

Umno mentality poses a challenge to opposition inclined voters
MalaysiaKini.com
23 Februari 2018

"God, do not let this country and the fate of this race (Malays) fall into the hands of traitors and the wicked."

- PM Najib Razak, Umno General Assembly 2016

COMMENT | What exactly is Bersatu's "struggles"? I mean I know that opposition types are using Dr Mahathir Mohamad, or at least they think they are using Mahathir, to gain rural Malay votes, but this is a strategy - not a very good one - but a strategy nonetheless. So what exactly does Bersatu stand for?

Honestly, if you ask an average Bersatu supporter, he would mimic exactly what an average Umno supporter would say. If you ask Mahathir establishment types, you would get a different, nuanced answer which involves correcting the systemic imbalances when it comes to corruption, and homages to old alliance politics, which ironically Umno and then Umno Baru had a hand in destroying.

So, this source - later confirmed by a Bersatu big wig - claims that the Umno mentality carried over to Bersatu has led to complaints of not having an easy ride to electoral victory as it was when they were in Umno. Money, of course, is the factor. These kinds of statements are embarrassing but more importantly, makes people question why exactly they are voting for the opposition. They would rather not vote or spoil their votes than facilitate the rise of power of people with "Umno mentality".

And some people are seriously making the claim, that these people will "Save Malaysia"? Some people are seriously making the claim, that these people are committed to making changes that would ensure that the country recovers from its kleptocratic nightmare. Some people are seriously making the claim, that these people would ensure that our religious freedoms, constitutionally guaranteed rights and whatever else we take for granted in our ever increasingly diminishing public spheres, would be protected?

Kelantan Bersatu chief Kamaruddin Mohd Noor claims that changing this Umno mentality will take some time, which implies that Bersatu - or at least that the impression they want to give - is in it for the long haul. But here's the thing. The opposition has made it clear that this is the election which would decide the fate of the country. This is the election which if we do not change government will spell the end of this country.

So what happens if Bersatu does not win big in this election? Does anyone really think that these “Umno” mentality types will stick around and continue the “struggles” of the party? Does anyone really think that these “Umno” types consider Bersatu a new dawn of Malay politics? Most probably, what these Umno mentality types will do is rejoin Umno who would welcome them with open arms, because this is the way in mainstream Malay politics. You take a shot at the Umno grand poobah, you miss, make amends and are rehabilitated.

What does this say about the base that these operatives appeal to? Does the base actually care about the corruption and abuse of executive privilege this country is facing or does the base merely think that Bersatu lacking funds cannot be as powerful as Umno?

Now I get that funding is important but surely if you are expecting an easy ride, it was because it was implied that an easy ride was what you signed up for when you jumped ship, right? I mean, personality politics does not put food on the table, and after so long on the gravy train, Umno mentality types are not expected to go on a handout-free diet, right?

And of course, there are invisible hands at work. They are Umno saboteurs in Bersatu because this is exactly the strategy Umno devised when people were busy jumping ship back after Bersatu was formed. This is exactly the strategy nearing an election when Umno sleepers choose to act. Of course, what Umno has to worry about are the Mahathir sleepers within their ranks, but that is all part of the game.

‘Hidden hands’

Claiming that people are dissatisfied because they do not have access to the funds they had when in Umno but claiming that voicing out these concerns is the agenda of “hidden hands” merely confirms that the opposition is made up of a bunch of political opportunists, who have no real attention of changing the system but instead are hoping to jump back on the tracks that Umno/BN have been travelling on post-1969.

You know what happens when voters, who do not participate in social media or are the opposition base, but who read these types of news items, think? What this does is that it sustains the impression that Bersatu is a leaking ship filled with undesirables who are either working secretly for Umno or Umno rejects who just want to replace PM Najib Razak and get back to the glory days of the old Umno Baru.

It brings me back to this: "The opposition always says that people are not 'educated' and that if they only knew the 'truth', they would understand why we need to change the government. Perhaps people know the truth and they believe that it is safer for whatever reason not to vote because it would not make any difference, especially now that the opposition has joined forces with the very man they claimed was destroying this country - how many times has this country been destroyed? - and attempting to engineer a revival that would see the system not only rejuvenated but also redeemed. Perhaps some folks do not want to be a part of that."

To be honest, I underestimated the people who are furious that the opposition has aligned itself with the former prime minister. I underestimated the feelings of anger and disgusts of people who thought that the opposition represented a new dawn in Malaysian politics. I underestimated the anger of those who quietly sit by and consume the news in the alternative press and have made up their minds that they want no part in this election.

Before all this nonsense, people used to accuse PKR of having Umno DNA. People used to say that the choice is between the lesser of two evils.

Yes, the good old days.

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