

**On Ops Lalang, Dr M moves to preempt
Malaysiakini.com
February 11, 2011**

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed is simply engaging in 'Orwellian doublespeak' when he blames the police for Ops Lalang, the ISA dragnet in late 1987 that netted 106 politicians and social activists for varying periods of detention.

Saying one thing and meaning the opposite, or doing the opposite, is not something uncommon to Mahathir.

For example, not infrequently he would blame the Jews for the world's troubles and in the next breath disavow any anti-Semitism.

His tendency to sally forth to stake a position, and when the going gets tough, to resort to dissimulation was best exemplified in his stance towards the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Lingam Tape in early 2008.

The inquiry was set up to ascertain the authenticity of the videotape which showed senior lawyer VK Lingam in an attempt to influence the appointment and promotion of judges.

Called by the inquiry to testify, Mahathir, who was PM when the events alluded to in the videotape took place, brashly asserted he was prepared to answer any question, both within and outside the inquiry panel's terms of reference.

In the course of the actual questioning, he resorted to the excuse of a memory gone misty to parry pointed queries whose thrust would have shown him up as acquiescent in judge-fixing.

The initial assertion of willingness to face all and sundry questions was merely a wily tactician's attempt to steal his detractors' thunder by affecting that he had absolutely nothing to hide.

Mahathir's tactics, when he has his back to the wall, are to stake the high ground preemptively, and when holes are bored into his redoubt, resort to subterfuge – in the case of the Lingam inquiry, a nebulous memory – to avert a collapse to his position.

Cops acted on their own?

On the evidence of his authoritarian character alone, one can infer home minister Mahathir's claim that the police acted on their volition in Ops Lalang is highly implausible: Mahathir is no respecter of the autonomy of any institution save his own personal fiat.

During his 22-year premiership, he was wont to emasculate institutions that enjoyed a measure of independence. What's become of our judiciary and police force, even of royalty, are the result of his schemes to make himself monarch of the Malaysian survey.

The question arises: why is he, at this stage of his long recessional from public life, doing something Machiavellians are advised against – tendering a cri de coeur for past actions?

'Don't stoop to explain, avoid apology' would be the motto of Machiavellians. To them, an

apology is a sign of weakness, something that would encourage adversaries to take advantage.

Even after it was proven that his absurd suggestion Anwar Ibrahim had inflicted a black eye on himself in September 1998 was false, he did not see fit to apologise.

Why then does he now say something in extenuation of his role in the ISA arrests of 1987?

Damage done to police force

Never the spontaneous politician, Mahathir is always several steps ahead of the next danger or adversary that could assail him. He positions himself such that he can ward off the threat before it gathers pace.

From that standpoint, he perhaps anticipates a collapse to the institutions he was most culpable in emasculating and is now beginning to manoeuvre to ward off the damage to his legacy.

Seriously, he cannot expect people to believe that he was not responsible for the damage done to the police force, having been home minister for 18 of his 22 years as PM.

But Mahathir is the sort not terribly concerned about the truth or falsity of a matter when it suits him. He is more concerned to create a subversive perspective in which the line between the true and the false is blurred, the better to achieve the surreptitious objectives he has in mind.

Perhaps, he sees that the Sabah 'illegal immigrants' issue is heading for detonation. The fallout is bound to entangle him; not for nothing was the project to inject Muslims from Mindanao and littoral areas into Sabah to pad the electoral rolls to upend the PBS government of Pairin Kitingan in 1994 called 'Project M'.

Mahathir can be counted on to stay true to his preemptively Machiavellian self right till the end.

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