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In these past several weeks, Malaysians have seen a drama unfold over what should be the Theme for their country's forthcoming observance of its independence day. And now placed on the table of the rakyat (people) are two very different Themes.

In this drama, Malaysians have been given a look at not just the output or outcome but the PROCESS in which each of these two very important Themes have been conceived and delivered. Perception comes from how leaders (political or otherwise) go about things. Rightly or wrongly, this is how I perceive things. Correct me if I am wrong.

One theme came straight from the ruling political party coalition via the ministry of information. The party=nation. The party knows best. The rakyat (people)? Just vote us in every 4-5 years. Trust us; we do everything for you. You will always have official avenues to channel your voice to your government. On the issue of national day theme, though, we don't need really need to hear your suggestion or criticism. We know what is good for you. We have the experience - fifty five years of it. Here then is the Theme for our independence day: "Janji Ditepati"(Promises fulfilled). The rakyat does not have to tell us but we tell you that we have kept our promises! We see no reason why our re-elections campaign theme cannot be the independence day celebration theme. Why not? As the ruling coalition, have we not kept our promises to the nation?

The other theme came from the rakyat because an invitation from the loyal opposition in parliament was issued to the rakyat: send in your own compositions of what you think will make a suitable theme. There is a name of the rakyat whose recommendation was selected from 250 entries via email: *Alhaimi Adam*. The public has access. The rakyat not only have the right but the opportunity to participate. Now even without any explicit call being made or promise of payment, designs of possible logo for the theme: "Sebangsa, Senegara, Sejiwa"(One Nation, One Country, One Soul) are coming in. This is what we call free enterprise. Personal initiative. Trusting that the rakyat knows and the rakyat cares enough to be involved. Not for money or fame but for love of Malaysians and their country!

This illustrates a very fundamental issue in a true democracy. Democracy is not just simply

WHAT Malaysia as a country does. It is very much also HOW we or our government go about doing so. The PROCESS is as important if not even more important than the outcome. The process in fact determines the outcome.

For that matter, for myself, a country which practises true democracy must not just hold elections and declares the results but the process in which it conducts its elections must be nothing less than CLEAN, FAIR and TRANSPARENT.

In the same way, a truly democratic country must not only be able to point to its development projects and its OUTWARD PROGRESS (since looks can be deceiving) but must demonstrate its INNER WORKINGS in the way the country's resources (human, financial and intellectual) are being utilised according to the best practices of good governance and the way it comprehensively measures the results of its work.

As the nation observes its 55th year of independence (1957)/49th year as Malaysia (1963), we the people must insist that the government of the people must be more transparent in choosing the Theme of our independence day observance as well as in everything it does on behalf of the people. This will come only when the government of the people fully respects the independence of the PEOPLE.

A Tale of Two Themes

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