

No respite for a scandal-rocked country, besieged PM

MalaysiaKini.com

June 2, 2013

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COMMENT The public must by now be feeling so blasé from the endless rounds of the weird masquerading as the normal in the government of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak that the latest argument that his administration is deeper into weirdo land recalls the humourist who thought he had hit bottom and then heard someone tapping from underneath.

A scandal-sodden public can reasonably be expected to be groggy about the fact that the month and the year when a supposedly transformative PM compounded his cabinet of illicit personnel was exactly 25 years on from the trigger for all subsequent mutilations to what is regarded as the due process of constitutional governance.

bar council judiciary dinner 170408 salleh abas interviewed This was the impeachment of then-Lord President Salleh Abas (right), an act of such monstrosity and cascading ill-effects that Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's attempt, on his prime ministerial watch (2003-09), to mitigate its virulence by offering sops to the wounded and the maimed among the affected justices is rather like Japan's effort to come to terms with the victims, comfort women and Death Railway inductees, of its imperial past - measly and inadequate.

"Our parents sowed dragon's teeth, our children know and reap the armed men," goes a saying of uncertain patrimony but singular pertinence to our current predicament.

A prime minister, whom we have good reason to believe is a suspected felon in the cover-up of a murder case no less, is heading a government placed in power on minority say-so, and is now in charge of a cabinet composed of some people who have about as much right to be there as some dubiously obtained MyKad holders had in being on GE13's electoral register.

The question at this stage is: Can things get any worse and if they do, will we see the removal of the coalition that has been in charge of this country since independence in 1957?

Things can and will get worse. This we can predict from what has already happened and will continue to happen.

Recalcitrant cops

You can't come to acquiring the statistic of a 218th death in police custody of a suspect since a count of such mortalities was kept since 2000 without there being something pathological in sections of our police force.

It is a pathology for which there was a remedy, commended by no less than a royal commission of inquiry into the management of the police force, which suggested, after a 15-month study of the problem, the formation of an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC).

polis malaysia police 260307 marchThe proposal, unveiled in March 2005 in a raft of recommendations for the revamping of the management of the force, was stiff-armed by a cabal of senior police officers who threatened to throw their support to the opposition if the government of Abdullah implemented it.

Talk of sedition - a charge hurled against student, social and political activists with promiscuous ease these days - the action of that coterie of recalcitrant police officers savoured of sedition, because the recommendation emanated from a royal commission, empanelled on authority of the Agong and was aimed at securing improvements to a vital limb of our criminal justice that carries the royal title on its coat of arms.

Depend upon it that could get conceivably worse.

You not only have not seen any determination on the part of the inspector-general of police and his boss, the home affairs minister, to do anything about this long suppurating sore on our criminal justice system, you have seen the leader of hitherto the shrillest protestant against such perversities join the government after having stunningly agreed to drop, as a condition of his enlistment in the ruling power structure, a demand for a cessation to custodial deaths.

Not only do things stay incorrigible, the government succeeds in enticing veritable watchdogs of good governance to join them in seeing how things can be bettered, the latter agreeing to enlist from the motive that puts one in mind of Dr Samuel Johnson's observation of a second marriage - "the triumph of hope over experience."

But often enough, the new enlistees turn over to discover that it is more a situation where drift, inertia and cynicism work their way to keep things the way they are or worse than that.

There is no substitute for "Ubah."

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