

Umno finds reprieve in Mat Sabu's Bukit Kepong remarks
The Malaysian Insider
September 01, 2011
By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 1 — Whether or not Mohamad Sabu's interpretation of the Bukit Kepong tragedy is accurate, it has opened the door for Barisan Nasional (BN) to go on the offensive after months of scrambling to control the fallout from inflation and the July 9 Bersih rally.

Despite Malays swinging back to the ruling coalition since Election 2008, Umno sees the recently-elected PAS deputy president as a "battering ram" that could yet break its hold on the majority race.

Mohamad is said to be unhappy that PAS's top leadership has failed to back him. — File pic But the maverick politician's controversial remarks have allowed Umno to plant seeds of doubt among the Malay electorate, for whom communism remains a bogeyman especially in the rural heartland.

"It's not an issue we can ride on for long, it is only a reprieve. But even though Mat Sabu is a battering ram for PR to gain Malay votes, he is a loose cannon and we can discredit him every time he says something like this," said Umno's Pulai MP Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamad.

His Umno colleagues have joined numerous other Malaysians on social media such as Twitter to condemn Mohamad, who is popularly known as Mat Sabu, who said that the attack on the Bukit Kepong police station, which killed 25, was by freedom fighters.

"This Mat Sabu character is god-sent to BN. In the spirit of Merdeka, I will defend his right to show his stupidity," posted Kota Belud MP Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin also goaded the federal opposition, encouraging its leaders and supporters to "continue defending Mat Sabu. There have been so many articles and statements supporting Sabu who said that the police were British lackeys."

The Malaysian Insider understands that Mohamad is unhappy that PAS's top leadership has failed to back him up over the allegations made by Umno's Utusan Malaysia last weekend, leaving PR colleagues such as DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng to come to his defence.

But PAS strategist Dzulkefly Ahmad told The Malaysian Insider that PR needs to bring political discourse back to policy matters which has seen the Najib administration on the backfoot due to public anger over record levels of inflation and international condemnation of its clampdown on the Bersih rally for electoral reforms.

"The message should have been that even though Tunku Abdul Rahman finally declared independence, even Islamic leaders and those labelled as 'leftist' all fought the imperialists and should be recognised for it. But it is going to be uphill for us," the Kuala Selangor MP said.

Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng also said that "Pakatan dropped the ball."

"By talking about Bukit Kepong, which is an ethnocentric issue, they are playing BN's game and BN has latched on to it and rightfully so. We don't need this kind of discourse coming up to a general election," he said.

Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong also acknowledged that PR had ceded "home advantage" by failing to keep political talking points on democratisation and the economy.

"Those are our home turfs where the entire coalition is in agreement but now we are playing to Umno's strength," the DAP strategist said.

Although Mohamad has denied mentioning "communism" in the ceramah covered by Utusan Malaysia and threatened to sue the Malay daily, it has not stopped other Umno leaders such as vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein and even former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad from accusing the PAS man for trying to revise history.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/umno-finds-reprieve-in-mat-s-abus-bukit-kepong-remarks/>