

PARTI SOSIALIS MALAYSIA – PRESS STATEMENT

Reform or repression? Badawi's reform Cabinet

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When Prime Minister Badawi named his new cabinet on March 20th, after the unprecedented election bashing he got, he called his new cabinet the reform cabinet and that he is willing to institute major reforms. In the March 8 election, the 14-party National Front (Barisan Nasional) government lost five states to the opposition coalition (Pakatan Rakyat) as well as lost two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Parti Sosialis Malaysia make the following observation in the wake of the recent reforms called by Badawi and the power struggle within UMNO :

While the Police Force has a new uniform, yet they don't seem to have a reform attitude. The Black 14 peacefully in-door gathering at a private venue was disrupted by the police at 10.20pm. when Anwar Ibrahim was giving his speech. What was even more high handed was when the police went to serve 111 notices as early as 6.30am to four leaders of Pakatan Rakyat including the Menteri Besar of Selangor , Khalid Ibrahim and PKR President Dr Wan Azizah Ismail. This is sheer harassment and an infringement to freedom of assemble. How does this action speak about the reform cabinet of Badawi?

Then comes the banning of popular Tamil-language newspaper -Makkal Osai. No reason was given though it is clear that it is a political decision as the daily has been critical of the leadership of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The paper also gave wide ranging coverage to the rally organised by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) in November 2007 and the issues surrounding the rally and its leadership. Our own assessment of Makkal Osai is that the paper ensures that it gives a 50% coverage to both Government and opposition news. But such mathematics does not help in Malaysian freedom of media, where the daily newspapers must give at least a 80-20% advantage to the Ruling parties' controlled newspaper. This ban takes place while new Information Minister, Shabery Cheek talks about freedom of the media. How does this ban fit into the new reform cabinet?

On the issue of the ISA, the new Home Minister, Syed Hamid Albar has made it clear that ISA is going to stay by refusing to immediately and unconditionally release the Hindraf detainees as well as other ISA detainees , some of them going into their seventh year of detention. So what does this say about the new reforms brought by the new cabinet.

Yesterday, Badawi once again tried to hood-wink by introducing reforms to the Judiciary. Badawi was very careful not to utter the word apology as well as the word "independent" when naming the new commission -Judicial appointments commission" which will give the Prime Minister prerogative to select the members of the Commission. Nothing was said about the other Commissions he set up before this and his failure to pass the IPCMC bill. Though Badawi has been quite radical in setting up Commission but nothing radical has been done to implement the outcomes. This announcement would keep the State controlled TV and media busy for another few weeks.

With this backdrop, it is therefore quite clear that the BN's Government intention to introduce an anti-hopping law has nothing to do with democracy and fundamental liberties. On the contrary, it is designed to control and contravene fundamental liberty as well as freedom of association. PSM, a party which has been denied the right to freedom of association for a decade now, can vouch on this.

No reform can reform the obsolete state the Barisan Nasional is today and the politics it offers. It is time for to take over power at the Federal level and undo the structures and the political systems created by the BN. In order to do that, BN has to go. BN rules the day by reform and repression.

The future of Malaysian politics cannot be held by a minority class using reform and repression to be in power. While the future of Badawi seems uncertain, the road to change is not going to be easy. BN leadership with its 50 years legacy of Emergency law and ISA will not transfer power easily to any new Government. It is this time, that the will of the people will have to prevail.

PSM and its front organizations are committed to face whatever consequences and call upon the people to raise as they have done many times before against this tyranny of BN rule. It is only when the mass majority of the people are united as a single united class led by principles of justice, conscious and equality can we overthrow the BN brand of politics of race, religion and corruption

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