

**Mahathirism dead, but not gone**  
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At first, one cannot help but take Mahathir's comments with a pinch of salt but almost immediately, premier Najib Abdul Razak makes a speech to civil servants about his reform efforts and endorses what Mahathir said.

Since he retired in 2003, the office of the prime minister has been categorised by flip-flopping. From the 'crooked bridge' to the recent reversal of the decision to demolish BB Plaza, prime ministers just cannot stick to a decision.

John Maynard Keynes, the economist, was asked why he reneged on several key ideas: "I don't know about you sir but when the circumstances change, I change my mind."

This is not about U-turns and stubbornness in not changing one's mind. This is about good stewardship and the ability to manage communications. In the Information Age, the PM's Office with its special officers and press officers should be better able to manage information and not let the premier look bad.

Lets take for example the statement on the Internal Security Act (ISA) - surely the premier should not have said: "The ISA was abolished because it didn't help the BN-led government politically. If you put someone in under ISA it doesn't kill them politically, instead it enhances their political career."

What does this mean? That the government has been using the ISA to detain and neutralise political opponents? It is not the function of the ISA to preserve the BN but the safety of Malaysia. What is the PM admitting to?

And this: "Similarly the PM also said that the Emergency Ordinance (EO) had to be done away with as technological improvements has rendered exile less than useful a deterrent to crime. In the old days, it was easy, if someone was bad, we just catch them and send them to places like Pasir Puteh, or maybe Jerantut."

Now how would the people in Pasir Puteh and Jerantut feel? Why does the PM need to name these towns? Why can't he just say that banishment means that the criminals no longer have a familiar operating context and that cut-off from his/her supply-chain, they cannot so easily set up a new network to support their criminal activities?

Instead, the statement is followed up with this piece of brilliance: 'As such, he said, the Malaysian police must now change the way they work. Now police must train themselves how to look for evidence. He stressed that instead of just catching suspects and chucking them into EO detention, police should now provide evidence to charge them in court.'

Here, the PM is admitting on the behalf of the police that Malaysia has used the EO to chuck suspects in jail because the authorities did not have evidence. Worse, the PM, is saying that the police did not have the requisite skills to find the evidence and hence used the EO as a convenient way to get rid of suspects.

Socialism in effect

Just when you thought the final gaffe had been made, this follows: 'The challenge before the police, explained Najib, is one that is faced by all civil servants as they face a more competitive global environment and rising public expectations. In the face of this, he said that one important role for civil servants is in working to create wealth so that the extra bounty can then be distributed to the rakyat.'

Since when is it the duty of the civil service to 'create wealth'? The PM probably meant that the civil service creates the correct working environment to allow entrepreneurs to make money, collects taxes from the entrepreneurs and individuals and uses the budget surplus to take care of vulnerable members of society. Surely, it cannot be the job of civil servants to create wealth!

For some strange reason, the PM's training in the UK did not include a basic understanding of socialism. Here is a classic example of Najibnomics at its most confused: "This is why the socialist approach does not work, they only talk of distributing, but we create wealth and then re-distribute."

'He said that it was only the creation of new revenues via higher income tax revenues and from the Customs Department that allowed goodies like the BR1M and other payouts to the rakyat to take place.'

But isn't this a classic description of socialism? I suppose the PM's form of government where civil servants are asked to create wealth to be re-distributed is the added value described as "we create wealth and then re-distribute" and not just "talk about distributing". If that is the case, French president Francois Hollande has much to learn from Malaysia.

Socialism, which seems to be a bad word in Malaysia, is most likely to be the most humane political ideology. But like all good things, there needs to be a balance. The private sector (what the PM means by income tax and other revenue streams) need to have good operating environment in the form of laws and policies to allow them to invest, take risks, create jobs and make money.

Governments then taxes these firms and their employees (us) to raise funds to pay for infrastructure development and also social and cultural policies to make the country sustainable. But excessive taxation - anything over 70 percent - is a disincentive to work hard and similarly over-protection in the form of perpetual affirmative action also lowers productivity.

Viewed historically, the role of the civil service in formulating economic policy (the work of the Economic Planning Unit) and implementing these policies have been rather tainted by socialism. Whilst we encourage investments and private enterprise, we also take care of the less fortunate and try to make the field of competition more level. This was the reasoning for the NEP, the NDP and the various economic policies.

So the government is actually very socialist except that the policies drawn up and implemented by Najib's father, Abdul Razak Hussein, was never meant to be forever. It was meant to be a fillip to help certain segments of society - regardless of ethnicity and religious beliefs - overcome the disadvantages of historical circumstance. It was definitely not short-term like BRIM and other types of unsustainable spending sprees!

Yes, Mahathirism is well and truly dead. But the excesses associated with it are now running riot with no strong leadership to keep these forces in check.

So, there is only one thing left to say: Reform, transform but for god's sake, put it in some form.

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