

The curse of absent local gov't elections
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Federal government elections and state assembly elections are enough to manage the affairs of municipalities and local councils! Holding local government elections according to Umno/ Barisan and its leader Najib Abdul Razak are a waste of time and government resources! Currently, they are being well-run and need no further input from locally elected councilors! Furthermore, holding these local government elections will lead to too much politicking that is unnecessary and a waste of time and money.

The above, in short, are the reasons given by the government for not wanting to hold local government elections. In this they are aided and abetted by the Election Commission and other government agencies and Umno/Barisan-held state assemblies that do not want to see any change in the present administration of municipalities and local councils.

Are these reasons valid enough to deny the citizens the right to choose their leaders at the local government level? Do we not begin at the local level before moving up? It must be from the bottom-up in politics for the peoples' voices to be heard. In Malaysia, it's the other way round to suit Umno politicians to remain in power.

Going by PM Najib's argument, does local government exist at all? True, civil servants do render some kind of municipal services to the public and believe that that is all that needs to be done no matter how poor or irrelevant the services may be to the needs of the general public. These public servants are not responsible to the people who pay their salaries and elected representatives are not there to question them for not giving the services the public expects of them.

Nominated members of local councils and municipalities are not bothered either for the public cannot boot them out because they were not elected to serve in these local government bodies. In short, nobody cares whatever happens in local government matters. Nominations to serve in local government authorities are gifts from Umno/Barisan for supporting their parties. So what commitment do they have in wanting to serve the public in the towns and cities?

As a result, many, if not all, local government machinery are unsatisfactory. Their services are found wanting in most areas because of poor supervision and inefficiency brought about by inadequate political leadership and integrity. The lackadaisical attitude of its workers and the ignorance of nominated councilors is simply that they are answerable to nobody, no – not even to the rate-payers who are paying their salaries. \

Nominated members of municipal councils and local councilors are not bothered either because they are there only to support the Umno/Barisan government who put them there as a reward from the ruling party. Yet, Najib has the gall to say that local government elections are unnecessary.

The reality being that they cannot win elections in urban areas where the people are better educated and not bothered about race but concerned more about bribery and corruption resulting in poor service and conditions in our towns and cities.

Before asking for local government elections to be held one wonders why local government elections were abolished in the first place. Why was it necessary to do away with it? Malaysians do have short memories indeed and they easily forget the reasons leading up to

its abolition in the 70s. Tell me how many local councils and municipal councils did Umno control? They had to depend very largely on MCA and MIC to win in these local government elections which actually meant Umno candidates had very little chance of winning in these urban areas of the country and thus became unrepresented in local government!

Mahathir was unhappy with this situation. While Umno could win in state assembly and parliamentary elections they couldn't make it in local councils and municipalities. These were dominated by non-Malays although they were part of the Umno/Barisan coalition. Now from mayors to members of municipalities and local councils are mostly Umno people because they have been nominated to serve. MCA and MIC members have been sidelined and marginalised in local government appointments. The services the public gets from these members of local councils do not reflect the racial composition and situation in our towns and cities. What do they do other than warming their seats and getting paid for it?

Local council by-laws with respect to buildings and public spaces are found wanting in every aspect. The number of illegal extensions and structures without permission within municipal limits in urban areas and housing estates is such that one wonders how these exist without the knowledge of the town and municipal councils. Pavements and walkways along shops are choked with all sorts of paraphernalia that pedestrians hardly have any walking space. Petty businesses and motor-cycle shops and repair facilities not only occupy the five-foot ways but also spill over to the parking lots on the public roads causing severe traffic problems.

In some places the parking lots are controlled by thugs and hooligans hired by businesses to prevent them being used by the general public. Yet nobody does anything about it; no, not even the traffic police whose business it is to see that empty parking lots are for vehicles needing space to park. At night, these parking lots become hawker establishments or controlled by restaurants who place all sorts of obstacles to prevent them from being used by motorists. Anyone who tries to remove these obstacles runs the risk of being beaten up or their vehicles damaged.

Added to the above the cleanliness of our towns and cities is a disgrace. We are really Third World in this matter. The drains are choked with rubbish. They are not covered thus posing a danger to the public and the smell that emanates from them attracts all sorts of vermin from cockroaches, toads and rats to some times stray cats, dogs and even snakes. Amidst all this filth hawkers do a roaring business without any fear from the authorities although many of them do not have licences to operate their businesses with the help of illegal migrants. Where are the municipal employees who are supposed to over see the work that needs to be done to keep our towns and cities safe, clean and disease free?

The health inspectors, hawker inspectors, building inspectors, traffic wardens, parking attendants and all the ruddy lot who are on the public payroll are not doing their work. Uncovered manholes along deep drains and potholes along major roads don't seem to attract the attention of the authorities. In the housing estate where I live, even the back lanes of the shops and houses have disappeared because of illegal extensions completely taking away the backyards and lanes. Car-park operators have sprung up making a nuisance to the residents in the estate and even public roads are being cordoned off to carry on business. Do we not need local government elections to look into all these matters? Is it a waste of time and money as Najib claims? Do you know what's coming next?

Yes, it's local government elections now because Umno Baru cannot win in urban areas. So it's done away with. Well, what about state governments where Umno/Barisan has lost out in five states and perhaps more will be gone come the 13th general election. Then state

assemblies too can be done away with similar excuses and nominated parliamentarians can be called upon to manage the state governments as well. Thus there will be less politicking to contend with for Umno/Barisan. After what has gone on over the last fifty years, Umno is afraid of elections particularly at the local level.

At the national level it is a different story for Umno to bribe their way through by throwing money and other goodies to the poor rural people to give them their votes out of gratitude. The recent by-election in Hulu Selangor was a perfect example of how they can win. It is claimed that they spent about RM65,000- yes, sixty five thousand ringgit per voter in that constituency of about sixty four thousand voters! What a colossal sum of money to win just one parliamentary seat.

There is nothing to gloat about in this victory for Umno/Barisan in a by-election but come the 13th general election Umno will surely have a very difficult time in retaining this constituency. Remember the Ijok by-election seat in Selangor which MB Khalid Ibrahim lost to the MIC candidate? Watch out, Umno/Barisan.

Whatever, not having local government elections is not in the best interests of the nation. It doesn't do Umno any good. Neither does it help the country progress. Municipal services will gradually degenerate leaving the public to manage with whatever little services they can get for the taxes and rates they pay. Already slum conditions are visible in some areas where municipal services are not forthcoming from the authorities. The council workers hardly do an honest day's job for the wages they are paid. It is hard to see them at work in late morning as the sun gets a little too hot, and by mid-day the workers have already gone home or elsewhere to find some other employment to supplement their wages. Either there's no one to control and supervise them or the spirit of 'adik-beradik' takes over and they just live and let live at the expense of the public's discomfort.

Does Najib still honestly believe that local government elections are unnecessary when there is so much to do in the towns and cities? What makes him think having elected representatives in local government is a waste of time and money? Yes, of course, city dwellers and urbanites cannot be easily conned and bribed into voting for rotten politicians who hardly understand the workings of local government and the laws and regulations that govern these establishments. Being elected to local government should be the first step for any aspiring politician who chooses to serve the people.

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