

**PM's mistake was ignoring the 'retired lion'**  
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**Elviza Michele Kamal**

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's legendary ability to lead needs no introduction at all. His feat in developing Malaysia makes even Julius Caesar's pale in comparison. However, just like other great leaders the world has ever cradled, many are not blinded to his misjudgment in ruling the country for more than two decades – it is unavoidable for he is only human. Passing the baton of the premiership to Abdullah was one of his grave mistakes.

When Tun handed over the premiership to Abdullah in 2003, the rest of the cabinet nodded in approval, without an iota of doubt vis-B-vis Tun's decision-making ability. It did not occur to them, back then, that Abdullah would send BN deeper into misery with his indecisiveness and unfulfilled reforms.

Abdullah, at the shift of the premiership, shined like a beacon of hope towards a more democratically progressive Malaysia post-Tun's era. Five years later, his poignant picture in the media, stating 'work with me, not for me' is reduced to nothing but a false sense of hope to the nation.

Abdullah is single-handedly responsible to the lack of economic progress in the country as opposed to Tun's era. His pledge to nip corruption in the bud remains undone as he packs his bag to leave office in March 2009. The same fate falls on Abdullah's lackluster economic corridors.

The mighty Barisan Nasional spearheaded by Abdullah – for the first time after the Independence in 1957 – was badly trounced in 2008 general election losing five states and its parliament's two-thirds majority. Facing the furore invoked by Pakatan Rakyat led by Anwar Ibrahim, BN's performance after the election has been less than desirable.

Recently, BN's ship sank deeper when Abdullah decided to invoke the draconian Internal Security Act against Raja Petra Kamaruddin, Teresa Kok and a Sin Chew journalist, ironically, just a day after the government decided to lift the suspension on 'Malaysia Today' – Raja Petra's controversial web portal, read by millions of Malaysians.

Many akin the recent ISA arrests to Operasi Lalang in 1987 when opposition leaders and non-governmental body representatives were arrested and major dailies were suspended in a concentrated effort to silence protests against he Tun after Umno was declared illegal by the courts.

But what we must not forget - no journalist was arrested or 'questioned' during Operasi Lalang.

Raja Petra and Teresa Kok were held for supposedly being a 'national threat' to the country, touching among others, on that 'sacred' racial line which divides multiracial Malaysia. While Teresa was released after a short detention, Raja Petra was sent off to Kamunting to serve a two-year detention sentence without being accorded a fair trial or the right to defend himself.

For decades, we have been forewarned to steer clear of sensitive racial issues for fear of resurrecting the ghost of May 13, 1969. The subliminal message to stay united beyond the

colour of our skin has been drummed into our ears via poorly-composed muhibbah songs and the ideology of perpaduan blasted by the government-owned media throughout the eighties and early nineties. We were almost certain that if we dare question the differences we have and the government we elected, May 13 would revisit the nation.

However, Malaysia has proved herself to be an adult nation, capable of making her independent choice, when days and weeks ahead of the most memorable general election on March 8 saw nothing but normalcy in our lives. The voice of people never got any louder.

While Abdullah is ready – or rather shoved forward to be ready – to pass the baton to Najib Abdul Razak, many more Umno stalwarts are now vying for the deputy-president's chair, a seat which falls vacant as Najib contests the Number One post.

The vacancy for the Number Two post will see a bitter fight within Umno: a society notoriously known for its stiff rule of hierarchy and money politics.

Leading a country which uphold traditions and respect for the elderly, Abdullah's most blatant faux pas was ignoring the 'retired lion' of Malaysia's political landscape, Tun Dr Mahathir. If Abdullah had heeded Tun's concern and criticism – the way Singaporeans still listen to their senior minister, Lee Kuan Yew – Abdullah would have left Umno on a better platform.

Leaders must remember that Malaysians have matured with time; their political opinions no exception. While it is unfair to gauge Abdullah's performance in such a short tenure, he undoubtedly, goes down in history as a pleasant prime minister forced to leave office to shoulder responsibility for BN's dismal performance in the March 2008 general election.

Umno must now change or perish.

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