

Dr Mahathir's blue-eyed boy fails to shine
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Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed disappointment in the performance of incoming premier Najib Abdul Razak, who was once seen as the 83-year-old statesman's preferred candidate for the top spot.

Speaking to Reuters, he said Najib needs to take swift action to reverse the declining support for the government which has been in power for more than 50 years.

Najib, who is slated to take over the leadership reins at the end of this month, will have to deal with the worst economic downturn since the Asian financial crisis of 1998 as well as rebuilding Umno.

"A lot of people are uncertain. Having watched Najib's performance as deputy (prime minister), he did not shine," said Mahathir, whose comments come just a week ahead of the Umno elections.

"Najib can do well, but we will have to see, because when I asked Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi) to appoint him as deputy, I had a lot of hope for him, but he did not perform the way I expected," he added.

However, the former premier praised Najib's action as finance minister in putting together a RM60 billion package of spending to try to offset the looming recession, contrasting it with Abdullah's performance as the previous finance minister.

Despite this, Najib's popularity has taken a beating, especially since he was linked to the murder of Mongolian national Altantunya Shaariibuu.

The incoming premier has firmly denied any involvement in the case and there is no evidence to tie him to the death either.

His popularity rating also stands at just 41 percent, according to a recent poll by independent pollster the Merdeka Centre, and that is lower than the 46 percent enjoyed by Abdullah.

'Anwar cannot be trusted'

Commenting on this, Mahathir said: "Legally he has cleared his name (over Altantunya). But whether people will perceive that he has cleared his name or not is something he cannot decide."

He added that one of the ways that Najib can fight back against negative perceptions is to stamp out corruption in Umno and Barisan Nasional.

"Today the problem with Umno is that people see it as a corrupt party and it has no credibility and they really look down on Umno as being irrelevant," said Mahathir who led the party for more than two decades.

If Umno fails to tackle corruption, he warned that it would lose power to the opposition and

Pakatan Rakyat leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Mahathir also took a swipe at the opposition leader, saying: "He (Anwar) is not to be trusted. He will do anything to become prime minister.

"During the time when he was my deputy, he was involved in cronyism. He supported a lot of his own people, they became very rich, because he gave contracts to them," he added.

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