

An open letter to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad
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JJ Ray

Sir,

In your 22 years as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, you undoubtedly took the country to greater heights, development-wise that is. Thanks to your visionary insights, Malaysia became a name to be reckoned with. You were keen to have the biggest, tallest and longest of infrastructure facilities in the country. And you saw to it that they materialised. Your name was synonymous with development and foresight. MCPX

But now that you are retired from active politics, it is understandable if you are not able to contribute anymore to the country's development, in any way. There has never been any pressure on you to come out from the comfort of your cocoon to take a stand on any matter. Therefore it is puzzling to read your scalding remarks concerning the leadership of the current premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the level of corruption in Umno and the hypocritical stand you have now adopted towards bloggers. What was it that spurred your vindictive approach towards Abdullah Badawi and his management style?

It was so disappointing to see you display such deep immaturity in vilifying Abdullah Badawi and his administration. You kept saying he is the wrong man for the job and that he was never your preferred choice for a leader. Again, it remains a mystery why you decided to adopt an impassioned desire to continuously mock Abdullah Badawi and his team.

For the benefit of the readers, I quote a phrase from the book *The Unmaking of Malaysia – Insider's Reminiscences of Umno, Razak and Mahathir* by Ahmad Mustapha Hassan. 'According to some sources, when Hussein Onn appointed Dr Mahathir as the Deputy, he chose the weakest of the three vice-presidents'.

It is no hidden secret that you never tolerated opposition in any form, be it from the political groups, the judiciary or the royalty. And it was also well known that you never shied away from wielding political power to the fullest in order to command respect. And this is where Abdullah Badawi is different. He is a people's leader, never forcing anyone to respect him and never misusing his authority to demand that the rakyat kowtow to him.

While you were all for power and personal glory and in the process demeaning the Malays for being lazy, Abdullah Badawi rightfully followed the path laid out by the second prime minister Abdul Razak which is to extend help to the needy instead of resorting to name-calling. Being the leader of a country is a responsibility like no other and this you should know well. Therefore, it was unbecoming of you to stoop low and attack your predecessor.

To further quote Ahmad Mustapha: 'Dr Mahathir, of middle-class origin, very arrogant and autocratic, with a very limited circle of friends, was never a sportsman, did not understand the Malays and their problems but however professed to provide a remedy for their lot in life. He hated competition, was very fond of overseas travels in order to teach the world how to behave, believed in creating icons as symbols of progress and only cared for the rich. And after 22 years in power, he failed in solving the 'Malay Dilemma', expanding its scope and dimensions instead'.

Is this the leadership quality you claim to have excelled in during your tenure as prime minister of Malaysia? There is no doubt that Abdullah Badawi has been left to clean up the mess that you left behind in your over two decades of power. Whilst the present prime minister does have his flaws, the onus is on you as the longest serving leader of the country to lend a helping hand instead of being imperious. Your impudent attitude no doubt needs a check if the 'statesman' honour accorded to your goodself is to be justified.

In case memory fails you (it appears to be so of late), it is well known that you were not the preferred choice of Hussein Onn - the third prime minister - to be his deputy. In appointing you as his deputy, Hussein Onn hoped that God Almighty would sanction his choice (The Unmaking of Malaysia – Insider's Reminiscences of Umno, Tun Razak and Mahathir).

The responsibility of managing a country requires liability in every sense of the word. Was the Petronas funds misuse, the Proton debacle, tampering with the judicial system and the lavishness accorded to mega projects like the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and the new capital administration Putrajaya not evidence enough of your failure in being transparent? The same fate befell the New Economic Policy.

When it was started by Abdul Razak in 1970, the ultimate aim was to achieve national unity through the eradication of poverty regardless of race and inter-ethnic economic equality. But it instead ended up reducing the non-Malays to the status of second-class citizens by cementing Malay supremacy or Ketuanan Melayu. Perhaps you have taken it upon yourself to become the people's voice in criticising the Government where need be.

But did you ever during your long years as the prime minister ever allow any individual the freedom to speak their mind? Your inability to face criticism had you blacklisting those whose voices seemed a threat to you. It was also during your tenure as Malaysia's numero uno that the phrase 'absolute power corrupts absolutely' was never more true. But your imperialism - though fear provoking - failed to paralyse many a great minds. Opposition leaders like Karpal Singh never cowered in fear, in spite of being detained under Internal Security Act during Operasi Lalang in 1987.

You now say that 'we need an opposition to remind us if we are making mistakes. When you are not opposed you think everything you do is right'. However, during your time as the prime minister, how did you react to criticism? During your time bigotry was the order of the day.

Perhaps old habits die hard. Maybe that was the case with you when you made the call for Umno to abolish the quota system of getting nominations from at least 60 divisions before a member can make a bid for the party's presidency. It was you who introduced this ruling after being challenged by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in 1987, when you managed to retain the presidential post by 43 votes. After that it was a tradition to not contest the party's top post. And it was you who had openly stated that it was Najib Tun Razak and not Abdullah Badawi who was your preferred choice of the Prime Minister. But today you sing a different tune. Why?

You will always remain an enigma for Malaysians but for the wrong reasons. Your desire for control and hunger for power remains unparalleled, not to mention your tendency to take Malaysians for granted. Rhetoric no longer appeals to the layman and it would serve you well, health-wise to continue resting in the comfort of your cocoon. You do not want to earn the wrath of Malaysians for stirring the hornet's nest for the simple reason that you would be the last person synonymous with the word 'trust'.

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