

Kit Siang accuses Dr M of rewriting history
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The verbal joust between two political giants - one a former prime minister and the other, former opposition leader - continues today with DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang firing another salvo against Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Lim was apparently flabbergasted that Mahathir could not remember details of the meeting which he claimed to have met all opposition members and assured them they would not be arrested before the 1987 mass crackdown of political dissidents.

Mahathir had yesterday responded to the repeated denials from Lim and DAP chairperson Karpal Singh - both of whom were arrested under the Operasi Lalang dragnet - that there was such a meeting.

"This happened 20 years ago. I remember distinctly having the meeting. I don't really remember the faces of those who were there, but I am quite certain that Karpal Singh was not there and that Lim Kit Siang was there," he told journalists.

Lim and Karpal as well as Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng were among seven members of parliament held under ISA, which allows detention without trial.

The opposition leader ticked off Mahathir for sticking to his version of the event despite his inability to recall details of the meeting.

"This is most untypical of Mahathir, who is credited with elephantine memory except when for political reasons he chose to be a victim of amnesia - as during his 90-minute testimony before the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Lingam Videotape scandal in January 2008 where he said 'I cannot remember' or its equivalent 14 times," said Lim in a statement today.

He said Mahathir should make a greater effort remember this "astounding" meeting, and not only "the who, but all other details as to the where, when and how the meeting came about, together with eyewitness accounts".

In a book by American journalist Tom Plate, Mahathir was quoted as saying that he had met opposition leaders to assure them that they would not be arrested prior to the swoop, which saw the detention of 106 people.

The former strongman said that he did not believe that the opposition leaders should be arrested, but the police had nevertheless insisted.

The 1987 crackdown, which occurred on Oct 27, saw opposition MPs, social activists and a handful of MCA and Umno politicians arrested, while the publishing permits of three newspapers - The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh and Watan - were revoked.

Why Najib wasn't nabbed?

The government had explained that the second largest ISA swoop since the May 13 racial riots were 'necessary' to contain rising 'racial tensions' from the protests over the

appointment of non-Chinese educated principals to Chinese vernacular schools.

In response, Umno held a counter protest, where notably then Youth chief Najib Razak led a mammoth rally in Kampung Baru days prior to the arrests.

According to Lim, upon his release from his 18-month detention, he did meet Mahathir.

"The first question I would have popped to Mahathir at that meeting would be to ask him why he had broken his word and why he had failed to honour his assurance to opposition leaders that there would be no ISA detentions, if Mahathir had indeed met with opposition leaders and given such an assurance before the launch of Operation Lalang.

Instead, when Lim met Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Office, he had asked the then prime minister "why the Umno Youth leader Najib Razak had not been detained for escalating the racial tensions in the country ... while innocent ones were made victims of Operation Lalang".

Lim wondered why Mahathir is now seeking to rewrite history to clear himself of the "infamy" of the Operation Lalang mass crackdown.

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