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Dr M steps out of save Umno mode

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Pakatan Harapan leaders still feel awkward around Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad but they are determined to keep their eye on the big picture, namely the next general election.

THE roads leading to the Shah Alam venue of the Save Malaysia political forum were almost impassable. Buses and cars lined the rain-soaked roads, many of them double-parked.

But politics was the last thing on the minds of the people who caused that jam last Saturday evening. They were there for the beautiful game – the FA Cup final was taking place in the glittering stadium next to the Save Malaysia gathering.

The crowd at the less beautiful game was far more modest in size and mood. It was the Selangor leg of the Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad-led campaign to oust Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The organisers announced that they had collected 1.2 million signatures since its launch three months ago. Of course, not everyone buys the figure, they think it is a case of “political arithmetic”. But the organisers are unfazed and are planning to hand over the signatures to the Malay Rulers as proof that 1.2 million Malaysians are against Najib.

It is still quite intriguing to watch Dr Mahathir on the same stage as those who were once dead against him, all those hardened politicians tip-toeing around him, unsure whether to kiss his hand or how low to bow when shaking his hand.

JOCELINE TAN
analysis



Even the silver Jaguar that he arrived in got top treatment – it was the only vehicle parked nose out at the VIP driveway.

Dr Mahathir has clearly become the flagship of Pakatan Harapan’s quest to replace Barisan Nasional. It is no longer a joke, he is like the de facto opposition leader.

“Only he has the immunity to say and do all these things and not get arrested,” said historian Dr Neil Khor.

The Save Malaysia roadshow has wound its way through several states but is still unable to shake off one glaring anomaly – the personalities who are against Najib are at cross purposes over why they want him to go.

Dr Mahathir has said that it is necessary in order to save Umno and ensure that Umno survives in the next general election but those with Pakatan Harapan are out to replace Barisan in Putrajaya.

Then there are the sub-groups who see the campaign as a means to free Anwar. For instance, several

times throughout the evening, black-shirted men posed with placards bearing the letters that spelt out: Bebas Anwar (free Anwar).

PKR vice-president Shamsul Iskandar insisted it is a continuation of the reformation movement that began with the Permatang Pauh Declaration of 1998.

Those like Datuk S. Ambiga see the campaign as a means to institutional reform.

Absorbing all that is like listening to the same song sung in different languages.

However, Dr Mahathir did go a step further that night – he urged the crowd to ensure that Barisan loses in the by-elections next month.

He said they should support whoever is standing against Barisan so that the by-elections would be a referendum on Najib’s leadership. He had finally stepped out of his “save Umno” mode and burnt yet another bridge linking him to his old party.

But it seems like the referendum thing only applies if it goes their way. They had also painted the Sarawak election as a Najib referendum, but went all quiet when Barisan won by a landslide.

Dr Mahathir, said a Pakatan Harapan politician, has come full circle. The man who once caused a

constitutional crisis when he curbed the powers of the Malay Rulers is now appealing to the same institution to help him topple a sitting Prime Minister.

“What happens after all those signatures are sent to the Rulers? What is the endgame? The Rulers know very well what is involved in a constitutional monarchy,” said the above politician.

Dr Mahathir is an extremely strategic politician. He is looking at the big picture. The signatures, the Malay Rulers and even the legal suit that he has filed against Najib are all part of sustaining a scenario or even a momentum till the next general election.

He would have preferred Najib to go now so that he can put up yet another Prime Minister of his liking. But that has not happened and he is zeroing in on the general election.

He does not have long to wait because the signs are that the general election will be called before the end of next year.

He will have to come up with new things and ways to keep people interested but if there is one thing that will continue to fascinate his audience, it is watching those who used to be against him try to explain why they are now with him.

Many of them are still struggling

to rationalise their hook-up with Dr Mahathir and the people around him.

For instance, the expressions on the faces of some PKR leaders on stage were quite priceless as they listened to Datuk Khairuddin Abu Hassan rant against Najib at the top of his voice.

Khairuddin was so worked up that his face turned red, the veins around his neck popped up and he was bathed in sweat by the time he finished.

If his speech was an SMS, it would be in all caps and bold font.

But that was not the point. Khairuddin was involved in the publication of *50 Dalil Kenapa Anwar Ibrahim Tidak Boleh Jadi PM*, the book that sparked off the start of the end of Anwar’s political ambitions.

It is doubtful if the PKR crowd has forgiven him for that. Politics is replete with ironies and this one is really the mother of all ironies.

Pakatan Harapan politicians, said Dr Khor, have compromised themselves by ganging up with Dr Mahathir but like their former nemesis, they also have their eye on the big picture.

They are itching to capture Putrajaya and this is a classic case of you help me, I help you.