

One swallow does not a summer make
Malaysiakini.com
July 30, 2010

For years, I had to endure the ignorant insistence by Malaysians who argue that whoever is conferred a Tunship by the Agong, would enjoy legal immunity.

This gave rise to rumours that Mahathir Mohamad was in haste to secure this title in order to protect himself from legal actions over all the misdeeds committed during his premiership.

Others maintained that once Samy Vellu was made a Tun, he too would be beyond the long arm of the law.

Not true. According to the supreme ruler's website, while Tunship does accord the recipient with the privilege to use the VIP room at the KL International Airport, it says practically nothing about legal immunity.

NONE Following the constitutional amendment in 1993 - and we don't have to thank Mahathir for that - it is now possible to bring proceedings against even the Agong or Sultan through special provisions and in the Special Court.

Thus granting a Tun legal immunity would only imply that the recipient is above the royal rulers.

Many were still not convinced. But with the prosecution of Ling Liong Sik (left) over the Port Klang Free Zone scandal, the myth is finally shattered.

The next question: is Najib Abdul Razak trying to prove to the public that his government is now serious about fighting corruption root and branch?

If anything, the appearance of Ling in court yesterday to face charges of cheating the government by misleading the cabinet on the land acquisition in Port Klang only reminds me of February 2004.

In that month, Kasitah Gaddam became the first cabinet minister to be charged in court with corrupt practices and cheating.

Kasitah's arraignment came just two days after Eric Chia, the former managing director of the now discredited Perwaja Steel Sdn Bhd, was brought to court over criminal breach of trust involving more than RM76 million.

These two high-profile prosecutions were giving the public high hopes that Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would eventually have a clean break with Mahathir's corrupt rule and that more big fish would be nabbed.

One month later, Abdullah went to the country, with the mainstream Chinese media portraying him as Mr Clean and a modern version of Justice Pao. He was rewarded with a huge victory that only made Mahathir quietly angry and jealous.

Uphill battle

The rest is history. Not only that the much hyped-up anti-graft war under Abdullah ended as

a flop with no more big guns under arrest, both Kasitah and Chia were also subsequently acquitted.

Before he stepped down as prime minister, Abdullah could only lament that rooting out corruption was an uphill battle.

kamaluddin abdullahOf course it was. To eliminate Malaysia's endemic culture of patronage, Abdullah ought to have explained in full how his son Kamaluddin (left) had secured the position of a leading shareholder of Scomi Group, whose share price shot up by nearly 600 percent just a few months before Abdullah was scheduled to take over from Mahathir as prime minister.

Abdullah's mentor-turned-nemesis, Mahathir, would in the following years go around the country alleging that Scomi had bagged RM1 billion worth of government contracts since 2004, turning Kamaluddin into an overnight multi-millionaire.

We must also not forget that Khairy Jamaluddin's meteoric rise to become the nation's most powerful young man took place during Abdullah's tenure. By 2006, Khairy the son-in-law too had made a fortune with the merger between ECM Libra Capital Bhd and the government-linked Avenue Capital Resources Bhd.

And I do wonder if Kamaluddin and Khairy were both given discounts on their posh houses.

Father in high places

Strange, isn't it? It would seem that most of the brightest and the shrewdest in Malaysia's business circle happen to have a father in high places. Mahathir reiterated time and again that his sons were successful businessmen "in their own right", while Ling argued that Ling Hee Leong became a multi-billionaire by the age of 30 because his son was "diligent and clever".

abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah 131107 02And I laughed my head off when Abdullah (left) repeatedly said that both Kamaluddin and Khairy had never used his name for business purposes. The election results in 2008 proved that it was a defence in futility.

With history in mind, one can be forgiven for thinking that Ling's sudden fall from grace is merely part of a sandiwara (drama) by Najib to shore up his support ahead of the 13th general election.

As Winston Churchill once famously said, in time of war, when truth is so precious, she must be attended to by a bodyguard of lies.

I suppose Najib is now badly in need of a better bodyguard.

Why? Because having been fooled by Abdullah in 2004, people were so furious that they punished him with the so-called political tsunami four years later.

Far smarter than his immediate predecessor, Najib would not be so naïve to think he could regain two-thirds majority in Parliament simply by putting Ling in the dock, would he? He knows he has to do much better than that.

Or perhaps Ling's case is just a warning shot.

Back in 2003, an Austrian businessman by the name of Franz Christoph Heldwein came to Malaysia in an attempt to recover the losses incurred from business deals between him and Ling.

What raised eyebrows was that a meeting was arranged by Soh Chee Wen, then Ling's close associate who is now one of Anwar Ibrahim's 'wise men', at the Transport Ministry. It was a sheer abuse of power and Ling escaped unscathed.

If Ling was unblemished then, why now?

Elegant silence

Two weeks ago, PJ Utara MP Tony Pua revealed that Muhyiddin Yassin, when agriculture minister, signed an endorsement letter for a government tuna port venture worth RM240 million in 2006. The bonds later defaulted, resulting in possible multiple lawsuits.

While Muhyiddin continues to maintain his elegant silence, all is not well between him and Najib, judging from recent developments in Umno.

It is widely speculated that the politically insatiable deputy prime minister, who so brilliantly engineered the downfall of Abdullah in partnership with Mahathir, is now teamed up with the latter and also the hawks in the party such as Ibrahim Ali and Ahmad Ismail to ensure Najib becomes the shortest-lived prime minister.

So is Ling's prosecution meant to be a stern warning by Najib to fidgety challengers in his own backyard?

NONE In the cruel world of Umno infighting, Ling is no sacrificial lamb but has been a vital partner in crime. No longer needed, he is now expendable, to the detriment of Chua Soi Lek (right), a faithful protégé of Ling once caught with his pants down.

That the MCA leadership had been kept in the dark over the major move by the AG's Chambers yesterday only indicates that BN parties have lost their relevance, and it may not be too long before the subtle tussle between the rival camps in Umno becomes visible to all.

But I am certain the public will not be satisfied with the netting of a rotten fish head; Malaysians want to see really big fish hauled up, and the more the merrier.

A swallow does not a summer make. Let's just sit back and watch as the sandiwara unfolds.

Sorry Tun Ling, you ain't worth my tears.

JOSH HONG studied politics at London Metropolitan University and the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. A keen watcher of domestic and international politics, he longs for a day when Malaysians will learn and master the art of self-mockery, and enjoy life to the full in spite of politicians.

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