

Bersih 3.0 and everything else not so 'Bersih'
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 30 — I decided to join Bersih 2.0 because I was outraged at the lockdown of the city. For Bersih 3.0 I was moved to come down again for one single reason: The immaturity of the KL Mayor.

Do watch the video clip of his press conference after his meeting with Bersih representatives and you will know what I am talking about.

From the moment Bersih 3.0 was announced, the drama started to unfold as expected.

The first couple of days, the mayor was given a lead role in this debacle. Then the police gained a court order sealing off Dataran Merdeka. Thus the official venue was off limits.

DBKL secured Dataran with three layers of barricades, but it was the police who add another layer of razor wire. This led the public to place signs such as "Welcome to Tel Aviv" and "This is Tel Aviv" on top of the razor wires.

This is such an irony since we, Malaysians, have always shown so much hatred towards the Zionist and Israel.

Despite the court order and the razor wires, on the eve of Bersih 3.0, people sent a clear message to the authorities that they will not be intimidated, and gathered at intersection of Dataran.

The size of the crowd apparently exceeded three thousand. Just like Bersih 2.0, the latest edition was very jovial and festive, at least until the all hell broke loose.

They came from all walks of life. They came down to the capital city from all over Malaysia. The people want to be heard. They united for common cause, a very noble cause.

I will not discuss in detail my personal experience from Bersih 3.0, but instead, I will share my opinion on the three main actors of the rally.

This is also because I had left the conflict zone much earlier, before all the violence erupted.

Bersih and the people of Malaysia.

Bersih 3.0 is all about the people, the ordinary Malaysian citizen. Datuk S. Ambiga and other affiliated NGO(s) had a clear objective, which is to send a strong message to the ruling government.

Malaysians were unhappy. Malaysians demand for fair and clean elections. Malaysians want to see more transparency. The people want to be heard.

Tens of thousands of Malaysians gathered despite the scorching sun. I must say, the heat was unbearable. The size of the crowd itself proved democracy will prevail.

I will not speculate on the numbers but I believe we outdid Bersih 2.0. This is also the clear sign that people will not budge or be intimidated.

The crowd was multiracial just like the previous Bersih gatherings. Everyone was genuinely friendly and helpful to each other. Everyone had respect for each other.

A sense of belonging to the same nation eliminates any other difference. Neither race nor religion was a matter. Bear in mind that none of them were wearing 1 Malaysia badges. I bet you don't wonder why.

Even though Bersih 3.0 Duduk & Bantah should start at 2pm and end at 4pm, it started much earlier and, of course, it ended so much later.

Let's leave the violent drama for later and let me highlight one bizarre scenario.

The crowd gathered at all intersections leading to Dataran Merdeka. Apparently the police have said the groups can gather or assemble anywhere but at Dataran. So we did.

What I and many others could not understand is, if we can gather 100m away from Dataran, why can't we gather in Dataran itself? Why the reluctance to allow the organisers to use the venue?

It is beyond our comprehension when DBKL and the police allow citizens to gather on any street but not in a single designated location.

Anyway, Malaysians were much smarter, much more civil and responsible as well. I witnessed many participants picking up almost any kinds of litter off the road.

By 8pm, my Twitter timeline was filled with tweets urging people to get back on the roads with garbage bags and help the good Samaritans clean up the streets.

This is Malaysia for you. Never mind the senseless leaders and others in power. We, the rakyat, have moral responsibilities and will always act with civilities.

The Pakatan Rakyat politicians

Bersih 3.0 was once again endorsed by the Pakatan Rakyat. This does not mean Bersih 3.0 is an idea from the opposition. It was not neither organised nor managed by the opposition.

But, at the same time, I must give credit to PAS for mobilising its Unit Amal to assist with crowd control. They did a great job. It was not an easy job to manage such a big crowd for the youths who lack experience but high on spirit.

In one of the video, I can see clearly the volunteers from Unit Amal PAS trying their best to stop the participants from marching into Dataran area. Kudos to Unit Amal Pas.

However, I am disgusted with PKR leaders. Azmin Ali, N. Surendran, R. Sivarasa as well as Anwar Ibrahim did give very provocative speeches to the crowd. This is unwarranted.

As this is not a PR event, I wonder why many of you from PKR needed to give speeches,

which clearly went against Ambiga's stand that we will not breach the barricade.

I personally will blame the speeches from Surendran, Sivarasa and Anwar for the mayhem and violence that erupted.

Please bear in mind that Ambiga had by then already announced the rally was over and for the crowd to disperse.

This is when Anwar and his boys hijacked the whole scene. This was the reason for me and my friends to leave the crowd as well.

You can find a video on YouTube where the famous Loybar Burok lawyer Fahri Azzat confirming this is how it all started.

Even before that, much earlier before 2pm, I witnessed something that was in very bad taste. Azmin Ali was making his rounds among the crowd but he did that with a strong group of bodyguards.

Why would you need bodyguards when you walk among your fellow citizens? What is the difference between you and the shenanigans from the other side?

If there is something that PKR needs to learn, it is to be humble. We could not fathom the arrogance of Barisan Nasional, so you guys please behave.

On another note, there are many reports that Azmin went to negotiate with the police. What is there to negotiate? There is a court order. Deal with it in the court. Period.

The police

There is nothing to deny with regards to all the violence and the vandalism that took place on Saturday. The fact is we need a balance account on what really happened.

If a mob breaching the barricade was the reason for rounds upon rounds of tear gas and endless water cannon spray, tell me why the FRU shot tear gas all the way to Petaling Street? I don't remember seeing any barricades in Petaling Street!

Once again, excessive force was deployed by the police. Surely you'll ask what about the police car that lost control while being attacked by the participants and subsequently overturned. This is an isolated case.

There are too many versions of stories. I will not defend the acts of the angry mob and other vandalism, but at the same time, everyone needs to watch the scores of videos uploaded on YouTube, which showcase the extreme levels of police brutality.

Some of it is so gross that you would never believe it happened in Malaysia.

Have we lost our moral ground? Shooting tear gas and water cannons is one thing, but a group of men in police uniform punching and kicking an arrested person? I dare to say that was the peak of police brutality in Malaysia.

It does not stop there. Many reports state that media personnel were harassed and assaulted as well. A photographer was arrested and Al Jazeera complained their camera was smashed by police.

On top of all this, once again those who were detained by police were denied legal representation.

Before I end this article, I have these two remarks to make.

As much as social media rules the day, especially on occasion like Bersih 3.0, everyone should apply self-restraint against spreading unconfirmed news and statuses.

Rumours can drive the crowd into madness when emotions are already running high.

Like it or not, Malaysia is changing. Malaysians are no longer shy about wanting change.

When you see videos and pictures of a man lying in front of a FRU truck and how youngsters enjoy the encounter with tear-gas happy police, this is not a good sign for those in power.

The rakyat and Malaysian politics will not be the same anymore. Street rallies will be part and parcel of our democratic process.

Welcome to the new Malaysia...

* This is the personal opinion of the writer and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider

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