

'Contemptible politician' meets 'loose cannon'

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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and DAP supremo Karpal Singh have locked horns over the 1988 judicial crisis, exchanging scathing correspondence in recent days. MCPX

The duo took the battle beyond the judicial crisis in the letters - made available to the media today by the DAP national chairperson - by launching accusations and personal attacks.

In one instance, Mahathir called Karpal the "most contemptible of politicians and individuals" to which the DAP leader retorted that Mahathir is a "loose cannon".

It began with a two-page letter from Karpal to Mahathir dated March 27, in which the ex-premier was told that he should personally apologise to judges who were sacked in 1988.

judiciary forum lingam tape 171107 salleh abbas palace of justicKarpal, also a prominent lawyer, said he holds the view that Mahathir had abused constitutional provisions to unfairly remove then Lord President Salleh Abas (photo) along with two supreme court judges, Wan Suleiman Pawanteh and George Seah.

"It is not the present government which should apologise, but you yourself personally. Your culpability in the events leading to the dismissal of these three judges cannot have any justification in law or otherwise," wrote Karpal.

"The necessity for you to apologise cries to high heaven. Your acts caused the judges concerned and their families untold pain and suffering."

Karpal also said it was Mahathir who "single-handedly destroyed the judiciary which has yet to regain its equilibrium".

Karpal, also the Bukit Gelugor MP, gave Mahathir a week to respond, failing which he said he would raise the matter when Parliament sits from April 28.

mahathir gesturing in disgust 271006On the day the seven-day 'deadline' expired, Mahathir responded in a two-paragraph letter by fax, lashing out at Karpal.

"You and my other detractors will never believe me, whatever I may say. You are moved by pure hatred and I cannot respond to people who can never accept reality," Mahathir wrote in the letter dated April 3.

The ex-premier reiterated that his conscience is clear and that does not owe anyone an apology.

"I am sure you will make use of this letter to dirty my name further. That is your right. I think you are the most contemptible of politicians and individuals," Mahathir said.

'Don't champion opposition causes'

In a statement released along with the letters today, Karpal said he had only received Mahathir's letter by hand today as the faxed copy had not reached him.

He said he stands by what he has said and would not respond to being labelled "most contemptible of politicians and individuals".

"As Dr Mahathir is much older to me, I do not propose to hurt his feelings in the vein by which he has described me. I would advise Dr Mahathir to take my views in his stride. I assure him I don't hate him," said Karpal, who nevertheless told Mahathir to stop being a "loose cannon".

"It is time for him to keep his peace and let the opposition keep the government of (Mahathir's estranged successor) Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in check. The opposition with its 82 seats in Parliament is more than effective to achieve this."

karpal singh and dap 120106Karpal said Mahathir should not "hold out to champion the cause of the opposition" by continuing with his attacks on Abdullah, as the opposition does not need such "unsolicited support" from him.

"Dr Mahathir, should, perhaps devote more time to his grandchildren in the twilight years of his life," Karpal noted sarcastically.

Mahathir should be held responsible for abusing power in suppressing press freedom, the infamous mass crackdown of Operasi Lalang in 1987 and the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as his deputy, said Karpal.

"The opposition does not need personalities like Dr Mahathir who even went to the extent of deregistering Umno in 1988 and generally acting in a dictatorial manner, to say the least of his penchant for attacking foreign government leaders which only adversely affected the image of the country, but also foreign investments."

zaid ibrahimThe debate over whether the government should apologise to the three sacked judges was rekindled last month with a statement from new de facto law minister Zaid Ibrahim who urged the government to do so.

najib tun razak 03While there is no official stand on this from the cabinet as yet, the government does not appear to be keen on the proposal. Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has said the proposal is merely Zaid's personal view.

Mahathir had earlier said he is not obliged to apologise as he had observed all procedures and laws in the matter.

Participants at an on-going judges' conference have lent support to Zaid's call.