

Perspectives on Bersih 5 from the fringe

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COMMENT Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not wrong to label ministers in the likes of Communications and Multimedia Minister Salleh Said Keruak as “half-past-six” when he could only utter conclusions without first going through his grey matter about Bersih 5 turnout being lower compared to Bersih 4.

According to Salleh, Bersih has seen the turnout drop by nearly [97 percent](#).

I wonder where he learnt his mathematics. And, he simply blamed it on Dr Mahathir for the low turnout.

I wonder if he meant that people like me who did not turn up at Bersih 5. Having attended two Bersih events in the past did not make me feel any more lethargic to go for Bersih 5.

In fact, when friends and relatives were asking me whether I was going to Bersih 5, I kept quiet, until the event was over. The reason is because I did not want my absence to demoralise anyone from going for Bersih 5.

Now that most of the people I knew went for Bersih 5, I will write my perspectives from the fringe. My absence this time was due to a promise that I made to my son two years ago to bring him to a father-and-son bonding camp which coincided with the date when Bersih’s Maria Chin Abdullah announced.

One thing I was happy that I was able to do was to tell my son during our trip back on the train that Daddy had foregone the Bersih rally just to spend to fulfil a promise made to him. Updating myself with the latest news for the day, I explained to him what Bersih 5 was about - his future!

I showed him pictures of many of my friends including senior lawyers and people from different backgrounds coming together as one nation, as one people to demand for all five points raised by Bersih 5.

I told him of an uncle and his wife, probably in their 70s, who checked into a budget hotel in Kuala Lumpur just to be able to join Bersih 5.

He was excited the moment he saw some yellow-clad Bersih supporters on the train back to Ipoh. We showed our thumbs-up to these people. Although we did not know each other, we received the thumbs-up from them.

This is Bersih’s culture for the awareness of Salleh, in case he does not know.

More yellow on the inside

While taking a cab to the campsite, I chatted with an old pakcik taxi driver.

“Pakcik tak pergi Bersih 5?” I asked. (Uncle, you are not going to Bersih 5?)

He answered in the negative, saying that he does not like the idea of going on demonstrations. But before I could proceed, he started telling me about RM2.6 billion and a RM2 million diamond ring.

“He thinks that people are stupid!” he remarked. “Tell me which Arab prince would give Najib (Abdul Razak) RM2.6 billion? And that wife of his telling us that she had saved the money from young to buy the diamond ring! How ridiculous can she be?”

I did not have to do much talking. That pakcik is a supporter of Dr Mahathir and he is now bashing Prime Minister Najib and his wife, Rosmah Mansor. I told myself, “Not bad for someone from a rural town in Perak.”

Then, came the issue of the Goods and Services Taxes (GST) and the subsidy cuts which have caused prices to go up.

And he immediately quoted the number of taxi permits to be issued for the whole country, and compared it to the number of taxis in the Klang Valley alone.

That was just one man yellow on the inside now. Surprisingly, the moment I mentioned about Bersih 5 during the camp, conversations were struck with a number of fathers like me.

Interestingly, it is not only people from the Klang Valley who are yellow at heart. Although these people were not present at Bersih 5, they were also yellow on the inside.

Wearing yellow with Bersih 5 is one way of making a statement. I noticed that even Sarawak Report editor Clare Rewcastle-Brown did not wear yellow when she turned up at the Bersih 5 rally in United Kingdom.

A chef and his wife, for example, also said enough is enough when we talked about the 1MDB scandal. They were yellow all the way.

We also talked about the East Coast Rail Link project worth RM55 billion which is clearly a soft loan, and the yellow chef and his wife also agreed that the loan would be paid by future generations of Malaysians. I wonder what the repercussions are!

Who else does not know who Malaysian Official No 1 (MO1) is? After all, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Abdul Rahman Dahlan had spelt out his name to an international audience.

Bersih 5 vs red-shirts

Clearly, my son could also see the difference between Bersih supporters and the numerous video clips that I showed him about the red-shirts and their leader Jamal Mohd Yunos.

Curiously, he asked, "Is that Umno?"

Careful as I was, I had to say, "Yes, Jamal is an Umno leader and many of the people who joined him are also from Umno." He saw all the gangsterism associated with red-shirts. After all, he, too, needs to be fully aware about what happens to the country.

One word I left with him, "Son, not every Malay is like this. There are some good Umno members, but only very few." I told him that I could count them on my fingers. After all, how many Umno members have spoken up against Jamal and his red shirts, or questioned Najib about the 1MDB scandal?

I also showed him a picture of red-shirts getting hungry and thirsty, and it was a yellow-shirt supporters who gave them food and drinks.

Therefore, with this, and looking at Bersih 5 from the fringe, I can say that Bersih 5 has successfully achieved its objectives. Even from the Bersih turnout vs the red-shirts, it is evident that the ratio is overwhelming on the side of Bersih.

I want to quote from a Whatsapp message that I received: "What we saw downtown today was not about bragging rights of which colour won the day.

"Given a choice, even those who donned the yellow-shirts would have preferred a quiet Saturday with the family after a week of making ends meet.

"Given a choice, they would give being in the crowd in the hot and humid day, always at the risk of either a physical confrontation with the opposing red-shirts or running foul of the law, a miss.

"Malaysians are not used to taking their grouses to the streets. And given a choice, a majority of them wouldn't want to get used to such actions.

"They are all too aware that all it takes would be one photograph of violence on the streets to make it to the international news networks, and all of them will lose everything.

"Given a choice, many Malaysians would have wanted to get themselves psyched up for this evening's grudge match between Manchester United and Arsenal instead.

"But still, they chose being on the streets of Kuala Lumpur, not minding the heat, the crowd and the threats. Why did they choose so?

"The question goes to the very heart of being a Malaysian and the answer would be found in each of their dreams, their aspirations and hope for the future which to them are increasingly threatened.

"While some may argue, and may well have a case, that the ballot box would be a more viable option, perhaps for the yellow-shirts downtown today the situation has reached a level akin to the doctrine of clear and present danger.

“The streets were their only immediately available choice.”

Most people want a clean and fair election. Most people have already lost confidence in Najib. Only a thick-skinned Najib would hold on to the office of prime minister.

So, to those who went to Bersih 5 this year, bravo and keep up the good spirit! For those who did not join, there will always be the next time. Perhaps, in the next two weeks, if you follow the news, you will find your blood boiling that it is not only Maria Chin Abdullah who has been apprehended under a ridiculous law meant to fight terrorism, but also others as well.

I started joining Bersih 3 because I, too, was angry enough when I saw how the people at the Bersih 2 rally were being tear-gassed. I joined Bersih 4 because I was fed up with Najib’s allegations one after another, from the story of the Arab prince to the claims that he did not know money had been siphoned out of the 1MDB.

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