

## **Mahathir turns up at Dataran Merdeka vigil, chants 'Free Maria'**

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**Kow Gah Chie**

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad turned up at Dataran Merdeka tonight to attend a vigil in solidarity with Bersih chief Maria Chin Abdullah who has been detained under the Special Offences (Security Measures) Act 2012.

"Free Maria, free Maria," he chanted with some 450 supporters.

Mahathir said the country is now ruled by a kleptocratic leadership.

"Few Bersih leaders have been arrested. Not only that, they are tortured. I'm sad when told that Maria was locked up in solitary confinement.

"This is a cruel act by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak. People like this should not be a premier," he said.

He said with the current leadership, Malaysia is no longer recognised as a democratic country.

The longest serving premier also raised his concern over the possibility of the country going bankrupt due to mounting debts, and the 1MDB problems.

Maria Chin is being investigated under Section 124C of the Penal for engaging in activities detrimental to parliamentary democracy and [detained](#) under Sosma, which allows for detention without trial of up to 28 days.

The vigil will be held daily until Maria is freed.

The crowd also chanted "Abolish Sosma", claiming it was a revival of the Internal Security Act (ISA).

### **Not all cheered for Dr M**

However, not all cheered for Mahathir. As he was about to start his speech, there were shouts of "*Mahazalim*" and "*Balik*".

Mahazalim was the nickname given by his critics during the Reformasi days, after the sacking in 1998 of his then deputy Anwar Ibrahim.

Another man added: "You have forgotten what you did."

Despite this, many supporters wanted to take selfies with the 91-year-old.

Meanwhile, Maria's son Azumin Yunus said he wished his mother was treated well while in

detention.

An ex-Bersih volunteer, Nalina Nair, asked the crowd: "If Maria is a terrorist, who is Najib? If she is a terrorist, we are all terrorists."

Bersih activist Hishammuddin Rais urged Malaysians to stand up against the government for turning Sosma into another ISA.

"The journey is long; we have to support one another. We have no choice and we have to take up this tough job," he said.

Hishammuddin also paid his respect to Mahathir, calling him a great leader for coming all the way from Sudan to join Bersih 5 rally.

"Thank you very much. We are creating a very broad, united front for the future," he said.

Earlier, Bersih deputy chairperson Shahrul Aman Mohd Saari said Maria and Bersih are being probed for allegedly receiving funds from George Soros to topple the government.

"If we had RM3.2 billion, we could have taken the helicopter like our friend did," he said, adding that Bersih only has RM2.6 million which were donated by the people.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall officers allowed the participants to use a corner by the Dataran Merdeka until 11pm for the vigil.

The event ended with the crowd dancing and singing "We are the World", a charity single for Africa sang by a group of artists in 1985.

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