

High Commission Lowers Flag In Shame

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Food always works with Malaysians. Tell them makan is available, and they will turn up at your event. Anything else and the chances are that they will give it a miss. So, if Malaysians are prepared to brave the elements, to stand opposite an empty building before walking 2.4 km in driving rain and cold, then what they have come for must be very important indeed.

This is what happened in London when around 1,000 Malaysians gathered in front of the Malaysian High Commission yesterday.

Normally, Malaysians looking for the High Commission in Belgrave Square need only look out for the Malaysian flag flying proudly outside the building. Yesterday, the Bersih protestors were stunned to find that the flag had been removed by the diplomatic staff.

Why?

Did the High Commissioner, Zakaria Sulong, act on his own initiative and order the flag to be lowered to spare his boss, the blushes? Did he receive a directive from the Foreign Minister Anifah Aman or from the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak?

It is clear that the Malaysian government and its foreign service do not want Malaysia to be associated with protests calling for free and fair elections. The Syrian Embassy is 50 metres away and has been beset by weekly protests because of the violence in Syria. Few will have associated Malaysia with dissent.

The impact of a tide of yellow outside the High Commission with placards bearing the words "Shame on you Najib" and "Stop Money politics" will generate ample bad publicity. The sting is worse for Najib, who places so much importance on image, when the Malaysian flag is flying in the background.

Perhaps, that is why the Malaysian flag was not on show at the Malaysian High Commission in London.

If Najib was shocked by last year's Bersih 2.0 demonstration in London, he will not be happy about this year's gathering.

When the UK riots last August resulted in the assault of a Malaysian student, Najib did not hesitate in drawing parallels between the two demonstrations, to justify the use of violence by his police force. He brushed aside criticisms that one was predominantly a social issue whilst the other was a demand to end electoral fraud.

He said, "The riots which have broken out in the UK are very serious and were absolutely not anticipated by the authorities there. Therefore, what the government decided in relation to Bersih 2.0's plan to march was to avoid any incident that could lead to a riot like the burning of shops or attacks on individuals".

He was condemned by Bersih for making unsuitable comparisons between the two types of protests – one peaceful and planned, the other was opportunistic and spontaneous - whilst the Home minister Hishammuddin Hussein and the Deputy IGP Khalid Abu Bakar were advised by DAP's Teresa Kok to learn from the UK government about policing.

The British police whom protestors spoke to at yesterday's Bersih 3.0 rally, were courteous, informative and helpful. One said, "The Malaysians are well behaved and easy to police."

The Malaysians had followed the strict guidelines stipulated by the Metropolitan police when making their

way from the High Commission to the Houses of Parliament where they handed a memorandum to UK MPs on various Malaysian issues.

If there was any criticism, it was that one policeman's boots were not as waterproof as he thought they should be and his cap was soaking wet.

The Malaysian government has been so rattled by the enthusiasm shown by overseas Malaysians for Bersih 3.0, that prior to the planned global protest, letters and verbal threats, were sent to Malaysian students in both America and England, threatening reprisals and punishments.

Sarawak Report has published various copies of exchanges from the Malaysian's Education Department in Washington to Malaysian students receiving government aid.

Despite the bullying, several students were present at the London protest. Some wore masks, whilst others felt that it was time they made a stand.

Many Malaysians had the courage to want their names and professions to be published. When interviewed, they said that Bersih 3.0 had been a success.

One student who was happy to give his name said, "The crowd was ecstatic and everyone was inspired by the event. There were students from Oxford, Cambridge and Leicester just for the Bersih rally. Some of them rarely come down to London.

"This is of course very inspiring and shows that the students are not as scared as we thought they were. In fact, I also heard there were a group of students who had an anti-JPA (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam or Public Service Department) placard as well!"

If the PM has not got the message about the objectives of Bersih 3.0, then he is more dense than we all believed him to be. Could Najib and his Cabinet have missed the 250,000 Bersih supporters in Kuala Lumpur and thousands more nationwide?

As reports filter in from the countries across the globe, Najib can only hang his head in shame. Bersih 3.0 has probably rung the death knell for Umno.

Najib, his Cabinet and the Election Commission (EC) cannot be like the ostrich which buries its head in the sand and hope that the problem will go away. It won't. However, these people can still redeem themselves. Accede to the demands of Bersih 3.0 and give the rakyat what it wants: Free and fair elections.

A PhD postgraduate student at King's College, London said, "The tides of change have come, and Malaysia's civil society is speaking loudly and clearly. Thank you everyone for your passion and perseverance".

His colleague had a more poignant message: "Before 2007 we could not keep up with the regime, but now the regime cannot keep up with us!"

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