

In Malaysia, who calls the shots?

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On Friday, Lim Guan Eng, the DAP secretary-general and finance minister, called the arrest of the party's members under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma) a "deep state" operation.

According to Lim, a question on this was posed during a meeting of party leaders. What does this mean? It means that we are in trouble because it implies that the state is not in control.

Many questions arise from this. Does this mean that the police are truly so independent that they call the shots while the prime minister and the home minister are not involved?

Dr Mahathir Mohamad has always had a standard and consistent answer.

He blamed the 1987 Operasi Lalang on the inspector-general of police, Hanif Omar. He told Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew he was not aware that Anwar Ibrahim was arrested under the Internal Security Act by the police in 1998. Lee was shocked by the answer.

Mahathir initially claimed that Anwar's black eye was a desperate self-inflicted wound to get public sympathy. Only after massive weekend protests demanding the IGP's resignation did he call a royal commission of inquiry which found the IGP responsible for Anwar's black eye.

The current IGP, Abdul Hamid Bador, was handpicked by Mahathir in May this year though some parties were not happy with his appointment.

Looking at many incidents since - the Mohamed Azmin Ali case, Dr Zakir Naik's investigation and now the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-Sosma arrest - was Mahathir not in the know or was he the mastermind?

Will the deep state jeopardise Mahathir's government or work hand in hand with him?

Or could it be that the police who are totally opposed to the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) are now giving the elected state a difficult time negotiating a watered-down IPCMC instead of the one called for by civil society and the people at large?

In Indonesia, Burma, Thailand and the Philippines, the army plays a significant role in politics and in determining support for the ruling party. In Malaysia, we don't have a tradition of the army calling the shots.

Malaysia is lucky to have a government elected by the people every five years though there has been much abuse of the electoral process. Nevertheless, the police have over the years played a critical role in maintaining the power of the ruling party.

For example, the state used the police to invoke the ISA in 1974 against the student movement, in 1978 against the MAS Union, in 1998 against the Reformasi movement, in 2007 against Hindraf, etc.

The police were also used extensively in prosecuting Anwar's Sodomy 1 and 2 cases. Altantuya's murder was linked to the police Special Action Unit (UTK) who were among those assigned as bodyguards to the prime minister and deputy prime minister.

After the abolition of ISA in September 2011, Najib Razak used the Sedition Act to arrest many people. Again, one needs the police to execute these arrests. ISA was replaced by Sosma which was passed by Parliament in June 2012 and came into force on July 31, 2012.

In spite of Najib's assurance that Sosma wouldn't be abused like ISA, he used it in October 2015 against Khairuddin Abu Hassan and his lawyer Matthias Chang. Sosma was again used against Bersih 2.0 chief Maria Chin Abdullah in November 2016.

For the record, 80 organisations as well as Suhakam and the Bar Council have called for the repeal of Sosma. Pakatan Harapan (PH) in its manifesto also pledged to repeal the law.

Why did the Sosma-LTTE arrests take place? Why now? Was it to divert attention from the Malau Dignity Congress or to win over Malay support in the Tanjung Piai by-election?

Not many people are worried about the LTTE Malaysia section. Most people assume that, as with many other arrests before, there are other motives for the crackdown.

Though I think the A Kalaimughilan video challenging the police might have triggered the arrests, the arrest of DAP assemblymen from the ruling party would definitely have been sanctioned from above.

Even the police have said that the Sosma arrests involved very high command - "arahan dari atas". But was the order from the top cop or from the head of government or from the home minister?

Mahathir and Home Minister Muhyiddin Yassin have both defended the arrests. All the main leaders of PH except DAP, including PKR and Amanah presidents Anwar and Mohamad Sabu, have said that the police must be allowed to do their work and investigation.

On Oct 26, 2006, Mahathir said his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had turned the country into a police state. The atmosphere prevailing then, he said, was preventing him from publicly airing his grievances toward the government. It was reported by the Associated Press which quoted Mahathir as saying in a press conference at his residence in Seri Kembangan:

"The habit of asking police to frighten people should be stopped."

If one calls the Badawi era state a police state, what do you call Mahathir's state? Who is now using the police to frighten who?

Who controls or polices the police? Assemblyman Saari Sungib said that when being interrogated by the Special Branch during his ISA detention, the SB told him that the police could determine the next prime minister.

Whatever the situation we are in now, PH goes into the Tanjung Piai by-election as a very divided coalition. The presidential council, the highest authority of PH, has to put a stop to all this. They must make clear if they are the ones who determine the future of the country or if it is all in the hands of the prime minister.

Again, the question arises: who calls the shots, the prime minister or the PH presidential council? PH always criticised the previous government, saying the prime minister had absolute power. Have

things changed now?

PH should put their house in order. They have been entrusted with the power to rule and govern. They cannot subcontract this job to the “deep state”. PH has full control and power. There is nobody else to point the finger at.

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