

For 46-year-old first time voter, Dr M is enough reasons to support Bersatu
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Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who during his time as prime minister was both admired for his strong leadership and condemned for his authoritarian methods, has proven to be a polarising figure.

Now as the head of Bersatu and Pakatan Harapan, the reactions have been equally divided. Some have threatened to spoil their votes, outraged that a former arch enemy once described as a dictator, was leading the opposition.

But for others, like 46-year-old Tony Ang, strongman Mahathir is someone to be admired.

"I always admired him, even before meeting him. He's my idol," said Ang who had come to see Mahathir during his visit to Krubong, Malacca, yesterday.

Sporting a Bersatu cap, Ang had no qualms with the party, which has branded itself as a Malay organisation albeit accepting non-bumiputera associate members.

He came armed with a huge frame of photographs of himself and his wife with Mahathir from 15 years ago, seeking an autograph, to which the former prime minister obliged.

The photographs were of Ang's meeting with Mahathir in Papua New Guinea in 2003, which happened to be Mahathir's last overseas trip as prime minister before retirement. Mahathir retired a month later.

"I was working as a supermarket manager in Papua New Guinea at that time. Mahathir came to visit the Malaysian High Commission and invited all Malaysians, so we managed to meet him and get these photographs.

"I put this up in my home. That's why when I met him again today, I wanted to get his autograph," he said.

After spending 25 years in Papua New Guinea, Ang returned to Malaysia three years ago to operate a restaurant and for the first time, intends to vote.

"I never voted before because I was overseas. It's just that Tun is my idol. I love the way he talks, the way he approaches, that is what I admire.

"It'll be my first time voting and I've already registered. I'll vote for Bersatu... I just admire Tun," he said.

Top Harapan leaders yesterday descended on several locations in Malacca, with their final *ceramah* in Alor Gajah. Malacca traditionally is not a key state for the opposition.

The bedrock support of the BN-led Malacca government has been its rural Malay constituencies, where Harapan now believes it can make inroads, with the help of Bersatu and its Malay credentials.

In the 13th general election, the opposition won seven out of 28 state seats in Malacca.

Six of these were won by DAP and one by PAS. They were largely urban seats and semi-urban seats while the rural heartland remained impenetrable.

At the federal level, the opposition managed to expand beyond its traditional stronghold of DAP's Kota Melaka, with PKR capturing the mixed parliamentary constituency of Bukit Katil.

However, Harapan is now setting its sight on Alor Gajah, a Malay-majority parliamentary seat traditionally contested by DAP but has been ceded to Bersatu for the next general election, which is seen as Harapan's best shot at wresting the seat from MCA.

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