

Why do Malaysians march?

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by **Yeo Yang Poh**

WHY march, when the government has said that it will review the Internal Security Act?
Why march, when there are other very cosy ways of giving your views and feedback?

One would understand if these were questions posed by nine-year-olds. But they are not. They are questions posed by the prime minister of this nation we call our home. Answer we must. So, why?

Because thousands who died while in detention cannot march or speak any more. That is why others have to do it for them.

Because persons in the corridors of power, persons who have amassed tremendous wealth and live in mansions, and persons who are in the position to right wrongs but won't, continue to rule our nation with suffocating might. And they certainly would not march. They would prevent others from marching.

Because the have-nots, the sidelined, the oppressed, the discriminated and the persecuted have no effective line to the powerful.

Because the nice ways have been tried ad nauseam for decades, but have fallen on deaf ears.

Because none of the major recommendations of Suhakam (including on peaceful assembly), or of the commissions of inquiry, has been implemented. Because the proposed Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) is not in sight, while corruption and insecurity live in every neighbourhood; and (despite reasoned views expressed ever so nicely in opposition) Rela (people's volunteer corps) is being brought in to make matters even worse.

The proponents in "Su Qiu" (remember them?) were not marchers. In fact it is hard to find nicer ways than "su qiu", because the term means "present and request" or "inform and request". In terms of putting forward a view or a request, it is the height of politeness. Yet they were labelled "extremists" – they who did not march.

And now you ask, why march?

Because you gave non-marchers a false name! You called them the "silent majority", who by virtue of their silence (so you proudly argued with twisted logic) were supporters of government policies since they were not vocal in raising objections. You claimed to be protecting the interest of the "silent majority". Now some of them do not want to be silent anymore, and you are asking why?

Yes, because double standards and hypocrisy cannot be covered up or explained away forever; and incompetence cannot be indefinitely propped up by depleting resources.

Because cronyism can only take care of a few people, and the rest will eventually wake up to realise the repeated lies that things were done in certain ways purportedly “for their benefit”.

Because the race card, cleverly played for such a long time, is beginning to be seen for what it really is – a despicable tool to divide the rakyat for easier political manipulation.

Because it does not take much to figure out that there is no good reason why Malaysia, a country with abundant human resources and rich natural resources, does not have a standard of living many times higher than that of Singapore, an island state with no natural resources and that has to import human resources from Malaysia and elsewhere.

Because, in general, countries that do not persecute marchers are prosperous or are improving from their previous state of affairs, and those that do are declining.

Because Gandhi marched, Mandela marched, Martin Luther King marched, and Tunku Abdul Rahman marched.

Because more and more people realise that peaceful assemblies are no threat at all to the security of the nation, although they are a threat to the security of tenure of the ruling elite.

Because politicians do not mean it when they say with a straight face or a smile that they are the servants and that the people are the masters. No servant would treat his master with tear gas, batons and handcuffs.

Because if the marchers in history had been stopped in their tracks, places like India, Malaysia and many others would still be colonies today, apartheid would still be thriving in South Africa, Nelson Mandela would still be scribbling on the walls of Cell 5, and Obama would probably be a slave somewhere in Mississippi plotting to make his next midnight dash for the river.

And because liberty, freedom and dignity are not free vouchers posted out to each household.

They do not come to those who just sit and wait. They have to be fought for, and gained.

And if you still want to ask: why march; I can go on and on until the last tree is felled. But I shall obviously not.

I will end with the following lines from one of the songs sung in the 1960s by civil rights marchers in the US, without whom Obama would not be able to even sit with the whites in a bus, let alone reside in the White House:

"It isn't nice to block the doorway
It isn't nice to go to jail
There are nicer ways to do it
But the nice ways have all failed
It isn't nice; it isn't nice

You've told us once, you've told us twice
But if that's freedom's price
We don't mind ..."

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