



Dr M crusades to save BN
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COMMENT Dr Mahathir is back in the control room. No longer content to be a bystander as in the early years of Abdullah Badawi's premiership, Mahathir is back to save the BN from itself.

This will probably be his most challenging mission yet and, judging from his advanced age, will probably kill him. But saving the BN means more to Mahathir (below) than even his own life. Such is the self-sacrificing nature of Malaysia's greatest prime minister ever.

To be a stable nation, the Malays, the majority race, must be in control. As Ibrahim Ali said, we all have rights but we are not equal. He used the analogy of a household where there is a father, mother, children and servants. Even servants have rights but they cannot be in the same bed with their masters.

So be clear, 1Malaysia is not about equality but knowing one's place in society. Presumably, Ibrahim Ali cannot be suggesting that the Malays are the servants as they have special rights. It is quite clear that the rest of us, the trouble-making non-Malays, should know our place.

Once the master race is in complete control as in the 22 years of Mahathir's rule, all will be well. Economic development and material progress is assured. Globally, Malaysia will be respected and everyone will be happy. The only problem with this hypothesis is that we had 22 years of glorious Mahathir rule and yet we are not happy at all.

Could the last five years of Abdullah Badawi's administration be so bad that it destroyed all that Mahathir built up? Was not Abdullah Badawi the anointed heir hand-picked by Mahathir? Did not Abdullah Badawi rise in the ranks because of Mahathir? Did not Mahathir personally "train" Abdullah Badawi when he was in the Mahathir cabinet in those great wonderful years?

Just when you thought it was safe

Mahathir, who never shies away from taking responsibility for his actions, once wrote in his blog that he regretted choosing Abdullah Badawi. That is why he is now devoting his dotage, his last years to rectify his mistake. In fact, all the political woes that the BN faces now can be attributed to Mahathir's terrible mistakes in choosing the wrong heirs.



His hand-picked one time successor Anwar Ibrahim (left) is now leader of the opposition.

His one-time deputy prime minister, Musa Hitam, is now chairman of Sime Darby. Mahathir recently called for the entire board of directors of Sime Darby to resign over huge losses incurred over bad investments in the middle east and over the Bakun dam project. Even Bakun was another Mahathir project.

Any other leader would look back at all the bad choices and

financial losses and cringe and slink away from the public eye. But Mahathir is “not for turning”. Just when Malaysians think it was safe to return to more democratic practices like drawing cartoons and writing in blogs, Mahathir returns to centre-stage telling the Malays that they risk losing political power if they voted for the opposition coalition.

How will Dr Mahathir save the BN? Well, by becoming the receptacle of middle Malaysia's concentrated hatred. Unlike Najib Razak and Abdullah Badawi, Mahathir never entered politics to be popular or even liked. He does not care very much about public opinion and it was this core element that made him so successful politically.

'Malays are losing power. They need a hero. They cannot rely on Umno alone. The opposition needs to be stopped at all costs'. So, the Perak constitutional debacle is acceptable because it was a “Chinese government” that was in power. Toppling a Chinese government is okay because the Chinese should know their place in Malaysia. It is akin to the servants trying to get into bed with their masters.

Never mind that the Perak state government was elected by the people. That was a momentary action of madness; they were angry with Abdullah Badawi. They did not reject the BN, they rejected Abdullah Badawi.

Furthermore, it was not a Malay government they elected, but a “Chinese government”. Plus there is no such thing as a Malaysian government unless it is an Umno (read Malay) dominated coalition where the servants know their place.

There is no doubt that whilst Najib Razak tries to win over the non-Malays, Mahathir rallies the conservative Malay ground with his “insider-knowledge” about Anwar Ibrahim, his great track record, his ultra-commitment to protecting Malay rights and his master strategy to return the BN to power.

Money defies gravity

If Umno cannot raise the keris, Perkasa can and Mahathir will use Perkasa as his political renaissance. It is so powerful that it can even wag its tail at the BN secretary-general and get away with it.



Ibrahim Ali is just an agent and can dream till the cows come home but will never be part of the political super-elite composed for the great Malay first families and Malaysia's political aristocracy. He will do well so long as he too knows his place in the real Malaysian house and not try to get into the bed of his masters.

There are three flaws in this strategy and if Mahathir wants to succeed he must take cognizance of them. First, technology has made it impossible to be everything to everybody. Politicians do not like to be tied down to principles or a consistent political stance.

Mahathir was uncompromising about development; it meant material development. He was seen as a bulwark against increasing Islamisation and, at the end of his premiership, he was ironically more popular with the non-Malays than the Malays.

Today, the situation has returned to circa 1969, with Mahathir seen once again as a Malay Ultra (whatever that means). But he must remember that everything he ever said is

“remembered”. More importantly, his action-oriented style is showing up Najib's less decisive-style and can, in the long term, hurt the government.

Second, politicians must remember that they should be flexible and not be too preoccupied by legacy issues. This was what made Mahathir an iconoclast. Nothing was sacred including the national anthem, that we all literally sang to a faster beat when he was PM.

Similarly, he should now allow Najib Razak to re-visit sacred cows like the NEP and modify them. He cannot allow legacy issues to blind him to the reality that some of his initiatives, no matter how well-meant, have failed.

The idea of creating a Malay billionaire class in the hope that they would help other Malays did not work, as money defies gravity and trickles up and never down. By blaming the non-Malays for policy changes and the revisiting of the NEP is to miss the point.

If Mahathir understands this and still pursues the path of racial divisions then his legacy will truly be defined by his final years. Like Tony Blair, whom he hates, he will be defined by the charge of racism which he rejects so vehemently in his blogs.

Move over Najib

Three, by entering the political centre-stage, Mahathir is literally crowding out Najib Razak. When Tunku Abdul Rahman retreated from politics, he left for the Middle East to take up a post at the OIC. Mahathir himself knows how difficult it is to be his own person with ex-premiers making public statements in the mainstream press.



Najib (left) does not have the advantage of closing down the Internet like Mahathir who closed down newspapers and then imposed strict controls over the mainstream press.

What he could not control, his businessmen colleagues bought and disciplined. Mahathir also knows that after 22 years of his signature rule, prime ministers must be seen to be in charge. Abdullah Badawi tried a different more consensual style but could not pull it off.

Najib now has to be assertive, decisive yet appear democratic. With Mahathir appearing all the time in all channels, the PM has little chance of owning and pushing through any initiative.

Yet it might all work out well for Najib. Let the two titans, Mahathir and Anwar, slug it out. At the end of the giant clash, that will happen very soon in the next general election, both would be defeated. Anwar would be politically vanquished and Mahathir would probably be physically incapacitated. At 85, how many more years can he keep up with his punishing schedule?

For Malaysians, this political battle royal has resulted in a lost decade characterised by inertia and stagnation on all fronts. These political leaders will eventually fade away but we will have to pick up the pieces and live with the consequences of their childish, egoistical and silly behaviour.

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