

**Bersih 2.0, Malaysia 0.0**  
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**Written by Our Correspondent**



Anwar: I was just walking along, minding my own business (photo from malaysiakini.com)

***Crackdown lowered rally numbers but made Malaysian government look bad***

Although Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak appears to have won the battle by closing down Kuala Lumpur on Saturday and arresting 1,667 mostly peaceful marchers and would-be marchers, the consensus seems to be that Malaysia has suffered a blow to its international reputation as a moderate, democratic country.

Bersih 2.0, as the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections is known, appears to have won on points. A wan-looking Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, the head of the three-party Pakatan Rakyat, was photographed in his hospital bed where he was kept for observation, a neat coup de theatre whether intended or not.

While it didn't draw anywhere close to the 100,000 people Bersih's leaders forecast, they can claim that the police intimidation kept marchers away. Crowd estimates ranged from 10,000 by the government to 50,000 by Bersih. Pictures of marchers being chased by baton-wielding police and hosed down by water cannon have made most of the world's major newspapers and the story was given prominent on-line coverage by Al Jazeera. Despite the fact that Bersih is an umbrella group of 62 non-government organizations, with a great many Chinese and Indian faces rather than Muslim ones, the march has been tied internationally to the Jasmine Revolutions of the Middle East, with at least one blog -- Time Magazine's Hannah Beech -- even alluding to opposition leaders hoping for the smell of jasmine.

The crackdown, which included razor wire strung at strategic entry points to the city, legions of police, tear gas, water cannon and truncheons, is especially embarrassing given Malaysia's membership on the United Nations Human Rights Council. To prove it is supported by the electorate, however, the government has promised a massive counter-rally that will draw hundreds of thousands of supporters, which probably will not be

accompanied by water cannons, truncheons, tear gas, razor wire and legions of police intended to keep marchers away.

The Barisan Nasional, the ruling national coalition, characterized the Bersih 2.0 march as a tool of the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition, and indeed top Pakatan leaders did show up and were duly arrested. It also alleged that the US was behind a plot to destabilize the country through the National Endowment for Democracy, which gives money to Bersih. The NED is a private, non-profit foundation funded by the US Congress whose ostensible aim is to support democratic goals.

Often the government's tactics seemed a puzzling throwback to previous arguments. In the run-up to the march itself, police arrested 30 members of the Malaysian Socialist Party on June 26 and charged them with seeking to overthrow the country's monarchy and make a hero of Chin Peng, the elderly one-time leader of the Communist insurgency against British Malaya who remains in exile. Last week, police held a press conference to announce they had found caches of machetes and Molotov cocktails secreted around Kuala Lumpur along with yellow Bersih tee-shirts, leaving the question open why Bersih members would leave the shirts with the weapons to identify them as violent when they professed to be peaceful marchers. The caches of weapons were mostly dismissed as a dirty trick.

"I think it has tarnished Malaysia's image and its membership in the UN Human Rights Council," political analyst Khoo Kay Peng told Agence-France Press. Describing the police action as "completely overdone," Khoo said, "It is a killer to our image as a progressive democratic country."

Beyond the question of who won or lost, the massive police crackdown raises the question why the ruling coalition reacted so strongly. The answer goes back to 2007, when the first Bersih rally drew 40,000 protesters, one of the biggest in modern Malaysian history, and engendered the same kind of crackdown by the government of then-Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

That rally was widely regarded as the spur that ultimately drove the Anwar-led coalition to victory in five Malaysian states and broke the Barisan's 50-year-old two-thirds parliamentary majority. Although opinion polls show Najib himself as popular with the electorate, the three political parties that make up the bulk of the ruling coalition -- the United Malays National Organization, the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Malaysian Indian Congress -- all are regarded as corrupt by segments of the electorate. The Chinese in particular have abandoned the Barisan.

With an election expected to be called sometime before the middle of 2012, Najib and the Barisan believe Pakatan Rakyat would be able to gain traction out of the protest, as it did in 2008.

Bersih argues that the Barisan is kept in power by electoral laws that create an unfair advantage. In particular, according to Bersih Steering Committee member Wong Chin Huat, 2.5 million young people are being kept off the electoral rolls at the same time many more ghost voters are being kept on the rolls.

The eight-point demands that Bersih had hoped to present to the king include cleaning the electoral rolls, reforming the postal ballots and marking voters with indelible ink to discourage repeat voters.

The organization also called for a minimum 21-day campaign period, complaining that the government can put its electoral machinery in place before the opposition has the chance to gear up. In one election, Wong told Asia Sentinel, only eight days elapsed between the dissolution of parliament and the polls.

With all of the conventional media -- newspapers, radio and television -- in the hands of the major political parties, Bersih is also asking for "free and fair access to the media," Although the opposition parties have their own press, it is subject to licensing by the government and can only be distributed to party members.

The press has become a potent issue, with seemingly hundreds of bloggers on the scene whose barbs are believed to have played a major role in the 2008 national elections. The government has periodically threatened to pass legislation to license Internet journalism, but has backed away. Wong, however, said that Internet journalists are unable to reach the rural Malay villages that form the bulk of UMNO's support.

One UMNO stalwart, however, denied that election reform is necessary, saying the fact that the opposition won five states in the 2008 elections is an indication that elections are already free and fair.

In any case, it's pretty sure that electoral reform is not going to happen. The Barisan maintains a strong hold on parliament and the chances of reform legislation passing are nil. Najib, in a triumphal press conference on Sunday, however, said the government is introducing its own election reforms including putting a biometric system in place.

#### Comments 11

The Malays had lost their power

written by orang lama lama, July 10, 2011

50 years ago, the ISA would have been liberally used to detain all the 500 activists from the NGOs. Now the government can only threaten and threaten. They no longer possess the iron fists. The Malays stand to lose the most in any conflagration. All their EASY wealth and power would dissolve in thin air overnight. If they are smart they must choose to be with the non Malays rather than with people like Mahathir and Ibrahim Ali. The Malays must discard their "ketuanan" attitudes and accept ALL in Malaysia as equals. Otherwise the worst will prevail, ie. when the Malays have Ketuanan but the country goes to the dogs, literally.

Malaysian oppression

written by caver38, July 10, 2011

So when is the international community and especially the ASEAN group going to make it clear to the Malaysian government that their actions are unacceptable . The government has made it clear they do not want a real democracy , and to them opposition is unacceptable .

So why is a member of the UN , and especially on the human rights council , they should be thrown out , and suspended from the UN .

Change

written by RYU, July 10, 2011

Like Obama said Change We can do it. Here in Malaysia also same CHANGE WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER.

Bersih trumps thuggery

written by vsp, July 10, 2011

There are wins and there are losses in Bersih's historic event. The wins are Bersih itself and the dawn of multiracial awareness of the people of Malaysia. The losses are the word "Bersih", the colour "Yellow" and the death of a martyr for the cause, Baharudin Ahmad.

Bersih was demonised and even banned from the face of the earth. Yet despite the brutality of the police and the wantonness of the regime to see its demise Bersih has

become a household name among Malaysians and the world at large in a space of a few weeks. A new icon is born in the person of Amiga. Bersih has also struck fear and paranoia in the heart of a ruthless regime. Bersih's simple demands for a clean and fair electoral process has teased the lie out of a regime that involuntarily admits that it does not advocate clean and fair elections. Through the baptism of fire that Bersih has just witnessed, it has brought out a new awareness of multiculturalism that the regime's own "1Malaysia" concept has failed to forge and had to buy through deceit and money. Bersih's rally has shown that Malaysia's motley citizens do care for one another despite the regime's racial and religious baits to divide. The regime is shocked that intimidation and naked brutality have not worked. In fact the more brutal and self-denial the regime becomes, the more adherents Bersih will attract.

Now the losses: Anything associated with Bersih has come under renewed attack from the regime. The new victims are the word "Bersih" and the color "Yellow". I am afraid that the offending word will be expunged from the dictionaries and school children will be taught to hate the word. The word which has graced the regime's own slogans will also have to be replaced. Now "kotor" will be the official replacement for the word "bersih". Malaysia will no more be a clean country. Dirty drains, dirty water, dirty politics and everything associated with "kotor" will be de rigueur.

There will be one less colour from the spectrum in paranoid Malaysia. There will be no yellow T-shirts, no yellow cars, houses, etc. No TV programmes and printed matter will have the colour "yellow" in them. Yellow which signifies royalty will have to be banned which will render our royalty less royal.

So these are the legacies of the Bersih's aftermath.

Shame on you Najib

written by sthiru, July 10, 2011

Liar... liar pants on fire. This is what my youngest child would sing to his big siblings when they lie to him. Now I am using that to Najib. Today we caught you lying to us and the nation. You promised a stadium and Bersih agreed to hold a peace rally. We as a whole family were planning to attend this historical peace rally. You turned around and lied. Your stupidity will cause your position as a PM of Malaysia. Mark my word. Your enemies no other than your own people in Umno are plotting for your down fall. You fall into their trap. Police brutality to the people that paying these dogs' salary must come to an end. These morons need to know we the rakyat are their bosses. Not this corrupted and evil umno. We need to stop these morons before they do any further damage to this great country of ours, Malaysia, It can only happen when opposition comes to power. That will happen. Opposition gained three more votes from my family totalling four. Two of my children are eligible to vote and along with my wife who never voted before. To other readers, go out and vote. If your family members are eligible, register now and vote for change and vote for better. Malaysia is beautiful. Don't let these tyrants ruin our lovely country.

Malaysia MALU..Najib Malu! Mahathir MALU!

written by Bomoh, July 11, 2011

Malaysia calling itself a democratic country, What a LIE!, It is the corrupt BN and UMNO parties using the powers of the polis to beat down on the peaceful Bersih Rally and intimidating the Opposition parties from demanding a Fair and Just Election.

The UN Must now ask the Malaysian government about it's Human Rights and kick Malaysia out of the UN Human Rights membership. It's abuse of it's own citizens equals Iran and Egypt.

The PM should be held accountable for the death of Baharudin Ahmad.

Desperate moves

written by vox populi, July 11, 2011

The ruling coalition Barisan Nasional are now in a position where they are seen as desperately trying to hold onto power. The promises, backtracking and lies in the recent Bersih rally episode has driven their image very low. The Malay majority who have benefited from the special discounts and preference in seat allocation for higher studies have not been able to leverage this to lift themselves out of the middle income trap.

Commercial interests have been outsourced or have become outdated in the companies they own.

The Malay majority and the wiser minorities have decided that years of divide and rule and special preferences have not made their lot any better and that the spirit of Muhibbah that the Tunku (Abdul Rahman the first PM and the architect of Malaysia's independence from Britain) needs to be revived.

The exclusivism of the Arabcentric Islam propagated by UMNO is giving way to the more IndoMalay form of

Islam of common culture, heritage and inclusiveness. PAS offers an alternative that is beginning to look more and more attractive to the non-malays. Fanaticism is dying out and a more progressive and internationalised Malay is replacing it. The newer generation of Chinese appear to believe in the share and grow philosophy of their grandparents rather than the role of a victim played out by their parents. In that sense there is a feeling of shared destiny among the youth that is more intense than that of an earlier generation. If change is to come to Malaysia, then it's through the hearts and minds of the new generation. Both UMNO and PAS are now doing everything they can to win over the young. PAS has made radical changes in being less exclusive and has reached out to people of all races and religion, UMNO on the other hand are looking at maintaining the old precepts and trying to gradually break down the apartheidian system that their previous leaders set up.

Both have just months to win the trust of the public and right now it appears that the opposition has gained ground. UMNO should look at people like Tengku Razaleigh, Khairy and a host of other moderates to lead the charge or face utter and shameful defeat at the next election.

Secrets

written by [cable](#), July 11, 2011

Malaysian government secrets <http://dazzlepod.com/cable/?or...ala-lumpur>

Tell The Truth

written by Going Hungry Senior, July 11, 2011

Thank you, Bersih. Not only is there widespread cheating in the electoral process as alleged, we have strong reasons to believe there's persistent and deliberate misinformation in the computation of the inflation rate which the administration claims is 3% p.a.

The minimum cost of our "charp fann" (economical lunch/dinner box, a staple of office/factory workers, seniors and the lower income group) here is RM4 and above, up from about RM2.80 about 2 yrs ago. This is inflation of at least 20% p.a. not 3%.

This "imaginary" figure of 3% is now used to justify the imposition of GST which will hit poor folk again.

To prove you're not lying, tell people how you calculate the inflation rate. Be open and transparent please, ministers and central bank chief.

High prices may not be anyone's total responsibility but bluffing people is adding salt to injury.

Don't force people to march to Putrajaya or the Palace to demand the truth.

Why the pariah police in malaysia must attacked the rakyat  
written by [OnePenangChinese](#), July 11, 2011

Not a single vehicle been burned or overturned, shop or house been burned or looted on 9 July Bersih rally..... why the Police have to attack the rakyat..... the police had abused their power and bullied rakyat..... it was a peaceful rally, no riot or burning of cars or buildings. The crowd are well behave and it does not warrant any use of tear gas..... shame on you pariah police.

Thank you rakyat for the peaceful rally and for good manner during rally unlike the pariah police behave like dog.....simply attack people....

The 18million silent majority of malaysians are secretly supporting Bersih 2.0..... well done Bersih

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written by T, July 11, 2011

The Bersih folks should keep this up each weekend, or once a month and see how the police can afford to lock down the capital city every week or every month.

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