

The dilemma: A Malay handicap
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Mahathir Mohamad's premiership was a mixture of adulation and fear. He was considered a Third World hero, a Malay champion and a divisive character. His admirers range from kampung folk to western educated non-Malay professionals. Although he resigned in 2003, he refuses to retire gracefully and cannot resist the political limelight. Last week, his damning statement, "To be given handicaps is to ensure fairness" caused outrage.

That statement appeared in Mahathir's blog, when he apologised to the Malaysian students in Melbourne, for his failure, through illness, to present his talk, "Are we ready for 1Malaysia: Does race still play a part?"

In it, Mahathir claims to 'love' Malaysia and said, "I am past self-interest".

Is he confirming he acted out of self-interest in the past and not out of the interests of the nation? Or is he looking down on the current crop of politicians who he believes is acting out of 'self-interest'?

His talk would have covered how "Malays must be treated as special and different", "for as long as the Chinese and Indians prefer to be identified with their countries of origin..... and keep their home languages and their schools".

Mahathir needs to be reminded that his policies perpetuate division. From the time we are born we are obliged to classify our racial orientation on our birth certificate, and later our identity cards. At school, specific subjects are taught to certain races. Racial quotas determine eligibility for scholarships or for civil service jobs. No one can escape their racial identity.

Non-Malays identify themselves as Malaysians. They were born here. Malaysia is home. It is the government which fails to acknowledge that.

Mahathir's obsession with race continues to be championed by Malay extremists. The problem is that the average Malay has a high expectation that his race entitles him to profits and riches.

We must be honest and make the most of ourselves by building our self-confidence. Aspiration and hard-work are not something we are born with, but something which anyone of us can learn.

Upbringing proved his success

Mahathir seems disingenuous especially as his upbringing proved his success. As a child, his highly motivated and disciplined father subjected him to a rigorous regime of study which made him excel at school and improved his mathematics and English.

Mahathir developed positive traits of discipline, hard-work, self-improvement and good learning habits. He spoke good English and was a voracious reader. All these changed his life.

Why is Mahathir denying the ordinary Malay the chance to excel, be disciplined, stretch himself, shake off his provincial thinking, be rewarded by hard work and realise that fear of

failure is only in the mind? Is this political expediency or lack of political will?

On a social level, Mahathir easily made friends with people from all ethnic backgrounds. And yet, his racial stance encouraged enmity amongst the various races.

Why perpetuate the myth that Malays need handouts? Mahathir told his children "nothing came easy" and there was "no shortcut to success".

Extremists are fuelled by Mahathir's racist rhetoric and will never earn the respect of others. These 'ultras' assume arrogance and tell unhappy non-Malays to 'return to their homeland'.

Mahathir argues that Malays who condemn the NEP fall into two groups.

The first group includes politicians or party supporters "motivated by a desire to get Chinese support". He said "They assume that they themselves would lead the nation and enjoy power and opportunities through Chinese support" and branded ex-Perak Menteri Besar Nizar Jamaluddin as a "mere puppet".

The second group is the non-politically educated Malays who are "ashamed they have to be helped". He said, "If we study these people almost invariably they have benefited from the NEP" but "they are ashamed to admit that they were unable to compete with the other races."

Why insult the Malays who succeeded on their own? Mahathir is emphatic he is a 'successful Malay'. Why disbelieve and begrudge the competence and capability of other Malays?

He then said, "the Chinese excel in developing Malaysia (for which they are amply rewarded)", and "Simply to catch up with them we need handicaps. To be given handicaps is to ensure fairness, not discrimination", as in a game of golf.

Competent golfers don't need handicaps

Mahathir failed to mention that once golfers become competent, they are 'scratch players' and do not need handicaps.

Left to Mahathir, Malays will always be given a handicap and be 'handicapped' for life. One would have thought that after 53 years of Umno, the Malays would not need this handicap.

He said, "It is selfish if having benefited from the handicaps you want to deny others from having them." But it is Mahathir who is selfish in wanting to continue putting the Malays down.

Not all non-Malays are rich and successful. There are poor Malays AND poor non-Malays. Only the cronies benefit.

Whilst Prime Minister Najib is desperate for his 1Malaysia policy to work, his efforts are hampered by Mahathir, goading from the sidelines, like a bully and a spoilsport.

If Perkasa, who echoes Mahathir's sentiments, is keen on Malay supremacy, why lap up every word of Mahathir who has Indian ancestry?

Two school principals who made derogatory comments about their students and the Biro Tata Negara assistant director, Hamim Husan who called the Chinese and Indian

communities "*si mata sepet*" and "*si botol*" respectively, have conveniently disappeared from the public radar.

No one knows if investigations proved they were guilty of racism and punished. A motion to debate racism was disallowed by the speaker of the Parliament.

Najib's insincerity towards 1Malaysia is shown by his failure to censure the racists. Moreover, a Race Relations Act was rejected presumably because Umno benefits from racial inequality.

Unsurprisingly, BN's non-Malay political parties were hardly vocal and did not hold Najib to account. Why?

If Najib was more decisive and used the laws on sedition to lock-up Mahathir, racist politicians including Cabinet members and key civil servants, only then will Malaysians get the message he is serious about 1Malaysia and racism.

If he was a capable leader, he would sack those ministers who claim they lack the 'power' to act.

Unless Najib is willing to demonstrate steadfastness and commitment, few will believe in his 1Malaysia ideal.

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