

It's People's Right To Disagree  
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by P Ramakrishnan

The minister in the prime minister's department, Nazri Aziz, doesn't seem to understand basic things concerning democracy. His notion of democracy is woefully dismal and disappointing. His ignorance on issues of democracy is alarming!

While castigating the current Bar Council president, Lim Chee Wee, and the former Bar Council president, Ambiga Sreenevasan, for organising the Walk for Freedom peaceful demonstration, he suggested that the Bar Council be registered as a political party and that they should stand for elections.

His stand seems to suggest that only political parties and politicians have the right to disagree and speak up and if you are not in either of these categories, you don't have the right to criticise or disagree.

This is utter nonsense. This right to disagree or criticise is not the monopoly of a political party or politician. This God-given right is the birth-right of every individual, and it is enshrined in the Constitution.

The right to freedom of assembly, the right to speech of expression and the right to freedom of association are the inalienable rights of every citizen. There are no caveats placed on these rights. Nazri, therefore, has no right to insist that one must belong to a political party to disagree with the Barisan Nasional's policies.

The Constitution has no such provisions barring citizens from speaking up or championing a cause.

In a democracy, citizens have a role to play and participate in every aspect of governance without belonging to a political party and without being a politician.

Nazri must be reminded that, according to A.d. Benoist, "The highest measure of democracy is neither the 'extent of freedom' nor the 'extent of equality', but rather the highest measure of participation."

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