

Obama must now listen to the 100,000 signatories

MalaysiaKini.com

Mar 11, 2015

By Stephen Ng

COMMENT The 'Free Anwar' online petition has not only hit 100,000 signatures this morning - it has become the 16th most popular petition on the White House site!

The online petition was initiated by former US ambassador to Malaysia John Malott on Feb 12 after opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was sentenced to five years imprisonment by the Federal judges.

The petition was to urge United States President Barack Obama to make the release of Anwar as top priority in the superpower's policy toward Malaysia,

Within the last 48 hours, the site was suspended for 14 hours despite nearly reaching the goal of 100,000 by March 12. When it came back online, the number was not much different from the previous figure when the site was suspended.

By 6.52am this morning, it has garnered 106,016 signatures, and by 10.43am, it registered a total of 108,291, short of only 2000 signatures to overtake another online petition to repatriate one Dr Aafia Siddiqui, who had been imprisoned for more than 11 years.

The sudden jump of 30,000 signatures occurred when both Anwar's party, PKR and the DAP campaigned for the last leg.

On the other hand, the counter-petition which harped on Malaysia as a sovereign nation was back online again at 9am this morning after it was suspended.

Although both petitions were neck-to-neck, with the counter-petition overtaking the Free Anwar petition by some 3000 signatories on March 9, the White House office in charge of the petition had cleaned up the signatories from a whooping 70,000 signatures to a mere 12,070 at 10.05am.

<http://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/291407>

Around the world in 30 days

With modern technology, it is interesting how 100,000 signatures were garnered from around the world in just 30 days. Through online social network, the Free Anwar petition has generated a lot of support within that short period of time.

With Washington DC time exactly 12 hours behind Kuala Lumpur, the March 12 deadline is apparently more than 30 hours more to go. Although the online petition was temporarily suspended, it still made it to the target.

This reminds me of Phileas Fogg, the English gentleman in Jules Verne's 'Around the World

in *Eighty Days*, who laid a bet with his friends at the Reform Club. Fogg was to prove that he could travel around the world in 80 days. If he returned on time by Saturday Dec 21, 1872, he would take home a wager of some (Pound) 20,000 (equivalent to Pound 1.6 million today).

Following Fogg and his newly employed French valet Passepartout was one Inspector Fix. Fix, thinking that Phileas was a robber, arrested him in Queenstown, Ireland. The misunderstanding was cleared after Fix realised that actual robber had been arrested three days earlier in Edinburgh.

This, however, had delayed Fogg's last leg to reach his destination in London, but five minutes late. It was Passepartout who suddenly realised that, as the duo travelled eastward, they gained a day. The wager could still be won, and when Passepartout finally made it to inform Phileas, the latter made it just in time to win the wager.

So, now, what?

Now that Mallot's online petition has hit beyond the 100,000 signatures to warrant Obama's attention, what is there to look forward to?

Some critics say that Obama will not rock the boat especially when Malaysia has not signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA).

But, then, what has the United States to lose when it seeks to bring up the subject about Anwar's jailing with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, especially since Malaysia and its people are friendly to the US?

After all, over 100,000 people have signed the petition, and they represent a wide spectrum of international sympathisers with the jailed opposition leader.

Besides, it is not only the ordinary people who have voiced their concerns, but many major superpowers have made their views heard loud and clear.

Although this is an online petition to Obama, it should be seen as nothing less than a platform to petition other heads of states including our sovereign head, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. Apart from what Malott has done, there is really no need to re-invent the wheel or to set up another signature campaign.

To avoid another major public relations disaster, the Malaysian government has to once again listen to the international community. There is simply no reason for the prime minister not to listen to major trading partners like the United States.

There was also no reason for Najib to allow Sodomy II to proceed to the Appeals Court, after Anwar was acquitted by the High Court. Instead, Najib should have engaged Anwar in public debates so that we will be able to assess who has what it takes to be a capable prime minister. Period.

The political will behind Sodomy II for it to go all the way up to the Federal Court shows that there was the intention to put the 67-year-old lawmaker behind bars and to finish off his political career. This is not the kind of democracy that we know about during the tenure of the first three prime ministers.

Let us now fold our hands and see what Obama would do to speak on behalf of 100,000 people who signed the petition. Meanwhile, let more people sign the petition!

STEPHEN NG is an ordinary citizen with an avid interest in following political developments in the country since 2008.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/291635>