

Najib Should Heed The Voice Of Malaysians
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By Lim Kit Siang

The Prime Minister Najib Razak should honour his declaration that "the era of government knows best is over" and heed the voice of Malaysians at home as well as global Malaysians in 72 cities and 29 countries who want real and not cosmetic change in national governance.

An email received today from a Malaysian who will be taking part in Boston Bersih 3.0 this Saturday illustrates not only the increasing momentum in the awakening and new sense of empowerment among Malaysians of their rights and responsibilities to help create a Malaysia where all Malaysians regardless of race or religion could feel proud, but also the light they see at the end of the tunnel inspiring their hopes and expectations for change in national governance and policies after 55 years of nationhood.

This is the email I received from a 29-year-old Penangite who have been in the United States for the last 10 years:

I'm a 29-year old Penangite, and I've been in the U.S. for over 10 years. I did not get a JPA scholarship or any government scholarships, but I was offered almost a free ride to five top-tier schools in the U.S. (Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Middlebury, Wesleyan (Freeman Asian Scholarship), and Dartmouth). I chose Wellesley where I received an amazing education (I met Nat Tan who was then at Harvard), and then worked in economic consulting in Boston for a few years, before starting a Ph.D. in Economics at Brown University.

My father was a businessman (and not a rich taukeh, mind you) and my mother, a primary school teacher. Growing up, money was always tight. Yet they managed to send four out of five daughters on to pursue their Bachelor's and Master's degrees in top 50 universities in the U.S. How did we do it? It was neither through government scholarships, nor through Father-Mother Scholarships, but through the generous financial aid of U.S. institutions and the contributions of relatives. Not surprisingly, of the four, one is in London, and three are in the U.S.

As a teenager in the 1990s, my only news outlet was mainstream newspapers, e.g., The Star, which as you well know, was effectively taken over in the 1980's by the government. I recall being irked by the low quality of the newspaper - I would deem the standard of writing equivalent to that of a Standard Six student. Coverage of local events, such as the planting of a tree, would revolve around xyz politician saying so and so. More annoying was that on day one, you would have Mahathir saying blah blah blah. On day two, you'll have several politicians parroting Mahathir's views, saying "Mahathir said blah blah blah so blah blah blah." And so on and so forth for the next few days. Did these so-called leaders have no thoughts or ideas of their own? It would seem that they, sememangnya, are incapable of such. Sadly enough, the quality of the media has hardly improved, but that is another story for another day.

Only after leaving Malaysia did I slowly realize how oppressed and repressed we had been (and still are). Part of it may have been a natural maturation process that comes with age. A bigger part, I think, comes from being taken entirely out of the country, and placed in a new context where I was exposed to people from different countries, with different experiences and different ideas. Perhaps more importantly, I realized that I used to identify as a Chinese in Malaysia, but now that I was out of Malaysia, my identity evolved to that of a Malaysian ... period.

The results of the March 2008 elections were unexpected, to say the least. Who would have thought it was possible? I have to admit that that was the first time I ever thought that one day, maybe one day I can go back to my country. Before then, it was not even a consideration ... why return to a country where I'll be treated as a second-class citizen?

Since 2008, the political sandiwara, parasitical leeching, and blatant thievery have continued, and in fact, intensified. At the same time, there is an awakening of the rakyat. The mantle of fear and oppression is being cast off. And we now have hope for the future.

I just wanted to thank you for fighting for our country, for speaking up when few would do so, for being a staunch opposition-er for decades. How much easier would it have been to fold in with the ruling party, to accept the accolades and bodek-ing and titles and easy money. I thank God for people like you who are willing to stand up to make a difference. And now you've paved the way for many, many people, young and old, to do the same.

I will be at the Bersih rally in Boston on Saturday. Those of us outside Malaysia have it easy. We just have to show up and sembang with fellow Malaysians. I pray for those of you in Malaysia, for God's protection over all of you. I'm praying for our country, and for the new generation of leaders that God will rise up. God bless you.

Does Najib understand the feelings and import expressed in this email, which represents not just of one person but of entire generations of Malaysians, both inside and outside the country?

If the answer is in the positive, then Najib should direct the police and all other enforcement agencies to give their full co-operation and assistance to facilitate and ensure the success of the Bersih 3.0 "sit-in" protest for a clean, free and fair election at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday.

This will be in keeping not only with his declaration that "the era of the government knows best is over" but also in line with his other declaration of wanting to make Malaysia the "best democracy in the world".

The electoral reform group Global Bersih has noted that Malaysians asking for free and fair elections have not received any support from "either Putrajaya, or a police force whose job it is to ensure the safety of Malaysians, irrespective of race, creed, religion or political affiliation".

It warned that any violence at any Bersih 3.0 sit-in in the country will ultimately smear Barisan Nasional (BN) and the police.

I endorse the two calls by Global Bersih to the Prime Minister Najib Razak, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein and Inspector-General of Police Ismail Omar, viz:

firstly, to publicly declare that they support Malaysians working towards an electoral system that delivers fair and free elections; and

secondly, to guarantee the safety of citizens attending Duduk Bantah events this Saturday, and to act to prevent other groups from attacking, intimidating or otherwise harassing the organisers and their fellow Malaysians.

Let the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Inspector-General perform their duty to the citizenry and the country.

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