

## **Analysts: Dr M stumbling block for Umno reform**

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**By Ram Anand & Lawrence Yong**

As Umno president Najib Abdul Razak attempts to reform the party away from its conservative ideologies, his biggest stumbling block could well be one of the party's most influential figures - former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Analysts Malaysiakini spoke to said the former premier's shadow still looms large over the Umno grassroots, and his outspoken views have now divided Umno down the middle.

NONEMahathir's views are often seen as being conservative and very much race-based, fuelling right-wing views about Malay supremacy and lending credence to the perception that the Chinese Malaysian community is attempting to seize political power from the Malays.

"Mahathir-ism remains the stumbling block to reform Umno," political analyst Khoo Kay Peng (left) conceded, referring to the faction in Umno that believes an authoritative leader like Mahathir would make Umno strong again.

"Mahathir's problem is that he can't see any other approach than his own (to govern). This is because he never lost a two-thirds majority before," Khoo told Malaysiakini, referring to the outcome of the 2008 and the more recent May 5 general elections.

Khoo noted that the problem started when Mahathir started attacking his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration, and the factionalism has grown to an extent that Najib is now unable to control the conservative wings of the party.

"Najib has no control over the conservative side of Umno, who want an authoritative leader like Mahathir," he said.

Dr M 'also at fault' for loss of two-thirds majority

Khoo also agreed with Abdullah's statement in the recent book "Awakenings: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia", that Mahathir is also at fault for BN's loss of a two-thirds majority in the 2008 national polls.

"He (Mahathir) kept bombarding the Abdullah administration until (Abdullah) was perceived to be weak and unable to carry out promised reforms.

"Now the perception that Umno can't reform has hardened even more in the last election, making non-Malays reject the party," he added.

ramon navaratnam interview 071108 01Asli Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) chairperson Ramon Navaratnam (left), meanwhile, said that Mahathir's main fault was that the former premier still "longed for prominence" eventhough he was no longer in charge of Umno or Malaysia.

"It is unbecoming of an elder statesman. He should quietly provide advise and lead behind the scene rather than publicly voice his views that can sometimes sound very abrasive in the new context of 1Malaysia," Ramon said.

"He is afraid that if he doesn't shout he would not be heard," he added.

Ramon likened Umno to a bunch of crabs tied together at this point, each pulling in a different direction and headed nowhere. He said that Mahathir was partly to blame because of his statements.

Universiti Malaya political economist professor Terence Gomez pointed out that Umno needed to look beyond Mahathir.

"The party has to change with the times," he said.

He cited Abdullah's fight against corruption and Najib's dismantling of "race affirmative" economic policies, all of which were used by Mahathir to weaken the leaders.

"In the case of Abdullah, Mahathir seems to have gone on a warpath because he worried that his legacy would be overturned," Gomez said, adding that Mahathir was less critical of Najib because he chased the same Vision 2020.

But unless Najib rams his reforms through, Gomez warned that "history will repeat itself".