

Sacking Najib is not the solution

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By Bob Teoh

COMMENT Najib Abdul Razak is probably our worst prime minister going by the news nowadays. But I think getting rid of him as Dr Mahathir Mohamad is bent on doing, is not the solution. The problem, after all, began with the former prime minister himself during his premiership for 22 long years.

If Najib goes, who do we get but Umno's deputy president, Muhyiddin Yassin, who also happens to be the deputy prime minister? It seems to me Muhyiddin has no notable credentials to be PM. His most memorable speech is that he considers himself to be Malay first; being a Malaysian comes only as an afterthought. We don't need to continue to run the country on a race card. So the solution does not lie in fixing the man but fixing a broken system.

Still if what Mahathir has accused Najib of has any truth then Najib should not be allowed to get away with murder by resigning. At the very least, he should be in the dock tried for gross or even criminal negligence of fiduciary duties as finance and prime minister.

As a medical doctor, Mahathir must surely know he can't be giving aspirin to someone to cure the pain when the patient is suffering from terminal cancer.

Mahathir says Najib is not fit to be prime minister. Why so? There are three main reasons; the unresolved gruesome murder of Mongolian model Altantuya Shaariibuu almost a decade ago. In not so many words, Mahathir is trying to hang Najib for this. Then there is the mother of all scandals - the 1MDB a.k.a. the 1Malaysia Dalam Bahaya. Last but not least, is the opulent life style or Mr and Mrs Najib at public expense when the country is swimming in toxic debts.

Mahathir sees a hidden hand in the murder of the Mongolian woman and wants the truth to be out. But Najib responded to this innuendo by going on TV 'live' but with a scripted pre-recorded denial.

"This is a story from long ago. I have taken a religious oath that I did not know Altantuya and I am not involved at all, directly or not," he said.

The then-opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was relentlessly piling up the pressure on Najib, forcing him to swear on Aug 23, 2008 in a small village mosque in Guar Perahu, in Anwar's constituency of Permatang Pauh in Penang.

This is what Najib said then: "Wallahi, Wabillahi, Watallahi (with Allah as my witness), I swear I do not know or have any connection with the Mongolian woman." He did not identify the Mongolian woman by name but the mainstream media was quick to identify her as Altantuya.

Najib clarified that oath did not amount to an “official swearing ceremony” but a matter between him and God. The question remains who was the Mongolian woman he was swearing about.

Najib’s former bodyguards, former police commandos Corporal Sirul Azhar Umar and Chief Inspector Azilah Hadri, were found guilty and sentenced to death by the Federal Court in last year.

Political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda, a confidante of Najib and Altantuya’s lover, who was also charged with abetting Azilah and Sirul, was acquitted by the High Court in 2008 without his defence being called. The government did not appeal his acquittal. Both Razak and Altantuya were linked to the corruption-tainted purchase of two Scorpene French submarines by the Defence Ministry of which Najib was the minister then.

‘Mahathir didn’t see a hidden hand then’

Despite the conviction, the motive for the murder of Altantuya was never revealed. Now Mahathir wants to know who was the hidden hand behind Altantuya’s murder. But Mahathir forgot it was he who hand-picked Najib to be prime minister to replace Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who he had also hand-picked earlier but found to be wanting. Mahathir didn’t see a hidden hand then.

Mahathir has also accused Najib for mismanaging the country’s sovereign fund, 1MDB, that has racked up debts of RM42 billion in circumstances so suspicious that the cabinet is not even aware of the scheme let alone approved it.

Jho Low, a Penang-born billionaire playboy who has links to Rosmah Mansor and her son from her previous marriage, has denied he is involved but his finger prints remain all over the alleged state-run Ponzi scheme. Like all such schemes, it would bottom-out sooner than later only to be bailed out by other government or public funds. Mahathir knows only too well that 1MDB is sunk. The money is lost forever.

Mahathir is no stranger to such hare-brained schemes during his long reign as PM. Take for instance his price manipulation of the world tin market using a RM2 company, Maminco Sdn Bhd, and rogue traders like David Zaidner and Marc Rich on the London Metal Exchange (LME). Mahathir was caught when the LME changed its rules and the US dumped its surplus tin stockpile leading to the crash of the tin market. Maminco lost RM660 million.

What is so ludicrous about Mahathir’s clandestine tin operations is that it was hatched while Hussein Onn was still prime minister but in bad health and Mahathir was effectively running the government. The month Mahathir took over as PM from Hussein in July 1981, Maminco started massive tin buying on the LME.

Mahathir kept denying any wrongdoing for five years until the DAP threatened to expose it in Parliament and Mahathir quickly explained at Umno’s general assembly that he would

have made money if the LME had not changed the rules. The Umno delegates believed him then, as always. Najib did about the same thing when he explained the 1MBD scam to Umno's supreme council a few days ago and they believed him, or so it seems.

As for Mahathir's questioning of Mr and Mrs Najib's opulent lifestyle, Rosmah's lavish spending and shopping jaunts have become legendary. Despite what Najib may have to say about having received "legacy family assets", their current income surely cannot sustain such extravagance. No doubt it's not a crime to flaunt one's wealth but taxpayers need to know the money is coming from. Mahathir is right on this score. And the same applies to him, too.

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