

Again, the government knows best
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I must confess I do not always agree with Jamaluddin Ibrahim, but we always manage to agree to disagree. The youngest son of the late freedom fighters Shamsiah Fakeh and Ibrahim Mohamad, Jamal or "Jiama", as he is popularly known in the Chinese-speaking community, speaks impeccable Mandarin, thanks to his birth and education in China.

Jamal joined the MCA-owned Chinese-language radio station 988 more than a year ago, and impressed the audience with his strong command of Mandarin. While Chua Soi Lek, the MCA president, has reiterated time and again he will not interfere in the daily operation of 988, the developments in recent days suggest otherwise.

Owing to his unique background, Jamal does offer interesting viewpoints at times that may not go down well with certain quarters in the Chinese community, while his effort to push the boundaries has certainly raised the eyebrows of the highest echelons of the MCA leadership.

Rumours have it that several MCA Youth leaders at the division level were keenly following the contents of Jamal's programme - 'Hi Malaysia' - in the morning, and expressed to Chua their dissatisfaction over alleged bias against Barisan Nasional.

Sources revealed these "informants" were closely affiliated with Wee Ka Siong, the MCA Youth chief. That they even resorted to recording was because Chua is English-educated and cannot quite understand Jamal's standard Mandarin.

Early this week, 988 received a letter from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) requesting explanations in regard to "inappropriate language" and "sensitive issues" as reported by a particular listener (yes, singular).

Since then, Jamal has been taken off air indefinitely and Wong Lai Ngo, the CEO, suspended together with several senior members of staff and DJs pending investigation. At a media briefing yesterday, Rais Yatim, the Minister of (Dis)Information, even had the nerve to brag that an advisory had been issued to 988 as a warning shot.

Swift action, but based on what?

I am at a loss as to what "sensitive issues" would there be that were repugnant to the mysterious listener. On one hand, I would love to commend the MCMC for the fact that it acted immediately on the complaint of one mysterious listener.

However, on the other hand, the swift reaction begs the question as to what elements in 'Hi Malaysia' which had actually caused discomfort to the complainant. How on earth is one expected to respond to accusations when relevant details are at best vague and at worst missing?

The MCMC letter did mention something about racial sentiments. But Jamal is a Malay who constantly encourages in Mandarin his Chinese audience to endeavour to understand other ethnic communities in greater depth, rather than being contented with superficial interaction. Were such comments as "seditious" as those made by Perkasa?

Meanwhile, Jamal's sarcasm and witticism are often targeted at both Chinese and

non-Chinese, and Malaysians should learn to take them in stride. To say that he is the best embodiment of 1Malaysia is rather far-fetched and clichéd, yet it would not be too pretentious to say Jamal is everything that Ridhuan Tee is not.

All this has prompted me to once again question the pledge made by Najib Abdul Razak upon ascension to the prime ministership last year. Then, he admitted readily that the days when the government knew best were over, and it was high time the media be given the right to report freely and responsibly in the age of political awakening.

Increased hurdles for alternative media

More than one year on, all that we have witnessed is increased hurdles for alternative media to be circulated in the market, egregious crackdown on publications not tolerated by the authorities, tightened control over news coverage on air, the unruly and insidious manner in which the mainstream press portrays national issues, the blatant political interference in media operation right up to the Prime Minister's Office, the arbitrary termination of documentary series that were deemed detrimental to the government, and the assault on the freedom of speech in broad daylight.

'Hi Malaysia' is the latest case in point. The incident has exposed to the full how far behind the MCA leaders are when compared to the political awareness of the general public. The moment the news came out, thousands of listeners vented their anger and frustrations on Facebook and via smses, and I could barely conceal my pleasant surprise that many were young people and housewives.

azlanFearing a backlash and further controversies, the management of the Star RFM took the liberty to close down fans' pages of all the 988 deejays. Is it not akin to the Chinese saying of stealing a bell with one's ears covered, pretending that the whole world is not in the know?

This flagrant attack cannot have happened without the connivance of the MCA and Umno, but their leaders must be warned they will pay with a heavier price come next general elections.

Mahathir Mohamad, Ling Liong Sik, Ong Ka Ting, S Samy Vellu and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi were all at one time or another deluded that they could manipulate and fool the people to their hearts' content, but they are now all struggling to protect the vestiges of their legacy. What makes Najib and Chua Soi Lek think they can do better than their discredited predecessors in a vastly changed political landscape?

Most importantly, any campaign in protest of the abrupt suspension of 'Hi Malaysia' must move beyond saving Jamal and other deejays to make it more meaningful, for it is an issue that concerns not only several prominent individuals, but every Malaysian who longs for a country in which one enjoys not only freedom of speech, but also freedom after speech.

We must boldly take up the challenge and confront the state successfully, only then can we proudly say that the days when the government knows best are truly over.

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