

Mahathir: If I were Isa...
Malaysiakini.com
Sep 26, 2009

Former Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad has a word of advice for ex-Umno vice-president Isa Samad - stay out of the Bagan Pinang polls.

"If I am Isa, I will urge the party not to make me the candidate. Then I will work hard to campaign for the chosen candidate. With that, it will boost his reputation," he said.

"But in Malaysia, such a culture does not exist," Mahathir told reporters, at the sidelines of his Hari Raya open house function at his residence in Seri Kembangan.

On the insistence of certain Umno grassroots that Isa be made a candidate, Mahathir said they did not consider the interest of the party as a whole.

"Well, they are very short sighted. They only see his (Isa's) interest and the interest of the 'bahagian' (division). But what about the interest of the party?"

"If the party puts a candidate which is not clean, then the whole party would be condemned," he said.

He added though it was important for Umno to secure a win in Bagan Pinang, a tainted candidate would cause embarrassment for the party and the ruling Barisan Nasional.

The Teluk Kemang Umno division leadership is unanimously adamant that their boss Isa is picked as the candidate for Bagan Pinang, which falls under the Teluk Kemang constituency.

Traditionally, the party leadership considers a list of names submitted by the division. However, Teluk Kemang Umno submitted only Isa's name.

But critics, most notably Mahathir, are against this because Isa was found guilty by the Umno disciplinary board of vote-buying during the 2004 party polls. He was then the Federal Territories minister.

Thumbs up for Makkal Sakti

Meanwhile, Mahathir was also asked about Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's scheduled appearance at the launching of the Malaysia Makkal Sakti Party (MMSP) on Oct 10, which he responded positively.

"There seem to be a lot of support for the formation of this party. I think it is a good thing because we don't want to lose the support of the Indians," said Mahathir.

Asked if this would dilute BN's biggest Indian-based component party the MIC, the acerbic tongued statesman said: "Well, I think MIC's influence is already diluted".

For the first time ever, the BN chair would be officiating the launch of a new party whose leadership is ironically made up of members of former Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf), a movement outlawed by the government.

Observers believe that the cozy ties between Najib and MMSP may eventually lead to the marginalisation of MIC, the BN coalition's third-largest component.

On MIC president S Samy Vellu's apparent plans to go on two months' leave to give his deputy a trial-run as acting president, Mahathir replied: "It should be extended to 20 years".

"He has been president for 30 years. I stepped down after 22 years, and even then, not that many people hated me. But the longer he stays, the more people will hate him," he added.

He was responding to a *Malaysiakini* report where Samy Vellu said he would take a two-month leave early next year so that his anointed successor G Palanivel can take over his presidential duties.

Samy Vellu has been under intense pressure to quit from Umno and from Utusan Malaysia - which is owned by the ruling party - particularly during the run-up to the MIC party elections a fortnight ago.

Newly weds centre of attraction

Mahathir was happy with the turnout at his open house and estimated an attendance of 10,000 people during the 10am to 1pm session. Doors were again open from 3pm to 5pm.

Numerous political big guns were in attendance including Najib, Malacca chief minister Mohd Ali Rustam and former MIC deputy president S Subramaniam, who lost to Palanivel at the MIC polls two weeks ago.

The MIC leader brought along a garland and presented it to Mahathir.

Two guests who turned many heads were newlyweds Ng Vin Ping and his wife Chong Pei Nee who came to extend their Aidilfitri wishes to Mahathir and wife, Siti Hasmah Ali.

The couple's wedding reception was held at the Palace of Golden Horses, a stone's throw away from Mahathir's residence, and they decided to attend the open house function.

The pair waited patiently in the queue for 30 minutes - both dressed in all-white wedding garb - before finally getting to meet Mahathir (*top photo*).

"To the Chinese, today is a very ong (lucky) day to get married. Mahathir is our idol and we are very happy to get married and personally meet him," said Ng, 37, who manages a pharmaceutical company in Shanghai.

"I greeted him and wished him a long life," said Chong, 27, a nutritionist who works for the same company.

After accomplishing their mission, the happy couple left the venue and but not before a round of congratulatory applause from Mahathir's guests.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/113636>