



Love your
mother,
mother
and
mother...
> N17

>> COMMENT

And now Umno stoops to another low

Sometimes we think that it is high time that there was decorum in politics. Surely there must be a line drawn on what things or matters may be raised, what approaches should be taken, who may be brought on stage to comment and so on, so that the already dirty politics tag does not make politics even dirtier.

But somehow in this country of ours, the politics of those in power against the powerless — read the Opposition — has always been dirty, nay, filthy, so to speak. Over the past one decade over it has been even more pronounced, when the “Islamizing” premier of the time, who still is around making some insignificant noises and rambling away over issues in his own senile way once in a while, found it fit to remove his then deputy by embroiling him (his deputy) in a so-called sex scandal. It worked, not because it was true but because of the immense power wielded by the former autocrat.

Recently and once again the ruling party and its chieftains have resorted to gutter politics. Again the former deputy, now the leader of the Opposition has been the target and again it was all about sex. There seems to be an obsession on the part of the party in power — Umno — to indulge in politics of sex to exact maximum injury on its nemesis. Perhaps according to its leaders’ thinking, this is the best way to convince the Malay electorate that Umno is the sex-free party in Malaysia while others have nothing else better to do.

And this form of filthy, lowly, gutter politics can only be of Umno’s. Hence the recent below-the-belt blow dealt to PKR deputy president, Azmin Ali, where his mother was brought into the fray to appeal to her son to stop being “part of them”. Umno’s dirty politics department has no

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Peaceful Assembly: Fatwa Council must be objective

KUALA LUMPUR: PAS spiritual leader Dato Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat has called upon the National Fatwa Council to be objective in issuing edicts like the one that Muslims are forbidden from taking part in peaceful demonstrations that could lead to riots and chaos.

The Kelantan Menteri Besar said issuing an edict from restricted perspective would raise questions on the conduct of the council.

“Is it an edict if no explanation was sought from both (conflicting) parties?” he asked in a statement May 7.

Nik Aziz said he agreed that demonstrations that were held for the purpose of creating chaos should be considered as not permissible in Islam.

“(But) I would like to ask, what can be more peaceful than a sit-in demonstration?” he queried.

Nik Aziz also pointed out that the Bersih 3.0 sit-in was held to press the government to ensure clean and fair elections.

Excessive force

He pointed out that the eight demands by Bersih 2.0 — a coalition of non-governmental organisations calling for free and fair elections — did not stipulate that it intended to topple the government by way of street



Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat

demonstrations.

He asked the Council to look at the issue of phantom voters and the irregularities in the election which could bring about a big impact on the nation in an objective manner.

Nik Aziz also pointed out to the excessive force used by the authorities to disperse the sit-in.

He said such excessive force if used would also have caused chaos during the two rallies recently attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in Gua Musang and Kota Bharu.

“If the Bersih sit-in is considered illegal, then what would be the edict on the Umno

President’s gathering in Gua Musang and (Kota Bharu) recently where Najib pressed the public to change the state government?,” he asked.

The National Fatwa Council, at its 99th meeting held in Sepang, decided that it was haram (not permissible) for Muslims to participate in any gathering or demonstration that is unproductive, is against the law or causes disturbance in the country.

Previously Nik Aziz called on Muslims to join the Bersih 3.0 sit-in and the call drew criticisms from some confused religious figures.

Safety guarantee for wanted Bersih protesters

In a related development, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang has sought a guarantee from the police that Bersih protesters who turn themselves in will not be harmed.

In a report filed by Malaysiakini, he said this is the real fear for those whose photographs have been released in the wanted list, following police heavy-handedness on April 28.

“We accept that the police have powers of arrest... but assaulting those who assemble, especially when they are dispersing, is wrong and very

cruel.

“How could the protesters who are now called to surrender know that they will not once again face brutality and assault during investigation?” he asked.

Hadi’s statement comes after police released the last batch of photographs of protesters wanted for alleged violence during the Bersih 3.0 rally, which appear to consist mostly of PAS Unit Amal members.

The photographs of 25 individuals, all in maroon which is the Unit Amal uniform, make up a total of 141 photographs released by the police since the rally.

According Hadi, who is also Marang member of parliament, it is common knowledge that many involved in the Bersih 3.0 rally were ill-treated and injured by “police brutality”.

“Police had handcuffed them, punched and kicked them repeatedly and dragged them when they were trying to disperse,” he said.

Yet, he observed, only protesters have been asked to surrender and no photographs of police personnel have been included in the ‘wanted list’.

“It’s unfortunate that the order to surrender was only made for protesters while the handful of police personnel who had acted beyond the bounds of the law are let off just like that,” he said. — ES

Hanif should be star witness not chair of probe

by Lim Kit Siang
MP for Ipoh Timor

It is most ironical that the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said in an interview on Sinar.FM radio station last Thursday morning that as Prime Minister he could not even afford a single mistake, and “if we have to make 10 major decisions, we need to get 10 out of 10 right”, as he had just made probably his worst decision in his three-year premiership.

This is the appointment of former Inspector-General of Police, Tun Hanif Omar as chairman of the six-member

Independent Advisory Panel to investigate the Bersih 3.0 violence and brutality.

Right from the second after the announcement by the Home Minister, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein last Wednesday evening, Hanif’s appointment as the head of the Bersih 3.0 panel had received immediate brickbats and all-round disapprobation and condemnation as being utterly inappropriate, rendering the whole probe not only lacking in independence but totally bereft of credibility and legitimacy.

I do not think it is possible to find another announcement of the

composition of a public inquiry by the government in the nation’s 54-year history which had attracted such instant and all-round rejection and condemnation by major national stakeholders in the country!

The answer is very obvious. Hanif is the last person to head the probe of Bersih 3.0 violence as nobody would believe that he could be impartial and unbiased after he had publicly supported Najib’s irresponsible, wild and baseless allegation that the Bersih 3.0 sit-in at Dataran Merdeka on April 28 was a coup d’etat attempt by the Opposition to topple the government when there is not one

iota of evidence whatsoever.

And what is Hanif’s proof for him to endorse Najib’s wild and far-fetched allegation of Bersih 3.0 as a coup to topple the government?

This is Hanif’s lame response as reported by Berita Minggu (6th May): “Sudah tentu ia berasas kerana Perdana Menteri tidak bercakap begitu saja. Ia memang boleh berlaku. Orang yang menunggu peluang melaku sesuatu demi kepentingan diri memang ada setiap masa.”

(“There has to be a basis because the prime minister

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UN special rapporteur visit welcomed

KUALA LUMPUR: The coalition for free and fair elections, Bersih, has welcomed the offer made by UN special rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue of Guatemala to visit Malaysia and to carry out an investigation into the events of the Bersih 3.0 assembly on Apr 28.

Bersih 3.0 said such an investigation ought to examine the role of Bersih as the organiser and the responsibility of the police and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) in facilitating such an assembly.

"We are ready to give all cooperation in such an investigation," Bersih said in a statement May 8.

On Apr 28 Malaysia

experienced arguably the largest peaceful gathering ever of approximately 250,000 people who came on to the streets of Kuala Lumpur to support Bersih's call for clean, free and fair elections.

Gatherings also took place at 80 other cities around the world in support of the globally-supported international movement for clean, free and fair elections.

Unprecedented show of force

Bersih also expressed concern that the Malaysian government appears to be requesting governments not disposed to democratic reforms to



Frank La Rue

launch a crackdown on Malaysians living in their countries who participated in the

global Bersih 3.0 sit in.

The coalition said if the reports were true, it is a negative development that must be deplored, and it urged all Malaysians to unite in support of the safety of fellow citizens.

Bersih also said it was confident that La Rue, should he receive a formal invitation from the Malaysian government, would be able to conduct a transparent and thorough investigation in order to provide an independent determination as to the exact events of the Bersih 3.0 sit in on Apr 28 with respect to the violence that occurred later that day.

In an unprecedented show of force, many instances of brutality

by the police against peaceful participants were reported.

Members of the media were also not spared from these acts of brutality.

Disproportionate force was also applied in an indiscriminate response and widespread retaliation for the breaching of police barricades, even though the court-ordered exclusion of Dataran Merdeka, the intended venue of the peaceful assembly, was not disobeyed.

While the Malaysian government has announced the formation of an independent panel to review the events of Apr 28, Bersih has called on the government to allow La Rue into Malaysia to carry out his investigation as a matter of urgency.- ES

Nation of Care and Opportunity booklet to be launched

KUALA LUMPUR: PAS vice president Salahudin Ayub said the party would soon launch its English and Mandarin versions of the "Negara Berkebajikan" (Nation of Care and Opportunity) booklet, in line with the party's aspiration to reach a much wider audience.

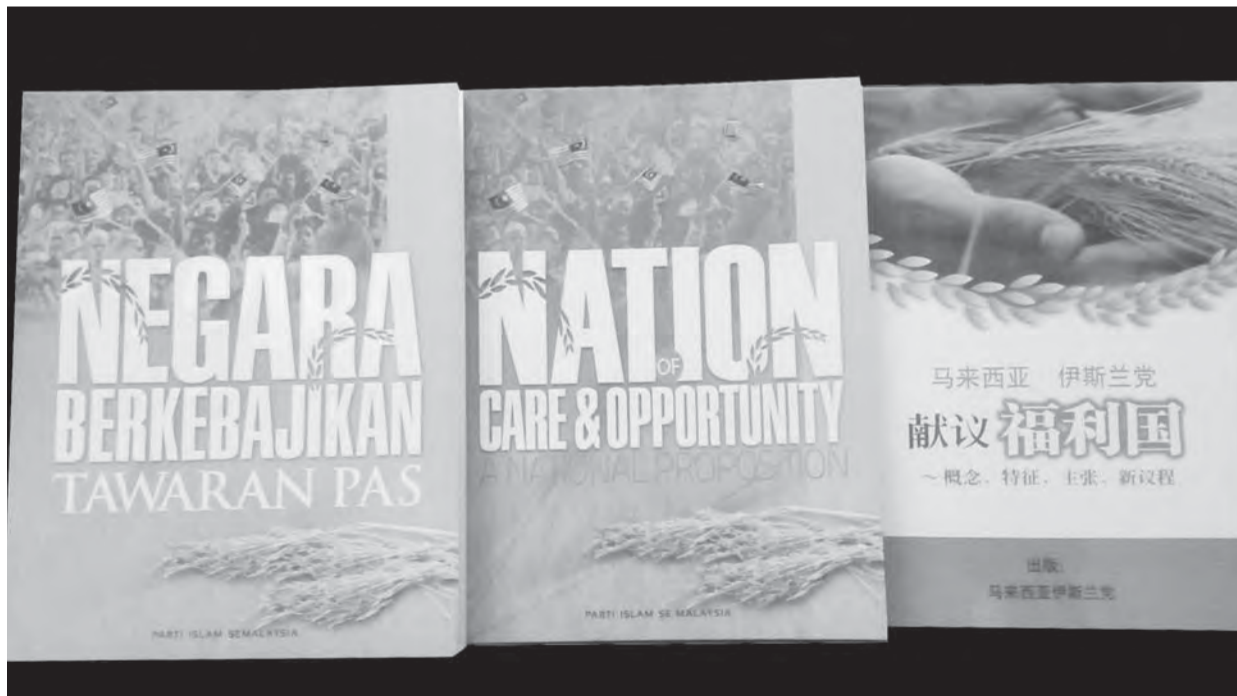
Salahudin said the English and Mandarin versions of the booklet would explain further the concept and the position of the party on all issues to those who relied on these mediums for information.

When met May 8, he said it was important for the party to extend its reach to a wider audience, adding that the Tamil version of the booklet was also in the pipeline.

The Negara Berkebajikan the Nation of Care and Opportunity is the brainchild of PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and signals the party's readiness to form the federal government.

The document promises to deliver several pertinent programs should the party form the next federal government with its other Pakatan Rakyat allies namely DAP and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (KeADILan).

The main agenda for the Negara Berkebajikan policy is to install a fair and clean government, ensure separation of powers, guarantee free and fair elections and rebuild institutions such as the Malaysian



The three versions of the booklet

Anti-Corruption Commission, the Attorney-General's Chambers and the police.

Not a welfare state

Others include the push for a bigger role for civil society and social businesses by reducing taxes and excise duties.

The Negara Berkebajikan concept also differs from the welfare state, and it will restructure development priorities so that economic growth will not be measured merely by construction projects and elaborate infrastructure, but more

importantly sustainability.

Others on the agenda include proper emphasis on eradication of poverty programs to help the 40 per cent of Malaysians with a household income of RM1,500 and below, free entry to public universities for deserving youth and promises of economic success and life assurance for second and third generation Felda settlers through the distribution of plantation land.

The party also aims for more low-cost and affordable housing to be built and to create houses for rent under local councils in big cities with minimum rental for families which need transition

homes before buying their own.

Others include the creation of a special fund for full-time housewives under the husband's Employees Provident Fund (EPF) to safeguard single mothers who do not have a stable form of income after divorce or in the event of the spouse's death and to institute the use of gold as an alternative bartering tool in trade and commerce transactions.

Copies of the Mandarin and English versions are priced at RM4 and can be obtained from Nufair Street bookstore or Unit Buku Harakah on Jalan Pahang Barat, Kuala Lumpur.- ES

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And now Umno stoops to another low

sympathy for an old, homely and doting mother who should rightly be left alone. What happens within one's own family is strictly the affair of that family and highlighting family matters — which cannot be verified anyway — in the open is nothing more than desperation on the part of the perpetrators, in this case, Umno. Apparently, when the recent filthy pictures depicting someone who resembled Azmin were splashed on the front pages of Umno-owned papers didn't work with even the octogenarian ex-premier not believing it and asking Azmin to sue the paper, this latest ploy had to be undertaken.

Are we to take it then that henceforth, families of leading politicians on the Pakatan side would be dragged out into the open to pressure these leaders? Is this not just desperation of the extreme kind which manifests as the lowest form of beastly behavior?

Umno is the most cowardly, lowly creature that Malaysian political history has ever known.

Disclose fees for MAS-Air Asia “collaboration”

KUALA LUMPUR: Pakatan Rakyat has called on the government to disclose the fees paid to CIMB and other consultants and advisers in pursuit of the poorly thought out MAS-Air Asia “collaboration”.

Pakatan Rakyat Policy-Manifesto committee member Dzulkefly Ahmad noted that after eight months and enormous damage to MAS and Firefly, the government has finally made a U-turn on the MAS-Air Asia share swap exercise.

Dzulkefly said while the about turn is essentially motivated by the fear of losing votes from the 20 thousand strong employees of MAS and their families, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak appeared to be genuinely oblivious to the extent of damage the tie-up would cause the national carrier.

“That’s indeed regrettable and truly disturbing,” he said in a joint statement May 7 with other committee members; Bukit Bendera parliamentary member Liew Chin Tong and Lembah Pantai’s Nurul Izzah Anwar.

Dzulkefly pointed out that many sensible Malaysians had strongly opposed the exercise from the outset.

He also blamed government linked corporation Khazanah and CIMB as responsible for the “ill-thought out scheme” that brought previously fierce competitor Tan Sri Tony Fernandez into the fold of MAS to ‘collaborate’ to the loss of thousands of Malaysians striving to earn a living and struggling for a better life.

“It is an acknowledged fact that successful airlines must have



Dzulkefly Ahmad

extensive flight networks in Asia as Asian economies continue to grow faster than the rest of the world, whilst building good partnerships globally,” he said.

He said Air-Asia’s success was attributed to its executing good penetration strategies in Asian markets such as providing connectivity in major non-tradition routes in China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Conflict of interest

He said the merger and the presence of Air-Asia’s shareholders on the board of directors had invariably prevented MAS from expanding into these fast growing markets and was a clear case of a conflict of interest.

“This exercise subsequently resulted in fewer flights, less travel options and higher ticket prices for Malaysians,” he said.

He also pointed out that MAS’



Nurul Izzah Anwar

low-cost subsidiary Firefly was transformed into a full-service short-haul carrier and also ceased its jet operations to Sabah and Sarawak with thousands affected by flight cancellations.

Dzulkefly said fewer flights and higher ticket prices do not just inconvenience the travellers but it is also bad for the entire economy.

He said according to Research for Social Advancement (REFSA) a non-profit organisation, fewer flights meant less work for airline crew and airport ground personnel, which leads to less employment and smaller incomes and less spending power.

Fewer travellers also means less income and employment opportunities for taxis, hotels, cafés, hawkers and all the businesses that provide the services that travellers need as well as other less tangible benefit.

“Especially hard-hit are our fellow Malaysians in Sabah and

Sarawak,” he said.

For example, he said the Sandakan-Kuala Lumpur route is now a monopoly of Air Asia.

Sole player

Dzulkefly said the debacle had left Air Asia, bankers and consultants the winners.

“Air Asia, which previously faced competition from Firefly, is now the sole player in the domestic low-cost segment,” he said.

“Khazanah likely helped this along by masterminding the hasty departure of Firefly’s respected managing director Datuk Eddy Leong in November last year,” he said.

He noted that Leong left abruptly with just over two weeks notice to join destination Resorts and Hotels, a unit of Khazanah.

He also pointed out that CIMB and other financiers must also have earned hefty fees and that Pakatan parliamentarians would be asking in parliament the total amount of fees and commissions paid to bankers, consultants and advisers in the pursuit of the extremely “ill-conceived exercise”.

Dzulkefly said MAS had been at the mercy of cronies and consultants for too long.

He said the once proud national airline had lost so much altitude since the entry of Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli engineered by then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Subsequently, he pointed out that the Widespread Asset Unbundling (WAU) exercise in 2002, the entry of Idris Jala and

his Business Turnaround Plan in 2006 and the latest collaboration agreement have all failed to restore the fortunes of the national airline.

“In fact, the situation is worse,” he said.

Taking responsibility

Dzulkefly said Khazanah Nasional, as the major shareholder of MAS, must take responsibility for the mess.

For a start, he called on Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar and Mohammed Rashdan Yusof of Khazanah Nasional to disengage themselves from MAS before they inflict further damage.

“Their earlier idea of the WAU exercise for which they were handsomely paid, didn’t actually turn-around MAS,” he said.

Ten years later, he pointed out that Khazanah enters into the terrible share swap arrangement to save MAS and in the process, Mohammed Rashdan, who is also now a Khazanah director, was appointed to MAS board.

He also pointed to an analyst’s view that, MAS is still in a dismal position, probably even worse in terms of staff morale.

Dzulkefly said the government must make its position clear and that MAS must be stewarded by a professional board, and run by professional managers with operating experience.

“Most importantly, there will be no further bail outs by the government. No more taxpayer money must be wasted, especially on consultants and bankers,” he said. - ES

Hanif should be star witness not chair of probe

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cannot simply make claims. It could happen and there are always people bidding their chance to do it for their own interest.”)

Berita Minggu also reported Hanif as saying that Najib must have made the allegation after receiving intelligence from the Special Branch.

The question is whether Najib received “intelligence” from the Special Branch that Bersih 3.0 was a coup attempt by the Opposition to topple the government before or after Bersih 3.0 on April 28, and if it was before, why Hishammuddin as Home Minister was given a different intelligence briefing causing him to say that Bersih 3.0 was not a security threat as it had “little traction” with the people?

Furthermore, why didn’t Najib reveal such intelligence of a coup attempt to topple the government before April 28?

If the Bersih 3.0 Panel is going to be a comprehensive and authoritative probe into the Bersih 3.0 violence, both Najib and Hishammuddin should appear before it to give testimony about the intelligence they had received about Bersih 3.0, both before and after April 28.

In fact, Hanif is the last person to be considered to head the Bersih 3.0 probe as he should be one of the inquiry’s “star” witnesses to substantiate his allegations that Bersih 3.0 was a coup attempt which involved pro-communist sympathizers!

On May 1, at 6.25 pm, *Bernama* carried the following report which was published by New Straits Times the next morning as follows:

Pro-communist elements seen at Bersih rally’

SHAH ALAM: Former inspector-general of police Tun

Hanif Omar said pro-communist individuals involved in the 1970s demonstrations were seen in Saturday rally in Kuala Lumpur, which turned violent.

“I recognize from the photos and broadcast images (taken from the rally), the pro-communist people who were involved in the 1970s demonstrations,” Hanif said yesterday.

“The tactics of using provocateurs to cause the demonstrators to clash with police and to bring children along in the hope they would get injured were tactics learnt from past pro-communist demonstrations.”

Hanif was clarifying a *Bernama* report on Monday which quoted him as saying that the gathering could have been masterminded by various parties, including several individuals who tried to spread the communist

ideology. *Bernama*

Hanif should appear before the probe into the Bersih 3.0 violence to substantiate not only his endorsement of the Prime Minister’s wild allegation that Bersih 3.0 was a coup attempt to topple the government, but his own allegation of involvement of pro-communist individuals involved in the 1970s demonstrations in Bersih 3.0 using “pro-communist”, “provocateur tactics” to cause the demonstrators to clash with police and to bring children along in the hope they would get injured.

Without casting any aspersions on Hanif’s integrity, I would respectfully suggest that he should spare himself, the Bersih 3.0 probe and the Najib administration any public embarrassment by declining appointment as head of the Bersih 3.0 probe, for the simple

reason that he should be appearing before it as a “star witness” rather than its head, in view of his publicly declared position on Bersih 3.0 rally.

Apart from Hanif’s appointment as head, the composition of the members (in particular the exclusion of representatives from Suhakam and Bar Council) as well as the lack of a proper and acceptable terms of reference are also matters of grave concern to all Malaysians who would want to see a truly impartial inquiry into the Bersih 3.0 violence to ensure that justice is done to all victims of Bersih 3.0 violence and brutality, regardless of whether police, media representatives or peaceful protestors and to demonstrate that Malaysia is capable of maturing to become the world’s best democracy. - ES

Youth rejects Hanif as head of probe

KUALA LUMPUR: PAS Youth has rejected the proposal by Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein to appoint former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Tun Hanif Omar to probe the violence during the peaceful assembly of Bersih 3.0 sit in that turned chaotic Apr 28.

Youth Chief, Nasrudin Hassan, said a more professional and neutral candidate should be appointed to chair the "independent advisory panel".

"How could Hanif be appointed to chair an investigation commission when he had from the onset accused Bersih 3.0 of having a communist agenda and was out to topple the government?," he said in a posting in his Facebook May 10.

Nasrudin said Hanif should withdraw from accepting the appointment due to his

"lopsided" opinion of the Bersih 3.0 sit in.

Putrajaya announced May 9 that the independent advisory panel formed to probe the events of the Bersih 3.0 demonstrations would be chaired by Hanif.

The other members of the panel would be: former Borneo chief judge Tan Sri Steve Shim, Sinar Harian Press Group managing director Datuk Husammuddin Yaacob, Sin Chew Press Group legal advisor Liew Peng Chuan, Petronas corporate affairs general manager Datuk Medan Abdullah and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia psychology expert Prof Dr Ruszmi Ismail.

Hishammuddin said the panel will be meeting as soon as possible to discuss its terms of reference and scope of investigations.

He reportedly said that the main objective of the panel was to



Nasrudin Hassan

investigate the truth behind the "riots" that occurred during the Bersih 3.0 demonstrations.

"It is my hope that the panel would be able to reveal the true events of what happened during the rally," he said.

Rally initially proceeded smoothly

Hishammuddin said the accusations which have been thrown out by various quarters tend to focus on only one aspect of the demonstrations.

"With this panel, it is hoped that any prejudice which some parties may have towards findings by the police or the Home Ministry will be dispelled," he said, adding that the panel would also quash doubts on the impartiality of the judiciary and the police.

The Bersih 3.0 rally, which saw thousands of Malaysians taking to the streets to demand for clean and fair elections, turned chaotic after 3 p.m. after a group of unidentified individuals breached the barricades in front of Dataran Merdeka.

Police then fired numerous

tear gas canisters and chemical-laced water straight into the crowd, which has been seen as their heavy-handedness and excessive use of force on the protestors.

The rally initially proceeded smoothly for an hour up to 3 p.m. at the fringe of the iconic square after Kuala Lumpur City Hall refused to sanction the use of the square on grounds that Bersih 3.0 was not a national-level event.

Widespread allegations of police brutality against protestors and media personnel surfaced in the aftermath of the rally.

Among the injured was *the Sun* journalist Mohd Radzi Abdul Razak, 27, who was allegedly beaten and kicked by seven or eight policemen for no apparent reason.- ES

SMSL walk out of Lynas PSC

KUALA LUMPUR: Save Malaysia Stop Lynas (SMSL) has staged a walkout May 8 on the Parliamentary Select Committee on Lynas for their refusal to provide a written guarantee that the necessary Parliamentary privilege be granted so that the evidence given will not be used for any libel suit.

"As a citizens and civil society group, we have every right under the Malaysian Constitution to protect our family, our livelihoods, our environment and our country. Yet the PSC would not even uphold the Constitution to protect citizens and Malaysia's own interest," SMSL spokesperson Tan Bun Teet said.

"In the first place SMSL wouldn't have bothered to take part in the PSC had it not been because it is necessary to clear the way for SMSL to apply to the court to withhold the three licences approved by the Government for Lynas to begin its operations," the Kuantan resident said in a statement.

Lynas May 9 had filed a second application at the Kuala Lumpur High Court to seek an injunction against Tan and another SMSL volunteer for alleged defamation.

SMSL is a people's organization consisting of a team of highly committed community volunteers backed up by strong public support from all over Malaysia and concerned citizens

internationally.

SMSL has sought expert advice on the Lynas project. It has had investigative research carried out on Lynas Corporation and its rare earth project by highly qualified independent professionals both in Malaysia, Australia and elsewhere.

SMSL's views are based on expert advice

"The Government's PSC is a charade and a farce if citizens right to speak out in the national interest is undermined, first by Lynas and now by our own Parliament," Tan said.

Tan emphasized, All we have done is speaking out in the interest of our country and telling the truth about the Lynas rare earth project in the interest of the public and our country.

"Our views and position are backed up by accurate and reliable data and research findings. For the Chairman of the PSC to make a public statement claiming that the LAMP is a state-of-the-art facility before the PSC inquiry is completed just goes to show how ill equipped and lacking our law makers are in tackling a complex issue like Lynas," he said

"SMSL will exercise its constitutional right to seek legal recourse. The people of Malaysia have given SMSL their mandate to challenge the approval of licenses at the High Court," he said.- ES

Mainstream media must report on Scorpene case

KUALA LUMPUR: PAS Youth information chief Riduan Mohd Nor has urged the mainstream media to give coverage to the ongoing investigation by the French Court on the purchase of the Scorpene submarines.

Riduan said the mainstream media should also take notice of the allegation of a USD1 (RM3.8) billion condition attached to the purchase of the two submarines.

In a statement May 8, Riduan said the mainstream media should give coverage to this scandal to prove that it is free from the clutches of the ruling party and because the case also involves the name of the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"For the wing, the news on this scandal is more important to be given maximum coverage because it involves the dignity of the top leadership in the country," he said.

Riduan also pointed out that the matter was currently under investigation by the French Court and hence the news was "very valuable".

"It is impossible for the French court to take on the fact with the intention to slander because they have to guard their credibility (in the eyes of the world)," he said.

Riduan said it was out of the ordinary that the prime media had chosen to blackout the news at a time when the international media had given this issue prominent



Riduan Mohd Nor

coverage.

"Has the local mainstream media been directed by the government to censor and not air the news even for a second, so that the people would be kept in the dark about the issue?" he asked.

To divert attention

Riduan said coverage of the issue would be beneficial to the all rather than the current focus on an alleged "sexual act" by a Pakatan Rakyat leader.

"It was odd however that the media was given the 'green light' to air slanderous news of a sexual nature against Pakatan Rakyat leaders," he said.

Riduan wondered if there was a concerted effort to divert the attention of the public from the real issues faced by the leadership of the country.

"If this is the case, than Pas Youth is saddened that the prime media continues to be used as a tool for the benefit of the ruling party," he said.

The case of the French-Spanish-built submarines has been taken to a court in France by the Malaysian human rights group Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) after Malaysia's anti-corruption agency refused to take on the case.

Suaram says they've had access to 153 confidential investigation papers on transactions between French defence company, DCNS, and the Malaysian Ministry of Defense which Najib headed at the time the subs were bought.

The man at the centre of the submarine scandal, Razak Baginda, has also been linked to the murder of a Mongolian model in 2006 - a crime for which two of Najib's bodyguards were convicted in 2008.

Razak Baginda was cleared of involvement in the brutal murder without having to put up a defence and now lives in Britain.- ES

Love your mother, mother and mother...

by LanH

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MOTHER'S day is celebrated on the second Sunday of May. This year the celebration falls on the 13th May. In this column I would like to pay tribute to all mothers especially that special woman who had moulded me into what I am today. She's none other than my mother.

Since a few years back I was responsible for her well being; almost every Wednesday I had to take the day off to take her to the Melaka Hospital for her weekly consultation and appointment. Nowadays she needs to go to the hospital or community clinic almost daily and that this was one reason why I decided to opt for early retirement from Harakah at the age of 50.

After retiring, several readers had SMSed and called me asking me not to abandon my column either in the Malay or English sections of this PAS newsletter and this has given me encouragement and strength to slog on.

My mother is a full time housewife; very busy in bringing up her children — eight of them, I am the second in the family. Almost all my siblings including myself went to residential schools; I must admit during those schooling years I was not too close to my mother because time spent at home was limited only to school holidays.

To be able to enter secondary residential schools, one had to pass with flying colours at primary level. During those primary years,

I witnessed how my mother who was very young (she married at 14 and perhaps at that time she was not even 25 years old) toiled to prepare the food for my siblings and me to take for the afternoon session school.

During those years, my family did not have a gas stove. Cooking was done by using firewood. It was difficult to start a fire especially when the wood was wet during rainy days. I witnessed how my mother scrambled to do her work — washing the clothes, cleaning and sweeping the house and then do the cooking at the same time attending to the needs of my younger siblings who were toddlers and babies.

Yes, it was very difficult to start a fire during the North East monsoon season as strong winds (my kampung folks called it Angin Utara) blew into the village. My mother lighted pieces of old newspaper or rubber cut from old bicycle tubes and tyres and put them under the firewood.

But it was no easy work to make the wood burn, so my mother had to blow and blow the stove. One morning I saw her face blackened from her work. It was hard work just to boil water, cook rice and fry fish or eggs and mould them with ketchup or 'sambal' (gravy) so that her children would be able to bring coffee and rice to school. The food had to be readied early as the school bus came at 11.00 am. We would be back until 6.00 in the evening.

When I was in Standard Two, one day my rice ration which was

kept in my school bag overturned; ketchup made marks on my books. I tried hard to wipe off traces of the ketchup marks but it was in vain. So for the whole year in Standard Two almost all of my books had ketchup marks on them.

Looking at the 'ketchup books', I could not help but keep thinking of my mother. I knew she had sacrificed a lot for her children, so to make her happy I thought why not I study hard to please her. It worked, and *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to God), I scored 5A's in the Standard Five Assessment Examination, and a year later I enrolled at the prestigious Malay College in Kuala Kangsar.

As regarding Mother's Day, I call upon men whose mothers are still alive to devote energy and time to give the best of help to them. It is common knowledge that the majority of men would give priority to their wives rather than to their mothers, what more if they are beautiful and do have worldly possessions.

A scholar had written out this point beautifully: Nowadays, a husband is allowed to witness his wife's labour when she is delivering. Some husbands videotape the event; they can witness great pain of their wives' suffering. But do not only think about your wife's suffering, remember your mother too experienced the same pain when was delivering you decades ago.

Please men out there; there should be no doubt or uncertainty that your mothers experienced and endured labour, giving birth

with great difficulty, a great deal of labour pains, a great deal of suffering and pains.

So you should kneel at the feet of your mother, seeking forgiveness for you had always sided with your wife, giving priority to her above your mother!

A few days before writing this piece, I received by post 'a precious gift' (a book entitled 'Let Us Remember Allah — For the Gift of Love in Our Hearts') from the writer herself, Dr Safiah Osman, a government retiree from Petaling Jaya. She signed the book with a note; "Sdr (Brother) LanH, may Allah SWT richly bless you and your family."

Alhamdulillah, I was very lucky indeed to have received that gift a few days before we celebrated Mother's Day. In her book which was published by Muslim Aid Asia Sdn Bhd, Dr Safiah who was a Professor of Language Education at the University of Malaya and also a Professor of Language Education and Director for International Relations at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) Tanjung Malim, discussed 39 topics on love beginning with 'Love for parents' and ending with 'Love for those who are not greedy and miserly'.

Dr Safiah said the aim of her writing the book was to create awareness, especially amongst the young people of the world, of the need to thank Allah SWT for His clear reminders that there must be love, fondness and kindness in our hearts.

Regarding Love for Mothers which is timely during this special

celebration of Mother's Day, among others Dr Safiah wrote: "There is nothing which can measure the depths of a mother's love. Her love is endless, boundless, and limitless without boundaries. When all around us there is a great deal of grief and misery, a great deal of heedlessness, carelessness, thanklessness and inconsiderateness, a mother's immense love shines through the darkness, glowing with her cheerfulness, kindness and goodness.

Truly, there is no greater love than a mother's love. It is a love which restrains us from walking off alone into the wilderness, into life's wilderness and dreadful darkness.

Let us keep in mind what Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (May peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Love your mother, love your mother, love your mother and then love your father."

The complete version of this hadith which was narrated by Abu Hurairah is: A man came to Allah's Messenger (pbuh) and said, "O Allah's Messenger! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?" The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Your mother. The man said, Who is next?" The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Your mother." The man asked (for the fourth time), "Who is next?" The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Your father." (Al-Bukhari — Hadith No. 5971) — ES

Reviving small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures

by Maria Zain

You buy your cosmetic soap; you're supporting P&G. You buy refreshments for a party, they fall under Coca Cola. You buy cereal, you're adding to the wealth of Kellogg's. You buy food for your children, you're supporting Nestle. You buy coffee to stay awake; you're increasing the profits of Kraft. Those are a few names, but there are only a few names. This is the umbrella of corporate consumerism.

How about buying something from a small business, made from their own brand name, where the main share-holders are mum, dad, and the kids' futures?

It's funny to think of small businesses. Maybe because they

seem to be disappearing off the face of the earth. It used to be a culture - these family ventures - mum and dad working hard to make a living. Using every last drop of energy to stretch the penny and feed the family. But nowadays when one wishes to start a small enterprise - whether or not it's based on the premise of a family business - there will be those cynical snipes that resonate throughout the ambit transversing through votes of no-confidence. A small enterprise is not a job. Get a real job - with a corporation, a company, a company in a tall building. It is safer, it pays monthly, and you will be able to survive on a good salary. A small business is too fragile, too dangerous; you may run out of

money and starve to death.

We hear of this all the time; to not even venture down the entrepreneurial route; and to play the safe path and join the masses of the mainstream. But this is what happens to nearly all human beings. We lose touch with our unique selves, our unique abilities and we end up following the crowd because it's the easier route to take. It's the route that absolves you of responsibility as there is no need to think outside the box. There will always be someone else to blame if things go wrong. The boss is mean and lousy, so I'm stuck in the position I am. The colleagues have a conspiracy against me, so I'm being squished to the pulp and am unable to express myself. The clients are

pretty horrible, but that's where the income reels in, so I have to accommodate their wishes, even if they compromise my own wishes, my integrity, principles and my beliefs.

There are so many people who are stuck in this position tend to stay in this position, because no matter how gruelling it is working with a corporation that dictates them, it's the safe bet. The one that pays at the end of the month, even if it means there is some compromise of beliefs.

There are many ayats in the Qur'an that read that "many people" tend to follow what is being said, but in turn do not take time to reflect. Taking time to reflect is a repeated theme in the Qur'an, because we rush around

with our busy lives without spending moments to ponder upon our intentions and actions. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? What is the most convenient? What will make my life easier?

Going against the grain is tough meat, to be honest. Those who have done it know it takes time and energy and a lot of hardwork before effort bears fruit. They also spend a lot of time doing research and understanding. They spend time in plenty of contemplation before embarking on a new business. And this is true for those who have been brave enough to step outside the box and pave their own career routes for rezeki.

Your life partner - Where the two become one

Adam and Aida have been going out for quite a while now. Adam had already cleared all his professional exams and is already a Chartered Accountant while Aida is currently the Team Leader at her bank. They are doing pretty well with their careers and are contemplating moving onto the next stage of their lives - as husband and wife. Read on to see how they now have to work out their finances prudently not merely on their own but jointly.

Adam was walking past a jewelry shop and he stopped to check out the diamond ring he had been eyeing for the past few weeks. He felt it was about time for them to settle down though realizing that the marriage expenses involved can be pretty substantial. Actually, he was waiting for his bonus but it so happened on that day, there was a special sale. Being a little kiasu, he didn't want to miss this opportunity and thought now was the time to grab it. Decisively confident that bonus is due within a month's time, he figured that he could very well charge it to his credit card first and by the time the payment was due; his bonus would have come in. With an irresistible sale gift of a candlelight dinner voucher for two at a posh hotel, he decided to go for it. "Charge it!" he exclaimed. The damage done - RM4,000 and that was after a good discount! This was his single largest purchase via his credit card but hey, it's only once in a lifetime, right?

Adam was well aware of the responsibility that comes with owning a credit card and he has been very disciplined by paying off his credit card bills in full every month. As a rule of thumb, we should never swipe the card if we cannot pay for it in cash. A credit card merely acts as a payment instrument that usually comes with reward points or some other incentives - it is to be utilized as a transitional substitute for cash but not as hard cash! Always discipline yourself to pay in full on due dates after charging your credit card(s) or else be prepared for penalties and finance charges of more than 18% p.a. If we have a tendency of not paying in full but still want the convenience of cashless purchases, move on to a debit card for a better alternative. A debit card is almost similar to an ATM card whereby the amount spent will be immediately deducted via on-line basis direct from your bank account. In other words, you would only be spending up to your own savings amount.

With a diamond ring in hand together with a candlelight dinner voucher thrown in, what's missing for a romantic ambiance was the bouquet of roses. Adam planned a

NO	ITEMS	BUDGET	ACTUAL
1	Wedding Dinner (500 guests @ RM60)	30,000	
2	Wedding Rings	6,000	
3	Wedding Photos	3,000	
4	Wedding Gown & Suit	4,000	
5	Gifts	3,000	
6	Honeymoon (within Asia)	4,000	
7	Other "surprises"	5,000	
	TOTAL	55,000	

surprise moment for Aida, so on the pretext of celebrating his promotion, he invited Aida out for dinner. As they were about to finish their dinner, Adam graciously presented Aida with the bouquet of roses leaving her amazed but pretentiously puzzled hoping for more dramatic action for a heavenly reunion. On bended knees, Adam with the symbolic diamond ring in hand, blushing proposed to take Aida as her life partner and she accepted immediately with a loving smile and gestures....

Dr. Joyce Brothers said, "Marriage is not just spiritual communion and passionate embraces; marriage is also three meals a day, sharing the workload and remembering to carry out the thrash."

If we think that owning a car is a big commitment, marriage is even a bigger commitment and should be entered into only if you

feel capable of handling the responsibilities. With the romance come the real issues, including managing finances mutually and harmoniously.

Be realistic about your wedding plans based on your budget and do not try to live up to the expectations of other people, including your prospective spouse.. Like in other aspects of your life, have a wedding budget. Aligned to your needs and wants - and most importantly, discuss with your spouse-to-be on how much money both of you can comfortably afford. Though it may be a once in a lifetime auspicious event, but it may end up taking up your lifetime earnings to pay off all your wedding debts.

Adam and Aida sat down together to talk about their expectations of the whole wedding ceremony and decided to work out their following wedding budget, as

can be seen in the table included.

From the budget, they now have a better idea of how much they roughly need for their wedding arrangements. They believe that the gifts from their guests (normally in cash) would be able to cover a major portion of the dinner costs. Adam has also accounted for a 10 % under the item called

Other surprises to cater for any other incidental and unforeseen expenses like costume jewelry, facial, hairdo, etc commonly applicable to any weddings. It's only prudent that we allocate such an amount for such contingencies..

A common legendary French proverb quoted "Love makes passion, but money makes marriage". As much as we hate to admit it, money will somehow affect our relationship with each other. For couples intending to tie the knot, it is best to be very clear where we stand pertaining to our expectations of marriage. Otherwise, you may end up getting entangled with all the money issues which might eventually strangle the love you have for each other....(until our next article).

Article courtesy of Agensi Kaunseling dan Pengurusan Kredit (AKPK). AKPK can be reached at the toll free number 1-800-88-2575.

Reviving small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures

FROM PAGE 17

This step is important, as meek as it seems, but it starts the ball rolling for the philanthropic joy of entrepreneurship. Yes, we hear of Corporate Social Responsibility and what-not by big corporations, but there is so much more to buying from a family business as compared to buying from corporations.

A family business, mum and dad businesses, work at home mum businesses - when we buy from them, we are supporting family values. We are supporting hard work and sweat and tears. We are supporting years of loyalty and guidance.

Gone were the days where parents worked in such a field, through passion, to become better parents. Children are involved in their plight as business and family merge. The money they earn goes

directly to the fridge. They are able to keep their children in art classes and buy seeds to grow an organic garden. They are able to teach values to their children of strong work ethic - first hand - and strict financial management - these things that are not taught first-hand at school.

Supporting a small business means that you also become the shareholder and not just a mere faceless client who comes and swipes a credit card. Supporting a small business is lending a hand to a family who is earning an honest keep, who looks into the future, and who is thinking outside of the consumerism box. Supporting a small business is also supporting an Islamic way of life because running a small business requires a lot more hard work, passion, creativity and

contemplation - all traits that are encouraged in Islam.

Supporting these small businesses mean that money is channelled straight to needs of a family, and even as the business grows, it is channelled to the wants of the people who work hard in getting there. We don't see many of these businesses nowadays, even if shares similarities with the likes of how Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions like Abu Bakr (RA), Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) and Khadijah binti Khuwalid (RA), who spent their lives as merchants. We now support the culture of commercialisation - and like it or not - we are all being swallowed up by the domination of major corporations.

Ironically, it only takes a few big names to realise that a huge chunk of our consumerism culture

falls under the dominion of a number of massive corporations - many corporations that have been released from strange litigation claims; those that have been known to control the market forces, those that dominate the economy and to the job markets' employment rates and the like - and those that eventually lead to problems like inflation, market manipulation and the choices that we make, as consumers.

It may be easy to shun consumerism and opt to purchase from small-scaled businesses, but at the end of the day, when there are so few left, the mainstream shoppers end up in mainstream shopping, forgetting that the small-scaled business run by a small family ever existed. It may take time to reinstate this important segment of the economy

because the culture has been so terribly washed out, but think of it as a stepping stone for the next generation.

There are plenty of hazards of ending up in corporations. Work politics, values, working hours; and sometimes, even, poor pay... and more often than not, neglect of one's own family.

There is so much more to living and working than by just following the norm. Getting a job needs to be done with 'aql and not just blind trooping over with the masses. Before making the choice of employment, the next generation needs to look seriously into the options that are open to them, and one of them is to revive small enterprises, so that the humanness of camaraderie doesn't get gobbled up by the culture of consumerism. - ES

Malaysians make world history

>> LETTER

The forces that be and the man of the hour, Datuk Seri Najib has spoken. We Malaysians are making world history – a record that can never be beaten by anyone in the world. All you people in the world out there be wise. Would you also like to learn from us some 250,000 people here in this tiny Peninsular called Malaysia?

According to the Prime Minister of Malaysia the citizens who were protesting peacefully to register their demand for free and fair electoral reforms nearly toppled the government of the day. And that is why the police had to run helter-skelter, into every street,

nook and corner, grabbing and beating up the protestors, and destroying their cameras and memory cards in addition to the torrential bombardment of tear gas and chemical water that the police rained on the helpless citizens.

The protestors – which the BN leaders claim were not even 50,000 were going to topple the government.

Now the leaders and die-hard agencies of BN say the crowd that turned up was 20,000 or 30,000 while a few BN stooges gripingly said the crowd was no more than 50,000. And now are they saying that these insignificant numbers from a national population of 28

million could have toppled the government?

And mind you, as pointed out by a PAS leader, the protestors mostly only came with tiny mineral bottled water, a yellow T-shirt, and some even having a spoonful of salt – that's it. Others had flowers; some could not stop taking photo-shots. Umbrellas were far too scarce to be noticed. From babies to wheelchair-bound, from young and able to senior citizens with walking sticks – these were the people who came to demand for a free and fair electoral system.

And they all walked kilometers with ice cream and candy in hand

on a hot Saturday as the roads were sealed away to traffic.

And these people threatened to topple the government? Oh how cool. That is a world record. Certainly this Bersih 3.0 is unprecedented world history.

Hey arms manufacturers, you can kiss goodbye to all your submarines, choppers and jets. We do not need bullets and nuclear arms to wipe out governments suspected to be rogues.

All you need is yellow T-shirts, flowers, salt, mineral water, cameras and hand-phones and a carnival festive-like mood. You do not even need half your nation's population to be on the streets to

topple governments.

And you do not even have to march to the government's administrative corridor. All you have to do is squat on the road near to a huge field that hosts a wide variety of entertainment events all year round. And at the tail end of your sit-down protest, just allow some thirty youth attempting to run into the cordoned field. And the government would be brought down.

What a great lesson for the stupid world out there wasting trillions of money building their armaments?

J. D. Lovrenciar
Kuala Lumpur

FROM PAGE 20

Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike since Apr 17

Palestinians cannot sail from Gaza to Egypt. They can't sail to Cyprus. They will be targeted by the Israelis. A sovereign state should have access over its water and we are not allowed access to our water. If you look into the other side of the Gaza Strip it is bound by the Israeli state and so you can't go to the West Bank.

What about the border with Egypt?

We only have a very small border with Egypt - about 15 km. There are a few crossings there like the Rafah crossing and others but they are not always open. Egyptian authorities Alhamdulillah are a bit more cooperative now but not up to the expectation of the Palestinians.

Some 1.5 million Palestinians would certainly need to go in and out regularly and you can't limit the number of people. There are also a number of lists - black list, white list but we hope this will improve over time. It's not as bad as before but it needs improving.

The Israeli West Bank barrier construction, is it still ongoing?

The wall now is a reality. Palestinians had tried to warn the world in the past decade that this will separate our towns, that this wall is taking up our land, and this wall was creating a new reality on the ground but unfortunately our call went on deaf ears and we did not get any answers.

After 10 years of construction the wall is a reality now. It separates certain parts, it surrounds certain other parts of the Palestinian land. For example

Qalqiya is now a big prison just like the Gaza Strip. Its surrounds Jerusalem. It surrounds Nablus and it surrounds al Khalil (Hebron). It also separates. Some people live on this side of the wall while their school is on the other side of the wall. So Palestinian schoolchildren have to run away from Israeli soldiers to cross the wall and go to their school. This is the daily misery that they are undergoing in the West Bank. But we still believe that the wall will fall just like the Berlin wall, because after all it our Palestinian land. If we were to live in side by side with another different state we don't mind having any kind of border but this is not the current situation in Palestine. There are Palestinians on both sides of the wall. It is Palestinian land.

Could you describe the daily living conditions? Do people have jobs?

Poverty is common place. In the Gaza strip there is also poverty but the government there however is more transparent. The daily lives of people is much better compared to other areas. There is a government and international NGO's are operating there, such as from Malaysia. They do have offices in Palestine. But if you look at the West Bank on the other side - and I am from the West Bank - there is direct Israeli occupation there with the Palestinian Authority not having any authority on the ground. People in the West Bank were promised peace and economic prosperity but in reality this is not happening on the ground. Petrol could cost you RM7 a liter and petrol is

cheaper in the Gaza Strip.

How much does it cost for a loaf of bread and how much is one's salary typically?

I have a friend who finished postgraduate study in Malaysia in IT. He went back to the West Bank. He was offered a job in the city of Ramallah for 1500 Shekel. The Israeli Shekel is a little bit less than the ringgit. So we are talking about RM1300 ringgit for a postgraduate IT specialist. Anywhere else IT graduates will get really good offers.

For teachers their salary could be something like RM1000 and this is definitely not enough to sustain a family. The price of bread is something like RM4.50 which could be eaten by two people. Our main food is bread. One kg of meat could go up between RM60 to RM80 and it is a dream for a family to have these luxuries. Fruits and vegetables are expensive. But although all these difficulties are making people's lives miserable but people know that this is not their serious issue. They know that the occupation is the more serious issue. Some least developed country has this economic condition but they don't have to put up with occupation. Here you have economic difficulty and you have your occupation. So you don't get your basic human rights. It's a double misery.

How is the morale of the people?

The people even though they face this difficulty you still see them resisting. You see them protesting against the Israeli occupation. You still see them

carrying out all kinds of activities that is inconveniencing the Israeli authority. Recently there were protests and mass rallies held inside occupied cities like al Khalil, Nablus and Ramallah. They have this gathering in al Khalil for the Palestinian prisoners. They had another big gathering in Nablus and some other small gatherings. They are targeted by the Israelis and those working with Israel. In the West Bank you might be arrested and charged for participating in a protest while in Gaza it is different. You might be targeted with missiles and get killed.

But there is the Arab spring now, and also there are flotillas being sent to Palestine. Are these all not good news?

Palestinians live a daily misery but the news that they receive is very encouraging. When there are changes in the Arab world, in Yemen and other places. People start to have the light of hope. These changes have a direct impact upon them. The changes in Egypt for example, change the relations between Egypt and Palestine. Previously the Mubarak regime used to pressure one side and help the other side. Now Egypt is more neutral in the region. Now Egypt is telling Palestinians that whatever you agree on we accept. That's a good development. Palestinians feel that when their neighbouring countries are democratising then the government would reflect the will of the people. And the will of the people is to support the Palestinians. The will of the people is not to support Israel either

through giving cheap gas or supporting its policy in Jerusalem. That is why Palestinians feel that any democratization is good for the future of Palestine. We hope InshaAllah the result for democracy would be good for the people.

Lastly, perhaps you want to tell us about PCOM and what it does?

PCOM was launched in February last year. PCOM is a Palestinian organisation but operating with Malaysian blessing and contribution. We have on our board of trustees people from different political spectrums in Malaysia. We have people from PAS, Parti Keadilan Rakyat and Umno. The core idea for PCOM is basically to coordinate anything involving Palestine in Malaysia. Currently there are about six Malaysian NGOs working for the Palestinian cause and they need Palestinian hands in coordinating efforts. Another role we are playing is to help manage and organise the Palestinian community here. There are thousands of them here, many of them are students and they need help with sponsorship, social care for the families and so on.

Currently there are also some 20 to 25 Palestinian families who are refugees from Iraq. We also have social activity like the Iftar, Hari Raya gathering and so on. We try to reach to Malaysian politicians, NGOs, government, the public and the media to update on the Palestinian struggle. We are also in the process of having a road show for Palestinian causes soon. - ES

Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike since Apr 17

English Section senior journalist, Saadon Aksah recently had the opportunity to speak with the Palestinian Cultural Organisation Malaysia (PCOM) executive director Muslim Abu-Umar. Abu-Umar spoke at length on the ongoing hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners and other developments involving the Palestinians and the struggle.

Could you tell us about the ongoing open ended hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners?

On 17th of April, 2400 Palestinian prisoners started their open ended hunger strike. The strike was because there is a conclusion amongst them that there is no way for them to force the Israeli authorities to give them their fundamental human rights except by a hunger strike.

An open ended hunger strike means prisoners will not take their meals for an open period - either two, three weeks or until the authority gave them what they wanted. This will mean that their health will certainly deteriorate and some of them might lose their lives in the process. They will only take water and probably milk - possibly a glass daily - and some salt to keep them alive. They have tried to do this in the past and succeeded in certain times.

Why are they having the strike now?

The last two years saw many new developments in the region, the Arab region, which motivated the Palestinian prisoners to take up the challenge. There are 4700 Palestinian prisoners currently languishing in jails and last October, the Palestinian Resistance Movement managed to clinch a deal with the Israeli authority to release some 1027 Palestinians.

This is a big number and at that time there were about 5000 Palestinian prisoners. With the deal, Alhamdulillah, about a thousand prisoners were released with about 400 to 500 sentenced to long imprisonment. The deal was a significant milestone to the Palestinian struggle. The second reason is because there is a change in the Middle East. The Arab Spring has inspired so many people including the Palestinian prisoners to try to force the authority to give them their rights through civil disobedience.

Has there been any case where a hunger strike successfully has achieved its objective?

Yes, brother Khader Adnan, a Palestinian leader who was under

administrative imprisonment, started a hunger strike about three months ago and his hunger strike lasted 66 days. This is a world record and nobody managed to continue a hunger strike for 66 days. He continued his strike until the Israeli authorities gave in to his demands. Brother Khader who is from the West Bank managed to force the Israeli authority to give his rights and he was released from prison on the 17th April.

Why was the date, April 17 chosen?

The 17th of April is the Palestinian Prisoners day and it is celebrated every year by the Palestinian prisoners because in the 1970s there was a third exchange deal between the Palestinian resistance and Israeli authority that took place, and the Palestinians resistance leaders were released then. Brother Khader was also released on the 17th and the Palestinians Prisoners day was also on the 17th, so the Palestinian Resistance Movement decided to start the hunger strike on the day.

What are the Palestinian prisoners demands?

The demands are not outlandish. They are demanding access to media, able to get access to a telephone, TV or newspapers.

Next, prisoners from the Gaza Strip should also be allowed to meet their families. Many of the prisoners from the Gaza Strip have not been allowed to meet with their families for the past five years, and they number around 480. Their fourth demand is to end humiliating policies such as strip searches. The guards conduct unexpected searches, sometimes coming for a visit at 2 o'clock in the morning!

They are not asking for their release even though that's more than fair. What they are asking for is their basic human right that is to end solitary confinement. There are nearly 20 prisoners currently in solitary confinement, some for as long as 10 years. Solitary confinement means that you are placed in a cell alone, and you don't get to meet people and, no activities, and no access to the media.

Are there any other demands?

They are demanding the end of administrative imprisonment. The British used to practice it in the 1920's and the 1930's where anybody could be put into jail



Muslim Abu-Umar

without any charges, without any rights and without access to lawyers.

You are not charged with anything but you are locked up because you are a threat to the regime. Israel claims itself to be a democratic state but it still applies administrative imprisonment. Currently there are 318 people imprisoned under this category.

Are Palestinian sisters and children also being held?

Currently there are not many sisters being held. Before 2008 there used to be more but Alhamdulillah due to the struggle of the Resistance and the exchange deal between Hamas and Israel, many of them were released and only six Palestinian sisters remain incarcerated. There are however, 183 Palestinian children in prison under the age of 18. If we include those under the age of 21 then the number would rise significantly..

How is the progress of the strike so far?

I believe the five demands would be met InshaAllah. The Palestinian prisoners are willing to sacrifice their lives to get their

demands. They are taking the example from brother Khader Adnan and also after sister Hanan Chalabi who went on a hunger strike for 43 days. Alhamdulillah she got her freedom but she was deported to the Gaza Strip. So after following the examples led by the two leaders I think Palestinian prisoners will be able to get their rights.

Could you update us on the situation in Jerusalem?

For Palestinians, Jerusalem is our capital. Israeli disputes that and they claim that it is their capital but so far only the United States recognises Jerusalem as its capital. Since Jerusalem was occupied in 1967, Israeli authorities are trying to change the demographic pattern there. They started the Judaisation of the city including forcing out Palestinians from their towns and cities, from their neighbourhoods and have been building settlements. For Muslims, Jerusalem is our third holiest mosque and we are losing Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in danger. The Israelis are trying to change the reality on the ground.

Can you tell us more about the excavations going on under the Al-Aqsa mosque?

Under the mosque there are many excavations and so many tunnels. There are also Israeli synagogues built under the Al Aqsa mosque and this is something that the media does not talk about. But this is serious since Al Aqsa mosque is still under the control of the Israelis. Muslims go and pray in the mosque but under the mosque there is an Israeli temple that has been built.

How is the welfare of the Palestinians who live inside the 1948 lands?

The Palestinians living in the 1948 lands are being discriminated against. Sheikh Raed As Salah, the Palestinian leader in the 1948 land or now what they called Israel had been arrested and imprisoned a few months ago. He was charged of inciting hatred of Israeli authority. Alhamdulillah two weeks ago the British removed the charge and released him and he is in Palestine now to lead the people in the 1948 land.

There are more than 1 million Palestinians living under what we called Israel now and these people

are not being given their rights as Israeli citizens. Their cities and towns do not get enough funding from the government and their cities and towns are not endorsed as Arab areas. They have changed billboards in the cities by changing them from Arabic names to Hebrew ones. They are changing the topography of the land. Palestinian children there are also not getting access to education like Israeli citizens.

Also recently there were some extremist Jewish groups protesting to expel Palestinians living in the 1948 land. They are talking about a project of transfer and these are not only normal Israeli citizens but also include senior Israeli politicians.

And the situation of Palestinian refugees?

Palestinian refugees living in camps are not living comfortable lives. They number about half a million in Syria and in Lebanon. If you are talking about those in Lebanon, their living conditions are miserable and could be even worse than the Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. This is because Lebanon itself is a small state and it is in need of help, so Palestinians are mostly those worse off.

How about the situation in Gaza strip?

Gaza strip is another story. The Malaysian population is very much aware of the Palestinian plight in Gaza because of the Israeli aggression in 2008. Today after three to four years after the invasion, the Gaza Strip has still not seen re-construction.

Whatever was damaged during the invasion has still not been rebuilt. Many mosques have been damaged, housing areas demolished and people are being hunted and killed and these people are not being compensated. Their property is not being reconstructed even until today. To add salt to injury the Israelis have stopped fuel supply to the Gaza Strip over the past few weeks which has resulted in electricity blackouts. Hospitals have been affected and critical patients have had to make do without electricity. Egypt does try to help by providing fuel but we need to have a permanent solution, not just fuel supplies for a week. But InshaAllah the situation will improve.

It has been described as an open air prison? Is that description still valid now?

To a certain extent, yes.