

PM 'must tread lightly' with Dr M on guard
Malaysiakini.com
August 04 2010

After two successors and almost seven years after vowing to take a back seat, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad is showing no sign of doing so.

Having been a vocal critic of his handpicked successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, recent developments indicate that Mahathir may be none too happy with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak either.

NONEA clear indication of this came earlier this week when Mahathir took a swipe at Najib, whom he had endorsed, for having failed to explain his 1Malaysia slogan convincingly.

“They (the public) do not know which is which, which ones are for the Chinese and which ones are for the Malays. If I were to explain, how should I know? I was not the one who created the slogan,” he said.

1Malaysia has not been the only area at which Mahathir has turned up his nose.

Only a month into Najib's premiership, the veteran politician weighed in against him on the reversal of the policy to teach Science and Mathematics in English.

Through his blog, which courts several million readers, Mahathir chided the then newly-minted premier for wavering on policy decisions.

NONEHowever, Mahathir had no issues with Najib's apparent policy reversal on the issue of bumiputera affirmative action due to pressure from the Malay community.

After months of apparent support, the elder statesperson took a stance against Najib's New Economic Model (NEM), which had called for the cancellation of racial quotas.

Mahathir also became patron of Malay rights NGO Perkasa. Emboldened by his endorsement, Perkasa fronted the Malay Consultative Council to pile pressure on Najib, leading him to finally claim that nothing had been finalised on the NEM.

Turning point

For political analyst Shamsul Adabi Mamat, the Perkasa episode signified a turn in the Najib-Mahathir relations which, he said, has had its ebbs and flows.

Mahathir Mohamad visits Najib Razak in Putrajaya “When Najib became PM, there were indications that their relations were chilly, but things picked up until the Perkasa issue, which led to public perception that something is not right,” said the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia lecturer.

However, he said, Mahathir's endorsement of Perkasa is more an attack on Umno and less on Najib's performance as prime minister.

The cheating charge against former transport minister Dr Ling Liong Sik, who served in Mahathir's cabinet, is also not likely to strain the relationship even though it may reflect badly on the former premier.

Yesterday, Mahathir said he was willing to be a witness in the case against Ling, but that his responsibility in the matter was limited “as there are lots of things that a prime minister does not know”.

“The public may have the perception that it may cause damage (between the two), but his statement on this shows that he is willing to help the government solve the issue,” said Shamsul.

“We are still at a stage where (Mahathir) is giving suggestions which he hopes the PM will consider.”

The suggestions, he said, would not cause Mahathir's ties with Najib to turn turbulent just yet, because the PM was treading carefully.

“(Najib) knows that Mahathir can sway public opinion and he can ill-afford to have strained relations with (the latter),” Shamsul added.

'Mahathir's shadow'

Similarly, Universiti Malaya political scientist Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad said Mahathir's public statements were signals to Najib.

“It seems that for Mahathir, Najib's one year as premier is not bearing the 'right' results. He is using a psychological approach by highlighting these matters publicly so Najib will take notice,” she said.

NONE It is also likely that Mahathir's seeming 'mentor-mentee' relationship with deputy premier Muhyiddin Yassin is adding to the pressure on Najib.

“Muhyiddin (left) is like Mahathir's shadow. He knows what is right and what is not right (by Mahathir) and he tries to guide Najib,” she said.

Noor Sulastry said Najib would do well to keep the “unofficial government adviser” at bay by acting carefully, especially on economic matters.

This, she said, was among the key reasons which led to the breakdown in the Abdullah-Mahathir relations.

But with Mahathir recently publishing a lengthy blog entry in which he poked holes in Najib's high-income economy goal, the writing may very well be on the wall.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/139176>