

Assembling Hypocrisy, The BN/UMNO Way
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Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's government is playing Russian Roulette. It is a practice of loading a bullet into one chamber of a revolver, spinning the cylinder and pulling the trigger while pointing at one's own head.

Yes, it's potentially dangerous. I am referring to both the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011 and the government's audacity.

In September, Najib scrapped Section 27 of the Police Act that requires a permit before holding rallies. It was, however, replaced with the more repressive Peaceful Assembly Bill with unacceptable restrictions on freedom of assembly, association and expression - the fundamental principles in a democracy.

The new Bill outlaws all street protests, forces the organizers to give a one-month notice to the police, regulates, restricts and imposes conditions on an assembly and prohibits anyone under the age of 15 from taking part.

Furthermore, protesters could be slapped with a RM 20,000 fine while organizers who failed to give sufficient notice would be fined RM 10,000. This is sheer madness.

But it also clearly reflects the political game plan of Najib's government. It outlines their fear of losing power at the next general election. It caricatures a desperate government which would clamp down on civil liberties to hold on to power.

And most importantly, the new Bill demonstrates that we have rogue politicians ruling the country as the stifling provisions are a flagrant breach of the Federal Constitution, that allows for freedom of expression and does not stipulate any age barriers.

In a sharp twist, the proposed assembly law provides the police with even more power and makes it legitimate for the force to take any action against protesters. It also empowers the home minister with authority to make regulations for the enforcement of the provisions in the proposed law.

None of these provisions are in line with Najib's promise to enable a more vibrant democratic space in the country. The tightening of the noose is very much like the law of the jungle disguised as justice. And in this case, passed off as one which is crucial to maintain national security.

Therefore, we could conclude that all this while Najib was pounding the propaganda drum.

It also spells more doom for the nation. I would not be surprised if the government comes up with more wrong head policies to clamp down on legitimate dissent. And our fear that a more

oppressive law would be put in place to replace the Internal Security Act (ISA) does hold water.

We have seen the prime minister attend a concert, cycle in Penang, announce a so-called people-friendly budget and host a get together for Manchester United fans at his home. Newspapers and the alternative media have reported that Najib's popularity rating was soaring.

After all these populist measures he turns around and plays his original self. And that too when he is seeking a fresh mandate through the next general election.

This raises crucial questions - would the government play extremely dirty at the polls? Has Najib endorsed the new Bill because he knows he has nothing to lose?

Whatever the analysis could be, we the rakyat simply cannot take the new assembly law sitting down. If we do not act now, it would send a signal to the government which would clearly translate to mean it could bulldoze into our democratic space and civil liberties.

I therefore concur with law expert Abdul Aziz Bari that this proposed Bill must be challenged in court, for it violates the Federal Constitution. This would send a strong message to the government that we would not allow the ruling elite to trample upon our rights.

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