

Endgame of the Mahathir myth
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Things are finally coming full circle. For Umno, two complete circles. Many years ago, Onn Jaafar, Umno's first president, decided to open his party to non-Malays as associate members. But his attempt to turn Umno into a multi-racial party ended his own political career.
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Malaysian politicians learned a lot from Onn's political experience. They realised that there was much currency in the primordial attraction of 'race'. The Alliance and now the BN, continue

to play up the race card in the hope of winning votes.

Which brings us to Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the ghost of Malaysia's past that refuses to go away. Mahathir has taken to cyberspace. He warns the Malays that if they do not stand up for their rights, if they do not take risks, then Malaysia will be ruled by other people.

Here is a man who promoted 'Bangsa Malaysia', Wawasan 2020, who supposedly designed KLCC and who championed global Islamic architecture in Putrajaya asking the Malays to 'take risks' and stand up for themselves.

Well, if this sounds familiar it is not because it is a return to his 1960s rhetoric. In those days, Mahathir believed in Social Darwinism. He probably never read Darwin and if he did, showed little understanding of it. Darwin never said that the species that survived was the 'strongest' or the 'best'. Merely the most adaptable. Which brings us to the underlying contradiction in Mahathir's prescriptive cure for the Malays. How are the Malays going to be adaptable if they are not allowed to change? For if they change, culturally fusing with global popular culture for example, will they still be Malay or Malaysian?

No, if Mahathir's rhetoric today sounds familiar it is because it recalls Onn's last days as a politician. Angry and disappointed that the non-Malays did not rally to his non-sectarian cause, Onn began to mouth pro-Malay slogans, in the hope that he would get some Malay support. He did but only in Kelantan.

Mahathir's 'warnings' to the Malays ring hollow. There are more Malay parliamentarians today than ever before. I cannot imagine them turning their backs on the monarchy or Islam if such a bill was proposed.

If it is Ketuanan Melayu that Mahathir is worried about, the only tuan that he should really be championing is the one that is in the constitution. That is the 'Yang Dipertuan Agong'. It is the only place where the word tuan is used anywhere in the constitution.

Mahathir was also the Malaysian PM that clipped the wings of the monarchy. In that respect, he was right. But people still remember the way he went about it. Organising demonstrations against the monarchs. So, how different is Mahathir from Hindraf, since demonstrations are 'not part' of Malaysia's political culture?

Mahathir says that the political situation today allows non-Malays to make demands. What

sort of demands are we making? Oh yes, better roads, more transparency in the way local government is being run; more enforcement of the laws regarding the environment; flood control measures; enforcement of traffic laws; a better judiciary etc.

Wait a minute, aren't these 'demands' shared by our Malay brothers and sisters? Perhaps non-Malays are asking for vernacular languages be made national languages. No, we are not. Perhaps non-Malays are deliberately not learning Malay to hinder national aspirations. No, Bahasa Malaysia and even Malay literature study have not recorded a drop in schools. Perhaps we want equality in terms of life expectancy? No, we want everyone's healthcare to be better not just ours.

No, Mahathir sounds like an old record because we have left him far behind. Oh, yes, he can still be dangerous. He can try to orchestrate a rebellion. He can incite racial hatred. He can convince some Malays that they are being threatened with extinction. He has a lot of supporters in Umno. Wait, don't we have laws against such actions. Oh, yes, it is called 'sedition'.

If Mahathir wants to rile up Malaysians he should declare that all shopping malls will be closed. No more hand phones allowed. Astro will be shut down and petrol prices will be increased by 1,000%. That is much more threatening than Malays losing power. If he can do that, all Malaysians will rise up - not just the Malays. But he cannot do all that.

Here is the man who created a culture of forgetting, hoping that his own paradoxes and contradictions will not be remembered. In this other endeavour, Dr Mahathir was partially successful. There are those who remember his political career, recorded all his contradictions whilst most Malaysians do not read history or value the past. In such a situation, a past leader has little place or influence.

So finally, we come to the endgame of the Mahathir myth.

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