

With Dr M as friend, who needs enemies?
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Umno is a racist party, says Dr Mahathir Mohamad. One can virtually see the banners emblazoned with this petard going up all over the four states presently under Pakatan Rakyat rule.

Pakatan would be foolish not to exploit to the hilt this faux pas by the former Umno strongman.

Some two and half years ago, Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz Nik Mat had the best take on the then long-running contretemps between Mahathir and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Commenting on whether Mahathir - who had theatrically quit in a high dudgeon over Abdullah's supposed deviations - should be allowed back into Umno, Tok Guru Nik Aziz said he hoped the former premier would be.

Tok Guru's mischief in wanting Mahathir's readmission was a variation on American president Lyndon Johnson's reasons for retaining J Edgar Hoover, which was that the FIB director would be more useful "in the tent pissing out than out of the tent pissing in".

Tok Guru's intuition about Mahathir was that whether out or in the party, he characteristically could be counted on to piss on it; it was better he did that from within than without.

Najib undermined

It would seem that in the current verbal jousting between Umno's loose cannon, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, and his nemesis, the party will see its hold on the ground recovered in the last eight months by Prime Minister Najib Razak undermined.

Nazri called Mahathir a "bloody racist" for defending the compulsory civics course for government scholarship holders and civil servants run by the Biro Tatanegara.

This drew a riposte from the former prime minister that was true both to his combative instincts and the syllogism he employed: Umno is a party of one race and Nazri was its member. Therefore Umno and Nazri are racist.

When the results of the Bagan Pinang by-election were announced on Oct 11, it was evident that the leadership of Najib had succeeded in recovering lost ground for Umno.

His activist style, favouring reform and addressing ethnic concerns, suggested that Pakatan would not have as easy a time gaining support as when Najib's predecessor, Abdullah, was in charge of Umno and the nation.

The Umno victory in Bagan Pinang confirmed what the preceding six months had signaled: Najib is a more formidable adversary than Abdullah.

One of Najib's successes was in getting the combative Mahathir on his side. That victory could yet turn out to be Pyrrhic.

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