

Najib, avoid a 'cold war' with the folk

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COMMENT I walked into a café at Mont Kiara recently, and there a group of chauffeur-driven rich men's wives were having their cup of coffee.

I happened to overhear part of the conversation about them going down to the streets of Kuala Lumpur for Bersih 4.

One of them was overheard saying, "Me? I have ordered my Bersih gear a long time ago!" Impressive, indeed! I was told that a few of them even carry titles of 'Puan Sri'.

It appears that the upcoming Bersih 4 rally this weekend has picked up so much momentum compared to the last one in 2012, and by now, Najib Abdul Razak should realise that his days as prime minister are numbered.

I am of the view that time is indeed running out for him and his deputy Zahid Hamidi.

It is unfortunate that I did not have the opportunity to talk to any of the ladies, whereas I would be interested to find out more on why they choose to go to the streets for Bersih 4.

They certainly did not appear to me as 'kaki demo' (street protesters) but were those whom you would meet at important social functions.

(YAB Najib, do you think that these women had nothing better to do during their weekends? Don't you think they could have spent a relaxing afternoon at the spa?)

Enough is enough

From the response that the people are giving to Bersih 4, it appears to me that both Barisan Nasional and Umno may no longer have much hope as far as trying to woo urban voters ever again, unless they learn to behave and talk like gentlemen.

As CIMB Group chairperson Nazir Abdul Razak rightly warned, those in the corridors of power, should 'stop saying stupid things'.

In the past, there were only one or two cabinet ministers who spoke 'stupid' things. These, among whom was former MIC president Samy Vellu, have even been surpassed by Najib's own cabinet ministers.

I am disappointed to say that statements made by the present cabinet ministers do not reflect well on their level of intelligence quotient (IQ). With no offence, Zahid, for example, 'confirmed' that he had even met the donor from the the Middle East channelled the money into Najib's account.

Zahid claimed that it was out of gratitude towards my fellow Malaysians who fought the Islamic State (IS).

The newly-minted deputy prime minister also quoted the Arab donor as saying, "Malaysia is not the only country we (the Arab family) are channelling our money to. There are many more friendly Muslim countries who we are donating to."

Zahid had tried to say that even the Sultan of Johor believed that only Umno can help the Malays, but he appeared to have been reprimanded by the Johor regent.

Now, of course, when the Arab donor chose to remain anonymous or simply might not even exist at all, it is easy for Zahid to say that the Arab family wants Umno and BN to lead the country.

If Zahid's story were to be accepted lock, stock and barrel, then some foreigners are indeed influencing the political development in this country. This has sent shivers even to former minister Rafidah Aziz who has asked an important question: "What were the alliances behind the donation? What could possibly have been promised to them (the donors)?"

In short, the Arab family has committed an offence that is indeed detrimental to parliamentary democracy of this country, where its voters should be the only ones to decide on its own future. Perhaps, Bersih 4 will show to Zahid who is ultimately the kingmaker in the coming general election.

It just doesn't jive

In the first place, as huge a sum of RM2.6 billion should not have gone into a personal account. If it is for a legitimate cause, why all the secrecy surrounding the transactions?

It would be more appropriate to have the money paid into the national coffers so that the government could make use of it to look after the welfare of Malaysians who gave their lives in the Middle East.

The money should have been distributed to the families of Malaysians who fought the IS terrorists. Why did the money leave the country again, and transferred to the Swiss bank based in Singapore?

Malaysians will not forget that it was also Zahid who claimed that the illegal online betting kingpin Paul Phua, who was arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), a great help to national security.

While writing this article, BN strategic communications Director Rahman Dahlan was quoted as saying that Bersih 4 will further weaken the ringgit and the country's economy. If Bersih is an illegal organisation as claimed by Putrajaya, then why is it drawing more people to the streets each time a rally is called?

In my opinion, international investors are reacting to the lack of transparency and good governance after the Wall Street Journal exposed the 1MDB debacle which has built up over the years until it hit the crunch. It certainly did not happen overnight.

It is the mismanagement of the country's economy over a period of time that has brought us to such a state. In fact, one economics professor told me that we have been 'stuck' in the middle income since 1994, two years before Thailand.

Bersih alone would not have been that effective in weakening the economy or the ringgit within just one month after it was announced. If it had, we would have seen a slide of the ringgit during the past three Bersih rallies, but one who was not born yesterday as Rahman should retract his statement.

The ones that will be most badly hit by any Bersih rally are the politicians themselves especially when the iron fist is used. Go back to the last few Bersih rallies and compare that with the Anti-GST protest, and see the big contrast!

Bersih is not even attempting to topple the government through street protests, it is merely a platform for the people to express their unhappiness with what they have been seeing since 2008.

At the point of writing, a Whatsapp message came through from Noor Farida Ariffin (photo), a former diplomat and currently coordinator of the Group of 25 eminent Malay former civil servants. I had merely asked if she would be going down to Bersih 4. Her answer (in her personal capacity) was: "Yes, certainly."

I would not be surprised that during Bersih 4, many of the former senior civil servants will be spotted walking with the people.

The veterans are the ones who can differentiate between the good old times and the rise of extremism (religion and race relations) since 2008, such as the recent display of martial arts by one Umno Sungai Besar division leader and the owner of the Sekinchan Ikan Bakar franchise Jamal Md Yunos who said he will garner the support of 30,000 red T-shirt supporters.

My suggestions

As police chief, Khalid Abu Bakar should get his men to ensure that Bersih 4 continues for the two days without any incident.

If Najib and his cabinet use force or allow thugs to intimidate the ordinary Malaysians (with the police merely watching the scene), I believe it will probably be many more decades before the situation can heal and BN win back the confidence of the people.

The people who will lose out are the younger generation of BN leaders, including young

aspirants such as Khairy Jamaluddin, because from henceforth, if violence or the abuse of the police force is again lashed out on my fellow Malaysians, BN politicians will for sure face angry voters everywhere.

Najib, if he is a seasoned politician, should have taken the cue and learnt from the responses that he received from the people who attended his 'Gangnam Style' concert-cum-ceramah in Penang. Also, politicians like Rais Yatim, who has urged Bersih rally participants to parade with the Malaysian flags, should also by now notice why people are quite indifferent towards the Merdeka celebration.

(Incidentally, I will be bringing a new Malaysia flag with me during the Bersih 4 rally, because after all that has happened, I am a patriotic Malaysian, patriotic to the country and the monarch. The government, including the prime minister, can be changed, and is never meant to be permanent fixture in any democracy.)

This is why I have always advised that Najib's administration against going on a 'cold war' with the people. It will instantaneously lose its credibility to lead if it uses its power to quash or suppress the people.

We are not talking about a few hundred people but tens of thousands of fellow Malaysians who will pour out into the streets of Kuala Lumpur, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, who in return, represent hundreds of thousands or even millions who are in agreement with the Bersih rally but for reasons known only to themselves choose not to participate.

Anything happening to them will not be forgotten for many general elections to come and they will come out in droves to protect their democratic rights against those who try to steal the election from them.

For this reason, if even the Puan Sris group that I met as I walked into the café, are making it to Bersih 4, Najib and his men should be prepared to count their days, and count the hefty cost that they will have to pay before making any more foolish statements or use the iron fist to suppress the people.

The international community is watching, and I have no reasons not to believe that our free-falling ringgit and weak economy are due to the cold treatment by the international community towards Najib's administration.

They will be diplomatic, but one can read the signs especially when both US President Barack Obama and British Premier David Cameron had dropped hints to Najib when they visited Malaysia.