

Najib: I didn't instruct cutting up of Dr M's poster

Malaysiakini

6 July 2018

EXCLUSIVE | During the campaign period for the May 9 general election, images depicting enforcement officers [cutting](#) out Dr Mahathir Mohamad's face from a DAP banner went viral on social media and created a huge impact.

Critics and the then opposition, who had long accused the Election Commission of being partisan to the BN government, blamed former premier Najib Abdul Razak for the incident.

In an exclusive interview with *Malaysiakini* last week, Najib denied he had instructed the EC to do so or interfere in its proceedings.

The former premier quipped that if he had a hand in the electoral process, BN would not have been defeated in the polls.

Responding to a question, Najib also acknowledged there was talk of internal sabotage within EC as well as Umno from certain party members or leaders who were still loyal to Mahathir.

“That is just speculation. I don't want to, I mean, some people say it is sabotage,

who knows?

“You just have to put the pieces together and ask the relevant people. Sometimes it doesn't happen at the top, it happens down the line but I wouldn't want to make any specific accusations,” he said.

Najib also said he found certain things not to his liking on polling day, especially the long queues at the polling centres, for which he was blamed as well.

“The inordinate lag of time people spent before they could cast their votes, disappointed me. A lot of our supporters were turned away or decided to go back and they were frustrated, they had to wait three to four hours before they could vote.

“These were the things that should never have happened,” he added.

The former premier pointed out that if there were four polling streams in a polling centre during the previous general election, then the EC should have anticipated the need for more polling streams for the 14th national polls given the increase in the number of voters.

“I would expect these sort of things to be taken into account. And there were reports that polling streams 1 and 2, for those 50 years and above, they were

placed on the second or third floor and elderly people had to be helped up and it was rather onerous," he added.

Najib said the older voters in streams 1 and 2 are the ones who would most likely vote for BN and they would be most discouraged to vote when there is talk of a long wait.

"So these were the things that I felt uneasy with... So these are the things which happened which backfired against us, there were unintended consequences.

"But you know the system is like that. Every little thing is blamed on the government and everything is blamed on the PM. That's the way things are," he added.

Below are excerpts from the interview, which have been edited for language and brevity:

Malaysiakini: For BN itself, what went wrong?

Najib: It's a long story. We will be here until evening on what went wrong. It is actually... a multitude of factors. In this case, it was a systemic collapse of so many things, internal sabotage, weaknesses in terms of their role...

We fought a positive campaign. We thought that we had a great story to tell, where we are taking the country forward. We had a vision for Malaysia and we had a real plan for Malaysia. We had delivered and we know that we can deliver even more.

We thought that was good enough, a good story to tell the people. And we had the results. Growth figures. Strong growth, development was taking place especially in the previously neglected Sabah and Sarawak and the peninsular east coast states, we vastly improved public transport, unemployment was low, inequality of income was getting better, Gini coefficient went below 0.40 for the first time, the stock market was strong.

The ringgit was getting stronger, commodity prices were getting better. We solved the lop-sided IPPs that saves us tens of billions of Ringgit every year, bought back PLUS highways to make sure there is no toll increases for PLUS-owned highways and made sure EPF benefited from the toll collections.

Both the World Bank and IMF had forecast Malaysia to achieve high-income status in as early as three years time.

Every single sector, even the middle class, we gave significant reductions in income tax and if you earn RM4,000 and below, you don't pay any tax. I was giving a lot of exemptions and implemented a social safety net for the B40 for the

very first time in Malaysia's history.

Certainly, there is still a lot that we can be proud of in the nine years that I was PM. I guess our biggest mistake was not to make sweet promises (in our manifesto) which we know is impossible to deliver like what our opponents did.

Malaysiakini: Will this be the end of BN?

Najib: I don't think it is the end of BN but it will be a hard road forward. Certainly, not for the faint-hearted people. For you to succeed against such difficult odds, you have to have courage, you have to have patience. You have to be able to convince the people to regain their confidence.

Don't forget Reformasi took 20 years to get where it is today. At one time, in 2004, they (the then opposition) were almost annihilated (in the election), but they persevered, they came back. And some of them can tell you some horror stories during the early days of Reformasi about some of their leaders, they spent quite some time as "guests" of the government but things are different now.

Malaysiakini: Do you agree that there were communal tensions rising from LRA and Act 355?

Najib: There were. But our society is a society that needs to manage multiple views. You can't say that one view is right because you also have views across the

spectrum. You may get a non-Muslim who is concerned about it and a Muslim who wants some of the punishments to be increased. But it was not hudud. It was just an enhanced punishment. In any case, it did not go through because we did not have enough support, which is fair.

At the end of the day, whatever we wanted to do must be predicated on democratic support. So we take in the views...I told PAS ... You cannot expect (me) as BN chairman at the time to forsake the views of component parties. MCA was against it, Gerakan, and the parties in Sabah and Sarawak. So it didn't go through and that's fine. So long as we believe in the democratic process that everybody has a say. There is no room for extremism. And I made it a point when I was prime minister that I was against any form of extremism. But there will be differences. There were differences.

Malaysiakini: Do you think Umno can bounce back in the next election?

Najib: I think it depends on a lot of factors. You know, Umno has to rebuild trust, there is a lot of work to be done. Umno has been in government for such a long time... We do not know how to operate from the opposition, really, we do not know, so we have to reinvent ourselves. How do we function as an opposition; as a constructive, viable opposition, that will be the challenge, without forsaking the core values.

In fact, the country has benefitted so much, and today whatever you see in Malaysia, is actually synonymous with Umno and BN. This is BN's legacy for the country and we must take pride in that, that we did not fail.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/433051>