

Najib has more to lose from the Sept 16 rally

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COMMENT Umno claims that it has over three million members, but in a country with over 30 million people, Umno is but a 10 percent minority, almost equivalent to the Indian population in the country.

Umno has been facing a number of challenges, but it will come to a crossroad on Sept 16. Whether the party will continue to remain in Putrajaya depends on how it plays the political game and the perception of the people.

If it is trying to play the middle ground politics, it cannot continue to allow the hardliners or the “thug-like” characters to dominate the political scene; because when the elections come, no amount of goodies distributed, with the hope of winning back the hearts of the people, will work any magic.

This is what Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak would have learnt from the last general election. People did not hesitate to accept the goodies, but they did not necessarily have to vote the ruling coalition as we saw in 2013.

Experiments with several other Umno-linked non-governmental organisations have failed miserably, and now, with the Malaysia Day rally, unless cool heads rule, it will send a damaging blow to Umno, being itself a ruling party and now going down to the streets to “demonstrate against a demonstration”.

People will not see former Malacca chief minister Ali Rustam as the president of Pesaka, but as an Umno chieftain; Jamal Mohd Yunus himself is the Sungai Besar Umno division chief.

Unless the ‘better half’ of Umno speak up now to condemn the right wingers, Umno’s own political rightness may be in doubt when there is a change of tune in months leading to the next general election.

More than a community issue

In fact, within the last two months, Najib’s problems are much bigger than just one community, because he appears to be facing many more scandals in the Bs (read, billions) than ever faced by any other prime ministers in the past, Dr Mahathir Mohamad included.

It is no longer a racial issue, but one that attracted people from all walks of life, as seen from the debates, news and commentaries that are taking centre stage in the public domain.

It is not the DAP, but the presence of Dr Mahathir (photo) at the Bersih 4 rally twice has sent a strong message to his own supporters, who are largely Malays and Umno members

themselves, the reason to step up pressure on Najib.

Therefore, any bloodshed or threats of a similar nature drummed up on Sept 16, Najib would have more to lose than to gain, from the political point of view. The rally goers have openly supported Najib, and in undeniable terms, any of their miscalculated moves would adversely affect his own credibility and that of his own trusted generals.

The urging for Najib's resignation is coming from all quarters on a nearly daily basis, including from within Umno itself. If Najib continues to remain in office, and if Umno continues to rear its ugly head, it may trigger an even bigger political tsunami – perhaps, a political earthquake, I predict – by the 14th general election, which has to be called by May 2018.

Mahathir is absolutely right that Umno may not have enough time to recover from its 'sickness' and the Sept 16 rally may be the tipping point for Najib.

The Malaysian society has changed. Realising that racial politics have often been played up by politicians, thanks to people like Ibrahim Ali (Perkasa) and the occasional and unexpected racial rants by certain public figures, the urban community is no longer tolerating the nonsense that they see.

Any attempt to even call for a state of Emergency, for example, will not be taken too well even by the increasingly urban Malay population, more so the other non-Malay communities throughout the country. It is unlikely that Umno strategists would want to win a battle now, but lose an entire war with the people.

With the international spotlight on Malaysia and on Najib, any wrong move on Sept 16 could trigger further erosion of the people's confidence in him and Umno and international pressure would undoubtedly be stepped up against him.

Currently, it is learnt that the governments of several countries have initiated investigation that may ultimately implicate certain people in high positions.

I do not believe Najib is unaware of the spotlight on himself, unless he chooses to act blindly or his men who are taking the path of narrow politics to use their Sept 16 rally to create fear and intimidate the Chinese community, which has often been used as a punching bag for Umno.

Someone has already pointed out that one man's sacrifice is never too big if it can save the entire political party from becoming a disdain to the voting community. In short, the people within his party are trying to negotiate for Najib's early resignation for the sake of Umno.

If Najib believes he can remain in office forever, he would not have asked for another six months to fix the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) scandal, would he?

Even before 2008

From my observations, the people's confidence in Umno has, in fact, started eroding much earlier, before the political tsunami of 2008, when the then Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (who happens to be my favourite PM) failed to deal with the thorny issues raised by the Bersih and Hindraf movements.

His failure, coupled with Mahathir's use of the iron fist and Anwar's jailing during the final years of his term in office, had triggered the people's determination to take justice into their own hands. The street rallies were their last resort within their democratic rights to demonstrate.

During his time, if Abdullah (photo) had the political will to deal with the issues raised by Hindraf, he could have changed the tides, but he left it to his home minister to handle them, and it was the excessive use of force to crush the voices of dissent on Nov 27, 2007, that led to people's unhappiness with the ruling coalition.

The Indian community is small in numbers in this country, and all that they were demanding for, was to help the underprivileged people within their community. The mainstream society watched them being tear-gassed and fired upon with water cannons.

This had been preceded with a Bersih rally on Nov 10, 2007, which also met with a call for a clampdown by Umno hardliners.

Ironically, Umno hardliners are now going to flood the streets of Kuala Lumpur on Malaysia Day. How they behave and how the home minister and the police handle the rally will be watched by many.

Trending right wing

Watching the political developments since 2008, I notice that Umno is trending more to the right, and because of this, it has lost the middle ground, where people once supported the Barisan Nasional.

The blame is not on the hardliners alone but the good people in Umno who failed to rise up to the occasion; instead, they allow the wrong people to represent the organisation to the rest of the population.

Even present Sarawak Chief Minister Adenan Satem (photo) has openly condemned Umno in one of his political speeches in Sarawak recently, which received thunderous support from the local community.

Umno has to realise that the middle ground has shifted, especially with the rise of the moderate and urban Malays, and the Christian bumiputera communities in East Malaysia since the last general election in 2013.

While many may not be as outspoken, most will talk among themselves and continue to watch enthusiastically (as in a football match) the current political developments. Most, by now, would have formed their opinions, and the opinions can either change or be further reinforced by what they continue to see happening.

Many of us are watching, for example, how the political plot may turn around, with Najib's most trusted allies eventually pushing him out of office – when the time is right. Anything is possible in politics, and this is one possible scenario.

This is, after all, how “foxes” play their political games. Dogs may bark and frogs may hop from one place to another for their own political survival, but foxes will do anything that they can to reach the top.

Behind the sly smiles, there may be a thick plot, which will eventually unfold before the eyes of the people. It is like a show and people will make their decisions on who to vote based on what they see.

What Umno needs since 2008 is not another fox, dog or frog, but a Nelson Mandela statesman who will win the hearts of the people.

More to lose

Based on the latest development, Najib appears to have more to lose from the Sept 16 rally from the way his supporters behave themselves.

A number of video clips and photographs of the red shirt supporters have gone viral, and it appears that the intentions of Sept 16 rally are clear – to intimidate the people who do not support Najib's administration.

Even Mahathir was being intimidated by a mere Umno division leader, Jamal Mohd Yunos (photo), whose Sekinchan ikan bakar franchise was badly affected after he first made appearance in front of former Bersih 2.0 co-chair Ambiga Sreenevasan's home and promised to rally 65,000 people at the Stadium Bukit Jalil if Ambiga did not back off Bersih 3.0.

A number of the franchisees have in fact gone out of business, a clear sign that it is not only the result of Chinese or Indians boycotting Jamal, but even the Malays themselves who have a preference for “halal” food chose not to support such an abrasive personality.

Unfortunately, as I have written earlier, it is such people who are today the faces of Umno and these are the same people who are supporting Najib.

Najib has already said that street demonstrations, referring to the recent Bersih 4 which attracted over 500,000 people, are not the way to show their displeasure against the political leaders in the country.

However, people are asking what does Najib have to say about the red shirt supporters who will be rallying in the streets of Kuala Lumpur on Sept 16 in support of him?

To allow it to happen will further diminish his political clout with the middle ground.

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