

Why we must not lionise Mahathir

MalaysiaKini.com

Jun 7, 2015

By Kee Thuan Chye

It's alarming that Mahathir Mohamad is fast becoming a hero in the eyes of many, especially after the 'Nothing to Hide' forum on June 5 that ended in a fiasco because the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) called a halt to it.

As the fiercest critic of Prime Minister Najib Razak's brainchild 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), the old man had come to the forum to listen to Najib's explanation on what was happening with the troubled company.

Malaysians expected a face-off between the two, and about 2,000 people gathered at the forum venue hoping to see a real-life drama.

But that drama did not take place. Najib failed to show up, apparently on the advice of the IGP who feared a threat to public order.

Most of the crowd was pissed off by the cancellation of the event, and cheered when Mahathir took to the stage instead.

The wily codger milked his moment at the podium. He seized it as an opportunity to run down Najib even more and make himself appear the spokesperson for Malaysians who are concerned about the 1MDB scandal.

"I come here to speak on something that is missing, that belongs to all of us," he cleverly said, referring to the billions of ringgit that 1MDB needs to account for.

When the police told him to stop speaking after several minutes, it made him look even more noble. He won sympathy and support. He came across as a victim of police power.

Doctor tastes own medicine

That should not have been the case, however.

When Mahathir was prime minister, he himself inflicted the power of the police on dissenting citizens. So, really, he was getting a taste of his own medicine this time. But, sadly, people failed to acknowledge or remember that.

In fact, the new drama that unfolded at the forum was something that suited Mahathir perfectly.

Immediately after he was stopped from speaking, he cleverly asked the police for permission to speak to the media.

At the ensuing press conference, he craftily exploited the situation to his own advantage. He protested that he was just an ordinary man. "I can't do anything to anybody; I don't carry arms; why should people be afraid of me?"

To milk the powerless-little-man idea further, he said, "The police came up to me when I was talking and told me to stop. So I stopped. I am a very obedient citizen."

The 'hero' who spoke up

When he was eventually escorted out of the forum venue to his waiting car, no wonder the crowd swarmed around him.

He had become the living embodiment of the man who spoke up for them but was stopped from doing so by the powers that be.

Some chanted repeatedly, "Long live Mahathir!"

To Najib's detriment, some shouted, "Where is Najib? He is hiding!"

Images of Mahathir's 'heroism' popped up in social media almost immediately in stills and videos.

At the same time, netizens denounced Najib as a "coward" for not showing up at the forum. They even theorised that he had developed cold feet at the thought of facing Mahathir and got the IGP to save him by stopping the forum.

No amount of insistence-till-blue-in-face to the contrary by Khalid Abu Bakar - whose credibility as the country's top cop has dropped incrementally for his ludicrous words and actions in the last two years - could make thinking Malaysians change their belief that Najib's blood, which he himself had proudly described as "not just any blood", was probably chicken blood.

They also had a field day making fun of his claim, "I have a warrior's spirit." One netizen tweeted, "Can you imagine a warrior declaring war and not turn up for the first battle? LOL!"

Bailouts during old man's tenure

It is really tragic for Malaysians that because we have such a weak prime minister in Najib that Mahathir is able to capitalise on the situation in order to worm his way back into the public's good books.

It is really tragic that there should arise a 1MDB scandal of such mega proportions to give Mahathir the chance to use it to gain the public's forgiveness for his past misdeeds.

It is really sad to see Malaysians cheer Mahathir when he calls on the police to investigate

1MDB when instead they should be telling the old man that during his tenure as prime minister, investigations were not conducted on the misuse of billions of the public's ringgit in the Perwaja Scandal, the Port Klang Free Trade Zone (PKFZ) scandal, the Tajuddin Ramli bailout, the alleged losses in currency speculation, just to name a few cases.

Why didn't he say then that all that money "belongs to all of us"? How did it get lost under his watch?

As prime minister, was he not responsible? Is he now the pot calling Najib the kettle black?

And yet he gets standing ovations at forums when he speaks out against 1MDB and Najib. And people inundate his blog seeking his 'wisdom'. And on social media, people say they are willing to forgive him his past sins if he can manage to "save" Malaysia.

Save Malaysia? The man who introduced the culture of fear when he was in control of the country for 22 years; who divided and polarised the races; who undermined the judiciary; who did not terminate the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1990 according to schedule; who introduced the negotiated contract and promoted cronyism; who set in place the system that Najib is now benefiting from?

The cause of Dr M

Look closely at his statements of the last few months and perhaps we might see his real agenda. They are not only critical of Najib, 1MDB, the Altantuya murder case, Najib's daughter's "wedding of the century".

He has also been hitting out at GST, BR1M, even the Government's use of the Sedition Act to keep the ruling party in power. (But didn't he call for the reinstatement of the Internal Security Act not too long ago?)

He knows the rakyat are angry at the Government, and he wants to be on their side. He wants to win their favour. He has long been maligned by many who consider him the most hated prime minister ever.

I think he wants to change this negative perception.

I suspect he is concerned about one thing more than anything else – his legacy. I suspect he is thinking of the cause of Mahathir Mohamad.

He would also have realised that at 89, his mortality is not boundless.

And perhaps when he saw the hordes turning up to pay their last respects to Lee Kuan Yew when the latter died, he might have yearned for a similar reception when his own time came.

The need to be loved

So, he does what he's been masterful at doing. He manipulates what he can get his hands on to serve his agenda, and Najib has been unwittingly obliging.

He also knows how to manipulate the media, from his decades of experience at it. We saw how he did it on June 5.

He wants to be a hero. He wants to be well-remembered after he's dead. In short, he wants to be loved. But we must not be fooled. We must not play into his hands. We must not lionise him.

We must be constantly aware that what he's doing now cannot redeem what he did in the past.

This is just a spoonful of detergent that cannot clean up the mass of filth he dumped upon us for decades. He has to be held accountable for that filth. Don't let him get off so easily.

He is still the man who did a lot of damage to the country and its institutions. Let us never forget that.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/300990>