

Non-Malays were unmoved by reformasi's street protests
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K Temoc

I refer to Manjit Bhatia's article Rock the boat? Not Malaysians, no sir....

Bhatia believes that when it comes to real, open commitment to politics or for the opposition political parties they claim to support, Chinese and Indian Malaysians are all talk but no action. He reckons the extent of their political commitment (to the opposition) has been limited to only 'kedai kopi' discussions or as the Penangites would call it, 'kong sam kok'.

'Sam kok' refers to the Three Kingdoms of the Eastern Han period (220 – 280 CE) with its Machiavellian politics, intrigues and politico-military strategies. The local term implies wannabe strategists indulging in cheap idle talk at the coffee shops, notionally solving all the world's problems but with no intention of committing themselves to any action.

As an example of the Chinese and Indian preference for 'kong sam kok', Bhatia reminds us of their lack of participation in the reformasi street demonstrations against the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim and his subsequent arrest in 1989.

I suppose one can't blame Bhatia for his outrage at the refusal of the majority of non-Malays to join in passionately in that rare occasion of public political protest. After all, Bhatia admitted he isn't a Malaysian, so how could he understand why the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese, wouldn't want to take sides in what was basically a tussle between two Umno factions - Dr Mahathir Mohamad's and Anwar Ibrahim's?

That one side lost was inevitable and certainly not the concern of either the Chinese or Indians. That the loser suffered all the subsequent nastiness is regrettable but hardly made that bloke a political reformist. Yes, Bhatia may not even be aware that Chinese Malaysians looked upon, and still do, Anwar Ibrahim and his so-called reformasi with cynicism, distrust and indeed disdain.

Anwar Ibrahim was, to put it euphemistically, not very nice to the non-Malays when he was in power. Chinese and Indian parents still bitterly remember his Education Ministry's draconian policy to make non-Muslim students perform prayers in Muslim fashion. I also recall Saifulbahri Kamaruddin, a former Malaysian journalist writing in to Malaysiakini on the hypocrisy of Anwar Ibrahim.

Unlike Bhatia, most non-Malays didn't view the so-called reformasi street protests as a clarion call for Malaysians to join in to protest against a repressive state. They didn't associate their own repression with Anwar falling on his Umno keris.

To them, Anwar was not the solution but rather part of the problem. Anwar had played for high stakes in a game that determined his personal ascendancy to the top of Umno, and which didn't include non-Malay Malaysians. So when he faltered in his ambitious endeavour, don't blame the non-Malays for not buying his spin that it was about political reforms. That's about as plausible as the Bush administration's fabrication on the Saddam Hussein-Osama Laden link.

Normally, I love to read Manjit Bhatia's articles, but in this outburst of his, I believe he has

been blinded by his immense dislike of Mahathir into believing 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. But we, who have felt the sting of Anwar's official hands, weren't and aren't so enamoured by his claim for 'reformasi'.

Anwar Ibrahim is a man who sang the Islamic tune when he was in Abim, the nationalist chant when in Umno, Paul Anka's songs when he's talking to the Western press and now lots of Canto-pop.

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