

Dr Mahathir's presence at Bersih 4 not enough to get rid of Najib, say analysts

The Malaysian Insider

August 31, 2015

By Eileen Ng

Putrajaya's high-handedness in the days running up to the Bersih 4 rally back-fired as the event brought together a bigger than expected crowd, estimated at 300,000, and it earned the organisers a morale victory with the surprise appearance of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, analysts said.

They said the rally not only united Malaysians from all walks of life but for the organisers, electoral reform group Bersih 2.0, the appearance of Dr Mahathir indicated his tacit support for the gathering.

Although the former prime minister had clearly stated that his only intention in showing up was to join Malaysians in pressuring Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to step down, his presence nonetheless brought renewed vigour to the organisers and rally-goers.

The two-day gathering which ended last night, was not only to demand that Najib step down but also for institutional reforms.

Analysts, however, cautioned against celebrating too early as they said that the presence of Najib's supporter-turned-chief critic would not be enough to pressure the prime minister to quit.

"It's a small morale victory for Bersih but too little too late to make much of a difference in the rally itself.

"Dr Mahathir has to sustain it by embracing Bersih's objectives, which I do not think he would do," said Dr Lim Teck Ghee of Centre for Policy Initiative (CPI).

Part of Bersih 4's objective is in synch with Dr Mahathir's, who has also repeatedly called for Najib to quit over the alleged financial improprieties into state-owned 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and the RM2.6 billion "donation" from an unknown Middle Eastern donor into his personal accounts.

"His aim is to bring Najib down and clearly this is part of a last ditch effort by Dr Mahathir. Good for Dr Mahathir's public image though," said Lim.

The retired statesman had told his audience in Gelang Patah, Johor on Saturday – the same day of the Bersih rally and hours before he dropped by at the rally in Kuala Lumpur – that he is not a fan of demonstrations although he conceded that Malaysians had to resort to such moves as the proper channels to resolve problems have either been closed or are no longer around.

It has also been pointed out that those who hold the key to Najib's continued tenure as the country's sixth prime minister are in Parliament and his fellow colleagues in the Umno Supreme Council.

"There was no way the rally, by itself, even if it drew a turnout of a million, could have brought immediate results in the objectives of structural reforms and change of leadership.

"These objectives have to go through the parliamentary route and not through any other way. But it did show the extent of distrust and lack of confidence in the present prime minister in his running of the country and economy besides the other concerns on electoral reform voiced by earlier Bersih rallies," Lim said.

This was concurred by Dr Oh Ei Sun, who pointed out that Najib had surrounded himself with loyalists from within his party and despite Dr Mahathir urging his fellow party members to support a vote of no confidence against the prime minister, such concerted efforts are unlikely to materialise.

"Very unlikely, as he is no longer in a position to dole out political favours which is the sole determining factor in political loyalty in the Barisan Nasional (BN)," said the senior fellow with Singapore's Nanyang Technological University S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in referring to the political patronage system.

University of Tasmania Asia Institute director Dr James Chin pointed out that despite the excitement over Dr Mahathir's visit, it cannot be denied that the fourth rally by Bersih 2.0 had sealed the election watchdog's reputation of rallying people to take to the streets.

There were also worries over the lack of Malays turning out for the rally, as reports from the ground after the first day of the rally indicated that there was a large majority of non-Malays.

Some had put this to the absence of opposition Islamist party PAS, who in the past had been crucial in mobilising its members and supporters to such gatherings.

PAS had split with one of its opposition coalition partners, DAP, due to differences over the former's intention to go ahead with its hudud agenda. That brought about the demise of Pakatan Rakyat.

In its place, however, PAS splinter group Gerakan Harapan Baru (GHB) had tried to mobilise its supporters.

Chin said that with such a success, the opposition can use it to build momentum for the next general election, which must be called by 2018.

"But I think they will use it for the no-confidence vote in parliament. They will go for it now, no doubt," Chin predicted.

So what can both BN and the opposition take away from this rally?

CPI's Lim said BN will play on the smaller Malay turnout and its lynchpin party Umno will claim that the majority of Malays are anti-Bersih.

However, he cautioned that the small but still considerable Malay turnout will be a cause for concern and predicted that Putrajaya will be looking for ways to neutralise it.

"As for the opposition, it has achieved the objective of showing that they are alive and kicking, and able to put up a strong showing even without PAS," Lim said.

"The PAS splinter party has cut its teeth in mobilising a younger urban Malay constituency which was very vocal and made its presence felt, especially in social media. This younger Malay component of the rally could be the opposition's trump card in the next general election," he added. – August 31, 2015.

Copyright © 2015 Edge Insider Sdn Bhd

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/dr-mahathirs-presence-at-bersih-4-not-enough-to-get-rid-of-najib-say-analys>