



Actions Speak Louder than Words

While the present administration has welcomed many a grand proposal to improve the lot of the people, many remain unimplemented. The time has come to translate these good intentions into solid action.

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has welcomed yet another 'good' proposal. This time, it concerns the formation of a Parliamentary Select Committee to investigate allegations against a Barisan Nasional (BN) Member of Parliament (MP).

The proposal came from the Johor Bahru MP, Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad, who, until recently, was chairman of the BN Backbenchers Club (BBC).

He resigned in a huff after failing to get the support of his colleagues for a Democratic Action Party (DAP) motion to refer a newspaper report to the Parliamentary Privileges Committee for investigation.

The report had accused the Jasin MP, Mohd Said Yusof, of trying to influence the Malacca Customs and Excise Department to be lenient on a timber importer for allegedly importing Indonesian logs below the approved size.

Shahrir was right in seeing merits in the DAP motion. An investigation by the committee should clear the air on the accuracy of the report and the complicity of the MP.

But the BN loyalists did not want any part in the DAP-inspired motion. They had not done anything out of the ordinary. They were merely clinging on to the party's policy of barring its members from supporting any motion brought up by the Opposition — a fact unequivocally reiterated by the Prime Minister upon his return from the United States on May 7.

Abdullah told the Press that the BN principle of not allowing its members to support any Opposition motion in Parliament remained and that it must be adhered to (*Utusan Malaysia*, May 8).

From the tone of his statement, it was also clear that the Prime Minister didn't want anything to do with Shahrir

anymore in as far as the BBC was concerned. He was reported as saying that MPs should not propose Shahrir's name again. It was a case of once bitten, twice shy for Abdullah.

Abdullah and his advisers must have had great hopes in the Johor Bahru MP when they put him up as BBC chairman. The two men share one thing in common — they were both critical of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

They were key members of 'Team B' that challenged Dr Mahathir for the leadership of the party in 1987. Both were then loyalists of former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam.

When their attempts at the ballot box failed, Abdullah stayed on with Umno but Shahrir left the party and declared himself an independent MP. He retained his Johor Bahru seat as an independent candidate in a by-election in 1988. He rejoined Umno the following year.

Shahrir has not really failed Abdullah. He emerged as one of the Prime Minister's key supporters in the April 12 decision to cancel the Straits of Johor bridge project although he was for the project a few days earlier.

Right job, wrong guy

The party's rule aside, Shahrir's appointment as backbencher head was a bad move from the start. Shahrir is not one who plays by the rules.

Abdullah, on his part, might have calculated that his appointment to the post could serve to rein the maverick in. He was wrong. If job stints with the late Tun Hussein Onn, Tan Sri Musa Hitam and the Cabinet had not tamed this political wild man, the leadership of the backbench was a poor stick of carrot.

Many who know Shahrir well saw his appointment as BBC chairman as a wrong move. Shahrir is far too free-spirited and liberal-minded for the liking of the bread-and-butter BN MPs, especially those representing Umno. Shahrir has a long history of not playing by the rules.

Now that he is no longer the BBC head, let's see if he is more willing to speak his mind and break more rules. If he had failed to translate the current mantra of transparency, accountability and integrity into action within, he should now try it from without.

I have not the slightest doubt that Abdullah and Shahrir have their own deeper reasons for acting the way they did.

Shahrir was so utterly disappointed with the rejection of his stance on the DAP motion by his peers that he walked out of the House and promptly announced his resignation.

It is ironic that the man who freely opposed and criticised others should behave so poorly when his own ideas were rejected. Still, he did the honourable thing by resigning.

Abdullah, as BN chairman, has his own reasons for wanting to keep the BN members on the straight and narrow path by continuing to bar them from supporting any motion proposed by the Opposition.

Having openly opposed his proposal to set up the Independent Police Complaint and Monitoring Commission (IPCMC), Abdullah could not afford further disobedience by the MPs.

Ironically, while his own MPs opposed the IPCMC proposal, Abdullah received strong backing from the Opposition, including the DAP.

Ikan Kembung woes

AT a time when certainty and stability are needed, the differences among MPs and their disobedience may not bode well for the administration.

The MPs – and that includes Abdullah and Shahrir – should be more concerned with the possibility of the people being resigned to the fact that their elected representatives are self-serving.

They seem to be more concerned with their private feelings and issues rather than those of the *rakyat*.

What good is their honour when the price of the humble *ikan kembung* (mackerel) in rural Kedah has shot past RM8 per kilogramme and that farmers' sons

and daughters are still unemployed after years of graduating from university?

Maybe Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Datuk Shafie Apdal should pay them a visit rather than merely listening to their *pegawai* (officers) or being seen only with the big boys in Kuala Lumpur.

They cannot ask the people not to doubt their *niat* (intention) if all they do is make press statements from their grand offices or at conferences. They should *turun padang* or, to use today's jargon, 'walk the talk', more regularly if they are really serious about understanding and solving the *rakyat's* problems.

Forming a Parliamentary Select Committee is another of the Prime Minister's *niat ikhlas* (sincere intention), but *niat* alone is not enough. Delivering the *niat* is what the people are looking forward to.

It is not measured by the column centimetres in party-controlled newspapers and length of airtime on government-owned television stations but by the price of *ikan kembung* in the far-flung corners of the land.

Not only the rural Malays are complaining about the high price of *ikan kembung* and other food items. The urban Chinese too have their complaints. A recent report in *The Star* said many Chinese are being forced to give up pork because the price is too high.

Alas, we Malaysians, once again, are living and suffering together.

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Making good of promises

Niat is great, but fulfilling the *niat* is what a God-fearing person should seek to do. To a Muslim, *niat* is everything. It's a promise made with Allah as the Witness.

When Abdullah became Prime Minister at the end of 2003, among the first things he did was to form the Royal Commission to Enhance the Operations and Management of the Royal Malaysian Police.

In the beginning of this year, in direct response to the controversy surrounding the stripping and illegal videotaping of a female detainee by the Petaling Jaya police, he ordered the formation of the IPCMC.

The IPCMC was one of the key recommendations of the commission. The incident created such a backlash because the detainee was initially believed to be a Chinese national.

An independent committee was set up to investigate the incident and it recommended that the government speed up the formation of the IPCMC.

The woman was later identified as a Malay, but many people did not quite believe it. They alleged a cover-up by the police. This isn't surprising because the image of the police hasn't improved since the publication of the commission's report last May.

We can't blame the people. To them, that's how the Prime Minister's *niat* has played out thus far. The IPCMC is yet to be established or may never be established because it is being opposed by the police and Abdullah's own MPs.

When five former members of the commission, led by Tun Hanif Omar, met members of the Human Rights Caucus of the Parliament recently, they received quite an earful from the BN MPs who opposed the IPCMC proposal.

They accused the commission of not being professional, of belittling the contribution of the police and, most shockingly, of usurping the powers of Parliament. Where they got these ideas from, only God knows. Maybe from not reading the report.

So I read to them the commission's report on the IPCMC, which clearly stated that:

1. The IPCMC should be an independent body that is established pursuant to an Act of Parliament,
2. The IPCMC will not supplant or supercede any existing organisation such as the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) and the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), and
3. The IPCMC shall submit an annual report to Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who shall cause it to be laid before Parliament. A copy of the report shall be submitted to the Prime Minister beforehand.

I hope they now understand and end their opposition to the Prime Minister's *niat ikhlas* to form the IPCMC.

Don't play into the hands of the Opposition

There is no need to remind the Prime Minister that he could be playing into the hands of the Opposition by floating these lofty ideas, which, I believe, is partly at the behest of his youthful inner circle.

The ideas are good only if they are effectively implemented and their results are felt by the people.

Lim Kit Siang's motion to investigate the newspaper allegation against the Jasin MP, to my mind, is another attempt to push Abdullah to a corner using the transparency, accountability and integrity mantra.

It is the Opposition's strategy to support such ideas. They know that fulfilling them is not as easy as being made out to be by the media. In Bahasa Malaysia, this kind of support is called *sokong membawa rebah*.

Thus far, the support for the IPCMC has come largely from the Opposition. History may judge Abdullah as the Prime Minister who received the most frequent support from the Opposition.

Lim Kit Siang's motion to investigate the newspaper allegation against the Jasin MP, to my mind, is another attempt to push Abdullah to a corner using the transparency, accountability and integrity mantra.

And it's not without results.

Mohd Said has admitted to being the sole proprietor of the forwarding agency that had handled the seized logs. So let us see what transparency, accountability and integrity punishment will be meted out by the Prime Minister.

Maybe the Prime Minister and his Cabinet members should speak less about their *niat ikhlas* and instead prove conclusively to the people that the price of *ikan kembung* or *ikan temenung*, as the people in the north call them, may not have to be as high as RM8 or RM9 per kilogramme or that they stick to their promise not to raise electricity rates.

They must be concerned about public perception and the credibility gap. Whereas the government had promised that there would not be an increase in electricity rates, the investors believe otherwise.

Thus, when Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik hinted that Tenaga Nasional Bhd might get the okay to raise tariffs, the price of its shares on Bursa Malaysia went up.

I would not discount the worst-case scenario of the promises being abandoned and the electricity rates going up. It has happened with fuel and it can happen with electricity and all other controlled items.

After all, this is the administration that has vowed to do away with subsidies and price support.

For the consumer, things may get worse. And whether they will get better after that only God knows. **mb**

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