

'Don't be duped by Anwar'
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In his first speech after submitting his application to rejoin Umno, Dr Mahathir Mohamad took the opportunity to ridicule his protegee-turn-nemesis before some 2,000 supporters in Bukit Gantang, Perak.

For about 10 minutes, the on-song Mahathir denounced "orang tu" (that person) as a hypocrite and a 'know-it-all', without mentioning his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim's name.

The delighted crowd - many of them elderly - egged him on, asking numerous times for the name to be revealed.

Declining with a grin and clearly in his element, Mahathir continued teasing them - at one point, he could barely contain his laughter.

"They call me an old horse. I admit I am old. I am already 84 but I am not slow, I can still give a speech, although it might not be as clever as 'that person' who uses such sophisticated language that no one understands him.

"As for me, I only speak bahasa pasar (colloquial language) because I feel people would understand me better, unlike academic language that sounds clever in order to manipulate the people," he said to laughter from the crowd.

He went on to say that he knew the person very well and that he has spent a long time with him while he was deputy prime minister.

"Never have I elevated someone to such a status, but I did it for him. (He had to wait just) a bit more, but not it did not happen. He couldn't wait, he wanted to oust me quicker.

"This kind of person, once we put them up, habislah (it's a goner). Your fate would be like mine. He will kick everyone below him off the ladder. I'm not talking about anyone else, you know who I am talking about - Anwar lah," he said with a laugh.

He said Anwar, like him, is in Bukit Gantang today to campaign for the opposition but that, unlike him, the PKR de facto leader was merely there to spread lies about him.

"He is only here to say that I am evil. That I (as a Malay and Muslim) have allowed my own son to import piglets or sell alcohol.

"Doesn't he have anything else to say about me? Look for something that is true, lah. Does he think that the people of Bukit Gantang is stupid enough to believe all this?"

BN's 'liberal' governance

He also warned voters not to be duped by Anwar who, he said, presents a different persona in different places as part of his political ploy to gain support.

"That person claims to support the Indian community, but when he speaks to a Malay

crowd, he tells them that Indian people are bad.

"It is the same when he speaks to the Chinese community. He says things like 'the government has ignored you'.

"This is not true. I want to speak the truth. Look at the education system of other countries. Is there any that allows vernacular education? Can you name any, oh Mr Anwar?" he said to thunderous applause.

Barisan Nasional has been liberal, he said, as Malaysia is the only country that allows vernacular education. He then countered allegations that the BN-led government practises racial discrimination.

"I just had a look at the list of the country's richest people. Number 1 is Robert Kuok (Hock Nien). He's a Malay. Now who is Number 2? It is T Ananda Krishnan. He is a Malay as well!" quipped Mahathir.

The former premier, whose tenure spanned 22 years up to 2003, said this is proof that the government has done its best to elevate the economic status of all ethnic groups, contrary to what is being alleged by Anwar and his Pakatan Rakyat alliance.

Next in his line of fire was ousted Perak menteri besar Mohd Nizar Jamaluddin, who was painted as an "irresponsible person".

In substantiation, he quoted Nizar's now legendary "Patek mohon derhaka" (Your Highness, I beg to be allowed to commit treason) statement.

"I have not heard this kind of statement (which sounds like something from) the time of Sultan Mahmud Mangkat di Julang (Sultan Mahmud Shah 11, the last ruler of Johor descended from the Malacca sultanate and who ruled during the 17th century).

"Is this the type of person we should choose to lead us? If you don't agree with something fine, we don't agree. But there is no need to go so far as to say such things. We know this person. He only wants to do things to gain popularity," Mahathir added.

Nizar is the PAS candidate for the Bukit Gantang parliamentary seat, contesting against Umno's Ismail Saffian.

The statement was made as the Perak government was collapsing and the sultan consented to the appointment of BN's Zambry Abd Kadir as the new menteri besar.