

## **Same old government, same old ways**

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**By Suaram Team**

COMMENT Three years ago, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak claimed that he was heralding a new era with his promise to grant greater freedom to the people.

With a delicate balance on national security and fundamental freedoms of the people, he repealed the Internal Security Act 1960, three Emergency proclamations, Restricted Residence Act 1933, Banishment Act 1959 and reviewed the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

However, in practice it appeared to be merely striving for political mileage as the fundamental freedoms of the people are still being denied by the government and its agencies.

NONEThe same could be seen in the 13th general election. On May 5, in arguably the most ferocious general election in Malaysian history, BN was declared the victor and Najib was appointed as the prime minister.

Many argued the outcome of the GE13 was marred with fraud, phantom voters, washable indelible ink, irregularities in the gazetted electoral roll and heightened political violence, which saw bomb blasts at campaign sites throughout the campaign period. There was even a murder case.

At the same time, various forms of harassment of human rights defenders took place.

Democracy has flourished since the birth of the social media and critical alternative news portals. With it came awareness of the people on current issues in the country.

The turnout of voters for the GE13 was tremendous and a true sign of democracy.

NONEPlenty of photographic and video evidence indicating electoral irregularities are available in cyberspace and countless reports and complaints have been made to the police against the Election Commission (EC) on the lack of professionalism and integrity in ensuring a free and fair election.

The overwhelming dissatisfaction against the EC, coupled with the betrayal of the

sanctity of voters' free will, culminated in massive protests against the serious problems plaguing the outcome of GE13.

#### Legitimate dissent quelled

From all that have been demonstrated during GE13, the people can hardly conclude that the police, the Registrar of Societies (RoS) and the EC are independent and impartial.

The RoS, which had harassed Suaram for seven months before ceasing a judicial review in the High Court, was commissioned again to harass the DAP at the eleventh hour, just before the GE13 nomination day.

DAP's eligibility and qualification to contest in the GE13 were threatened, and even more absurd, ridiculous tasks were given at the very last minute.

Serious matters that required immediate attention were kept pending by the police.

NONEThese included the murder of a PKR election campaigner in Tapah K Murugan (right), several bomb blasts at campaign sites, countless reports and complaints made to the police against the EC, seditious "Chinese tsunami" statements made by the prime minister and ministers, Utusan Malaysia's 'Apa Lagi Cina Mahu' (What else do the Chinese want?) headline, the racist group attacks on an anti-racism student group in Penang, and the investigation against bloggers Papagomo and Milo Suam, just to name a few.

Instead of immediately responding to the cases, the focus was directed on harassing human rights defenders.

The concerted actions taken by the government and its agencies in encroaching into the people's democratic space flew in the face of Najib and his promises.

The civil service was perverted before, and still is, after all these years. As repeatedly stated by Suaram on many occasions, governments may come and go but the civil service must remain impartial at all times and should never act on political instructions from the government.

#### Use of regressive legislation

Regressive legislation such as the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012, the Sedition Act 1948 and Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma) were used or threatened to be used against human rights defenders pre- and post-GE13.

Prior to the election, threats of political instability and racial riots similar to the May 13, 1969 incident were used to raise fear among the people, should anything untoward take place post-GE13.

NONESeveral members of the opposition parties were questioned and charged with having organised or taking part in illegal assemblies under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012.

The Act, which was rushed through Parliament without any public consultation, is used as a tool by the government and its organs to quell legitimate dissent.

The Sedition Act 1948, dubbed irrelevant and as the stumbling block to freedom of expression, was used regardless of previous pledges and initiatives by the government to repeal the law.

Similar to the draconian Internal Security Act of 1960, the Sedition Act will continue to be used and defended.

The use of the Sedition Act on Batu MP Chua Tian Chang prior to GE13 and on the latest arrest and detention of student activist, Adam Adli, have proven this.

The threat of possible use of the Sosma against "rioters" during the GE13 was floating in the air like an imminent threat, until the government finally confirmed that it would never be used for the purposes of GE13.

Perhaps, the statements made by the former IGP Ismail Omar, who said that the police would still use the old ways to maintain public order, if appropriate, despite the absence of ISA 1960 and the Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) Ordinance 1960, would ring a bell.

Indeed, the comments of the new inspector-general of police and home minister are worrying for the people.

NONEHome Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's suggestions to revamp the ministry drew Suaram's grave concern as the police would now join the ranks of the Armed Forces in training to reduce crime and to ensure public order.

It was made public shortly after the present IGP Khalid Abu Bakar complimented former IGP Ismail Omar's Ops Daulat operation in Lahad Datu, Sabah.

Instead of focussing on how to reduce fatalities of suspects in police lock-ups and

fatal police shootings, the police would now undergo their training with the military in firearms-related situations to combat crime.

Adding salt to the wound

EC chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof had, on few public occasions, answered questions pertaining to the complaints raised by the voters with regard to vote-rigging.

However most of Aziz's answers were bare denials. As the body solely responsible for the operation of GE13, it did little to dismiss the damning allegations of electoral fraud.

NONEWith only bare denials and a promise to investigate the complaints thoroughly, the EC failed to diffuse the tension among legitimate voters.

If there is any attempt to prosecute peaceful and legitimate human rights defenders, it would be the sole responsibility of the EC to stop it as it is solely responsible for creating tension and disappointment among the voters.

Malaysians have matured and are ready to embrace democracy in a legitimate and peaceful manner.

On this note, Suaram calls upon the government and its agencies to cease all forms of intimidation and harassment against human rights defenders.

Suaram beseeches that constructive steps be taken to end the various investigations and release the results to the public.

The damage to the sanctity of the voter's choice and free will have already been done but adding salt to the wound is definitely not the way forward.

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