

Putrajaya upset with diplomats yet Malaysian envoy tracked Bersih abroad
Malaysian Insider
July 02, 2012
By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, July 2 — A Malaysian diplomat observed the April 28 Bersih rally in Melbourne, in the same manner as three Singaporean envoys here the same day that raised the ire of Putrajaya.

A YouTube video from the day shows Melbourne's Consul-General of Malaysia Dr Mohamad Rameez Yahaya at the Bersih rally there, where he also spoke to a reporter about his disagreement with some aspects of the event.

The recording suggests Wisma Putra also sent its diplomats to observe events that it might have an interest in, just as other embassies.

"I'm here to observe... You just know my official stand. For us, we cannot contain democracy in a sovereign nation. In Malaysia, if you follow rules of law, there will be no problem," Mohamad Rameez was quoted as saying in the three-minute video.

Mohamad Rameez, like many other envoys, was sent to observe the rally and report back to his superiors, a common practice among his peers. Except that in Malaysia, foreign diplomats doing the same seem to have met with controversy after a pro-Umno blogger urged Putrajaya to take action.

Wisma Putra had last week chided three Singaporean envoys over unsubstantiated accusations from bloggers that they actively participated in the chaotic April 28 Bersih rally.

This forced the Malaysian High Commission in Singapore having to defend Wisma Putra's move after a public backlash over the incident in the island republic, which is triggering another diplomatic headache for Malaysia with its southern neighbour even as it is fending off attacks from Indonesia over claims of cultural theft.

Singapore has officially responded to the accusations of its envoys' involvement by pointing out that the three had only been on the streets of Kuala Lumpur to observe the rally, along with diplomats from many other countries.

But the island republic's explanation appears to not have satisfied Malaysia's diplomatic officials.

"There is also a need to appreciate the minor but nevertheless significant differences attached to the issues of diplomats attending a legitimate rally and an illegal one," Nik Ady Arman, a political counsellor at the Malaysian High Commission in Singapore, wrote in an open letter published today in the republic's The Straits Times newspaper.

He was responding to three letters published by the Singaporean daily on Thursday criticising the Malaysian Foreign Ministry's action against the three Singaporean diplomats.

"Malaysia, as a democratic country, has never restricted or prevented anyone from participating in any legitimate assembly.

"But it is important to remember that Bersih was an illegal one," Nik Ady wrote.

He said the involvement of foreign citizens in a rally deemed “illegal” would generate speculation on their motive and put the burden of ensuring their safety on the host government.

This is not the first time Malaysia’s diplomats have written in defence of Putrajaya’s actions, but the civil service officers’ impartiality is being questioned by opposition lawmakers ahead of key national polls due within a year.

Last week, a Wisma Putra official rebuked a Canadian newspaper for describing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak as a “false democrat”, along with other world leaders criticised for their authoritarian rule.

Foreign Ministry undersecretary Ahmad Rozian Abdul Ghani was replying to an article written by The Globe and Mail’s Mark MacKinnon, titled “A Roster Of The Modern Autocrats”, in which he lumped Najib in the same league as the world’s iron-fisted rulers, such as Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Palestine’s Mahmoud Abbas, Algeria’s Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and closer to home, Cambodia’s Hun Sen.

“In just three years, [Najib] has repealed Malaysia’s colonial-era Internal Security Act, ended the 60-year state of emergency, introduced measures to increase media freedom, reformed the Universities and University Colleges Act, created the Peaceful Assembly Act, announced a review of the Sedition Act, repealed the Banishment Act and the Restricted Residences Act and implemented a raft electoral reforms — an impressive track record by anyone’s standards,” Ahmad Rozian said in his letter, published June 26 on the Canadian paper’s website.

The undersecretary said MacKinnon’s view did not “tally” with the opposition’s record win in Election 2008, and added that Malaysian voters will once again “be free to choose who they want to lead their country” in the national polls that must be called by next year.

The Najib administration has come under criticism globally in the aftermath of violent street demonstrations here over Bersih’s push to clean up the electoral roll ahead of the 13th general election.

Malaysia’s three main opposition parties — DAP, PAS and PKR — won an unprecedented five states and 83 seats out of a total 222 in Parliament in Election 2008, denying the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition their traditional two-thirds control in the lawmaking body for the first time since Independence in 1957.

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/putrajaya-upset-with-diplomats-yet-malaysian-envoy-tracked-bersih-abroad/>