

Najib's critics in Umno insist Dr Mahathir does not support Bersih
The Malaysian Insider
Sept 1, 2015
By Md Izwan

Despite misgivings over Bersih 4, Umno grassroots leaders said they understand why former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad attended the protests at Dataran Merdeka last weekend.

They also accept Dr Mahathir's decision to appear at the rally, which demanded Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's resignation.

But Kota Raja Umno division deputy chief Mohd Hamidi Abu Bakar admitted that many were initially angered by Dr Mahathir's latest stunt.

"At first, many were angry because they didn't understand, but today they are beginning to understand.

"Tun was not there because he supports Bersih, but because he wants to be with the rakyat who are unhappy," Hamidi told The Malaysian Insider.

Downplaying the matter, Hamidi said it was not a big issue as Dr Mahathir had openly criticised the party's leadership before.

"It's not a perception issue anymore. The entire country can see the message Tun is trying to send," he said.

Dr Mahathir has repeatedly called for Najib's resignation since the beginning of this year, and has taken to his blog to pen posts criticising, among others, 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), Najib's policies, and, most recently, the US\$700 (RM2.6 billion) million "donation" from an unnamed Middle Eastern donor.

Former Keliang Umno Youth chief Moohamad Faizal Abdul Raub said Dr Mahathir's appearance at the rally showed what little patience the former prime minister had left with Najib now.

"Even though I personally disagree with the Bersih rally, I understand why Tun made such a decision," he said.

He added it was a sign Najib no longer had the support of the majority in the party.

"Dr Mahathir uses language that the rakyat can easily understand. But Najib's supporters use complex language. Now everyone realises this," said Faizal, who recently resigned from his post in the party.

Faizal said Umno members were at a loss over how to criticise Najib, as his supporters were quick to attack any detractors.

"When someone speaks out against Najib, his supporters attack those who criticise him.

"Then they come up with a ridiculous statement, even though the grassroots have made it clear they don't know how else they can approach Najib."

Tenggara Umno Youth division committee member Asrul Esreen Mohd Salleh urged the central leadership to stop demonising Dr Mahathir and focus on solving the party's internal crisis.

"The top leaders should find a solution to the party's conflict. Solve the 1MDB issue and explain the RM2.6 billion, that's what the grassroots want.

"Don't pre-occupy yourself with condemning Tun," said Asrul.

Umno veteran Tan Sri Zainuddin Maidin (pic, left) said he believed many Malays sympathised with Dr Mahathir's reasoning for attending Bersih 4.

"I think Tun's explanation – that he went because he doesn't like Najib, and not to support the rally – resonates with the Malays.

"So I think it will be difficult for Najib to get the support of the Malays after this," he said.

The former information minister added that Dr Mahathir's loyalty towards Umno was not in question, despite his appearance in Bersih 4.

"He still supports BN and he just wants Najib to resign. He is not supporting Bersih.

"Umno runs through Dr Mahathir's blood and he will never leave the party, unless he is expelled."

Zainuddin said Umno supporters still believed in Dr Mahathir, and their anger towards his presence at the rally showed how much the party still needed him.

"They wouldn't have been so angry if they didn't love him."

Meanwhile, political analyst Dr Azizuddin Mohd Sani said he believed Dr Mahathir was trying to send the signal that a no-confidence motion must be tabled during the next Dewan Rakyat sitting.

"This gives the signal that he is willing to work with the opposition and really wants the motion to be tabled this October," he said.

The Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) lecturer said Dr Mahathir was now pressuring Umno and BN leaders to remove Najib yet maintain control over the government.

He said Dr Mahathir needed many BN MPs to support the no-confidence motion, to

ensure that the government did not fall to the hands of the opposition.

"Tun wants many Umno MPs to support the motion so they have bargaining power to appoint the next prime minister," he said. – September 1, 2015.

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