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CRITICISMS

Dr Mahathir alone is not Malaysia

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I BEGIN by declaring, first and foremost, that I have high regards for the many good things that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has done for this country. Among others, he saved us from an economic meltdown during the financial crisis using an unorthodox method, proving to Western economists that they were wrong to predict the opposite.

I was devastated at the Umno Assembly when he declared he was resigning, more than a decade ago. He had just returned from an official visit to the United States not long before that and his ratings at home were at its peak. Selfishly, I thought I would be a sure candidate in the subsequent elections, having been a part of the small outfit under the late Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayub and Tan Sri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis, who was with him in Washington.

Dr Mahathir's retirement was a double whammy for me. It took me 10 years and two administrations before I was nominated to run for a seat in the state assembly.

In retirement, Dr Mahathir remained active, later attacking former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the person he handpicked to be his successor, and rallied for the people to vote against the ruling coalition to force Abdullah from office.

The public took his cue.

Before that, the majority of those who were not inclined to vote for Barisan Nasional remained indifferent and stayed home, thinking that, even with their votes, the incumbent party would sail through. Well, it proved otherwise in 2008, after Dr Mahathir's nationwide instigation. There was a 76 per cent turnout on polling day, and BN lost five states and the two-thirds majority in Parliament that we were accustomed to.

As for the public, especially the ones who were not exactly on our side, once they had a taste of honey, there was no turning back. What happened in the subsequent elections (2013) proved it. After Abdullah gracefully exited, BN, under new leadership with much promise and vigour, still fared worse, though there was an increase in Umno seats in Parliament.

Even with Dr Mahathir helping

BN in the 2013 campaign, the people he got to come out to vote for the opposition in the 2008 elections most likely maintained their vote for the opposition and even came out larger this time, with an 85 per cent turnout on polling day.

Dr Mahathir reportedly said that he had lost faith in the government. This is the government that was given the mandate by the people in a free and democratic general elections two years ago.

Dr Mahathir alone is not Malaysia.

If the Internet and WiFi services were as widely available during his tenure as it is today, along with the freedom of speech and expression afforded under the current administration, I doubt if the fourth prime minister himself would have lasted 10, let alone 22, years in office.

There may be some legitimate issues raised by Dr Mahathir, but it has been dealt with in the courts.

As far as Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB) is concerned, the prime minister has left it to the Public Accounts Committee, whose members include those from the opposition party, and the auditor-general's office, to investigate the matter.

The prime minister assured the nation that those found to have breached the law would be dealt with. We should wait for their "verdict".

So, here I am challenging Dr Mahathir's contention, based on statistics and a 26-year experienced political gut feeling, in predicting that removing Najib from office before the next elections would not make our results better.

It would be as good as giving the opposition their first taste of power on a silver platter. BN may lose more states, if not the government.

Ironically, the only time BN got a rousingly handsome victory after the departure of any incumbent prime minister in the history of Malaysia was when Abdullah took over from Dr Mahathir.

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