

In Shah Alam, Dr M takes the stump for Zul Noordin
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SHAH ALAM, May 2 — Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate Datuk Zulkifli Noordin got a boost in the Shah Alam race after Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took the stump here last night to rally support in a ceramah that drew thousands.

While the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) had claimed the former prime minister no longer wields any clout particularly among the younger voters, last night's rally showed the 87-year-old could still muster the numbers.

The 3,000-strong crowd had gathered as early as one hour before Dr Mahathir arrived for the Election 2013 campaign. From old to young, they flooded the ceramah canopy and poured onto the nearby streets, holding BN flags and banners with his picture on them. One had "Tun, the nation's hero and saviour" written on it.

"If only the opposition can see this, forget Khalid Samad, even Anwar Ibrahim would pack up and run away," Zulkifli told the crowd in his brief speech before giving way to Dr Mahathir, whom he called "ayahanda" or "father".

Khalid is the Shah Alam PAS incumbent while Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is the opposition leader and whom Dr Mahathir sacked as his deputy 15 years ago on sodomy and corruption charges.

BN courted controversy when it decided to field Zulkifli as its candidate in Shah Alam given his hardline Islamic views and also for some racially insensitive statements he made in the past.

But observers close to the coalition believe that Zulkifli, a former PKR leader who was sacked for insubordination, could be the right person to take on Khalid in a seat made up of mostly conservative Malay-Muslims and where religion is a key issue.

And since Dr Mahathir's staunch pro-Malay politics has won him the respect and love of conservative Malays, his presence in Shah Alam is seen as helping to improve Zulkifli's chances in what is seen as an uphill contest for the seat.

Speaking before the Malay crowd, Dr Mahathir played to the gallery by blasting PAS's Chinese allies, the DAP, as anti-Malay and anti-Islam, much to the delight of the audience who responded by either calling the opposition party "communists" or "hidup Tun (long live Tun)".

BN's attempt to play the race card was more visible when booklets depicting the DAP as communists and a Chinese racist party that hated the Malays were distributed to the crowd.

Among the allegations made in the booklet were the DAP's link to former Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak which it claimed to be the vice-president of Socialist International despite Barak being a known right-winger.

Communism is a sensitive issue for the Malays following decades of war with the now-defunct Communist Party of Malaya, a predominantly Chinese movement. Meanwhile since Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country, most Malays are anti-Israel and sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle in the Middle East.

The booklet also highlighted the DAP's opposition towards PAS's Islamic agenda including the implementation of hudud.

Dr Mahathir warned the crowd that racial tension was inevitable if they were to vote the DAP-PAS-PKR alliance into power, an accusation he has repeatedly made in the past.

He called on the Malays to continue backing BN at the May 5 polls to maintain the existing racial harmony that he claimed was nurtured by the coalition's "kongsi" or power-sharing concept.

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