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Former prime minister **Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad** giving at speech at the Bersih 5 rally near KLCC yesterday. With him are former deputy prime minister **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin** (right) and Dr Mahathir's son, **Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir**. Pic by Mohd Yusni Ariffin

Dr M's bid to rebrand himself is paradoxical

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IT HAS BACKFIRED: Out of power and out of office, he suddenly realises that everything is not right in this country

IN his classic speech at Trinity College, Oxford, in 1985 that later became a model for speech-writers, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad stated:
"In fact, many authoritarian regimes have been the expression of the electorate's will freely exercised."
"Many authoritarian governments have been elected by the will of the people who want a strong, no-nonsense administration."

In fact, during his 22 years in office, he resorted to various authoritarian measures against political opponents, as readers of Malaysian politics have noted.

He detained opposition supporters and non-political figures when the government was even slightly threatened.

Many of the detentions in 1987 under Op Lalang were examples of this abuse.

To Dr Mahathir, who ruled Malaysia with an iron grip and with ruthlessness towards opponents, democracy is only a means to an end.

He was reported in the media on Oct 14, 1995, as saying: "If liberal democracy only results in insecurity, fear and poverty, then democracy must be tempered with responsibility so that it delivers what it is supposed to deliver."

Fresh from his Sudan trip, the ageing leader stepped out of his private jet yesterday to lead a rally in Kuala Lumpur to remove the Umno-led government he once helmed.

With his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and children Marina and Mukhriz in tow — all donning the yellow Bersih 5 T-shirt — they made their way to the KLCC intersection where Dr Mahathir and his newfound ally, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who was dumped as deputy prime minister, took turns to attack the government.

This is the second Bersih rally that

he has taken part in, and which saw Muhyiddin and Mukhriz, now in the opposition, making their debut.

Video footage even showed Marina chanting "Reformasi" — the battle cry of Dr Mahathir's old foe Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim — on the 4WD truck taking her and her family to the centre of the rally.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir paid tribute to those who thronged the capital for the rally, praising rally-goers for their "courageous" display.

"We are not afraid as we know we are not in the wrong," he said, urging the people to topple the government which he described as "cruel".

"There is no jail that will be able to imprison all of us here today," he said. "They are trying to intimidate us, but you are strong people."

"Maybe there are those here who still do not support any opposition party. So, I implore you to join one today. Join Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, which will collaborate with all opposition parties to bring down Najib."

The turnout was much lower than the organisers had expected and KLCC became an impromptu venue after the police cordoned off Dataran Merdeka — the proposed venue.

There was another setback, too. Pas has refused to throw in its support, while Bersih rallies held in other towns failed to draw the crowd.

At one point, some Bersih sup-

porters took to Twitter to show their displeasure to the organisers for allowing politicians like Mat Sabu to hog the microphone.

Dr Mahathir has resorted to leveraging Bersih this time around to pitch for his fledgling Malay-based political party.

He made a cameo appearance at the last Bersih last year which was dubbed "the Reformasi of the Chinese".

Dr Mahathir's initial game plan was to seek Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's ouster to pave the way for his politically-ambitious son Mukhriz to eventually take over Umno and the prime ministership.

That plan has backfired. He is now openly and vigorously seeking to overthrow the Umno government.

It is quite a paradox to see the 92-year-old man rebranding himself as the country's top dissident in his twilight years.

Out of power and out of office, he suddenly realised that everything is not right in this country.

He had engineered the plan to oust Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and to bring in Najib, but now, he says Umno itself needs to be replaced.

Is this political opportunism at its best?

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A veteran newsman, Jalil believes that a good journalist should be curious and sceptical at the same time

