

**Time for the daring questions**  
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**A Ghani Ismail**

With stakes reaching above the moon, Umno is now looking like an upside-down circus, with the weakest man on top and the strongest apparently cowed into submission - and seen as vulnerable as he is forced down the crest of popular accusations linked to an on-going murder trial.

MCPX

In the run-up to the party supreme council election scheduled for December, some veterans are screaming over unfair and undemocratic practices of the party president and his clique.

Bent on scuttling challengers, Pak Lah has once again been abusing democratic rights in Umno as he did in 2004.

najib abdullah 100408Former party president and premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is hoping for the Number Two to go for Number One in December, said his "cowardly" protégé and candidate for the top post in Umno had told him he had to have the president's permission in order to meet with him (Mahathir).

Mahathir, who dubbed the deputy prime minister a coward during a recent talk to Malaysian students in Manchester, is now making the man look like a schoolboy of 10 who is afraid to play truant and meet his former boss to discuss why the party had lost as badly as it did in the March 8 general election.

The ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional, lost five states and for the first time in history, was denied a two-third majority in Parliament. It has made the prime minister a lame duck and his authority has been defied by several Malay rulers who refused to accept his candidates for menteri besar.

Pak Lah, is refusing to step down and instead is said to be using his regime-support apparatus to deny his challengers constitutional rights and due democratic process.

tengku razaleigh ku li interview 090806It's a repeat performance many find intolerable, the first being the siege of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah that he had applied in 2004. It left the prince with a single nomination in his attempt to contest for Umno president.

Party divisions were ordered to deny him the 60 nominations he needed to qualify. He obtained only one nomination, from his own division of Gua Musang.

As Tengku Razaleigh riled about the plot mounted to ruin his bid in his second attempt to contest for president, Mahathir publicly rued the deputy president's apparent disability, asking what kind of a political party Umno has become under Pak Lah.

In these circumstances, the name calling and the diminution of the Number Two left in its wake a remarkable turn of events that finally thundered with Raja Petra Kamaruddin's article in his blog, Malaysia Today.

**Abusive agencies**

Even as Mahathir wonders out loud what kind of party Umno has become under his successor, observers are quick to ask why he had enhanced the set of regime-supportive apparatus that made it possible for the party president to preside as a dictator.

mahathir mudah lupa 181008 mahathir cryMahathir may not have set up most of the quasi-political agencies that had made Umno a rather muscular giant. But he strengthened them, ostensibly in an attempt to "institutionalise Umno".

The Biro Tatanegara in the Prime Minister's Department is one of several agencies responsible directly to the prime minister and empowered to intercept, and has been intercepting, the democratic political processes.

It began employing ex-commandos during Mahathir's premiership and has been alleged to have been using intimidation and coercion with impunity to keep party members subdued and the opposition endlessly harassed.

With power and substantial funds, these agencies promptly became abusive.

Seranta, another quasi-political agency set up during Mahathir's regime, sent more than 3,000 members to stay for months within the small state constituency of Kuala Nerang in Terengganu, to appeal for votes and ensure victory in the PAS territory in the early 1990s.

Discipline could hardly be sustained among the participants and several of the young women became pregnant while villagers complained of the men troubling village girls. Maybe the idea was to quickly increase the number of voters.

sanusi junidTrouble in these agencies has brewed from the early days. In the 1980s when Sanusi Junid was secretary-general of Umno, he loudly proclaimed his disgust when he was given a set of 'blue' videos made by and which featured members of Kemas, yet another quasi-political agency.

The videos were made for sale, leaving Sanusi aghast and spoilt for a decision whether or not to lodge a police report against the instant film-stars and film-producers.

Many who had asked before about the kind of a political party Umno was, were left unheard.

Belonging to the politically favoured agencies, however, must have made these vivaciously talented people highly influential in the party, for very conceivable reasons.

Pak Lah, it is alleged widely, has been excessively using these agencies along with the police. Even many senior journalists were debarred from the mainstream media ever since he became PM, a reason why they became effective bloggers.

Abuses like these had obviously been one of the major causes for the massive rejection of the ruling party by members of Umno, a factor that will surely be carried through to the next general election and will ensure the end of Umno's unbroken rule since 1955.

mongolian woman bombed altantuya 081106These abuses were etched in blood when members of the police special squad attached to the defence minister and deputy premier Najib Abdul Razak have been charged with the murder of Altantuya Shaaribuu, who worked as translator for his political strategist Abdul Razak Baginda.

[Najib has denied any involvement in the case.]

How we protect ourselves from such powers of the regime's special apparatus, therefore, becomes the biggest question for the nation, daring each and everyone to ask the questions Raja Petra voiced on our behalf.

Is it then time to call an end to Umno and for the members to seek other and more realistic means for regime change rather than continue to wail like beaten banshees over ruined chances to democratically contest in the party?

It is also pertinent to ask if it is at all useful for Tengku Razaleigh to keep trying to breach the siege in Umno.

Or, would he serve the nation better should he call it a day and join Anwar Ibrahim in PKR as a faction, or revive his old vehicle, Semangat 46?

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