

Did Najib Threaten Us?
MalaysianMirror.com
29 January 2012
Mariam Mokhtar

Malaysian parents already bemoan the fact that they have to spend a fortune on PS3, X-Box and other computer games.

If that was not sufficiently worrying, Home minister Hishamuddin Hussein has spent about RM7 million of taxpayers' money on a simulation centre at the Rakan Muda Complex. He claims that this facility is necessary for Rela Youth cadets to "foster youth interest in security and public order issues through the activity of shooting".

Rela (Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia) is the People's Volunteer Corps, and the outfit was formed on January 11, 1971 under the Emergency Act 1964.

Yesterday's report of Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak's warning to protestors, that the paramilitary Rela was ready to defend the country from turmoil, is both worrying and disconcerting.

Was Najib issuing a masked threat to the rakyat?

He said: "When the chips are down, Rela will be with this government to defend the country.

"Do not cause havoc in this country because the 2.8 million Rela members will not stand idly by and watch the country descend into chaos."

The old warhorses would consider 2.8 million troops an "army theatre", as in a theatre of war.

Unless Malaysians have been sleepwalking, the South-East Asian region does seem a relatively peaceful area unlike some parts of the world.

Perhaps we should ask the PM: "Who or what are we defending the country from?"

Further north, South Korea is on high alert because of potential attacks from its northern neighbour. Down south, that insignificant little red dot, as a former PM once described Singapore, would not want to disturb the status quo, and why should it? We are one of their major trading partners and our links are more than just a shared border and a shared history.

Most Malaysians are unaware of any threat from warring nations. There is always the danger of terrorist attacks but so far, there has been no new alert.

So, is Najib issuing a silent threat to people who want a change from Umno/BN? Is this a version of Najib's "best democracy in the world"? Is this a typical of the leader of a 'moderate' nation?

In 2007, when the Bersih 2.0 chairman, Ambiga Sreenevasan, was president of the Malaysian Bar Council, she said that allegations of abuse by Rela could not be ignored.

"That's a frightening prospect because what they're doing is they're going into premises, there are cases where they have broken in, they've used gangster tactics and we are very concerned with the human rights abuses."

One former member of the armed forces said, "RELA was formed in 1971 under Emergency Act 1964. This Act was amended in 2005 for obvious reasons - to give the BN government more clout to do the unthinkable. Rela's role has been hijacked by BN to ensure its own survival."

Another of his retired colleagues said, "At the top of Rela is the director-general and if the current national strength is about 2.8 million, then each state has substantial numbers of Rela volunteers.

"This is pretty huge and is much larger than the armed forces or the police. They are at the Home Ministry's beck and call so you can imagine what they can do in an event of an emergency."

In 2007, when the Rela director-general Zaidon Asmuni was interviewed by an online news portal and asked about the requirements to join Rela, he said: "Ordinary Malaysian citizens above the age of 16 who hold an identity card are eligible to enrol as volunteers."

When asked whether the district Rela officer had to obtain permission prior to a raid on illegal immigrants, he responded with: "No need. We give them a blanket approval since our core business now is against illegal immigrants. It is stated in our regulations that operations can be conducted without police or immigration (supervision)."

When asked if recruits were screened prior to selection, his reply was, "Nowadays we don't have to screen. Anyone can join and become a Rela member. If we were to conduct a screening exercise, it would take the police some time (to do so), because they have their own priorities. Those who join will receive a membership card within two weeks. It's as simple as that."

His reply was contradicted by another armed forces member who used to work in East Malaysia: "Lately some Filipino illegals in Sabah with false ICs, were arrested for being in Rela. It's becoming a joke."

Perhaps, Najib and Hishammuddin need to consider the dilemmas facing our youth.

Malaysian students are barred from being involved in politics but can enjoy learning about firearms and virtual warfare.

Children who reach puberty can get married and have children, drive a car at 17 years, open a bank account but cannot vote till they are 21.

Around the world, the young are told about the dangers of gun crime. Here in Malaysia, the PM seems to be encouraging our youth to use violence to protect the country from chaos.

Using Twitter, Hishammuddin defended the virtual firing range and said that it would impart "technical training value" for Rela to help trainees keep calm during tense situations.

"In fact, they will appreciate peace more."

We are most fortunate that we have such a benevolent government. Most countries use these virtual battlefields to train their troops to kill without hesitation.

MARIAM MOKHTAR

(The views expressed above belongs to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)

Copyright © 2012 www.malaysianmirror.com
<http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/56421>