

Najib has all the wrong strategies, or does he?

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COMMENT Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his Umno warlords appear to have all the wrong strategies in their attempt to win the people's hearts.

No other campaigns have been maligned as much as the 1Malaysia slogan, which was created as part of the Barisan Nasional's campaign in the lead-up to the general election in 2013. Compared to former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's (Pak Lah) simple but impactful, 'Do not work for me, but work with me', the 1Malaysia has proved to be Najib's biggest liability during the last general election.

After having spent millions of Ringgit on the campaign, while Pak Lah spent almost nothing by comparison, the 1Malaysia slogan has caused Najib to lose the popular vote, in comparison to the 2004 general election, when Pak Lah won by a big majority.

The atmosphere then, of course, was different, but Pak Lah was able to bring 'healing' to the nation after 22 years of dictatorial rule by Dr Mahathir Mohamad. At that juncture, the nation was looking forward to a good leader who could bring about transformation, but lo and behold, when Dr Mahathir began bashing Pak Lah, the nation turned against BN.

The people soon realised that Dr Mahathir's Team A was already too strong for Pak Lah, formerly from Team B, to hold his fortress. I was one of those who saw the wickedness of Dr Mahathir and his warlords.

Many of us decided that we would punish the other BN component parties because they too were nothing but 'puppets' and 'rubber stamps'; hence, in constituencies where MCA, Gerakan or MIC depended on the non-Malay votes, the results were against the BN component parties.

After these years, it is safe to assume that Najib is at the helm of Umno, and he has his war strategists at work in Umno's war room, whose job is to put together strategies to fight off Pakatan Rakyat.

While some things may not have drawn up in the war room, people have become too used to the 'dirty politics' which they now will blame on no one else but Umno/BN. In the lead up to GE13, Pakatan de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim garnered a lot of his support as a result of the accusations and 'fitnahs' leveled against him.

Boon or bane?

While Najib was pushing his 1Malaysia campaign, Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali was given the liberty to attack the non-Malays, and at times jeer at the non-Muslim community.

Ibrahim was taunting the Bersih movement, saying that he would turn up on the streets, but he never did. In the same breath, even Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin was threatening to bring his Red Patriots to the streets, when Bersih was all about clean and fair elections.

At the same time, people could see how the authorities were making it hard for the committee to even organise a sit-down protest on the lawns of Dataran Merdeka.

At that point, I was advocating that Najib should just allow the people to sit on the lawns and turn up to give a speech. He could have won many a heart, had he done so!

Instead, when thousands of people turned up at Dataran Merdeka, mostly in a carnival mood, the forces were lashed out against them. Innocent people were arrested and were being bashed up. April 28, 2012 turned out to be a dark patch of our history, and the outcome of a growing public anger was a huge turnout of the Chinese community in the general election last May.

Not forgetting Ibrahim Ali's threat to burn the Alkitab, another group known as Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) organised a seminar that was largely provocative. It had even invited speakers from Indonesia who were found to be liars. One of the speakers, for example, claimed to be a former priest from Indonesia, but when checks were done with the Indonesian churches, it was found that no such person had gone through its priesthood.

This all happening in the aftermath of the raid on the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) by the Selangor Religious Affairs Department (Jais) has not only impacted the church in Malaysia, but the larger Malaysian population as whole. The international community was also closely watching the country's human rights record.

Initially, the blame was placed on the Selangor state government because the people thought that Jais was part of the state government. The truth soon came out that, apart from a dotted line to the menteri besar of Selangor, Jais was strictly accountable to the Selangor Religious Affairs Council (Mais), whose chief is none other than an Umno strongman.

The 'Islamisation' of native Christians with a 'Bin' or 'Binti' to their names in Sabah by the National Registration Department, coupled with the fact that the Alkitab and the Iban Bibles seized by Jais have still not been returned to the Bible Society, despite the urging by the Christian churches, is already riling up Christians in both Sabah and Sarawak, with the leaders there urging 'mamangkis' (awakening). Both states are BN's vote deposits.

Whatever promises made through the 10-point agreement no longer hold water to these native Christians in East Malaysia, as well as the Christian community in peninsular Malaysia at large. Therefore, whatever 'good' that is done, is now offset by the other 'bad' strategies that have been implemented the past few years. The same can be said about the agreement signed with Hindraf's P Waythamoorthy, who was later appointed Senator and a

deputy minister.

BN cannot blame the people for what it has done to lose the people's support. To win in any election, it has the duty to do what is right to win the heart of the people, but instead of mending its ways, the recent spate of arrests has drawn more ire amongst the people.

Sedition Act

Currently, Najib is seen as turning his back on the promise he made in 2012 to repeal the Sedition Act. Whether he will be another Pak Lah, whose transformation plans were derailed due to pressure from people who are otherwise aligned to Dr Mahathir, is something yet to be seen.

As it is, Perkasa's Ibrahim Ali again came out with his One Billion Dollar Statement that, if the Sedition Act is abolished, he would consider not voting for BN. Given that the Sedition Act is used now against a broad spectrum of people - from opposition members to activists from civil society - Ibrahim Ali, and his like appear to be enjoying immunity, despite making more 'seditious' statements.

Of course, ordinary people like me would ask, "Where is the justice?" You cannot blame the Malaysian public for asking such questions. Someone like Ibrahim Ali threatened to burn my holy book, and he is still free, whereas student leader Safwan Anang has just been sentenced to 10 months for sedition.

Safwan may have uttered certain words out of anger, and with the same argument applied which was made to defend Ibrahim Ali, Safwan has not even managed to instigate the people to topple the BN government. In fact, on a number of occasions, these activists have been reined in by opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim, who understands well the importance of upholding democracy in the country.

A number of others including former Chief Justice Abdul Hamid Mohamad have uttered even more seditious words, but actions on them have been found wanting. How can Najib expect the people to vote his coalition come next general election?

The current spate of arrests over sedition has definitely brought a lot of us together once again. The Bar Council has already vowed that it would kick-start a campaign. In Sarawak, it is reported that Sarawak PKR Youth and Bandar Kuching PKR division has launched a year-long campaign starting today urging the abolishment of the Sedition Act.

Even former Bersih 2.0 co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan has said that it looks like a street demonstration, which is on everyone's mind, may have to be done sooner rather than later. Other groups have also talked about demonstrations similar to Black 505.

All these campaigns are harmless in nature, but the impact of even collecting signatures or going down to the streets would certainly make a big impact on BN's next GE outcome. I just wonder if Najib or his war strategists have even learnt from past GEs.

Selangor MB crisis

Most people who have been following the Selangor MB crisis are also aware of a number of facts that have led to the ongoing crisis.

First, the reluctance of Khalid Ibrahim to be accountable to his party is a main reason for his downfall. On top of this, Khalid has not been able to explain to his party leaders as well PAS Member of Parliament, Khalid Samad how Bank Islam's suit against Khalid to recover a RM66.6 million personal loan, was set aside.

Based on the Selangor state constitution, it is clear that the sultan as a constitutional monarch does not have the absolute discretion, but His Royal Highness' discretion only comes into play only when there is a hung assembly. In the current scenario, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Kak Wan), being president of PKR, is the only one obvious state assemblyperson who has the confidence of the bigger majority, either party-wise or by the number of state assemblypersons who backed her.

In the minds of the people, Kak Wan will be the next menteri besar, but Najib's chide that Pakatan did not understand the constitution and that their loyalty to the sultan was being questioned, has received criticism even from a former minister, Zaid Ibrahim, who said: "This cheap political trick to question the loyalty of opposition parties should not come from a prime minister".

What Selangorians want to see is that Kak Wan be appointed to the post as menteri besar. Even if Anwar is eventually thrown into prison, Kak Wan will get the support of her own state exco to run the state. She is one woman who is well-respected, because of her clean record and her ability to listen to the people. She may have her own weaknesses, but who else is perfect?

Najib, comparing Kak Wan with Rosmah Mansor is definitely another long shot. Anwar has been in prison, but Najib belongs to the elite group. When Kak Wan becomes menteri besar, how can she be a crony of someone who is preparing to go to prison?

Sometimes when I think about Najib's comparison, I wonder if he has lost touch with reality. Why is it that an ordinary person like me can see the difference, but he could make such as comparison without thinking twice what the people would say?

The Selangor MB crisis is also about the sudden turnaround in signing the water agreement with Putrajaya, after the hype over water shortage and frequent water cuts, all expected to happen during the dry spell every year. Khalid's open defence for projects such as the Kidex, despite the people's protests, has also caused the people and his own colleagues to lose support for him.

Along with Kidex, another good example is when recently, state assemblyperson for Bukit Lanjan, Elizabeth Wong also urged the people to register their objection to the DASH

project, if the reasons are valid. This clearly shows that when the plans were drawn up and proposed by Putrajaya, it has not taken into consideration the people's interest at heart from the onset.

Within the past few months during the Selangor MB crisis, a number of well-written articles have suddenly appeared that try discredit Pakatan. The current spat between PAS and the other two component parties of Pakatan shows that, in any political organisation, there will be the in-fighting. This is human nature, but it is better that we see it in the open, than merely hear the rumblings below the bridge with Dr Mahathir's sudden withdrawal of support from Najib.

Besides losing Dr Mahathir's support, does Najib not deserve the people's support, especially people who are against the former prime minister's antics? Despite promising that he would not interfere with future prime ministers after he retired in 2003, is Mahathir trying to write his story, "I did it my way" with the strokes of his pen?

Wrong or right strategies?

The Billion Dollar question is - how can the people now look up to BN, and still vote for BN, when after 57 years of being in its grips under Dr Mahathir, we are still quarrelling over race and religion?

Although on the ground, Ali, Ah Chong and Muthusamy are still enjoying their relationships as fellow Malaysians, there is a small group of troublemakers out there who keep fuelling anti-racial tension in the country.

How can the strategies win BN the votes that it desires so much when these troublemakers are nothing but a bane to Umno's own strategies to win the people's votes?

In my opinion, Najib and BN, supported mainly by lobbyists such as the likes of Ibrahim Ali (Perkasa president), Zulkifli Noordin (former Perkasa deputy president), Abdul Hamid Mohamad (former Chief Justice), Ridhuan Tee Abdullah (left - Universiti Pertahanan Malaysia lecturer) and Abdullah Zaik Abdul Rahman (President of Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia or Isma), will never be able to win over the hearts of the non-Malays.

Will he also win the support of the moderate Malays? This is a question that does not need to be answered, especially after we read of law lecturer Azmi Sharom's sedition case, another Malay activist with Anything But Umno (ABU), Ali Abdul Jalil, who has been charged with sedition twice, is now expected to face yet another sedition charge in Johor.

And, not forgetting the daughter of an Umno member, Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud, who has already said that Najib has an "obsolete mind", when the latter chided her for joining the DAP when the parents are both Umno members. "We should encourage the young people to think for themselves," quipped the young woman who managed to steal the people's heart during the last by-election in Teluk Intan. I, too, was mesmerised by this young woman's charisma.

In contrast, Dr Wan Azizah, despite being hurt by the criticisms she received from PAS president Hadi, urged her fellow party members not to carry out character assassination against Hadi. She deserves more respect for her 'strategy' to win the people's heart.

Between the two sets of strategies, it is obvious who the people will support, because moderates like me who like Umno's Saifuddin Abdullah would certainly vote for his rival even if Saifuddin were fielded in my constituency.

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