

**The curious case of Dr M 'mudah lupa'**  
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**RK Anand**

Imagine having led an illustrious life, leaving indelible marks on the pages of history, and then waking up one morning just to realise that you cannot remember certain important events.

Experts call it selective amnesia and scientists are researching the possibility of using this to aid those suffering from post-traumatic stress. Laboratory tests have found that by administering a certain type of drug, memories of a traumatic event had been wiped out in a rat.

For politicians however no drug is required. Their brains appear to produce a chemical that allows the suppression of selected memories.

A prime example of this is none other than the good doctor, Mahathir Mohamad himself.

Since relinquishing the reins of leadership, the 84-year-old statesman has been exhibiting signs of a prolonged case of selective amnesia.

The symptoms became evident when the former premier started talking at length about subjects that were considered taboo during his administration. Freedom of expression, the right to criticise and the importance of politicians being untainted by scandals were just some of the issues that Mahathir suddenly began to feel passionate about.

To the layman it reeked of hypocrisy, for Mahathir has been accused of every possible transgression under the sun apart from the likes of murder and sodomy.

**The deputy who refused to play dead**

However, there is no denying that he is a master of his chosen craft, a brilliant strategist, meticulous planner and visionary. His mere presence alone has an overwhelming effect on people.

With a tinge of envy, many also marvel at his ability to appear fit as a fiddle and sharp as a razor despite being 16 years shy of turning 100.

But one cannot help but wonder if this is a boon or bane in the case of Mahathir.

Since sacking his heir apparent turned nemesis Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, the 'deputy destroyer' had the displeasure of watching the phoenix rise from the ashes once again. For this was one deputy that refused to play dead and has returned to haunt him. Exactly a decade later, the prodigal son-helmed alliance of opposition parties took five states (now reduced to four) and denied the ruling coalition its customary two-third majority in parliament for the first time in history.

Jaw agape, nostrils flaring, Mahathir pinned the blame squarely on the shoulders of his forty winks-fond handpicked successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The latter found it to be too big a burden to shoulder, crumbled under its weight, and was subsequently driven out.

Somehow his criticisms outweighed his praises for Abdullah, when just a year after Mahathir

had resigned in 2003, his successor had chalked up the biggest mandate ever, leaving a big dent in Mahathir's so-called popularity myth among the masses.

But in the aftermath of the 2008 general election, Mahathir's selective amnesia deteriorated further.

With Umno Baru beaten black and blue, its founder and former president decided to deliver another devastating right hook by quitting the party, placing personal differences above party interests. Although he argued otherwise.

By then, Mahathir had conveniently forgotten the irreparable damage he had inflicted on Barisan Nasional and Umno with his incessant blows on Abdullah in the run-up to the polls. His vitriolic outbursts had led many to wonder if Mahathir had in spirit, floated over to the opposition.

The former Umno president also played an instrumental role in opening the floodgates for protest votes from the party members and grassroots leaders.

Mahathir believed that the wounds would heal once his other protege Najib Abdul Razak became the president of Umno and prime minister. But the latter is constantly haunted by a Mongolian specter and since his installation, a series of by-elections have produced the opposite results.

Now Mahathir is worried.

Would he live to see Anwar unpack his bags in Sri Perdana, the opulent prime ministerial complex which Mahathir supposedly constructed with many bedrooms with his nemesis' large family in mind?

### **New mission: Destroy Samy**

To distract himself from this unsettling thought, Mahathir has embarked on a new mission which would involve murder... the stabbing to death of another political career.

Many years ago, Mahathir pointed out that in politics, friends do not remain friends forever. So he has no qualms about sharpening his blade for MIC president S Samy Vellu.



Plunging the knife deep into the heart, the former premier who led his party and the nation for 22 years, was of the opinion that the MIC president has committed a cardinal sin by remaining at the helm seven years more than him.

Mahathir launched an acerbic verbal salvo against his long-time ally, conveniently forgetting that he retained - in his own words - that 'poor performer' as a minister throughout his tenure and heaped praises on him in the past.





He also failed to remember that whatever alleged skeletons which Samy Vellu has in his closet were decaying right under his nose during the MIC president's loyal service as a minister in Mahathir's cabinet.

Mahathir - whom in the past preached the gospel of non-interference - now wants this golden rule broken because the asset has become a liability. Like a volleyball match, he sends the ball up for a spike.

But twisting Samy Vellu's arm into leaving would not make things rosy again.

In fact, it would probably spurt more thorns for BN since the MIC chieftain still commands tremendous support in the party. This was evident in the recent party elections, where the president's men made an almost clean sweep.

Even Najib's groundbreaking speech on popularity failed to make any significant impact other than drawing a thunderous applause from the MIC delegates, leading some to question the prime minister's popularity among component parties.

Samy Vellu's forced exit would create ripples of consternation among MIC members, which would then gather momentum to become a wave of revolt and culminate in a tsunami of protest votes.

It is nothing short of a Bollywood dream sequence to believe that the president's departure would bring the Indian community running back with open arms and tears in their eyes to embrace MIC once again.

Like it or not, the epochal Hindraf protest has altered the script.

### **Umno checks, the rest balance**

So Mahathir, who is said to be a big fan of Shah Rukh Khan, and his retinue must realise that the BN machine is not on the brink of a breakdown because of a single loose screw.

It is the entire ruling coalition and its bastion of leaders - both past and present Mahathir included - that suffer from a credibility crisis. And as for the current buzzword 'popularity', one cannot ignore the fact that BN politicians, top to bottom, are more infamous than famous.

And for the non-Malay voters, as long as Umno insists on doing all the checking while the rest are forced to do all the balancing, and as long as its mouthpiece - Utusan Malaysia - continues to spew venom, it would always be a case of not One, but Two Malaysia.



But the perception is different with Pakatan Rakyat.

Strange bedfellows they may seem and riddled with cracks is their fledgling alliance, but there appears to be more of an equal partnership and grudging respect among the component parties.



And in the words of one seasoned observer, "The opposition leader appears to be suffering from selective amnesia as well. He now seems, at least superficially, not to be a racist."

So it appears that unless 'roadblocks' are mounted, there is no stopping the opposition's first family from speeding

along the road to Putrajaya.

During a recent private luncheon, a senior BN leader revealed how he warned Mahathir many years ago about an astrologer's ominous prediction that Malaysia would witness a change of government in the early first quarter of this century.

Selective amnesia or not, this would be something hard to forget.

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