

Samy : Dr Mahathir has weakened BN
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He served under him for more than two decades. The loyalty then and now remains unquestionable. MCPX

It has been five years since former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad stepped down, but the very mention of his name still gets MIC president S Samy Vellu choked up with emotion.

His tone and facial expressions changed when addressing questions concerning the man whom he regards as a great leader. At one point, he even seemed to be fighting back tears.

Mahathir's recent scathing criticism against Samy Vellu had done little to affect the respect and admiration the MIC president harbours for his former boss.

samy vellu interview 160408 02Some have even cited Mahathir as being a contributing factor to Samy Vellu's defeat in his stronghold of Sungai Siput on March 8. But the latter refused to retaliate.

"When you keep a person at a very high esteem in your heart, your eyes will not see what his mistakes are. You will only see the good things he has done," the 72-year-old politician told Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview at the MIC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

However, Samy Vellu lamented that Mahathir's attacks against his successor Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the government have weakened Barisan Nasional to a great extent.

According to him, the former premier should have opted for a more softer approach to get his points across.

"Mahathir had a lot of experience in running this country. As a father of the nation, he should have put it in a more milder format (to state) what should be done.

"It would have benefitted the government and it would have benefitted the people also, rather than this straightforward attacks. It (has) never happened in our country before."

To another question, he said: "If Mahathir continues with his attacks on the government, the only thing, whatever he does, it will erode the support of the people for the government he so dearly built."

Give Pak Lah time

Samy Vellu also disagreed with those calling on the prime minister to step down in the wake of the ruling coalition's disastrous performance in the March 8 polls.

NONThe former works minister said Abdullah - who assumed control in 2003 - should be given the time and space to steer the battered vessel in the right direction again.

"I don't think at this time simply by stepping down everything is going to be alright. I think Abdullah must be given the time and the peace to put things in order.

"Then he chooses his successor, he hands over peacefully and he leaves like how Mahathir left Umno and the government peacefully and with good name. I think that should be the methodology to adopt," he added.

Earlier, Samy Vellu had described Mahathir as "the builder and moderniser" of this nation who had slogged for 22 years to give Malaysia the status she enjoys today.

The MIC president also said that he is not perturbed by the remarks the former premier had made against him.

"He might have said one or two things about me. I am never upset about it. I hold him so high in my heart. Even though he is angry with me sometimes ..."

In an interview with Malaysiakini prior to the elections, Mahathir had accused Samy Vellu of stifling Indian voices and complained about how the latter blocked the MIC splinter party Indian Progressive Front (IPF) from joining BN.

In response, Samy Vellu offered a simple reasoning.

"My explanation is ... if in the Barisan Nasional, Umno is the only party that can represent the Malays, what is wrong in MIC being the only party to represent the Indians?

"Also, there are a lot of splinter parties outside representing the Malays, they are not coming into, they will not be allowed to come into the Barisan Nasional."

Turning to Mahathir the person, the MIC president said the former premier was a kind man. "He may not like some people some times but when people go and see him ... he excuses people very fast."

Asked if he met Mahathir recently, Samy Vellu replied: "The last I met him was at the Chinese New Year (celebrations). I went to shake hands with him with my great respect for him. He shook hands with me, but not in his usual style. But I didn't mind it."

Letter to Mahathir

The MIC president also revealed that he penned a letter to Mahathir on the day he left the Works Ministry after the March 8 elections.

mahathir interview 050308 virtue "I said (in the letter) 'At this moment of leaving the Ministry of Works, I write this letter to thank you for what all you have done for me'. I said 'you are a great leader the country has ever seen'.

"This country will never get another leader of your kind. It is a great gift of God to this country'. And I said 'you are quite unhappy with me over certain things and whatever you said during the elections about me, I take it this way, that you don't mean it'.

"Even though I have lost the elections, I don't think you wholeheartedly said that and you don't mean it (the criticisms)'. I sent him the last letter."

However, Samy Vellu said Mahathir did not reply.

"He doesn't have to reply. I am a very small man from a small community. My background is ... I am the son of an ordinary labourer."

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