

Burger Protest A Sign Of Umno's Desperation
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When the seven-member international group came to Kuala Lumpur to observe the Bersih 3.0 rally, they interviewed several people including Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

When asked if electoral reform in Malaysia would be possible, Tengku Adnan had allegedly said: "Are our people (Malaysians) mature for freedom?" (sic.)

Ordinarily, Tengku Adnan would be considered wrong; but being an Umno man, he was probably referring to the Umno members, when he made those remarks. So, Tengku Adnan is correct when he said that the Umno members have little maturity.

The petty traders group, Ikhlas, which carried out their "burger protest" outside Ambiga's house in Damansara Heights, is an example of the people whom Tengku Adnan was thinking of. Perhaps, consuming too much fast food like burgers, which are full of saturated fats and additives, retard brain function.

Ikhlas chairman, Mohd Ridzuan Abdullah claimed that petty traders lost about RM200,000 in business because of the Bersih 3.0 rally on 28 April. So, they vented their anger by setting up a burger stall outside Ambiga's house.

He said, "If we cannot do business in KL, then we will do business here".

One wonders why these Ikhlas traders sold western burgers and not roti canai or nasi kandar.

They can't have been serious about losing business because they set up stall in the upmarket residential area and gave away free burgers. Nor were the enforcement officers serious about performing their duties.

If Mohd Ridzuan and his members had been more switched on and read about Bersih 2.0, he would have encouraged his traders to set up stalls and provided the several hundred thousand rally participants with food and drink.

Last year, during Bersih 2.0, there were no reports of vandalism or damage to shops. On the contrary, the few shops which stayed open for business did a roaring trade.

On the eve of Bersih 3.0, people were already thronging the streets of the capital and the smart entrepreneurs who provided snacks and drinks, ran out of supplies within hours.

Ikhlas traders claimed to have lost much trade on 28 April, but they only have themselves to blame. Instead of providing the niche service, they relied too much on Umno propaganda that said there would be riots and trouble.

They should also have realised that Umno cannot make up its mind. In the days leading up to the event,

Home minister Hishammuddin Hussein had declared that Bersih did not present a security threat.

Even former Prime minister Mahathir Mohamed's daughter, Marina, who joined the rally, complained in her blog about the lack of food stalls and foodshops open for business.

If we in the country cannot depend on the simple provision of services by Ikhlas, at least we have hope in our youth.

They were the ones who seemed to be more mature, more vocal and more willing to participate in calling for a more free and fair system of democracy. Some of them who were camped in Dataran Merdeka before Bersih 3.0, suffered blows to their body and damage to their property.

The students have shown courage and tenacity in fighting for their rights.

Ikhlas is not alone. Prior to Bersih 3.0, there were calls by the Malaysian Taxi Drivers, Limousine and Car Rental Operators Association (Petekma), that taxi-drivers would lose business because of congestion.

After lodging a police report against Bersih 3.0, Petekma deputy president, Syahrir Abdul Aziz said: "This will be the third time we are going to face the same problem if the Bersih rally is allowed to go on..... Please do not hold it at Dataran Merdeka or on the streets. It will cause traffic jams all over the city."

Perhaps, Syahrir is unaware that Kuala Lumpur's traffic chaos is due to poor road planning, lack of enforcement, floods or when ministers or VVIPs and their outriders stop traffic so they can pass.

In between taxi-fares, Syahrir should have analysed the problems of transportation in Malaysia and realised that Umno spent billions of ringgits on Proton and toll roads but very little if anything was spent on improving our public transportation system.

Like Ikhlas, Syahrir should know that if Malaysians received free and fair elections, ministers or their cronies will not be allowed to control the taxi concessions and taxi-drivers will get to enjoy more benefits.

Last week, Tourism Minister Dr Ng Yen Yen blamed the Bersih 3.0 rally for having a dire effect on the tourism industry, causing last-minute cancellations of tour packages and hotel reservations.

Most of us were led to believe that tourists flock to our beaches and resorts, where none would have even seen any Bersih activity. Out of 71 cities worldwide which saw a Bersih 3.0 march, only KL experienced trouble when police kettled protestors, and prevented them from going home after their peaceful sit-down protest.

Tourists are generally happy with Malaysian hospitality but there are glaring issues which Yen Yen has not resolved. There are several examples: Taxi drivers refusing to use the meter; Abusive policemen; Dirty restaurants; Filthy toilets; Lack of disabled-friendly facilities and a lack of road and marine safety.

In short, Bersih 3.0 has made an impact and Umno is disturbed. Yen Yen is part of the BN machinery to blame Bersih. That is also why Ikhlas decided to target Ambiga.

Why has Ikhlas not targeted the other co-chairman, the poet laureate, A. Samad Said?

The more bizarre methods of protesting, like the burger protest or the grim mock-funeral protest outside Penang Chief minister Lim Guan Eng's house are all signs that Umno is desperate and is losing its hold on the Malaysian public.

Umno has little else to offer apart from threats and intimidation.

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