

Dr Mahathir endorses Muhyiddin as DPM
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“One of the candidates couldn’t write in English, he couldn’t speak English and therefore (that was why) he did something wrong in Australia because he could not understand English. My choice is Muhyiddin (Yassin).”

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad made this sarcasm-tinged comments when asked by a reporter as to who he would endorse as the country’s new number 2 once current Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak takes over the country.

Muhammad Muhd Taib and Muhyiddin are the only two candidates left contesting for the deputy presidency of Umno after the party’s disciplinary board barred Malacca Umno chief and Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam from contesting following his involvement in money politics.

It is therefore clear who the sarcasm was targeted at.

Although the reason given by Mahathir not to endorse Muhd Taib appears to be superficial, the former premier has stronger reasons as to why he thought Muhd Taib would not make the best candidate for the deputy presidency.

“It is important for the party that only personalities 'beyond any suspicion' are in the leadership line-up,” he told a press conference at his KLCC office this afternoon.

He said it was important for Umno members to be aware that Umno had already been rejected by the people as reflected in its poor performance in the March 8 polls last year.

“This is caused by widespread public perception that Umno is a party with corrupt leadership and therefore members must elect clean leaders in the party polls next week in order to restore public confidence in the party.

And for him, Muhd Taib who was arrested in 1996 for carrying RM2.4 million in cash in Australia is seen by the public as a corrupt person and does not exactly fit in the ‘clean character’ bill.

To a reporter’s query of the possibility that Mohd Ali’s supporters may back Muhd Taib given their perception that their leader has been sabotaged, Mahathir replied, “If that is the case, the real verdict will come at the 13th general election.

“When the public see that Umno members are electing someone who is not above suspicion, I think they will make a decision. They can elect him as deputy president but Umno will lose the next election,” he said.

Disciplinary board has no credibility

Mahathir also said that it was an absurd decision by the party’s disciplinary board not to suspend Mohd Ali from his post as Malacca chief minister.

“I’m not completely happy with the board’s decision. Here we have a very strange decision. He (Ali) is found to be corrupt, but he can still be chief minister.

“So now we have a person who is confirmed as corrupt but the party has accepted him as chief minister. What the public think about this, we will hear it at the 13th general election,” he reiterated.

Mahathir added that the credibility of the party's disciplinary board "has been undermined due to this peculiar decision" and said that the board had blown its chances to restore public confidence in the party.

He also laughed off the accusations made against him that he was involved in the punishment meted out to Mohd Ali by the disciplinary board.

"I heard that Ali had accused me of being involved in the board's decision. I wish I could but I am not a member of Umno. If I had been involved, I would have thrown him out from the very beginning. But I'm not involved. So sorry," he said.

'Zaid Ibrahim is irrational, stupid'

On Zaid Ibrahim's call to the king not to appoint Najib as prime minister, Mahathir responded, "He has the right to express his opinion but he is only one person. If the king is ready to listen to the opinion of one person, that is his right but it must be noted that the person who made this suggestion is not a person who is highly admired or someone who is considered rational.

"If I am the king, I wouldn't want to even listen to this person. (He is) too stupid. Who does he want to be prime minister then? Dia nak Pak Lah balik? (He wants current prime minister Abdullah Ahamad Badawi back?)," quipped Mahathir.

He further accused Zaid of financing a PAS candidate to contest against a BN candidate when he was in Perth and when he was still an Umno member.

"So how can he be appointed a minister, I don't know," he said and added that Zaid is "a character that would jump 10 times a day like a frog."

"Would the king actually listen to a frog?" he asked.

On whether if he would support Najib as prime minister, Mahathir said he would give conditional support to him - Najib has to put up a team of clean and incorruptible cabinet minister.