

Free And Fair Elections To Become Election Issue At 13th GE?
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With the PM Najib declaring that the Bersih march on July 9th is alleged to be aiming at toppling the BN government, whether the election conduct in Malaysia is free or fair, or the other way round, had quietly been upgraded as an election issue, beyond the wildest dream of the organisers!

BN claim to defend the EC's election conduct while the Bersih supporters claimed otherwise, and endorsed by the Opposition. The voters will vote to speak out on whether they consider our prevailing ways of running elections eg not clamping down on abusing public fund in ruling party's campaigns, blatant vote buying, extremely short campaign period, unequal media access etc, are acceptable to the people!

The people don't really have to run their own candidates to contest in the elections to push these issues-as suggested by Najib. They just have to make a choice/judgement based on the stands of the parties/candidates on the issue above. So: where do they stand, really?

And clearly the issue does not favour the ruling parties under BN. There is a clear consensus on both sides of the political fence that the elections are never conducted on free and fair basis. The last international observers from the Commonwealth, in 1991, also judged that Malaysian elections are free but not fair-meaning that it failed half way in its score! The difference between the people are more on whether this is justified. The ruling party has been justifying it by suggesting some kind of political `NEP' -parallel to the economic New Economic Policy where the Bumiputra politics need sheltering or handicap. This has never been vocally put forward as the economic version - but often the implied arguments are more than clearly spelt out by PERKASA's Ibrahim Ali. Thus he claimed today that Bersih's aim to fight for free and fair elections is only to topple Malay power!

While the NEP or its clones carry on based on unclear statistics on whether it has succeeded to achieve its targets after 40 years of implementations there is no doubt that the Malays with other Bumiputras politicians -in contrast to their community, have been enjoying overwhelming political power, dominating all political institutions in the country from the very beginning. There isn't a unmet target argument here. And there is also no possibility of any change of that in the future - even after the Malays dominated Opposition takes over!

Most people want good non-corrupt governments - they are not so bothered about whether the government is led/over represented by a certain ethnic group. Without delivering non-corrupt government for over half a century BN's offer of only Malay/Bumi representations may well fall short of the expectations of Malaysians of all ethnic groups!

That may be the weakest point on the BN's argument that the banning of Bersih's free election rally is needed to preserve the Malays'/ Bumiputras' power/representation in government. There is now not just 1 brand of Malay/Bumi political representatives. This is not the issue of concern to most voters! It is also clear that they are fighting tooth and nail to make themselves the only representatives of the Malay/Bumiputra's views.

But this precisely put them out of the democratic norms: in a democracy the voters chose anyone they can trust to lead them, irrespective of ethnic or religious or other considerations. If the voters are indeed insisting on leaders from a certain background they will express it through the ballot box-nothing for any party to justify undemocratic means eg banning peaceful rallies meant to fight for free elections, to keep political power to

themselves.

And the joke is: even the ethnic power they try to champion is not an issue that voters are bothered about. The voters, like voters everywhere else, want non-corrupt governments who don't embezzle the public fund. They want free and fair elections that allow them to make their choices freely-including the choice on whether to keep corrupt Malay/Bumi parties or non-corrupt Malay/Bumi parties!

The more the BN try to put the 'toppling regime' and 'toppling ethnic power' argument to justify its crackdown on the people's rights to assemble peacefully, the more they will be at odd with the people/voters' sentiment! Their actions so far had already help to publicise Bersih's rally to the whole country-through the paper, TV and radios which normally never help to publicise the civil society or Opposition's activities at all! Imagine how many forums and leaflets that the Bersih organisers otherwise have to do before achieving a fraction of this publicity!

Then the BN's incredible self-interested arguments expose their own narrow partisan self-interests-which differ much from what people expect of a government for all people - whichever way they vote in the elections. They are scoring their own goals every time they open their mouths and print valuable column inches in the papers, provide air-time over radios and TV channels, to highlight negative or irrelevant arguments against free and fair elections, all just to keep power to themselves!

With this performance by the BN then the general election issue is all set: voters are made to choose between a ruling/incumbent party which want their votes irrespective of the means they use, or where their campaign fund come from, and on the other hand, Opposition parties which want voters to be given respect to choose freely and fairly. The issue is raised by the people - which included endorsement by the Opposition parties, and the response from the BN is confirming their position as criticised by the civil society/Opposition parties.

So: let's the people choose - whether to turn up at the July 9th rally, as well as to continue to vote BN. The BN has nobody to blame if the voters refused to vote them as they have taken the side of the un-reformable anti-democratic advocate, even after the 2008 electoral debacle! History will repeat itself if people don't learn from it!

Before this Opposition parties, civil society and academics grumbled about unfree and unfair elections in their own circles and in their own blogs. They, all put together, are clearly a minority of minorities - not even enough to vote in a pro-free election candidate anywhere in the country! There were no chance that the voters who are more concerned about getting better deal for their livelihood - by fair or vote-buying ways, are going to make their choice based on different models of elections-democratic or not. By spelling out that their ways to conduct elections are the ways that BN will stick to - then the BN is conceding a good bullet to the Opposition parties and the anti-unfair elections voters.

But by making it an election issue through the mainstream media even the crucial majority middle-ground voters will be forced to make a choice based on the issue of whether the elections are run fairly or not. The chance that these healthily cynical voters, except those few heavily bribed class, will side with the unfair election advocates are pretty slim! Without the constant highlighting in the mainstream media the Bersih rally - whether they rallied 30k or 300k voters, will be gone un-noticed after July 9th, much the same way as the 'million-youth' rally organised in Putrajaya! Did anyone noticed the 'million-youth' rally that took place last month? Rallies do not by their numbers alone, gain votes - but the

incessant talks about them - do!

So: free and fair elections as an election issue? Definitely YES for believers and also for middle-of-the-road Joe and Jane/Ali, Akau, Athi or Apai voters! The unfair regime had chosen a fair issue to fight in the elections - let the people welcome it on July 9th and even after! Every baton coming down on a protestor, every shot by the water cannon, every tear gas canister thrown, every Pak Cik and Mak Cik arrested from the crowds, will mean votes lost to the BN! The regime that pour scorn on the voters' choice - through their recalcitrant insistence on running unfair elections, will deserve what history give them unmistakably everywhere in the world!

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