

Illegal Rally: Bersih Wins Nothing, BN Loses Nothing
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By Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, July 22 (Bernama) -- So what is the state of the parties after the July 9 illegal rally? According to several political analysts, Bersih 2.0, the organiser, won nothing and Barisan Nasional, the government of the day, lost nothing. They believe that the rally has neither affected the foundation of the BN nor increased support for the PKR-DAP-PAS pact which is said to be behind the street demonstration. Dr Sivamurugan Pandian of Universiti Sains Malaysia said that no matter what issues were raised at the rally and regardless of how the opposition pact or Pakatan Rakyat played them up, Malay voters in the rural areas would still support the BN for growth, peace and harmony. "Similarly, however they are labelled, Pakatan Rakyat won't lose their die-hard supporters," he said. With little change perceived among supporters on both sides of the political divide, attention turns to the fence-sitters, the main target of people who orchestrated the rally. While opposition supporters are loud in claiming success in drawing neutrals, some intellectuals who had been satisfied being part of "the silent majority" begged to differ, and are speaking up. Lecturer Azli Abdullah of the same university said: "I no longer have any sympathy for the opposition. What kind of Malaysians are they? They work in cahoots with the foreign media to put Malaysia in a very bad light, trying to give the impression that our country is on the verge of chaos, that we are the next Egypt." He thinks that the police did a good job preventing the situation from turning ugly. Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar said that 5,000 to 6,000 people took part in the rally while the opposition claimed a total of 50,000. Sivamurugan said the opposition hoped that the street demonstration would create a ripple effect before the general election just like the 2007 Bersih illegal rally did. He does not believe that people living outside Kuala Lumpur and Selangor feel strongly about the rally. He also said that it was still unclear how many of the participants were opposition supporters notwithstanding the assertion of Pakatan Rakyat partisans that all who took part were for them. While the argument continued over the effects of the rally, some observers make the point that these might not be lasting. "People have short memories. Whatever effect the opposition claimed the rally had that favoured them could be wiped out by time. Or it could be offset by the government introducing more people-friendly policies," an observer said. The opposition obviously believe that rallies are a good way of gathering support. PAS has said that it would hold a rally before the next general election if the Election Commission does not implement the reforms demanded by the organisers of the July 9 demonstration. Whatever the politics of the illegal rally, "the economic consequences have been bad," said an analyst at a local stockbroking company who did not want to be identified. The analyst said: "Small and medium enterprises in Klang Valley suffered great losses. People and goods were blocked from entering the city while hundreds of millions of ringgit were frozen and prevented from flowing into the market." The government, too, had to bear a huge cost, including the amount spent on the deployment of police personnel from other parts of the country and payment for their 24-hour shifts. If all the 1,667 protesters arrested are charged, the courts would also have to spend a large amount of resources. Pakatan Rakyat estimated costs arising from the rally to total RM150,000, including the payment of bail for arrested protesters, while the financial loss to the government is at least 10 times that. Appraising the situation after the rally, industrial leaders said that anything that afflicts the economy should worry everyone and not just business people. Tan Sri Pheng Yin Huah, president of the Federation of Chinese Associations of Malaysia, popularly known as Huazong, said the world economy has slowed down and the financial crisis in parts of Europe threatens to spread. "Under such circumstances, the ruling government should be allowed to focus on revitalising the economy, and political confrontation should be set aside for the good of the nation," Pheng said.

"Time and effort should be given to moving the country forward."

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