

Frenzy over Dr Mahathir's 2nd Bersih appearance
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By Jennifer Gomez and Ram Anand

Factory worker, Ella 40, stood by the cashier counter at Restoran Yusoof dan Zakhir near Central Market waiting and hoping to be able to kiss Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's hand.

Like many, she was excited that the former prime minister had decided to make an appearance again at the Bersih 4 rally.

"The man who built this country is here with us, he is our icon, he is our hope to clean up this country," she said clapping her hands.

Ella said this was the second time she had participated in the Bersih rally, to protest against what she described as "all that had gone wrong with the country".

"We just want to live in peace and harmony with the Chinese and Indians but some people don't want that.

"So Tun M is our hope, he coming down here is a clear sign that he sees what we see is wrong with this country."

Equally excited was Norman Pereira, 39, who said that Dr Mahathir was sending a strong message by coming to the ground.

"He supports the Bersih cause, he is a true Malaysian.

"We want and need change for Malaysia. The current situation where non-Malays are bullied has to stop," Pereira said.

Gary Tan, 37, felt that despite thousands gathered at the rally, it would be meaningless if people, such as the former prime minister, did not lend their support.

"We ordinary citizens can gather, but there is less power than when someone as powerful as him shows up," the businessman said.

Dr Mahathir's presence at Bersih 4 was his second following a five-minute appearance yesterday, but it was also his first time partaking in any rally, for a man who was criticised for cracking down on opposition during his 22-year tenure as prime minister.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir took a train ride from KL Sentral and disembarked at the Pasar Seni LRT station, accompanied by his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali in a congested train.

The clamour that his presence had caused seemed to throw people in the Indian

Muslim restaurant nearby into a shock, with media practitioners and the public attempting to cram into the outlet.

His aides urged the public to stay outside and only allowed the media to enter, but even this resulted in chairs and tables being broken, as some attempted to climb onto chairs and tables to get a glimpse of him.

After a reprimand from a visibly upset restaurant operator, the media finally rearranged the tables and waited for his press briefing.

The cashier at the Indian Muslim restaurant said Dr Mahathir had visited the restaurant once about 20 years ago when he was still the prime minister.

"Of course, I'm happy to see him, this is my second time, I was working here back then when he came," said a beaming Syed Jaiubar Ali.

Aunty Frances, 75, however, was less optimistic about the presence of the country's longest serving prime minister at the rally.

She wondered if he had an ulterior motive.

"Is he here for his son? In any case he must know he started the mess the country is in today.

"But the reality is that it takes someone like him to help us clean it up," said the senior citizen donning a yellow T-shirt and holding onto a walking stick.

Bersih 2.0 chairman Maria Chin Abdullah said she did not view Dr Mahathir's appearance as a distraction, adding that showing solidarity for the rally must go beyond wanting Najib to resign.

"Of course, we want Najib to go, he has to account for what he has done, but our demands go beyond Najib, it is about the system being reformed," she told The Malaysian Insider today.

She added that she wanted to know with which Bersih demands Dr Mahathir disagreed.

"He said he's not here for Bersih's demands, so I would like to know more about those demands that he does not agree with." – August 30, 2015.

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