

Prosecution Of Mat Sabu Should Dampen Euphoria Sparked By Najib's Gambit To Make Malaysia 'Best Democracy In The World'

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The malicious and selective prosecution of PAS Deputy President Mat Sabu for criminal defamation should dampen the euphoria in certain quarters sparked by the Prime Minister Najib Razak's latest gambit to brand himself as the reformer par excellence to make Malaysia the "best democracy in the world".

The proposals to set up a parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms, to repeal the nefarious Internal Security Act (ISA) and to amend various laws such as Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) have not been able to stand up to close scrutiny that they are intended to usher in a major democratisation of the country.

The proposed parliamentary select committee will only be meaningful if it results in changes to the electoral system to ensure free and fair elections as envisaged in the Eight Demands of Bersih 2, and most important of all, that such reforms are all effected before the dissolution of Parliament and the holding of the next general elections.

The very fact that the Prime Minister is not prepared to give an undertaking that Parliament would not be dissolved until the parliamentary select committee has made recommendations for a free and fair electoral system and their full implementation raises the question whether this is just a political ploy or a meaningful reform exercise.

The repeal of the ISA will be tested as to whether the two replacement laws for it would only result in spawning new ISA-like detention-without-trial laws without the term of "ISA".

The PPPA amendment to do away with annual licensing for newspapers will not lead to free and responsible press so long as the government continues to exercise a media stranglehold through other measures as licensing of newspapers and political party ownership and control of newspapers.

At a time when Najib's bona fides for political reforms has come to the very national forefront, the malicious and selective prosecution of Mat Sabu for criminal defamation has come as a reminder that if Malaysia is to make progress towards a more democratic society, upholding human rights and the rule of law, it is equally important to end the gross abuses of power so rampant in the present system – as illustrated by the case of the malicious and selective prosecution of Mat Sabu for criminal defamation.

There are incidents galore in the past two years of reckless and irresponsible incitement of racial and religious hatred and tensions, as in the lies and falsehoods alleging a DAP conspiracy for a Christian Malaysia and a Christian Prime Minister, but which enjoy utter immunity and impunity from prosecution.

There must not only be far-reaching reforms to abolish draconian and undemocratic laws but also a restoration of the independence, professionalism and integrity of key national institutions, whether the Judiciary, Attorney-General's Chambers, Police, Election Commission or MACC, if Malaysia is to become a normal democratic country.

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