

Malaysians Merely Seeking True Democracy
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By Lim Kit Siang

Yesterday, former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad questioned the "clamour by some quarters to push for a revolution to topple the government when the latter was already giving a lot of priority to the people's interests".

In a forum entitled "Discussions with a statesman – The commitment of graduates will be a catalyst for national progress" at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Mahathir said there was no necessity for Malaysians to act outside of the law to topple the government as Malaysia had a democratic system that was much better than many countries affected by the "Arab Spring".

Mahathir is in his classic and irresponsible self spouting perverse illogic, deliberately and mischievously couching the present phase of the democratic battle in Malaysiain misleading and tendentious context by invoking the images of bloodshed, chaos, violence and riots by referring to "a push for a revolution to topple the government".

Only very recently, there was the monstrous lies about the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28 as a "coup attempt by the Opposition to topple the government" when Malaysians, regardless of race, religion, class, region, age or gender gathered peacefully in a common national cause for a clean election for a clean Malaysia, armed at most with salt and water mineral bottles to defend themselves against irresponsible police firing of tear gas and chemically-laced water cannons.

But whether on April 28 or in the run-up to the next general election, there is no "push for a revolution" in Malaysia.

Let it be spoken, loud and clear, that what Malaysians want in the 13th General Election which the Prime Minister Najib Razak has kept postponing is not a revolution but a normal democracy where peaceful transition of power at the national level is accepted by Najib, UMNO and all stakeholders.

Najib is clearly very upset by a recent article in the Canadian daily The Globe and Mail which has categorized him as a "false democrat", putting him in the same league as the world's autocrats.

The article by award-winning journalist Mark Mackinnon entitled "A 21st-century checklist of the new autocrats" categorises autocrats into four groups – false democrats, mad egotists, violent populists and callous capitalists.

Najib is put into the first category, together with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

The 'ex-members' of the club are former Yugoslavia president Slobodan Milosevic and former Egypt president Hosni Mubarak.

This is Mackinnon's description of the "false democracies":

*Key characteristics: They hold elections but have no intention of giving up power. Serious political rivals are jailed and their parties are outlawed on legal technicalities. Mr. Putin's spin doctors call it "managed democracy" – giving voters the appearance of choice while ensuring they have very little to choose from on election day.

*Reason for hope: Because they allow the trappings of democracy – opposition parties, some independent media, the very process of going through an election every few years – these false

democracies create the possibility of change. Mr. Milosevic and Mr. Mubarak were ousted because citizens used the political space allowed them in a false democracy. Russia's opposition has similarly been on the advance over the past seven months. The next election in Malaysia promises to be interesting.

*Reason for despair: False democracies give the impression of being freer than they really are, which means they rarely face the kind of international pressure that the really nasty regimes get.

The question at issue in the 13th General Election is not whether there will be "a revolution to topple the government", as the answer is a clear and unequivocal "No".

The Pakatan Rakyat parties of DAP, PAS and PKR are fully committed to the ballot box as the sole avenue for political and democratic change. The 13GE will be the 11th general elections for the DAP in over four decades and the history and record of the DAP is unswerving commitment to the democratic and constitutional process to effect political change.

The real question at issue in the 13GE is whether Najib and UMNO are equally committed to see Malaysia mature as a normal democracy where change of the federal government through the ballot box is accepted as a healthy democratic process and not one to invite threats of violence, bloodshed, chaos, riots or coups.

A week ago, I had asked Najib to declare publicly whether he is prepared to accept the verdict of the electorate to ensure a peaceful transition of federal government if Pakatan Rakyat wins the next general election.

It is significant that at the post-UMNO Supreme Council press conference last Friday, Najib studiously avoided answering this question when it was posed by the press.

The question Malaysians and the world are asking is whether Najib is a "false democrat", who "hold elections but have no intention of giving up power".

This is why Najib cannot continue to evade the question – whether he is prepared to make a public pledge that he and UMNO would freely and democratically accept the verdict of the national electorate in the 13th general election and that he would ensure a peaceful transition of the federal government if this is the will of the voters?

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