

'I used draconian laws to keep peace, not acquire funds'

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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has justified using draconian laws during his tenure as a means to quash violent racial divides.

"During my time, yes, there were things that I did that were maybe not considered democratic and all that, but my job was to ensure that race relations in this country remained healthy," Mahathir told The Guardian in an interview.

"To that extent, I never used (the powers) for my personal gain, for trying to acquire funds in an illegitimate way. That is an abuse of power," he added in reference to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Mahathir during his tenure of more than two decades was condemned for his regular use of the defunct Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain individuals without trial and for curtailing the powers of the judiciary.

The article in The Guardian article pointed out how some of the publications currently being intimidated by Najib's current administration were also harassed by Mahathir.

The British daily publication also stated that Mahathir had never been contented with his heir-apparent and successors, such as Anwar Ibrahim and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

'I wanted Anwar to succeed me'

Commenting on Anwar, Mahathir premier said: "Sodomy is not a crime in many countries. Even (foreign) ministers now come with their boyfriends. That is very acceptable. These people think I am not giving enough freedom."

"Well, this country is very conservative. We don't want that kind of behaviour to be connected with our prime minister," he added.

Mahathir also said he wanted Anwar, whom he fired as deputy prime minister in 1998, to succeed him.

"I brought him up. But with his faulty moral character, I don't think he was suitable to become prime minister.

"I think he should have succeeded me. In fact, I was ready to step down after the Commonwealth Games in 1998. I thought, 'I've had 18 years of prime ministership, it's time I go and give it to him.'

"But it was exactly at that time that these things were exposed. I felt that he no longer deserved to become prime minister," he added.

Mahathir also said he believes that the person who succeeds Najib would not be as powerful as his predecessors.

"I think if (Najib) steps down, whoever takes over will not be given the kind of authority he had, especially over the police.

"I think the people have learnt our lesson. They cannot give too much power to the prime minister," he said.

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