

Ambiga: This is not courage, Mr PM
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More than two weeks ago, Dr Mahathir Mohamad had unleashed a scathing criticism of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Among others, the former prime minister said Najib lacked courage and pandered to the demands of the opposition and civil society groups, such as in repealing the Internal Security Act.

The 89-year-old former Mahathir remains influential in Umno and Najib has been cautioned on the perils of disregarding the impact of his criticism.

After all, the doctor-turned-politician has a reputation for amputating political careers.

So, is the current sedition dragnet, which has now enveloped the academia as well, Najib's response to Mahathir and to prove to Umno that he has fortitude?

But when the question was posed to former Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenevasan, she dismissed the latest developments as being synonymous with courage.

"Courage, in this context, is not coming down hard on criticism, it is bullying. Facing criticism and engaging the critics is the courage we expect from the leadership," she said.

Without mincing words, Ambiga, who is the patron of NGO NegaraKu and former chairperson of Bersih, described the crackdown as "despicable treatment of your own people".

Noting how Najib did a "marvellous job for a noble cause" in engaging with the Ukrainian separatists over the MH17 incident, she called on the prime minister to do the same at home.

"I am asking the same prime minister to engage with his own people.

"I would urge good sense, and for the prime minister to engage with civil society and critics instead of taking the easy way out," she added.

Setting a bullying example

Ambiga also questioned Najib for turning on his own people shortly after delivering a speech that emphasised on unity.

She expressed disappointed that a prime minister, who promised transformation and

greater democratic space, is now setting a "bullying example" that others are following.

Citing the slew of police reports lodged by Perkasa against a Malaysiakini journalist, Ambiga asked: "Are we turning into a society of bullies?"

"But Najib can change all that by withdrawing the (sedition) charges," she added.

In his Merdeka speech, Ambiga said, she was pleased when Najib spoke about the next generation.

"But having said that, is this the legacy you wish to leave behind, a society that is oppressive and repressive, where bullying tactics are legitimised?" she asked.

Ambiga also reminded Najib that times have changed, and that Najib is embroiled in a different ball game compared with his predecessors.

"We are in a different era, it is a different ball game now, you have the social media and people who are well informed.

"The leaders must come out of the framework that belongs in the dark ages and move into the 21st century," she said.

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