

Dr M vents his spleen, entangling Daim
MalaysiaKini.com
March 1,2012
Terence Netto

COMMENT Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's petulant streak has not cost him dear the way it has other politicians.

Usually, the tendency to fly off the handle, as Mahathir periodically does, will push a politician to retractions and about-turns to salvage his or her public ratings as adverse reaction laps about them.

But not where this physician-politician is concerned.

'Never apologise, never explain', a piece of tough-minded advice of uncertain provenance, does help to explain Mahathir's style.

From the time in the late 1970s when as deputy prime minister, he alarmed international opinion by saying that Malaysian naval boats would fire on rickety Vietnamese refugee-laden vessels landing in Terengganu to his latest riposte to calls for an audit of financial scandals that happened on his prime ministerial watch, the man stays true to his shoot-from-the-hip form.

However, his most recent demonstration of combativeness, freewheeling in aim, ought to land him in trouble.

That this is unlikely may have more to do with the taciturn character of some of his - most probably - unintended targets and the fact this is pre-election time for his party to which several of them belong; they, who do not share Mahathir's impetuosity, may feel that discretion is the better part of valour, at least at this point in time.

What about Tun Daim?

Mahathir's feisty response to Lim Kit Siang's call for an audit of the huge losses said to have been incurred when the former was PM for 22 years (1981-2003) was almost certainly targeted at his predecessor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"Not only me ... all the Tuns should be audited. And their sons and grandsons too," was Mahathir's curled lip reply when asked to comment on Lim's call.

The use of the plural as in "Tuns" was a gift horse that a veteran political fighter like Lim is obviously not going to stare in the mouth.

Lim wasted no time in inquiring whether Mahathir wants Daim Zainuddin, who was conferred the honorific 'Tun' at a precocious age, investigated too, for financial scandals that had occurred when Daim was finance minister and later financial adviser to the government during Mahathir's long tenure as PM.

Given that the animus Mahathir has for Abdullah is not as rancid as that he feels for Daim, though PM and financial adviser parted on strained terms in mid-2000, it is obvious that Mahathir did not intend Daim in his call for an audit of all the "Tuns".

But an unchecked proclivity for aiming from the hip is not easily curbed.

So Mahathir's tendency when irate to speak like a Sten gun would inevitably mean the ambits are going to be wide. Thus Daim became entangled in his former boss's scatter-shot reaction to Lim's call.

A conspiratorial relationship

When Mahathir released his long-delayed memoirs 'A Doctor in The House' this time last year, it was bruited about on the grapevine that Daim had his own book ready for publication which he decided to hold back to allow Mahathir to bat first.

Mahathir had written in his book that Daim had to go in the middle of 2000 as financial adviser to the government because the complaints from assorted politicians and corporate captains of Daim feathering his own considerable business interests were too weighty to ignore any longer. Presumably, the adviser had to depart on conflict of interest grounds.

No doubt Daim would have his explanation of this chapter - together with several other controversies in his career - in his memoirs which the lawyer-turned-businessman is still holding back, a year after Mahathir's version would have stung him to the quick.

It is understood that Daim has evidence of Mahathir's involvement in matters that would not withstand scrutiny but whether he would proffer the factual details is in doubt.

Both men shared when their careers intersected an alliance of potent convenience, a conspiratorial relationship in which personal interests were subsumed under macroeconomic goals.

It was an intriguing relationship while it lasted, the subject of much political saloon palaver, but because it was guarded by the staunch discretion of its principals, speculation about its true nature had to be conjectural than concrete.

Even now with Mahathir's careening responses that tend to bend more fenders than it is politic to do, it's doubtful a thereby riled Daim would vent what he knows.

Having puffed on a suspect common pipe tends to preserve the instinct for self-protection.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/190721>