In Umno, incumbency rules, not reforms
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Three things we learned from this weekend's Umno polls.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's influence in the party on the wane.

Yes, he is still the most recognisable name in Malaysian politics and a segment of Umno members yearn for a return to the days when he owned Putrajaya but there is a limit to what Dr Mahathir Mohamad can do these days.

We got a peek into his waning influence in the run-up to the general elections on May 5 when he could not alter the outcome in many places where he campaigned furiously. Remember Gelang Patah. Remember Shah Alam. Remember Pasir Mas. Remember Lumut.

For many younger voters, he was like a voice from another generation. For many non-Malays, he was the leader of the right-wing brigade and a reminder of all the excesses of the Mahathir era.

Still, there was the expectation that within Umno circles, what Dr Mahathir and his supporters say would have significant influence during the party polls.

Not so, it appears. In the run-up to the Umno Youth and Wanita Umno polls yesterday, bloggers and politicians aligned to the former prime minister made clear that they did not support Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil for the Wanita Umno position because her family's involvement in the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal had tainted her and made her unsuitable for high office.

In Khairy Jamaluddin case, a whole bunch of issues made him unsuitable, chief among them the fact that he is the son-in-law of Mahathir's nemesis, Tun Abdullah Badawi, and that he more than anyone else was instrumental in convincing Abdullah to dismantle the mega projects of the Mahathir era.

The onslaught against Shahrizat and Khairy failed and both incumbents were returned with yawning margins of victory. Helping Khairy was the fact that none of his challengers were brand names. In fact, they were largely anonymous outside their immediate circle of family and friends.

Helping both Khairy and Shahrizat was the behind the scenes campaigning by all the senior Umno politicians who wanted the status quo. This powerful lobby included Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Umno's value system versus what Malaysia wants.

In the eyes of most Malaysians, Shahrizat (pic) should be retired.

Even Umno veterans are stunned that Prime Minister Najib appointed her as a special advisor on women's affairs with the status of a minister, concerned that it will send a signal to the Malaysian public that Putrajaya felt that the NFC fiasco was much ado about nothing.

Congratulations, Najib. You know your party delegates better than most.

They have no concern about scandal, leakages and the standing of an Umno leader among Malaysians. What they care is whether the person they vote into office will be able to look after their welfare and daily needs; whether the person they vote for has the resources and network to make life more comfortable.

Reform? Change? Transparency? Morality? Integrity? Are you kidding? These words do not exist in the lexicon of the Umno person.

Influence of Umno bloggers overstated.

Early in the Abdullah administration, those who felt sidelined and cast aside by the avuncular politician took a leaf out of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's supporters' book and put forward their case in cyberspace.

They set up blogs and kept up a barrage of attacks to influence the Umno ground and the electorate to reject Abdullah. Even Dr Mahathir began to blog, complaining that the mainstream media was blocking his views.

The pro-Mahathir bloggers worked with other bloggers who thought they could end Abdullah's rule and, by extension, that of Barisan Nasional for Pakatan Rakyat to capture Putrajaya.

It worked to the extent that Abdullah's historic 91% control of parliament in 2004 ended with him losing the two-thirds super majority in 2008, ushering in Najib whose aides have assiduously worked with the bloggers to ensure his image remains intact.

Chuffed with their success, the pro-Mahathir bloggers then turned their sights on Khairy and Shahrizat in the Umno polls but to no effect. All the publicity for their opponents came to naught yesterday. Their champions lost.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin (left) with Wanita chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and newly-elected Puteri Umno chief Mas Ermieyati Samsudin at the PWTC, yesterday. - The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, October 13, 2013.Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin (left) with Wanita chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and newly-elected Puteri Umno chief Mas Ermieyati Samsudin at the PWTC, yesterday. - The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, October 13, 2013.The point is that incumbency has its advantages. Both Khairy and Shahrizat have built their base and pitched it directly to the delegates with their own social media rather than bloggers, some of whom are not even in Umno.

And this is something that Najib should take on board, instead of being afraid of the bloggers. He should take them on, on issues that matter, and go to the ground for people's support rather than bask in the praise of a few bloggers. - October 13, 2013.

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