

**Q&A: no gentleman's agreement between us**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Mar 05, 2008**  
**Soon Li Tsin**

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad clarifies that there was no gentleman's agreement for his successor to serve only one term in this first of a three-part interview.  
MCPX

**Malaysiakini: You previously said that this election could be the most corrupt. Ten days into the campaigning period do you still hold to that?**

Mahathir: I have no evidence of such things because corruption is not something that can be easily proved but I suspect there would be corruption because I believe in the by-elections before there was corruption.

mahathir interview 050308 sinisterBut of course in the general election, it is far more difficult because of the numbers involved but I am quite sure that if need be some people ... may resort to corruption. The top leadership may not know but (it could happen) in the ground level.

What corruption are we talking about? Is it money or phantom voters? You must have some idea of how it is done or how it could be done.

(Laughs) I don't think it is possible to take away ballot boxes. Even phantom voters is quite difficult but what could happen of course (is) that a lot of money can change hands. Voters may be approached in marginal areas by whichever party - government or opposition - in order to get the few votes that would win the elections.

**What about the issue of postal voters?**

Well, the armed forces and police - they vote in front of their officers. I don't think there were any observers. This time I am told there are supposed to be observers. Although I have not seen it, I saw it in the papers police voting but I have not seen the actual voting being done with observers from the opposition or government parties. So I cannot really comment on something that I really don't know.

**Is there any possibility that ballot papers are marked by their superiors?**

I don't think their superiors mark the ballot papers but the presence of their superiors creates an impression on the minds of the uniformed staff but I do know during my time there were a lot of votes cast against BN especially in 1999. That is why we barely managed to win.

**Do you honestly think the Election Commission is independent?**

Well, it is not subject to direct instruction but sometimes a government tends to presume that they are the authority, like fixing this and things like that. Actually all those things

should be done by the EC. The government's role is merely to dissolve Parliament. After that it is up to the EC but for the EC to say 'I already know when the election (will be)' that is all wrong.

We have not yet understood the meaning of independence. Although we are independent, we tend to sometimes play the wrong game.

**What about the fact that the EC could be put under pressure such as the redrawing of boundaries where there could be consultation made between the EC and the government?**

I think it is the local people who are very concerned about this. The government would not know. I think the local people of course may protest when new boundaries are drawn and I think by and large the EC listens to this because they cannot just draw any way they like, it must be related to the population in the given area. Otherwise you have some constituencies with huge number of voters and others are very few. PAS always makes a lot of noise.

**Many are saying that the revoke of the indelible ink could work in BN's favour. Why do you think the EC actually decided to reverse their decision or do you think they are justified to do so?**

abdul rashid ec chairman and indelible ink for election 010607People in the rural areas, in particular, are not very sophisticated. In the old days, people used to tell them if you don't like the party then cross it (laughs). Then the party they did not like (were given) a lot of votes. This time round, what happen is that somebody has apparently imported this ink from India and if they go around and started marking the fingers of the villagers, they go to the voting station and their fingers are already marked so they cannot vote, then they lose votes.

**Do you think Malaysia voters are that gullible to buy into this sort of thing?**

But this is a new thing. Marking the cross is an old thing, a lot of people know about that. But this is a new thing using the indelible ink on the finger. So you don't need a big number of people, just a small number of people getting that thing (the ink) and not voting. It may make the difference between winning and losing for whichever party.

**How many seats do you think the opposition will be able to win this time around?**

Last time (BN) won 90 percent of the seats. Two-third means 66 percent. If it's two-third, then it is already 24 per cent of the votes. That's a big drop if that happens. That's why my assessment is that there will be a drop but it will not be 24 percent. I think that the government would still win a two-thirds majority.

**If the government won 90 percent of the seats (in 2004), how much do you think they would win this time?**

About 70 to 75 percent.

**What do you think of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis - the Malay belt - from what you have heard?**

Malays are very loyal to their parties. The only time when they were not loyal was in 1999 when they voted against the government. So I expect a few seats to be lost in Kedah and a few more seats in Terengganu.

Kelantan would be a very difficult thing because although the margin is very small, Kelantanese have got a mind of their own, so to speak. If they are living in KL (Kuala Lumpur) they are very supportive of the government but if they are living in Kelantan, the peer pressure is very strong.

**What about chances of your son, Mukhriz, in Jerlun?**

I think he has a reasonable chance unless of course something unexpected happens. I should imagine that he would win by a small majority. But if somebody instructs Umno members not to vote for him then he will lose.

**He has been given a difficult seat. Do you think this could be an attempt to kill him politically?**

Well, there are a lots of talks like that, it's almost Machiavellian to think of such things. Maybe there are a few people who thought that this is the intention, but I have not seen any positive signs of this thing being deliberately done.

**What about Penang and the Chinese votes?**

Even before the elections, from what I get to learn about the Chinese attitude, they are not happy with the government because of no business opportunities and things like that. So there will be a diminution of votes from the Chinese voters.

How much it will diminish is another matter, maybe even sufficient to cause the Gerakan and all to lose a few seats. Whether it'll be sufficient for DAP and PKR to get the majority, I don't think it's possible. In Penang, maybe not (for the opposition to deny) two-thirds (majority).

**Do you think the opposition is equipped this time around to put up a formidable fight or is it a case of the government being weak thus making the opposition look strong?**

The opposition is not very smart - the way it approaches the elections. There are so many things that they can make an issue of and attack the government but I don't see them doing that.

**Issues such as?**

Well, the economy and all that. They can't argue on the economy because people are so taken up with the figures that the government has published but they can't argue about such things. So they cannot convince the people and PAS is even unable to play the Islamic state card because PAS will lose non-Malay votes. By and large, the opposition is quite incapable of playing up real issues.

Instead they brought out a CD about me saying that I regret arresting (Anwar). I mean any stupid fool would have seen that it was a sarcastic remark made by me. But they make use of such things and this convince voters that they are not really knowledgeable about things or they are not very sophisticated in the use of the media.

And of course they said something about my attack on Pak Lah. Well, I did say those things because I was critical. Within Umno, it is possible to be critical without being anti-Umno or anti-Barisan Nasional.

**What about the opposition's promise that if they come into power, there will not be a fuel hike and they would give monthly allowances to certain groups by relying on Petronas' money?**

The opposition doesn't seem to understand that it has fielded very few candidates from each party and they are not working together. There is no possibility for them to become the government. There is no possibility for them to win the election and form the government. I mean when you talk about it, people think you are silly.

That's why I say the opposition doesn't seem to understand the real factors that favour them. They talk about things they cannot do. Of course, they say 'when we become the government' but will you become the government? There has been 11 elections so far - your performance is terrible, you're fighting each other.

**In one of your speeches you were adamant that 'Pak Lah bohong'. In what way did he lie?**

(Laughs) Well, when he said they had no money to continue with the projects, that is not true. When I left, I made sure that the party, the government and the finances are in good shape. I don't just leave because this is a retirement and (I was) not under pressure. This is a retirement I made on my own accord and I cannot leave the government (in a bad shape).

mahathir leaflet 050308 bukan pilihan pertama I wanted to resign in 1998 but if I left, the whole thing would be in shambles. You see what happened in the 1999 elections. So I stayed on to put things back in order. So when I am told that these projects have been postponed because of no money, this is not true, it's definitely not true. If I was still the prime minister, I could go on not only with the projects that has already in the pipeline but also with new projects because we had money.

You know, when we wanted to build a new airport, people said this is very expensive. Somebody told me this is going to cost me RM20 billion. We built the airport, it cost us RM8 billion and it is the finest airport in the world. It is how you manage money that is important. Some countries like America has not a single cent but it still survives.

**Abdullah has completed one full term as PM. There was talk that you wanted him to be there for only one term. Can you clarify that matter?**

I want to say this, there was no gentleman's agreement on this but my thinking was that he should serve for one term and give Najib (Razak) who by then would be much older to succeed him, you see. We believe in a very smooth transition, you know. When one PM exits, a new PM who was the deputy takes over.

**Was he on the same wavelength on you on that?**

I don't know.

**Why did you choose to give Abdullah just one term and not longer?**

If it is longer then Najib will be a very old man by the time he becomes PM. I have a great deal of respect for Najib. I have worked with him and whenever we give him a job, he will do it.

**Why didn't you just appoint Najib as PM?**

Because I thought Abdullah was older and well, I thought he should be given a chance. I don't want to show that because he went against me therefore I exclude him. I have accepted people who have fought against me and tried to bring me down.

**With your plan unravelling and Abdullah intending to stay for more than one term, do you regret making the decision to appoint Abdullah as PM?**

Well, in a way I regret but of course it is his right also to try and stay on.

**If you were to give a report card for Abdullah, how will you rate his performance in the past four years?**

I thought he has already delivered his report card? (laughs) Well certainly the bridge is not built, the railway is not built, the Bakun project was not implemented. It is up to the people to judge. You see, I would be bias.

Of course if you ask a former PM what he thinks of the new PM, he would say 'oh, he's not good' and all that. That is normal and for the new PM if he wants to leave his mark but the unfortunate thing is that the mark cause some losses for us. That is why I was so critical.

**Khairy (Jamaluddin) will be perhaps a minister after the elections and previously you said it will be disastrous. Why is that?**

Because of the way he operates. I mean he is involved with Kalimullah (Hassan) in controlling the press, he has done [...] with regards to ECM-Libra and the acquisition of the Avenue assets. We also hear about (him) splashing money and things like that.

**So you think he is going to become a pretty bad leader?**

Well, he has said that 'I can do these things because I get protection from my father-in-law'. Nobody should ever say that. Do the right thing - you don't ask for protection from your father-in-law.

**And that's the reason why he wants Abdullah to continue as PM?**

Well, I think it's very comfortable to have you father-in-law always protecting you.

**On the eve of the elections, what would be your message to Malaysian voters?**

Vote sensitively. Vote not only with party loyalty concerns but also vote in order to have good people setting up a good government.

**Would you argue to vote for a strong opposition?**

mahathir interview 050308 angerWell, I believe in an opposition, I have always maintained that this country needs an opposition and they should be critical of the government without which we don't have a mirror to look at our faces. We think that we are very beautiful but it is the opposition that keeps on telling us (this may not be true).

You know the government member (of parliament) sometimes they are 'ahli bodek' (apple polishers) they are always saying 'you're right' and you have no means of assessing whether you are going in the right direction or not. So this country, if it loses its opposition and be like Singapore, then there will be disaster.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.  
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/79232>