

Dr M turns 89, Anwar and Najib pray for his health
MalaysiaKini.com
July 10, 2014

Dr Mahathir Mohamad turned 89 today, and the former prime minister shows little if no sign of slowing down, despite his advanced age and having undergone two heart by-passes.

Among those who wished him well was his former heir-apparent turned nemesis Anwar Ibrahim, who now leads the opposition bloc Pakatan Rakyat.

"Pray for his good health," tweeted the opposition leader, who has often said that he has no axe to grind with Mahathir, whom he once regarded as a father figure.

Also wishing him was Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who tweeted: "Eighty-nine but (he) still looks full of energy right? Happy birthday Tun Dr Mahathir! May Allah grant you long life."

From being one of the most respected figures in the nation, the octogenarian, who was born in 1925, has become one of the most criticised.

The Kedah-born Mahathir, known among friends and family as "Che Det", became Malaysia's fourth prime minister in 1981.

He held the post for 22 years until resigning in 2003, making him the country's longest serving prime minister to date.

During his tenure, Mahathir had four deputies, starting from Musa Hitam, Ghafar Baba, Anwar and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

After Anwar was sacked and Abdullah filled the post, there was a joke circulating that the latter had asked Mahathir, "Boss, how many years contract is this?"

Ruled with an iron fist

Though his supporters continue to praise him for bringing economic development and putting Malaysia on the world map, his detractors accuse Mahathir of being an autocrat who ruled with an iron fist.

From castrating the judiciary to stifling freedom of expression and the media, his reign was also riddled with allegations of corruption.

Critics claim that the problems besetting the nation, now ranging from racism to religious extremism, sprouted from the seeds sown during the Mahathir era.

The former prime minister - whose favourite song happens to be Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way" - continues to lend his controversial voice on national issues, often drawing brickbats from the opposition and civil society.

He played a key role in the ouster of his handpicked successor Abdullah in 2009 and now pecks at Najib.

One of the most darkest periods during his rule was in 1987, when more than 100 opposition leaders, social activists and dissidents were detained without trial under the now defunct Internal Security Act.

But the incident that caused the greatest damage to Mahathir's reputation, both here and abroad - and which continues to haunt him - was the sacking of Anwar in 1998 on a charge of sodomy.

Anwar, who was then deputy prime minister and went on to spend six years in prison, has always maintained that the charge was part of a political conspiracy authored by Mahathir and his men.

Mahathir was also instrumental in curbing the powers of the Malay rulers, a move which even his staunchest of critics grudgingly laud.

After several hours, two official birthday posts on Mahathir's official Facebook page this evening garnered around 3,500 comments, almost 1,000 shares and about 22,000 "likes" combined

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