

**Another cock-and-bull story from Mahathir**  
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COMMENT Dr Mahathir Mohamad should talk straight or just shut up.

Whenever he rebuts allegations of wrongdoing during his tenure as prime minister, he appears to sound not only defensive but deceptive as well.

Now he says the government's bailout of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) in 2000, during his premiership, was "not the worst". What does that mean? Is he saying that the bailout was all right simply because it was not the worst?

mahathir daim zainuddin and tajudin ramlif he is still of sound mind and can understand this, let me say it is not all right. So what if it was not the worst act of using public funds? It was nonetheless committed. Should only the worst be held accountable?

That bailout cost Malaysians RM1.8 billion. And the government paid for the MAS shares at more than double their market price. Why was this so?

Well, Mahathir has become famous for blaming others; this time, he points to the Finance Ministry - for recommending the purchase at such a price. Has he forgotten he was the country's chief executive officer then, and that it wouldn't have gone through without his say-so, no matter which ministry or individual recommended it?

He says MAS had to be saved from bankruptcy because it was "necessary". But why was MAS privatised to Tajudin Ramli in the first place when the latter had had no track record in the airline industry? Whom would Mahathir blame for this?

And what about the other bailouts? Bank Bumiputra, Renong, and Proton, which was bought by Petronas from DRB-Hicom when the latter was deep in debt?

Mahathir is always right

Mahathir tries to justify the MAS bailout by comparing it to the cancellation of the double-tracking project by his successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. But that doesn't make it right. Would making such a comparison absolve Mahathir from the questionable use of public funds under his watch?

mahathir in heart institute ijn 091106 abdullah ahmad badawi pak lahDid Mahathir have a personal stake in that project to make him so angry towards Abdullah for cancelling it, and therefore so unforgiving of the latter?

The way he's been slamming Abdullah, almost at every chance he gets, indicates he has a personal axe to grind with the man. But he's been doing it so often now that it's really getting tiresome.

The thing about Mahathir is, he is always right and everyone else wrong. Less than two weeks ago, he refuted allegations that when he was prime minister, he cowed the judiciary.

Has he forgotten that in 1988, his ruling party, which then enjoyed a two-thirds majority in Parliament, passed an amendment to Article 121 of the Federal Constitution which effectively removed the judicial power from the courts and made the judiciary subservient to Parliament?

When former chief justice Dzaiddin Abdullah brought up three weeks ago that this was so, and de facto

Law Minister Nazri Aziz agreed, what was Mahathir's response? "This is fitnah (slander)," he said. But why is it fitnah when the amendment was indeed made and we have seen the consequences of it?

To deflect from the real issue, Mahathir blamed Nazri for getting personal. "Nazri ... you know, he never likes me," he said. But what about Dzaiddin? Mahathir doesn't mention it, but does Dzaiddin not like him too?

So that's how Mahathir avoids facing up to the truth - use emotional prattle, throw the focus off himself onto others, make it seem that others are against him and that they want to run him down.

To aim insult at Nazri and aggrandise himself, he also said, condescendingly and arrogantly, "Let him be. It doesn't hurt me. Let dogs bark, but mountains don't crumble."

He even asserted that he was blameless in the sacking of then Lord President Salleh Abas, which Dzaiddin claimed was due to the disagreement between Mahathir and Salleh over the role of the courts. Whom did Mahathir blame instead?

"It was the Agong (king) who wanted [Salleh] removed," he said. That must have got people rolling on the floor with laughter. Given Mahathir's track record in relation to royalty, are we to believe that he would have acceded to the request of removing Salleh if indeed the Agong had made it?

Not responsible for ISA arrests too

How did we entrust a man who talks like that with the nation's most important job for 22 years? If we weren't vigilant then, we should be vigilant now and make sure we don't put into that office someone as reluctant to be accountable as that.

Mahathir was unwilling to be accountable for Operation Lalang too. Regarding that infamous swoop on 106 citizens in 1987 that detained them under the Internal Security Act, he passed the buck to the police.

He said: "Well, I would have handled it differently, except that the police wanted to do these things because they say it is necessary ..." He washed his hands of the matter. He was effectively saying the police did it.

But if that was so, how come when it came to authorising the detention of 40 of the 106 to two years, Mahathir, who was also the home minister then, signed it? Did the police twist his arm and force him to do it too?

He is even down on record to have said, "I actually met all of the opposition members (beforehand) and assured them that they would not be arrested."

But Lim Kit Siang (right), who was among the 40 detained for two years, has attested that he never met Mahathir beforehand. What does Mahathir have to say to that?

Perhaps it's best not to ask him that question or he might come up with something that looks like a Uri Geller feat. Or Lim might get blamed for this too!

Actually, it's not good to ask Mahathir any questions. Or to give him so much coverage in the media. He should be allowed the space only if he talks sense or if he admits to whatever mistakes he has made. But then infallible as he is, such an admission looks unlikely to happen.

The way it looks, the mountain is not going to crumble. If it does, the world would end - for Mahathir.