

Najib's getting off this tiger's back

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COMMENT In the Malaysian public domain one issue seems to be taking a lot of attention; its source, of all things, is a book.

For a people not known to read much, this is bizarre. For it to be written purportedly by Abdullah Badawi, as some have assumed, more bizarre still.

Actually 'Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia' is not a book written by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at all; it's one about him but edited by Bridget Welsh and James Chin.

NONE In it Abdullah (left) makes comments about his tenure as prime minister, about how he dared go against the wishes of predecessor Dr Mahathir Mohamad who apparently was holding the reins of power in the background.

Abdullah was commenting on how he was hounded by Mahathir but stood his ground anyway, and even cancelled some Mahathir-conceived mega projects.

Abdullah claimed his action had helped save the country from bankruptcy.

Mahathir, the megalomaniac supremo, was so upset by this rebuff and as history has indicated, used all realpolitik tricks (as a past master he has a lot up his sleeves) to throw out Abdullah from his perch as prime minister.

The issue here is that at long last, Abdullah as a former political leader, has dared to make comments, to question, tarnish and demolish the record and performance, achievements and prestige of Mahathir his predecessor.

Also it revealed the sad truth that under Mahathir's long tenure as president of Umno and prime minister, he has transformed the party from one of liberation and reform into one ferocious tiger.

So when Abdullah took over he was riding on the back of this tiger.

This tiger of course is the animated composite of Mahathir the institution, his cronies and party warlords, the religious bigots, the civil servants, all those people directly benefitting from the status quo.

Mainly it is the mentality that unites them together - the racist (like Ibrahim Ali) and the religious extremist (like Harussani Zakaria). Mahathir would be the tiger's fangs.

Upon realising this, Abdullah wanted to tame this tiger. But the tiger did not take too kindly to his act of defiance and mauled Abdullah instead.

How indeed does anyone tame a tiger? He unceremoniously lost his job.

This defiance and recalcitrance has been a form of progress and development of sorts in this subservience and loyalty based Umno polity.

The previous norms have been for all and sundry (and this includes former prime ministers) to say only good things about Mahathir.

Indirect support

Underlining this groundbreaking development Abdullah's comments has been that they were taken up by his successor Najib Razak, who appeared to concur with Abdullah's views.

But perhaps upon noticing how Abdullah was mauled by the Umno tiger and being coy, Najib merely expressed his support indirectly, thus; that Umno members are now aware they need to change.

He cited the change in the party constitution as one solid example.

But he cautioned eager Malaysian beavers starved and clamouring for change that going into the entire Umno polity (and by extension the public policy changes this ruling coalition would bring), is a very slow process.

For Umno members this might take several generations he reportedly said.

najib hari raya open house 080813Now Najib (right) might have a point. Change is indeed a peculiar thing - it is there every second of the day, all the time, but it does not happen if there is no awareness of it happening.

There is no change if you are not aware of it taking place, there is only a happening.

To reiterate, change takes place if a person is aware it is indeed taking place. Without this awareness there is only a natural transformation, not change.

Right now the country is so ready for change. To say the least, it needs to get out of its many social, economic, political and intellectual ailing most of which were created by the outdated Umno mentality.

These are not to be repeated here in detail, their broad outlines would suffice: widening racial distrust, citizen distrust of the police and the AG's office, corruption involving astronomical amounts and committed at the highest echelons, mountain high national debt, young talents fleeing abroad, Hollywood, nay, Mafia style gangland shootings.

Feeling jittery

Now, Najib is jittery. He is the incumbent prime minister and aware of the enormity of his task. He knows what he should do like putting the people together again under the 1Malaysia rallying call.

He wants the economy to move forward under the various transformation programmes.

But with the tiger under him Najib has not been able to do much. He sees Abdullah's dumping as a clear and real possibility that this can also happen to him.

Now the Umno general assembly is about to take place in October. His post of party chief and thereby the premiership can be challenged with the real possibility of him losing his present job come October.

So what can he do to contain the tiger and maintain his job?

On this, the alternatives are wide open. Many things can be done. He could listen to the advice and comments made by concerned citizens, and reinstate the rule of law.

NONEHe could reintroduce checks and balances; rein in those who in public opinion, are the breakers of the rule of law.

He should allow the police do their job, silence Mahathir (left) and his civic society cohorts like Perkasa and Jawi.

Rein in all other race-based civic societies and religious bigots like Harussani Zakaria.

Inculcate into them the fact and reality that the constitution is the supreme law of the country.

But he is not going to do any of these for the party elections are just around the corner.

He has to play safe and to the gallery. Indirectly agreeing and supporting Abdullah Badawi is about the only thing he is willing to do now. How sad.

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