

Loss of confidence in PM is not a crime

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COMMENT How many of you have lost confidence in Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's leadership? I know I have. And because I no longer have confidence the prime minister will do what's best for the country, I am supporting Bersih 4's urging for Najib to step down.

Let's be clear. The loss of confidence in Najib's leadership and Bersih 4's demand for him to quit isn't the making of political saboteurs - federal opposition, foreign, Christian or Jew. They are the direct results of the prime minister's own actions. They stem from what Najib has done, as both prime minister and finance minister, over the 1MDB financial scandal and the eventual admission that RM2.6 billion was indeed deposited into his personal account.

It is Najib who continues to defy public demands to clarify where the RM2.6 billion came from and what he used it for. And it is Najib who continues to openly resist and thwart citizens' right to know about how 1MDB racked up huge debts, and how he could have imperilled tax payers' money by having the government guarantee those debts.

So, yes, many of us have lost confidence in the prime minister. And it really shouldn't come as a shock that we have. What is instead shocking is this. For all Najib has done to undermine the people's right to know and to insist that he doesn't need to be accountable, Najib's party, his cabinet and Parliament have yet to conclusively demonstrate that they have lost confidence in him.

It is because of this public loss of confidence in Najib and the lack of action on the part of the cabinet and Parliament - two entities I believe are entrusted to uphold parliamentary democracy - that I will be attending Bersih 4.

What is Bersih 4 all about?

Essentially Bersih 4, for me, is about saying to the prime minister, "Sir, we have lost confidence in your leadership because of all the things you have done to undermine our trust in you."

Do we have a right to do this? Of course we do. Democracies are all about people having the right to decide who should represent them in government. Democracies are also about citizens having a right to determine who can access and use our tax money to govern the nation.

And yet, the police have already begun threatening Bersih 4 that the rally and its demands will be seen as criminal if it turns "seditious" and is an attempt to illegally topple the government. It might not be too long before Bersih 4 is also accused of undermining 'parliamentary democracy'.

What do you think? It is a crime to let the prime minister know what kind of leadership we want for this country? Is it seditious to organise people to come together peacefully to demand for fair elections, more checks and balances on executive power, greater accountability, and an honest government?

Is it a threat to parliamentary democracy if people express a lost of trust in a prime minister who seems hell-bent on acting in self-interest rather than the nation's interest?

Peacefully expressing a loss in confidence in the prime minister isn't a crime. And it cannot be equated to illegally toppling the government. It's in fact part of democratic practice that citizens should be able to express their opinion openly and peacefully about the kind of leadership they would like for the nation.

And expressing that loss of confidence is not the same as storming Putrajaya with sticks and stones, or breaking down the gates of Parliament, or assaulting the prime minister. Expressing an opinion and making our demands heard peacefully is not an act of violence that would be criminal like what Penang Umno did when it stormed the state assembly in May last year.

All the Bersih rallies to date have upheld citizens' democratic right to peacefully express their demands for fairness, accountability and transparency. None of the Bersih rallies have undermined parliamentary democracy. The upcoming Bersih 4 rally will not do so either for so long as it is conducted peacefully.

Thousands of Malaysians expressing their loss of trust, respect and confidence in the prime minister cannot be construed as actions that are criminal, illegal or undermine parliamentary democracy.

They may certainly undermine Najib's position. But he is the one who is acting against the best interests of a democracy and citizens' rights. Hence, asking Najib to step down so that processes and institutions that ensure accountability, integrity and transparency can begin to be restored would actually be good for parliamentary democracy.