

**Mahathir: My regret is not with what I had created**

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*"Don't follow the crowd, let the crowd follow you."*

- Margaret Thatcher

The following is the second part of an interview with former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The first part appeared yesterday.

**Critics have asked for some form of regret or repentance on your part. So far this has not been forthcoming. Does Tun have any regrets for the system you helped create and nurture that gave us Prime Minister Najib Razak?**

My regret is not with what I had created. My regret is with regards to the changes in the mentality of Umno members. Once they get into a position, they prevent people with caliber, good people from joining Umno because they are not thinking about Umno, they are thinking about their position.

That, I regret, because I am willing to give up my position as PM. Nobody asked me to, nobody even knew, and I thought that would be a lesson to them - when people think you are overstaying your welcome, please go. It wasn't that I was unpopular, I could still win elections but I decided to go.

These people once they are in positions they do not want to go. I have met senators, and they want to go on and on and on, so they prevent other people from being nominated as senators. I limited that to two terms only so others can have a chance.

This is the problem with a party in power, the tendency is to manipulate so that you stay in place. I didn't want to do that because when the time comes for me to go I go.

**Does Tun think there should be a term limit for Umno presidency?**

Well, that is something that could be thought about. There are pros and cons. If you don't give a leader enough time, he cannot achieve but if you give a leader too much time he may abuse, but even within a short period of time and you can see with Najib – how many years? – already he is abusing his powers.

So it is not the time he has power that is important, it is the character of the person and the ability of the members to get rid of that person. Once he shows signs of going the wrong way, he should be removed. The members should be able to remove him.

### **Why does Tun think that Umno has been unable to dislodge Najib?**

Well, he has a certain hold on them. You know, he likes to give rewards. He believes that cash is king and whenever somebody is displaced, he creates a job, a special job for them so they can continue to earn a lot of money, that's the way he operates.

Let's say a minister is dismissed, then he creates a job for that minister, gives him a good salary say that you have ministerial rank, which is very costly for the government, and you get a lot of pay, allowances.

So that is why people don't want to give up, they want to stay because they are comfortable and there are a lot of accusations that he gives them money. Two of them admitted - Shahrir (Abdul Samad) admitted he got one million (ringgit), Ahmad Maslan admitted he got two million.

### **And in Tun's thinking this is a clear case of corruption?**

Yes, it certainly cannot be just those two people. If only those two people were to get, the other would say, "What about me? If you don't give, I will stop supporting you."

### **What happens to all those people who have benefited from his leadership?**

When he steps down, they also will need to go. But we are a democracy in Malaysia, we believe we should things democratically, it is up to the party whether you want to keep these people or not, and I am quite sure the party will not want to keep these people because many members are also eyeing for these places. If they are still there, they don't have a chance.

### **Is the PAC (public accounts committee) report credible?**

It is not a credible commission despite the fact that it had opposition members. What it has revealed is that short of what actually happened, many things that are not dealt with were basically covered up. But there are many things in the PAC report that confirms all the accusations against 1MDB, that money has been moved here and there, that money has disappeared.

This is admitted by the PAC. If the PAC doesn't publish the report, then it will become an official secret and we will not be able to say anything.

### **What about the PAC chairman who cleared Najib of wrongdoing?**

He must be blind. Because article 117 (of 1MDB's memorandum of articles and association) that says everything which is done in 1MDB must have the approval of Najib and he signed. He admitted that he signed. Now of course, his legal advisor is saying that he signed but that doesn't mean he agrees.

Now how do you say I signed a document but I do not agree with the document. If you don't agree, you don't sign.

**Does Tun believe there should be a referendum on Najib?**

If you want to have a referendum by all means do. Let the people have a say. You are denying people information. You are denying people their rights to express an opinion and even to carry out their legal duties.

As members of parliament, they have a right to criticise the PM even if he is from the same party. In all countries even if you are in the same party and you find your PM doing something wrong, you don't support him.

**Is relying on international pressure an effective way in removing Najib when foreign governments find him useful?**

Well, you have to resort to international pressure because all the means of redress within the country has been shut down by Najib. You make a police report, nothing is done. Instead you are jailed for making the police report. If you give a report to the AG (attorney-general), he dismisses it without revealing the contents; you can't even have a vote of no confidence. So what do you do?

You have to accept the fact that the whole world condemns Najib and calls him the worst minister of finance in Asia and we cannot be proud of that.

**Would Tun find it acceptable for foreign powers to interfere in domestic affairs of this country?**

I do not believe that foreign powers should interfere in our internal affairs, that is provided our internal affairs is working according to the laws of this country. Now Najib has brushed aside the law. I mean he can charge a person of being a terrorist under a law meant for terrorism when this man had nothing to do with terrorism. We are helpless. What can we do?

You remember what happened to Cambodia. The Cambodian government slaughtered two million of their people. That is an internal affair but if you accept that slaughtering your own people is okay, then foreign nations should not interfere. But when foreign nations see you actually disregarding all the systems, all the laws of your country, I think foreign nations have a right to criticise.

**Pro-Najib forces claim you have as many corruption scandals as the sitting prime minister. How does Tun respond to this?**

You know when I stepped down, Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi) tried very hard to find

something against me, he couldn't. And Najib also would like to find something against me. But so far, he has not found anything. The fact is that I don't take money from the government, even when I am entitled to it. When I was retiring, they wanted to give me land for free. I said no, I will buy the land.

And all the gifts that were given to me during my tenure, from the time I was minister of education - 29 years - I accumulated huge amounts of gifts which are sometimes very valuable, I didn't take them. The cars that have been given to me - 26 cars - all are given back to the government. Even when they were given to me, I refused to accept them as mine.

So if I wanted to accept money, I could have accepted but my style of living is within my means. I don't have palaces. I don't have weddings for my children. Have you heard about the weddings of my children? I never spent the money because I don't have the money.

I was brought up to be very careful about money and even when I was with the government. To me, money was not important; what I do and if I succeed, that is important. I don't work for money. Otherwise, I could be very rich but they can investigate if I took any government money.

### **How does Tun intend to reform the system, when Tun has complained of the system of patronage within Umno?**

Yes, there is a system of patronage but that is applied almost entirely to whatever happens. But there are people who have achieved because they have the capability. And these are the people who succeed not necessarily because they are cronies, but they succeed because they have the skill to make a success of whatever it is they are doing.

And when they make a bid they present better bids than others do so they get it. It is not a question of cronyism it is a question of your ability to deliver and these people have delivered. But there are people who try to make bids for contracts [for example] who fail but these people are not regarded as your crony.

In fact, they would probably be known to the cabinet or somebody because they have some connection but their presentation is bad, their record is bad and they didn't get it but because they didn't get they are not regarded as cronies.

Those who get, these are all cronies. So what can we do? Make sure that everybody fails? Then there will be no cronies. But then you make sure everybody fails and the country suffers.

### **What does Tun think of the alliance between PAS and Umno considering Tun's rhetoric about PAS?**

Well, if you want to have an alliance, you must have a common understanding. You can't

have an alliance with two different thoughts. So this is not an alliance, this is political expediency. Whereas the BN and the Ikatán before, they were true allies. They believed in certain things and they came together because of that.

But here PAS and Umno has nothing in common. But they came together because I will support you as you support me because I am in trouble.

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