

Dr Mahathir - from London with spite
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 31, 09

On Saturday in Kuala Lumpur. Just before the curtain fell on the 59th Umno general assembly, the party's 83-year-old former president made a grand entrance with his wife in tow.

Looking debonair in a neatly-pressed deep purple striped shirt and black slacks, Dr Mahathir Mohamad was given a rapturous welcome by the Umno leaders and delegates alike.

After all, Mahathir and his wife Dr Siti Hasmah Ali are the two pioneer party members bearing the respective membership numbers '000001' and '000002' of Umno Baru - the party born out of the 1987 crisis which saw the original Umno being declared illegal.

It was a night of love, apparently masterminded by newly-minted Umno president Najib Abdul Razak to bring his mentor and outgoing premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi together.

Mahathir, who looked the sharpest of the lot on stage, awkwardly embraced Abdullah whom he had been attacking incessantly since a year after he had handpicked him as his successor in 2003.

It was a scene that surely deserved an Oscar nomination and one that made headlines the next day. The hatchet had purportedly been buried.

Overwhelmed with emotion, Najib said he hoped Mahathir and Abdullah would together guide him through his tenure at the helm and offer him ideas for his unenviable task of rebuilding the party.

Mahathir who quit Umno last May in protest of Abdullah's leadership also vowed to return to the fold soon.

Unfortunately, the dream was short-lived.

'My only mistake'

Fast forward to Monday in London.

The former premier, who is in Britain to attend a Palestinian conference, again let loose his stinging criticisms of his successor-turned-nemesis Abdullah.

In a five-minute interview with BBC World's Mishal Hussein at its London studio, Mahathir slammed his successor for sullyng his legacy.

"Everything went rotten when Abdullah took over," lamented Mahathir, who refused to acknowledge any shortcomings on his part for the problems in Umno despite being asked several times.

"My mistake was to choose this man (as successor)," said Mahathir, who added that that was the only mistake he made in his two decades in power.

Moving on to another one of his favourite targets, Mahathir fired several rounds at Abdullah's son-in-law and newly-elected Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin for his influence over the government.

Mahathir's vexation towards Khairy escalated last week when the latter defeated his son, Mukhriz, in the coveted Umno Youth chief contest.

In a hard-hitting blog posting later, Mahathir - who during his 22-year tenure was accused of everything in the dictionary related to corruption - slammed the Umno Youth movement for bringing shame on the party

by endorsing a 'corrupt' leader.

The former premier also said that in 22 years in office, Barisan Nasional always won two-thirds control in Parliament but the last polls saw the ruling coalition suffering its worst ever setback, by not only losing its two-third majority but also several states.

It is this which increased the pressure on the premier to relinquish the reins although his term does not end until 2013.

Ironically four years earlier, Abdullah secured the biggest ever mandate for BN, seizing control of 90 percent of the parliamentary seats.

Mahathir appeared to claim some credit for the historic mandate in 2004, noting that the general elections had come just after he stepped down as prime minister.

But observers had pointed out then that it was precisely Mahathir's exit coupled with his successor's reform pledges had led to the boost in support.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/101335>