the society as Malaysia celebrates its 55 years of independence.

These are not the only issues we are concerned about - a gutless democracy, discrimination against women and children, racism, curbing of civil liberties, trampling of human rights, rampant corruption and a government that would bend or amend every law and indulge in a dirty electoral process to stay in power are what the nation is gripped with now.

Organising a glitzy event at Bukit Jalil for Prime Minister Najib Razak and his cabinet, civil servants and selected others won't make pressing problems in the country disappear.

Just days before Merdeka Day, we saw a repeat of a court ruling which shocked the public. A 22-year-old man who had raped a 12-year-old child escaped a jail term. This is the second case in weeks where another perpetrator walked free. In both cases, the court ruled that both men had great futures and the acts were consensual.

This is outrageous. It sets a bad precedent and has failed to look into the welfare of the victims.

Politically awakened

Over the last few months, the fight for power has intensified in the country. Whistleblowers were penalised. Corrupt politicians walked free despite strong proof of corruption amounting to billions of dollars and opposition leaders being targeted in smear campaigns to break the increasing support for Pakatan Rakyat.

Political discourse in the country is almost non-existent and ruling politicians are happy to use devious tactics and gutter politics centering around the private lives of opposition leaders.

While the second quarter gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 5.1 per cent has surprised even government optimists, this surge was largely due to pump priming of the economy.

But can the government continue to manoeuvre the economy, if there is another downturn brought about by external factors, given its huge spending on mega projects and cash handouts ahead of the polls?

If all this is not enough, we have government-backed water concessionaire Syabas manufacturing a water crisis to hold the opposition-led Selangor government hostage in order to force the state to agree to building a water treatment plant which would cost Malaysians billions of dollars.

Our stand is that there are other pressing problems like Syabas looking at ways to reduce the amount of water wastage lost to leakage and theft, which is about a third of the total production.

While the government is busy scheming and trying to devise new strategies to hoodwink the people, including using the Merdeka Day as a bait, it has failed to realise that Malaysians are becoming politically more vocal.

The thousands of people who turned up at Dataran Merdeka in yellow T-shirts to show support for Bersih, a coalition demanding free and fair elections, and other groups is a clear sign that Malaysians will not allow the government to indulge in shadow play.

And the success of the protest is a signal that as Malaysia enters its 56th year of independence the society, no matter what the government says, is sufficiently mature to hold peaceful political rallies. It also illustrates that the society is politically awakened to ensure their demands are met.

And this is what Najib and his government must remember on this historic day.

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