

'Apa lagi Umno mahu?'

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By K Temoc

COMMENT There has been a lot of ironies surrounding and emanating from the response of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak when queried by reporters on Lim Kit Siang's solid victory in Gelang Patah as well as BN's loss of other parliamentary seats to the Pakatan Rakyat coalition. Najib had identified the cause as that of a 'Chinese tsunami', perhaps shooting that answer from his hips - at least I would like to think so.

That was all it took for former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamad to run away with it in a lamentable direction so as to wreck his fury at Umno's favourite punching bag, the Chinese. Needless to say, many like Utusan Malaysia jumped on the bandwagon to echo his regrettable spewing of unnecessary poison.

azlanBut political analysts including even those from Umno's side have dismissed the no doubt deliberately (mis)identification of the swing against BN as Chinese in character. One wonders how 25 percent of the Malaysian population could have provided Pakatan with 51 percent of the popular vote in Malaysia's 13th general election?

First irony - hasn't it been ironical that the first person to challenge the PM's claim of a Chinese tsunami was A Kadir Jasin, a pro-Umno blogger, former group editor-in-chief of New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd and at times also a Berita Harian columnist?

Pak Kadir stated it had been a Malaysian and not Chinese tsunami. Since then, other political analysts have concurred with Pak Kadir's correction of Najib's so-called Chinese tsunami.

Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) identified the swing towards Pakatan as from the Malay middle-class in urban areas, especially disgruntled Malay young voters. He dismissed the swing of voters as being due solely to racial polarisation, and pointed out two other factors in play, namely, the effects of class, both socially (rich, poor, middle class) and regionally (urban, rural).

Second irony - hasn't it been ironical that Mahathir, the man who first mooted the noble idea of Bangsa Malaysia in 1991 in his Wawasan 2020 (Vision 2020), is now angry at these same Bangsa Malaysia, the young multi-ethnic and mainly urbanites

for voting against BN in the recent elections?

NONE In his 'Malaysian ideal' encompassed in his Wawasan 2020, he outlined nine strategic challenges that Malaysia must overcome, ironically with Challenge No 1 being "Establishing a united Malaysian nation made up of one Bangsa Malaysia".

The further irony in this is that Mahathir has, whether he likes it or not, achieved Challenge No 1, at least with respect to young Malaysians as the recent polls, which showed those who voted against BN were not only Chinese but a new multi-ethnic generation of Bangsa Malaysia.

Perhaps it must have mortified Mahathir to hear his Bangsa Malaysia voicing their dissatisfaction with the way Umno has been going about the business of governing Malaysia.

Mind you, probably and again ironically those who oppose his Challenge No 1 of Wawasan 2020 have been himself and his own faction of Umno, including its auxiliaries like Perkasa. But others in Umno don't support his regrettable stand like, for example, former PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin, as well as Saifuddin Abdullah.

What then about Najib defending Utusan on its racially inflammatory front-page headline 'Apa lagi Cina mahu?' (What else do Chinese want?) which attempted to portray the general election results as a Malay-versus-Chinese issue?

Najib under extreme pressure

Most Malaysians know Najib has been and probably still is under pressure from the right-wing elements in his party and seen to be tap-dancing around the more extreme public statements made by his alleged mentor-scrutiniser, Mahathir.

Zaid Ibrahim, former Umno law minister who resigned from his ministerial position in protest over the draconian detention of Teresa Kok (Pakatan MP), Raja Petra Kamarudin Petra (Malaysia's most famous blogger and political activist) and Tan Hoon Cheng (a journalist in Sin Chew Daily) in 2008 under the Internal Security Act (ISA), said of Najib:

"As a former colleague, I know him to frown on combative politics. He was always more interested in placating and pleasing, but this will not do when dealing with Umno extremists. He tried hard to please them by putting Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin up as election candidates.

"Sometimes his speeches to an Umno audience bear the same uncompromising trademarks that peppered former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Ibrahim's speeches - even Najib's oratory style has been modulated to sound fiery. But I for one still think he has real concern for national unity. Let's see what he will do in the next few weeks."

Third irony - it may be worthwhile reminding us that Challenge No 2 of Mahathir's Wawasan 2020 is "Creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society."

NONE And what did we witness in the last couple of years in Umno's pre-election campaigning but our so-called Bapa Bangsa Malaysia repetitively punishing and twisting the Malay minds to be psychologically besieged and insecure, let alone developed.

I believe that should be enough, and I need not go further into how Mahathir ironically went against the other challenges of his own Wawasan 2020.

Fourth irony - Mahathir is particularly known for his saying of 'Melayu mudah lupa' (Malays forget easily), implying they forget their debts to their benefactors all too easily. He has also admitted that without Chinese support for him and BN in the 1999 general election, he would have lost.

Last year, he stated "So the government must show that even though they look after the welfare of Malays, they do not forget the welfare of others."

"Towards the end of my time as prime minister, I got a lot of support from non-Malays and they were the ones who determined that we had a strong government despite the loss of faith among the Malays."

Pray tell me, who is now the Melayu yang mudah lupa? I wonder whether Mahathir would be able to recognise the sad irony of his earlier pontifications?

MCA deafeningly silent

Fifth irony - on May 7, 2013 Edy Noor Reduan from the NGO Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia (SAMM) released a press statement 'MCA merajuk, beri laluan isu perkauman dibakar' (MCA sulks - allows racist issue to blaze) which is self-explanatory.

While MCA has been sulking in petulance at its election loss and remained deafeningly silent as right-wing elements in Umno and its mouthpieces Utusan and

sister publication Kosmo! deliberately conflagrated the inflammatory accusation against the Chinese, it took two MIC members and Umno leaders mentioned earlier to speak up against the racist demonisation of Chinese.

MIC deputy president Dr S Subramaniam said the Chinese should not be considered racist or against the Malays when they have merely transferred their political support from Umno Malay candidates to Pakatan Malay candidates in PKR and PAS, stating "We have to accept reality. It was their right to choose. And it is not right to blame them for voting the opposition."

Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali He was echoed by another MIC leader, Vell Paari, the son of former MIC president S Samy Vellu. Vell Paari gave his opinion that "... the Chinese supported the opposition because no action had been taken against Perkasa and Ibrahim Ali (left) for their comments. Putting Perkasa members as BN-friendly candidates had also driven away Chinese and Indian votes in Selangor."

Sixth irony - a big part of the problem leading to the current issue has been the pressure on PM Najib to win more than his predecessor former PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's 140 parliamentary seats in the 2008 general election.

The mental pressure suffered by him could be likened to the fabled Old Man of The Sea (from the tales of Sinbad the Sailor) sitting on his shoulders.

You may say The Old Man of The Sea was and maybe still is Mahathir.

I was informed that Mahathir had once stated (prior to some kind of election, perhaps the one between him and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for the Umno presidency) that even if he won by one vote, he was still a legitimate winner and would accept the post. So, hasn't it been double standards to expect Najib to meet the requirement when a political party could form a government with 112 parliamentary seats?

Yes, the so-called benchmark of a minimum two-thirds majority (148 seats) has been a myth, nay, a nonsense which admittedly would be nice to have in order to make all sorts of constitutional amendments at will, but not something necessary to form a reasonably stable government.

Where is it stated that a government elected under a Westminster democracy or any other democracy must achieve a two-thirds majority to be entitled to call itself a stable government?

Indeed, given Umno's frightened realisation of the increasing electoral swing

against it in the last few years, explaining why Mahathir and his Perkasa were hysterically pounding some of his own Wawasan 2020 'Challenges' to smithereens, no BN leader, not even Mahathir himself, would have been able to achieve that impossibility of a win with the preposterous two-thirds majority in the recent general election.

What Najib has really achieved

So let us instead look at the final and seventh irony and examine what Najib as BN leader had achieved in the Malaysian 13th general election for BN.

Now, I know there are still questions to be answered on the conduct of the polls and the Election Commission itself, but let us leave that aside at least for now.

Many Pakatan supporters of course would not agree to this but I am attempting to see it from an Umno member's point of view. The reality, no matter how unpleasant it may be to a Pakatan person is that to Umno, Najib has been a HERO for winning GE13 and saving the party from political doom as well as undoubtedly saving many BN politicians from legal prosecutions for alleged corruption and abuse of authority.

Well-known political activist Haris Ibrahim had earlier made known his wish to serve a Pakatan government as its chief prosecutor on the more notorious cases of corruption involving very senior ministers. Well, they have been spared a Haris Inquisition by Najib.

NONEI have capitalised the word HERO because that has been the magnitude of Najib's achievements for BN in the face of the expected tsunami against BN nationwide.

No doubt about it, during the election campaign and long before that, Najib has been, take your choice, sincerely or cunningly friendly, earnestly or sneakily warm, truly or insincerely charming, genuinely or craftily generous, and everything he senses he has to be. He can be ruthless, calculative, scheming and probably liberal with his promises, but all of which makes him a successful politician.

There is no doubt he has worked indefatigably during the election campaign for BN and particularly Umno.

His biggest mistake was to inexplicably stand a non-Umno Zulkifli Noordin as the BN candidate in Shah Alam. That move had not only lost for BN the seat but probably caused an anti-BN domino effect in Selangor state which enabled PAS to double its state seats to 15 in the Selangor Malay heartland, a traditional

stronghold of Umno.

Many said it was a decision to appease someone powerful in the Umno right-wing elements, more so when Zulkifli Noordin and Ibrahim Ali were from Perkasa and not Umno.

Be that as it was, while Pakatan was making inroads in BN strongholds like Johor and Negri Sembilan, Najib and his team were quietly taking the back lanes and by-roads into Pakatan territory to successfully seize seven seats from PAS in Titiwangsa, Kuala Selangor, Pendang, Padang Terap, Jerai, Sik and Baling and eight from PKR in Balik Pulau, Bagan Serai, Kulim-Bandar Baru, Merbok, Machang, Ketereh, Tanah Merah and Hulu Selangor (won by PKR in 2008 though held by BN in a by-election).

Umno's ignificant 15-seat harvest

It was a significant 15-seat harvest for Umno because it mitigated against the loss of 22 other seats to Pakatan.

Just imagine if he didn't succeed in the above, the final election would have been only 118 seats for BN versus 104 seats for Pakatan, a mere 14-seat difference or only an eight-seat majority to rule. Okay, perhaps let us not proceed any further as to what possibilities this would have offered the other side.

Najib also ripped back Kedah for BN, which surely would and should have earned the undying gratitude of Daddy Mahathir, while holding BN's position in Perak, Perlis and Terengganu. In wrestling back Kedah and holding off Pakatan in Perlis and Terengganu, he has basically destroyed the putative 'Northern Green Crescent' and isolated PAS to only Kelantan.

NONEFor Umno alone, he increases its 79 parliamentary seats in 2008 to 88, and in Peninsular Malaysia, BN collectively won 100 seats compared to 99 in 2008, a gain of one parliamentary seat. He also increased the state seats from 239 in 2008 to 244 [figures obtained from Malaysia-Today blog].

And that has been why I capitalised his HERO status for Umno, including Mahathir, to see and think about. They and not the Malaysian voters should be 'grateful' to Najib.

So we come back to Utusan's 'Apa lagi Cina mahu?'

Given Najib's considerable Houdini-style achievements, warts and all, for Umno to

escape being ousted from rule in ignominy, shall I end with an ironical 'Apa lagi Umno mahu?'

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