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Will There Be Malaysia Spring? A Comparative Assessment on Social Movements
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“*Will there be a Malaysian Spring?*” - as the title suggests, it seems that this article attempts to predict whether the waves of mass uprisings and regime change in the Middle East and North Africa would claim a new ‘victim’ – the state of Malaysia. In the early part of the article Nidzam and Kartini (2017) pay attention to the historical aspect of revolutions and mass mobilizations that occurred around the world, including in several states of Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. According to the authors, the region of Southeast Asia had already experienced an Arab Uprisings style of public protest when mass mobilizations and protests succeeded in toppling several dictators – specifically Marcos of the Philippines (1986), Suharto of Indonesia (1998) and Thaksin of Thailand (2006). The Malaysian regime is a close neighbour that yet seemed ‘immune’ from the ‘threat’ of civil protest. There are several reasons pointed out by the authors which may have prevented the success of regime change via street protests to take place in Malaysia such as those seen during the Arab Uprisings. These reasons are explained as follows.

- i. *Social structure and ethnic issues* – Ethnic, religious and political ideology sentiments often disrupt unity amongst citizens. As a result, it is challenging for Malaysians to have a strong and solid mass protest against the ruling government.
- ii. *The nature of unemployment and poverty* – In Malaysia, the rate of poverty and youth unemployment are slightly less than in some Arab states. Most Malaysians are considerably well employed and committed to their jobs. Thus, to organize a continuous protest and civil disobedience, from week to week and month to month like the majority of ‘revolutionaries’ did in Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi and Sanaa would be almost impossible.
- iii. *State control* – With the advance of modern surveillance systems, the intelligence units under state police control (Royal Malaysia Police) are well prepared to interrupt any attempt to overthrow the ruling government.
- iv. *Media and Hegemony* – The mainstream media and the ‘government-controlled’ channels are extremely efficient, such that they ‘hegemonize’ a large section of the population, especially in the rural areas - thus the ruling government is portrayed as legitimate and responsive.
- v. *External influence* – The majority of the Middle East and North African states have their own preferable ‘alliance’ with certain Western great powers – for instance, Mubarak of Egypt used to be a close ally of America, while Russia and China continuously back the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad. The same situation applied to Ben Ali (former Tunisia’s president) and his close ties with France. Libya, on the other hand was seen as an ‘enemy’ of the West, manifested by the tense bilateral relationship with the United States under the Qaddafi leadership. As argued by the authors, the involvement of these superpowers with their own agendas and interests had the potential to escalate any crisis in the Arab world. As for Malaysia, this is not the case, since the country remains neutral to any ‘blocs’ - be it the US, Europe, Russia or China. In fact, Malaysia’s commitment in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) demonstrated the ‘un-biased’ policy that had been practiced since 1970.

All the factors stated above provide reasons why Malaysia is unlikely to become the next Arab Uprisings ‘victim’ in Southeast Asia. In other words, the authors believed that there was no such thing as a “Malaysian Spring”. Regrettably, these optimistic views from the authors appear too subjective and debatable. The current ruling government under the leadership of Najib Razak has suffered from a series of political scandals, mismanagement by government officials, power abuses, human right violations, implementation of unnecessary taxes, price hikes, inflation and racial tensions - and these cannot simply be overlooked.

Indeed, Najib is not Mubarak, Ben Ali or Qaddafi and to merely neglect the numerous mass protests, such as series of Bersih movements against his leadership held throughout the country indirectly gives this article a less balanced perspective.

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