

Bersih's Aftermath: A Movement Of Change Against Najib?

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Sometimes one creates a dynamic impression by saying something, and sometimes one creates as significant an impression by remaining silent - these are the words of the Dalai Lama.

The revered leader lives in exile following the 1959 Tibetan uprising which is largely seen as mirroring the discontent of the people against Chinese repression.

The overwhelming sea of yellow Malaysians on Saturday, who called for tougher measures to curb electoral fraud, reflect a similar dissatisfaction.

Reading the comments of leaders from ruling UMNO/Barisan Nasional, the meaning of Dalai Lama's words dawned upon me.

Their rambling comments, aimed to downplay the Saturday rally, signify their embarrassment and inability to concede defeat.

Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak was quick to say that he is happy no one was injured or property destroyed. Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein tried twisting facts to say it was an opposition-led protest, done with the sole aim of gaining political mileage.

The IGP, Ismail Omar, congratulated his men for keeping the situation on the streets under control. He said the rowdy officers used minimal force, thus dismissing the fact that they used excessive force on unarmed protesters.

In a futile effort to repair the government's tattered image, Ismail said some 6,000 people rallied prompting many responses on social networking sites. Obviously tickled by the police chief's "inability" to count, many said he must have failed math.

Thinking back, I realize that the government and police have no choice but scramble about to do a patch-up work.

The rally is the biggest anti-government protest in four years. It brought together people from all walks of life to demand that the Election Commission looks into measures to stem electoral irregularities which has helped the Barisan Nasional government stay in power.

It has also exposed Najib as a weak leader. Flip flopping on his decisions to meet the Bersih 2.0 steering committee members and allowing them the use of a stadium to hold the rally demonstrate that the ruling elite are divided down the middle.

Following the success of the rally, Najib's position has become even shakier. The wrest for power between the premier and his deputy, Muhyuddin Yassin, is an open secret. Now Muhyuddin has a free pass to push for Najib's ouster.

But hoping to bolster his position, Najib has opted to take a tough stand by announcing his government is not afraid to take on the opposition in the next general election.

But Najib faces pressure not just from his nemesis but from a vast majority of Malaysians with their 100k resignation demand on Facebook.

The tens of thousands of Malaysians who took to the streets despite weeks of threat from the government and police to call for a check on an electoral system which is open to abuses have created a dynamic impression.

To hold on to whatever dignity that is left, the UMNO/BN leaders and police should have simply shut up. But they indulged themselves in the exact opposite, only to emerge looking more idiotic.

Sunday's headlines screamed about Najib's request to the silent anti-Bersih majority to speak up. Without marching on the streets, of course.

MIC chief G Palanivel told reporters the lack of Indian representation at the rally is because they are aware that such practice is no longer relevant in resolving issues.

He further said the realization came about after proactive measures taken by the government that focused on improving the community through efforts such as in the education, social and business sectors.

The MIC is a sell-out. Palanivel's statement is an attempt to deflect any criticism from UMNO leaders, with whom the MIC enjoys a client-patron relationship.

Palanivel's arm-chair observation is purely simplistic. Young and professional Indians marched in solidarity with the rest of the protesters to make their demands visible.

Unlike Palanivel, I walked alongside my fellow Malaysians and saw the rounds of tear gas and water cannon shot against the people plus the high handedness of the men in uniform.

Protesters were kicked around, beaten and treated inhumanely. Media friends saw tear gas being shot into the Tung Shin hospital compound by the FRU. And although there is enough video evidence and eye-witness accounts to prove this incident, the police chief insists nothing of that sort happened.

One man died at the rally. Baharuddin Ahmad, according to media reports, collapsed after being tear gassed. His family blames the police for his death, saying their pleading for help to take him to the hospital following seizures, was ignored by the police.

This, in itself, sums up the abuse of power by the police.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my condolences to Baharuddin's wife and family.

Instead of adopting a conciliatory measure, Najib's hardline strategy would only serve to further alienate the people. The crackdown on the protesters has wreaked havoc on Malaysia's image as one of Southeast Asia's more democratic nations.

Amnesty International spokeswoman Donna Guest called the crackdown "the worst campaign of repression we've seen in the country for years".

Despite hundreds of police and anti-riot trucks, thousands of baton-wielding policemen, stern warning from the police threatening arrests and a lock-down of Kuala Lumpur, 50,000 people slipped past watchful police officers to join the rally.

Instead of dealing with their discontent to find durable solutions, the government is

filibustering to avoid embarrassment. This would only further anger the masses and increase groundswell of unhappiness against the ruling government.

But for now it's clear that Najib and Co are struggling to accept that a revolution has started in Malaysia and it signals the beginning of their end.

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