

Moving On...



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 President

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August was a month of much driving for me. First, to Kuantan for their State Dinner – I was surprised to find that the fastest route was through the most rural areas of Melaka and Negeri Sembilan. There was very little traffic, the roads were in good repair and there were no tolls. MMA Pahang were gracious hosts, and I enjoyed the dinner, where the *Menteri Besar* was the Chief Guest. I must say that I have never yet seen any other state emulate his gesture of offering to pay for the dinner!

The next week it was off to Kangar, Alor Setar and Ipoh for their dinners. It is interesting to note the differences between branches. Though technically Perlis and Kedah are the same age, since they both split from the joint branch at the same time, for some reason Perlis feels like the younger branch. It is certainly smaller, and this shows in the more comradely, informal atmosphere. The Chief Guest in Kangar helped to fill-up the tables by calling in housemen who had just finished their shifts.

In Alor Setar, I was able to observe the Stress Management Workshop for junior doctors – a worthwhile and laudable initiative by the Kedah Committee. The dinner was a slightly bigger affair than the Kangar one, and was graced by the State *Pengarah*, who is a very strong supporter of MMA's initiatives to help doctors.

Finally (for August) was Perak's State Dinner. This was a large and well-attended function. In order to minimise protocol, no outside Guest of Honour was invited, and everybody was able to let their hair down and enjoy themselves.

I would like to thank all these branches for inviting us to their dinners. I enjoyed meeting members and learning about each branch's peculiar problems and special strengths. I hope that this tradition of inviting the ExCo to dinner continues. It really helps us to keep in touch with what is going on and what concerns branches and members have.

Unfortunately, I cannot just write about dinners. How can I ignore what was the largest event of August? I refer, of course, to the *Bersih 4* rally. I know this is a polarising issue, but hiding our heads in the sand is not going to help. I know there are people out there saying, "Why is MMA not taking part in Bersih? Don't you want a clean Government?". At the same time, we also have members who are either ardent Government loyalists or believers in maintaining the absolute political neutrality of our association. Is the answer to steer clear of anything that may possibly be construed as political? Are we to maintain silence and discreet inaction when faced with anything that might be "sensitive"?

You will guess, I am sure, that my answer is a resounding NO! Of course the MMA focusses mainly on the medical and healthcare issues facing the country. This is not to say that we pay no attention to larger issues. After all, why do we strive for healthy citizens? It is not so that they can labour more efficiently for the development of the country. It is not so that they can be smoothly functioning cogs in the machinery of production. The target must be to allow each person to fulfil his potential, not in order to boost the GDP, but to improve individual well-being and increase happiness. That is easier said than done, but let us be clear about it – we are working for the individual patient. Even if the Government is my employer, my duty is to my patient.

It stands to reason, then, that the MMA must stand for those fundamental freedoms enshrined in our nation's constitution, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. Furthermore, we must stand against those things that detract from our collective well-being, such as intolerance, repression and corruption. I expect that all our members would agree on these broad principles, but as always, the devil is in the details.

There are those who believe strongly that *Bersih* is right and would have the opposing "Red Shirts" rally banned, and there are those who believe the exact opposite. I believe both sides have the right to peacefully assemble and put forward their point of view. However, I do not believe both sides are equally right. In this world, we cannot any longer pretend to stand apart from each other. Whether we like it or not, we are interconnected. This being so, messages of hatred and calls to marginalise people based on their ethnicity or religion are simply not acceptable.

Thus, though the MMA took no role in the rallies, I know many members were present. I believe most of them were at the *Bersih* rally, and I am glad for that. Everyone has a right to speak, but not all speech is true or equally valuable.

People will ask if the rallies achieved anything. People blew off some steam, and everything goes on as before. I do not believe that is the case. At least we know that some Malaysians can march and protest peacefully. Some Malaysians know what they want, and are not afraid to articulate their demands. All Malaysians should now feel free to speak out freely and clearly about their views of the future of this country.

Finally, you might wish to know if MMA would have worked with other bodies to organise such rallies. I do not believe that is the MMA's role. However, I do think that if we had been asked to help out with first-aid stations and medical volunteers, we would not have refused if the organisers were inclusive and respectful of our constitution and our fellow Malaysians. We respect the right to free speech, but we do not have to respect all that is said. The MMA stands for inclusivity, diversity, community and tolerance of dissent. We stand peacefully but resolutely against racism, corruption and the fostering of hatred and divisiveness. We must use our professional standing and ethics in the service of national well-being, unity and the promotion of human rights.



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- At least a Master's degree, Board Certification, Membership, Fellowship or any other recognised specialty training in the related field.
- Eligible to be registered with the Malaysian Medical Council, preferably as a specialist with the National Specialist Register.
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