

Najib must turn to senior leaders
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Feisty ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised Deputy Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak - who is widely tipped to take over the country's most powerful job next year - to seek the help of senior leaders and experts.

"There is a lot of work to be done to restore the confidence of the people in the government," Mahathir was reported as saying over the weekend.

"But Najib must not try to do everything himself. He must get proper advice from the right people."

The 82-year old, who ruled Malaysia with a fist of iron for 22 years, did not identify who the 'right people' were.

Nevertheless, his comments are likely to send a shiver across a large section of the country as it braces for the leadership transition from Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to Najib.

Already, there are growing fears that a Najib in power will see a return to a more authoritarian and oppressive government. Some even fear Mahathir might make a comeback to the cabinet in an advisory role, much like Singapore's Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew.

khoo kay peng "It won't be a surprise to anyone if Najib consults Mahathir," political analyst Khoo Kay Peng told Malaysiakini.

"Mahathir has supported him all the way, so people would be watching to see to what extent Najib will be influenced."

"If he doesn't toe the line or show proper respect, you can be sure Mahathir won't mince his words. He will attack him as he did Abdullah."

A second-generation Umno leader, the 55-year old Najib is well known to be a protege of Mahathir, who was in the same cohort as his father Abdul Razak - the country's second premier.

Famous for his outspoken speech which has been criticised by many quarters including present Umno leaders, Mahathir also called on Najib to distance himself from nepotism and cronyism.

"He should not be surrounded by cronies and family members as this will not be good for the country," Mahathir said.

Ironically, the medical doctor-turned-politician has himself drawn sharp domestic and international rebuke for economic policies that favoured not just his own race but also business leaders from both Malay and other ethnic groups.

Troublemaker

Last week, Mahathir advised Abdullah, with whom he has been feuding, to 'shut up' and let Najib do the job when the latter took over - sparking a slew of protests from Umno leaders.

"He should have followed his own advice instead of creating all the trouble for us," Tourism Minister Azalina Othman Said told the local press.

"Tun Mahathir should not feel that he is always right by giving advice. It is going to weaken the party further," she said, adding that he should instead set a good example to the younger leaders.

Mahathir had passed the baton to Abdullah in October 2003.

On Saturday, Mahathir told a Malaysian youth seminar at the University of Melbourne in Australia that the Umno-led Barisan Nasional's weak performance during the March general election was due to government leaders having lost touch with their voters.

"The votes we lost were protest votes. Malaysians were not happy and this was reflected at the ballot box," he said.

""Some MPs felt, that once elected and given a ministerial position, there was no need for them to go back to their electorate to talk to the people, to discuss issues and find out what needed to be done and to explain government policies."

anwar pak lah najib crash styleDuring the national polls, the Barisan lost for the first time its long-held two-thirds parliamentary majority, surrendering control of five of the country's 13 states to Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Rakyat.

The post mortem that followed the shock outcome has since forced Abdullah to agree to step down by March next year. He has also promised not to defend the powerful Umno presidency, making room for Najib to tighten his grip on the post.

By convention, the Umno president and deputy president become the country's prime minister and deputy prime minister respectively.

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