

History will judge Najib positively, says Sabah speaker

The Malaysian Insider

Jun 16, 2015

By Eileen Ng

Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak has emerged as one of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's fiercest supporters, defending the prime minister and the controversies surrounding the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) through his blog.

The Sabah assembly speaker also pulled no punches against retired prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, repeatedly taking to his blog to counter the statesman's criticism on Najib and 1MDB which is sitting on RM42 billion debt.

The Usukan assemblyman is well known in Sabah, having been the state's ninth chief minister in the mid-1990s during Dr Mahathir's era.

His father, Mohamad Said Keruak, was Sabah's fourth chief minister 20 years earlier and later appointed the state's Yang di-Pertua Negeri.

The Malaysian Insider asked Salleh to explain his defence of Najib. Below are excerpts from his interview:

TMI: Why do you choose to express your opinions through your blog?

A: I choose to give my opinion through my blog because, firstly, I want to express my personal opinion rather than the opinion of Umno or the Sabah government and, secondly, I want to reach out to the younger generation who are going to represent the majority of the voters in the next general election.

There is nothing wrong in having a personal opinion. Everyone has one. But you must make it clear that this is your personal opinion and not that of the party you represent, or the government you serve. So what better way than to do that in a blog? This is me, Salleh talking, not the speaker of the Sabah state assembly or spokesman of Umno.

TMI: In your blog, you have repeatedly defended the prime minister against his critics, who include Dr Mahathir. Why are you doing this? Is it because there are not many ministers and BN leaders defending Najib?

A: The issue is simple. Tun Dr Mahathir cannot seem to agree with all his successors whereas he personally handpicked these successors. The reason Dr Mahathir is angry with Najib is because, according to Dr Mahathir, Najib gives in to Singapore.

That has been repeated many times. I think this is an unfair allegation. Countries must be considerate, civil and courteous to their neighbours. Dr Mahathir is talking as if Malaysia is at war with Singapore.

That is why I defended the prime minister. I think Najib is doing the right thing in

discussing with Singapore, before doing something that mutually affects both countries. Can Britain build a tunnel to France unless France also agrees to it? That is the issue.

TMI: Do you think Najib is under siege? Is he misunderstood? Is he a good, capable leader?

A: The opposition will oppose any prime minister from Umno or Barisan Nasional. But now some in Umno have united with the opposition to attack the prime minister. So they are creating an impression that the prime minister is under siege.

Why don't they try to pass a vote of no-confidence against him in Parliament? Then we will know whether the PM is under siege or not.

Is Najib misunderstood? Every prime minister since Tunku Abdul Rahman was misunderstood. Even Dr Mahathir was misunderstood. Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher were also misunderstood. I suppose it is natural that all great men/women are misunderstood to some extent. Great people are complicated people so simple people can never understand them. It comes with the territory.

They say that people are judged after they have gone, so maybe we will allow history to answer the question of whether Najib is a capable leader. I believe, however, history would judge Najib positively.

TMI: What is your message to Najib's critics?

A: What message can I give Najib's critics? If they do not like Najib, they will continue not liking him, never mind what I say. Most have closed minds, which will never open to whatever you may say.

TMI: What do you think of the controversies surrounding 1MDB?

A: Malaysia is facing many issues – economic, security, social, racial, religious, etc. But the way 1MDB is being played up is giving the impression that is the only issue or the most critical issue of all.

Even if 1MDB can be considered a serious problem, it is not the only problem or even the most serious of all. I would rate security, racial, and religion as being above all other problems because if they are not properly handled, they can tear the country apart or cause a great loss of lives.

So that is why I speak about 1MDB. Furthermore, there appears to be a lot of distortion and misconception regarding 1MDB. On the one hand, we want PAC (Public Accounts Committee) to investigate 1MDB and come out with an extensive and thorough report.

On the other hand, even before the investigation and report can be completed, we have already formed an opinion and made up our minds regarding 1MDB. There are

even statements such as 1MDB must be considered guilty until and unless it can prove its innocence. This goes against the very grain of justice, which is innocent until proven guilty.

So what are we asking PAC to do? Are we asking PAC to prove that 1MDB is innocent and if it can't, then we will have to assume it is guilty? Will we put someone on trial for murder and unless that person can prove he or she did not commit the murder we will send him or her to the gallows?

In that case it will be very simple. All PAC has to do is to issue a statement saying that they have investigated 1MDB and they can't find any evidence that 1MDB is innocent so that means 1MDB must be guilty although there is no evidence of guilt.

In other words, prove that you did not receive any bribes and if you cannot do that then you must have taken bribes even though we have no evidence that you did. That is crazy!

We demand that 1MDB reply to the questions. But when they do we say we do not believe they are telling us the truth. So why demand they reply to our questions, if we are determined that whatever they reply is not true? Don't ask any questions then. Ask a third party instead of 1MDB to reply. And this third party is PAC.

But they can only reply after they investigate 1MDB first. That is why I talk about 1MDB in my blog. The whole situation has become ridiculous and many are talking irrationally. It is almost like mass hysteria. No one wants to know the truth any longer. They want to hear just one thing: that 1MDB is guilty.

Any statement other than 1MDB is guilty is not acceptable. What is going on? Have we all become mad? Why not just let PAC and 1MDB do their jobs? What we want is for a good job to be done. But we are not allowing that to happen. That is what I am trying to say in my blog.

TMI: With the current imbroglio over 1MDB, won't it be a good idea if Najib rebuts his critics in a forum, dialogue or even a televised Q&A for Malaysians to listen to his points of view rather than being branded a coward for not attending the Nothing to Hide forum on 1MDB?

A: There are many controversies. There is also the controversy of Anwar's (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) sodomy charges and the controversy of the illegal ICs given to Sabah immigrants during Dr Mahathir's time.

Did Dr Mahathir agree to a public debate to talk about these? What about the Memali massacre? Can Dr Mahathir agree to debate on that also? Why just pick on 1MDB? The Memali massacre is even more serious, and to us in Sabah, the illegal ICs are the number one problem.

So why just pick on 1MDB? 1MDB is trying to resolve all the issues. Also, PAC has not completed its investigation and report yet. So why disturb everything?

The Nothing to Hide dialogue was supposed to be a dialogue between NGOs and Najib. It was also supposed to be by invitation only. Then they tried to turn it into a Najib-Mahathir debate. That was not what was agreed.

TMI: Issues surrounding 1MDB were brought up as early as two years ago, but the company did not rebut or answer them. Do you think 1MDB should have answered its critics from day one when issue of its mismanagement was brought up instead of keeping quiet and letting it fester until now?

A: The opposition raises so many issues. We cannot reply to every issue the opposition raises. The government is spending too much time just replying and rebutting that we no longer have time to run the country.

It is becoming too ridiculous. Let us allow PAC to reply. After all, whatever 1MDB says is rejected anyway.

TMI: Dr Mahathir has been vocal against Najib on several issues like 1MDB, BR1M (1Malaysia People's Aid), the murder of Altantuya (Mongolian Altantuya Shaariibuu) and it cannot be denied that his views have influenced Malaysians' views on the prime minister and BN. How damaging are his actions to BN and Najib? What should be done to counter his influence?

A: Dr Mahathir helped the opposition win big in 2008. I suppose Dr Mahathir can still cause more damage to BN in the next election. Let us see what happens.

TMI: The country has also been mired in racial-religious tension since the last general election and the government has been viewed as not doing enough to douse such flames. Do you feel the government is not doing enough to check raging racial religious tensions? What needs to be done to bring us back to harmonious Malaysia where people of all races respected each other?

A: Politicians from both sides of the fence, in particular in (the peninsula), are playing the race and religion card. There is nothing politicians can do if the people do not reject this. So the people need to reject these types of politicians. If not, then they will continue playing race and religion politics. – June 16, 2015.

Copyright © 2015 Edge Insider Sdn Bhd

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/history-will-judge-najib-positively-says-sabah-speaker>