

For Najib, it's perestroika without glasnost  
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COMMENT One did not have to wait for the just released annual Civil and Political Rights Report 2010 compiled by Suaram to have it confirmed that the Najib Razak administration thus far can be described as having engaged in perestroika without glasnost.

Malaysia's sixth prime minister started out in April 2009 exhaling reformist vigor in the economic and political spheres in an attempt to ward off the sclerosis that threatened his party and country.

After almost three years in power, the country has experienced some economic changes but there has been little or no inkling of political reform, as elaborated in the Suaram report.

In short, there has been a modicum of perestroika (restructuring, in the economic field) but certainly no glasnost (openness, as in more political space for dissent).

Najib as Gorbachev-lite is certainly not going to succeed against the array of problems in the economic and political spheres both Umno and the country is faced with.

In fact, the problems on the political front – corruption, judicial decay, a dysfunctional police force, racial and religious cleavages and tensions, to name some of the more pressing concerns – have increased in intensity.

Widespread public cynicism over the land fraud charges levied last week against former Selangor chief minister Dr Mohd Khir Toyo only underscored the mood of disbelief that the powers-that-be have it in them to tackle corruption.

Coupled with the continuing deprivation of elementary justice to Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim in Sodomy II and in Parliament where he stands accused of misleading the House, an overall picture of human rights deterioration in the country is perceptible without resort to the Suaram analysis.

Rights situation has worsened

Not that hopes were high when Najib assumed power that sweeping political and economic reforms would be introduced to prevent the country's slide into a Burma-like morass.

But for someone like Najib who evinced managerial acumen and some political savvy when he was deputy to predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, it was reasonable to hope that the status quo would be improved on.

That it has not – in fact, the human rights situation has measurably worsened – is what the Suaram report delineates.

The point is inescapable: it is not necessary to rely on Lord Action to recognise that power which is not transferred from one group to another - as distinct from having being slightly shifted among its existing holders - is power that will be abused.

The fast approaching 13th general election will turn out to be pivotal if a majority of the electorate realise this point.

TERENCE NETTO has been a journalist for close on four decades. He likes the occupation because it puts him in contact with the eminent without being under the necessity to admire them. It is the ideal profession for a temperament that finds power fascinating and its exercise abhorrent.

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