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Mahathir-Forgiving

THE FORGIVING NATURE OF DR MAHATHIR

By: Sajad Hussain

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- The general perception of the man in the street of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is that he is a very stern and hard task master who brooks no nonsense.

But there is another side of the man, which only few are privy to. One aspect of Dr Mahathir's congenial nature is his big heart and forgiving trait.

This was revealed to Bernama by his long time party comrade and now his Political Secretary, Datuk Mohamad Johari Baharum, who spoke about several important episodes in the 22-year tenure of the Prime Minister where these traits of Dr Mahathir stood out.

Among them were the re-entry of the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) into the Barisan Nasional and episodes involving former Umno Youth head Datuk Zahid Hamidi, corporate big wigs and political rivals.

As for the PBS episode, Datuk Johari said the party was a strong Barisan Nasional (BN) component in Sabah then in 1990 and was expected to deliver all the 20 parliamentary seats in the state to the ruling coalition during the general election that year.

But during the last lap of the campaigning the PBS withdrew from the coalition.

Johari said: "This act of PBS led by Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, was most unfortunate that sent shock waves through the Barisan camp.

"During that time too, Umno, the main BN partner was also in a very uncertain and fluid state and needed all the assistance and help from other coalition partners, thus, this withdrawal really hurt Dr Mahathir very deeply."

Despite this, the BN won, but instead of being arrogant and proud, Dr Mahathir as the BN chairman was not vindictive in considering the re-entry of the PBS into the BN fold 10 years later.

Johari said Dr Mahathir's main consideration in accepting the PBS was his concern for the Sabah people who had no progress under the PBS Government.

Datuk Johari said when he first brought up the subject of the PBS's re-entry to senior BN leaders they were all sceptical about the party being accepted after what it had done.

"However, when I approached Dr Mahathir and told him how the Kadazan-Dusuns were being neglected and needed help, he relented and asked me to find out whether the PBS was genuine and sincere in wanting to rejoin and work for the betterment of the people.

"Together with Datuk Kalimullah Hassan (now Bernama Chairman), I approached Datuk Pairin and did the preliminary ground work and we brought him to see the Prime Minister to hand in the application form.

"Pairin was worried that the PM will put strong conditions for the re-entry, but to the contrary he had a pleasant surprise that not only Dr Mahathir accepted the application without any preconditions but also the Prime Minister treated Pairin and PBS Deputy President Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili who was with him, most graciously and saw them off until the door.

"The meeting which was scheduled to last for 15 minutes, stretched to 45 minutes:

"This really touched Pairin very much and he shed tears," Johari said.

Zahid Hamidi the then Umno Youth chief was aligned to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He very strongly criticised Dr Mahathir and accused him of

nepotism and cronyism during the 1996 Umno general assembly which shocked party delegates and members alike.

But as history has recorded, Zahid retracted what he had said and asked for forgiveness and Dr Mahathir not only magnanimously forgave him but also rehabilitated him in the corporate world.

All these shows how big hearted and forgiving Dr Mahathir is -- something which the general public should know, Johari added.

-- BERNAMA
SJH RYN AAM