

**'Mahathir Mohamad' - One man cannot a country make**  
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I refer to my article in *Malaysiakini*, **Indian Muslims - in defence of Mahathir.**

The article generated a lot of comments (23 to date) and most of which were in reaction to the title 'In defence of Mahathir' which was not of my choosing and that completely missed the point of the article.

As much as we like to cast Dr Mahathir Mohamad as demon, it is impossible to alter the history of Malaysia as plural society, a result of British colonial policy and further enhanced by the BN.

I am particularly miffed at remarks that I belong to a segment of non-Malays who see Mahathir as some sort of bigger-than-life figure. I think the reverse is true.

If we still think that Mahathir is the architect of all that is wrong with Malaysia today, we are attributing to this individual too much credit. In fact, Mahathir is not the man who invented the Alliance or the BN.

That he made the best of the race-based politics of this country there is no doubt but so did so many other non-Malays, many of whom once wholeheartedly supported the Alliance and the BN.

By demonising Mahathir, are we therefore absolving ourselves for the support we gave him in election after election in his 22 years as prime minister?

It is better to try to be objective and less emotional. One man cannot a country make. Even his spin doctor, Mohamad Rahmat, has come out with a book to explain how it was 'a team effort' to create 'Dr Mahathir' the politician.

We risk making Mahathir into a wicker man and thus miss holding the present powers-that-be responsible for their failure to make Malaysia a better country.

There were another set of readers who felt that I created 'spin' to explain away Mahathir's statement. That the choice was not really between 'Indian' and 'Malay'. The reality is very different on the ground.

Malaysia is still a race-based country. This is the challenge faced by non-sectarian political parties in which Gerakan was a showcase. Today, the DAP is also trying to prove itself as non-sectarian whilst being deliberately cast as 'Chinese'.

At the time Mahathir began his political career, it was still possible for an Indian Muslim to enter the Malay Muslim fold. Today, Malays constitute the majority and no longer need ethnic hybrids to bolster their numbers.

Race-based politics, my article was trying to show, is a numbers game. I know it is very difficult to wrap one's mind around how race and religion can be conflated. Here is the warped logic of race-based politics, which is stranger than fiction.

Hence to clear the air - we really have to outgrow our own worship of politicians and their supposedly superhuman feats. Mahathir did not create race-based politics although he eventually came to head Umno and the once mighty BN.

Similarly, not all politicians who operated in race-based politics are racists. Tunku Abdul Rahman, for example, wanted to see us become more integrated gradually although he felt we should be independent first.

He too was president of Umno, although he was a leader of another time. Anwar Ibrahim was also once deputy president of Umno but today he is a champion of a non-sectarian political party.

Malaysians have to accept the reality that politics is the art of the possible and that politicians are merely human. Mahathir like the rest of us is, only a product of his times. If this is not myth-busting, I will have to write a work of fiction. Alas, I lack that special talent for drama.

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