

**Ballot Box, Not Street Demonstration, Holds Sway In A Democracy**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- Although the Bersih 2.0 marches on the streets of Kuala Lumpur took place more than three weeks ago, the cyberspace is still raging with a lot of debate on what should have been done and what should not.

Some claim that the marches, deemed illegal by the authorities, had been peaceful enough while others charge that the marchers were not above-board either.

As usual, it has been easy for many armchair critics to slam the authorities for their alleged lack of clarity and below-the-belt tactics on handling the demonstrators.

Commentators, prominent or otherwise, have often questioned why the government had created so much fuss about the demonstrations, which were touted as an expression of free speech.

The proponents claimed at the outset that the marches would be peaceful, something akin to the relatively tame candle-light vigil marches in Hong Kong to commemorate the Tiananmen student demonstrations.

But were the July 9 marches a stroll in the park? They weren't. Simply because Malaysia is no Hong Kong.

It is still rather perplexing why the ring leaders of the marches had wanted to expose their followers to potential hazards, all in the name of greater democratic space.

A certain degree of ambiguity begs one to question why the ring leaders of the marches did not hand over their eight-point demand to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at an audience they had with the King several days before July 9?

Why insist on marching on the streets when you already have the chance to explain to the monarch your aspiration for electoral reforms and development of the democratic process?

And the King had even advised that street demonstrations would bring more harm than good, although the original intention to amplify the aspiration for electoral reforms was good.

Although the authorities had disallowed the use of the Merdeka Stadium as a venue for the proposed Bersih 2.0 gathering, the ring leaders still insisted on having the demonstration there, throwing caution to the winds.

They had somewhat forgotten that the venue was close to very congested areas and also near a place where a lot of vitriol was spewed some 42 years ago during the funeral procession of a Labour Party member, which had sowed the seeds of discontent for further trouble in May 1969.

A former top law enforcement officer who had been through the Communist insurgency and May 13 riots said that fortunately nothing more harmful took place on July 9 other than sore eyes and muscle aches.

He said all it would have needed was for some riff-raff from either side to ignite the recipe for disaster.

The ring leaders may have their so-called noble intentions but how were they to control the rabble rousers at the back of the crowd intent to create trouble at the slightest

provocation?

The July 9 marches were potentially a tinderbox for trouble amidst heightened tensions if the authorities had not acted firmly. We need to be thankful that nothing untoward happened on that day.

The government has announced its commitment to electoral reforms, which includes addressing the often-brought-up issue of phantom voters by having the biometric identification system.

There is no reason to doubt Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's pledge on this as he has been on the road for transformation since day one of his administration.

For those intent on upholding democracy, it is the ballot box that holds sway, not the chest beating, hair pulling, tear gas canisters nor water cannons seen at unsanctioned street processions.

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