

Unrobing Of 'The Great Transformer'
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By Lim Kit Siang

The Najib government's gross mishandling of Bersih 3.0 of April 28 is proving to be even more disastrous than its initial mishandling of Bersih 2.0 of July 9, 2011.

At least, the Najib administration realized in the nick of time and reined in its excessive over-reactions to the Bersih 2.0, performing a volte face two months later by announcing on Malaysia Day on Sept. 16 a slew of repeal or reform of draconian laws like the abolition of Internal Security Act to make Malaysia "the best democracy in the world".

Ever since, the Prime Minister Najib Razak has taken pains to emphasise that no one else but the Barisan Nasional should take credit for the slew of reform of draconian laws, like the revocation of the four Emergency Proclamations, the repeal of the Internal Security Act, amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act and enactment of the Peaceful Assembly Act because the Barisan Nasional government is prepared to "listen to Malaysians who want change".

I concede that Najib and the Barisan Nasional Government had attempted to listen to Malaysians who wanted change as represented by the Bersih 2.0 rally which saw 50,000 Malaysians peacefully gathering in Kuala Lumpur for free, fair and clean elections.

But the government had not listened fully or attentively, which is why four or even five times the number of people who turned out on Bersih 2.0 - some 250,000 Malaysians - gathered peacefully in Kuala Lumpur on April 28 in response to Bersih 3.0 call for free, fair and clean elections.

The Najib government at least made an effort to listen to the people's demands in Bersih 2.0 although the efforts at reform proved to be half-hearted, half-baked and generally unsatisfactory like the recommendations of the Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral reforms.

But what has distinguished the Najib administration's reaction to Bersih 3.0 as compared to Bersih 2.0 is its complete inability and refusal to "listen to the people's demands for change".

Instead, the Najib administration launched a concerted and systematic campaign of vilification and demonization against Bersih 3.0 illustrated by:

(i) the wild and irresponsible allegation by the Prime Minister that Bersih 3.0 was an anti-national conspiracy to topple the government;

(ii) the instant, blind and unthinking support given to this conspiracy theory by the former Inspector-General of Police Hanif Omar;

(iii) establishment of an "independent advisory panel" headed by Hanif to conduct an inquiry into the Bersih 3.0 violence although it does not enjoy support, trust and confidence of the Malaysian public, totally lacking in credibility and legitimacy; and

(iv) a most biased, one-sided and tendentious 30-minute documentary entitled "Bersih 3.0 itu Kotor" broadcast on TV1 to poison the minds of viewers on Bersih 3.0 and proof that the government is not prepared to keep an open mind to allow for an objective and impartial inquiry into the Bersih 3.0 violence and brutality.

Four recent events have banished beyond a shadow of doubt hopes that the Najib administration would be prepared to be open-minded and listen to Malaysians in Bersih 3.0 as had happened after Bersih 2.0, namely:

(i) The ridiculous claim by the Minister for Information, Communications and Culture, Dr. Rais Yatim that there were only 22,270 people who joined the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28;

(ii) The incessant harassment of Bersih 2.0 co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenivasan, violating her privacy, human and citizenship rights;

(iii) The prosecution of Parliamentary Opposition Leader, Anwar Ibrahim and PKR leaders Azmin Ali and Badrul Hisham for offences under the Peaceful Assembly Act in connection with Bersih 3.0; and

(iv) The "last straw" – the government suing Ambiga and the Bersih 2.0 steering committee for alleged damages amounting to RM122,000 on Bersih 3.0.

The message that Najib is sending loud and clear is that he has exchanged the robes of "the Great Transformer" for those of "the Great Reactionary" as he is no more prepared to listen to the real voices and legitimate aspirations of Malaysians for change!

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