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Dr M shows up in Sungai Besar

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Former premier wants the by-elections to be a referendum on the Prime Minister but he did not look pleased when asked what if Umno wins both seats on June 18.

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analysis



It was the first time that many of the local folk in Sungai Besar had seen Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the flesh.

Most of them looked like they were unsure what the whole event was about.

All they knew was that the former premier would be there and it was evident they had been persuaded to come and fill up the hall.

Politics is about numbers and this was one of those occasions.

Some of them came in T-shirts, Bermuda shorts and slippers, which, by the way, is how everyone dresses over here, plus the fact that they ride all over town on their motorcycles without their helmets on.

You could tell that many of them were thrilled at the sight of Dr Mahathir even after all these years. He will turn 91 soon but he still has the star power.

The common refrain from many of the local ladies was that he is still so healthy at 90.

Dr Mahathir's presence also caused the biggest traffic jam that the town had seen since the campaign started.

Actually, he is more than healthy, he seems fighting fit and, yesterday, he took his 1MDB fight with Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to Sungai Besar. Today, he will be in Kuala



Friendly visit: Dr Mahathir visiting Shukur at his home.

Kangsar for more Najib-bashing.

He is asking the voters to make this a referendum on Najib. He has thrown his support behind the Amanah candidates so that Umno will be defeated in both seats and Najib will have to step down.

Dr Mahathir is taking the fight to a new level and also further down the road of no return with Umno.

But what if this so-called referendum works in Najib's favour? What if Umno wins the seats?

Dr Mahathir did not look very pleased when asked whether this would mean that the people supported Najib if Umno wins on June 18.

It was only later, when met at another venue, that he said that if Umno wins, he would accept the decision of the rakyat.

Dr Mahathir's presence gave Amanah candidate Azhar Abdul Shukur a much-needed boost.

His visit to the home of Azhar's invalid father Datuk Abdul Shukur Siraj was quite a shrewd move.

The bed-ridden Shukur was a former Umno strongman in Tanjung Karang and there had been talk that Azhar did not get his father's blessings to contest on the Amanah platform.

Shukur almost teared up when he saw Dr Mahathir standing at his bedside.

It has been decades since the pair set eyes on each other and it has been quite a red letter day for the family.

The family had put up some of Shukur's pictures during his political heydays.

It might have been a trip down memory lane but Dr Mahathir had more current affairs on his mind.

Dr Mahathir campaigning in the by-elections is hardly a surprise but the decision to hold a Special

Colloquium on the 1MDB issue in this town dominated by farmers and fishermen was quite bizarre to say the least.

This was a rather high-brow event featuring intellectual names like Datuk Zaid Ibrahim, Prof Dr Aziz Bari and former Kinibiz editor P. Gunasegaram.

The topics ranged from "A Global Failure of Financial Institutions" to an examination of whether the MACC, A-G and Bank Negara had done enough on the 1MDB issue.

It was simply not the sort of thing for a place like Sungai Besar where Mandarin is the lingua franca and where the Chinese school system has produced a generation of people who do not speak English.

The whole event was so out of place and would have been a wash-out if not for the star presence of Dr Mahathir.

The hall was half empty by the time the speakers got going.

"It was too big for them, I don't think they understood what was discussed," said a journalist from a leading Chinese newspaper.

Whoever came up with the colloquium idea probably had no clue about how life is lived outside of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya.

This is the mid-point of the campaign and the sense is that many people have already decided and hence, the thin crowds at political ceramah and other gatherings.

Watch the video
thestartv.com 