

## **1MDB, RM2.6 billion scandals reach Pekan but have little impact**

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**By Ram Anand**

Datuk Seri Najib Razak's constituents in his hometown and Pekan parliamentary seat are not oblivious to allegations against the prime minister involving 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and the RM 2.6 billion deposited into his personal accounts.

In fact, many here are well aware of the attacks on their MP, especially by his former mentor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has now openly called for Najib's resignation.

But although news travels fast to the heartlands of rural Pekan, it breezes through without leaving a dent to Najib's support base here in Pahang, the peninsula's largest state.

"Yes, there are so many people talking about it here. They come to the shop and they are constantly talking about it. They talk about 1MDB, RM2.6 billion. It's not like the people here do not know," said Husna Mohd Kahlon, 44, who runs a small eatery near Chini.

But for Husna, who recently quit Puteri Umno, the young women's wing of the lead Malay ruling party, these issues leave little impact on how the people here will vote in the next elections.

Voters here have their welfare taken care of, she said. They speak about Najib's cash handout programme, 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M), and other aid in positive terms.

"We get money for Raya, we get BR1M," said Husna.

"For me, I'd still vote for Barisan Nasional (BN). People can say a lot of things, but I don't believe in them. What's important is our country is still peaceful," she added.

At another eatery, murmurs about the alleged scandals implicating the prime minister are audible, but no one goes to the extent of being critical of Najib.

"Of course, the issues reach us. We have WhatsApp," said Abdul Ghafar Abdul Hamid, a former Umno member, referring to the instant message mobile application.

"Who watches the news on TV nowadays? We either read the papers, or there is WhatsApp and Facebook," he said.

But while people are talking about it, they are not quick to criticise Najib.

"You won't hear people saying these things out loud. Everyone is quiet here, everything carries on as usual. Umno here is as usual, they are not facing any

problems," he said.

The association with Umno and BN, the ruling coalition that has been in power since independence, is prevalent here even for those who are not party members.

At a padi farm just off the main town, Wan Hassan Wan Rudin, 72, retired from the civil service a long time ago but says he still supports BN, his shirt and cap with the coalition's logo – the scales of justice – a giveaway as to where his loyalties lie.

"I'm always for 'dacing' (the scales). Only once I voted for PAS, that's because I was unhappy because I did not get a land I was promised," Wan Hassan said.

His loyalty to BN goes back to pre-Merdeka days of the Alliance and the communist insurgency in Malaya, Wan Hassan added.

But he, too, is not oblivious to the criticism against Najib.

"Yes, I read the news. I know about Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's criticism of Najib," he said, adding that the retired statesman should, in fact, be grateful to Najib.

"Dr Mahathir was removed from the party during the time of Tunku Abdul Rahman but it was (Tun) Abdul Razak who took him back into the party," he said, referring to Dr Mahathir's sacking from Umno in 1969.

And as such, Dr Mahathir owes one to Razak's eldest son.

For Wan Hassan, the 90-year-old Dr Mahathir had become "senile".

"I think he is a bit like me – he is so old and when you are this old, you become senile and you start forgetting things."

Signs of opposition to Najib and Umno here do exist, however, albeit minimal.

In the same padi fields, carrying bird traps in a bag, former military bullet specialist Rosli Jabbar wanders around enjoying his retirement.

Asked about his political affiliations, he said: "Oh, I am with Gerakan Harapan Baru", referring to the new splinter group that broke away from the opposition Islamist Party, PAS.

"PAS is useless here. They have one foot in BN and one foot in PAS. They don't walk straight any more."

But he, too, admitted that the prospect of unseating Najib on home ground would be an uphill task.

A padi farmer, Ahmad Rudin, 42, also did not offer explicit criticism but said support for the incumbent was due to "the way things work around here".

"It's normal. It's coklat (candy) culture. When there are elections, they give candies and the people accept," he said.

"You know what is democracy? Demo-kasi. If a person can demonstrate and sell you a product, he gets the contract. He says I sell you one water bottle for RM20 and gives another two for free, and the people buy that, too." – September 7, 2015.

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