

Najib, Dr M put on show for S'wak polls
Malaysianmirror.com
16 September 2010

Those who have forecast a major power tussle at Umno may have to reassess the latest situation. The two protagonists Prime Minister Najib Razak and his predecessor Mahathir Mohamad appear to have knocked out a deal or at least reached an initial compromise.

At glittery function on the eve of Malaysia Day, both men were all smiles and Najib not only paid tribute to the elder statesman but also pledged to continue the latter's Vision 2020 economic plan.

"Our aspiration was encapsulated when Tun Dr Mahathir launched an articulated Vision 2020 and we are the generation that will make it happen," Najib said in his speech at the inaugural Music Arts Style International Festival or MASiF 2010.

Najib chickens out, Mahathir sings new tune

To financial analysts, Najib's words provided further proof that his own New Economic Model, due to be fleshed out next month, will be a watered-down version to appease Mahathir. The ex-premier does not want any further lifting of protectionist barriers even though experts have warned they would harm the economy.

To the political observers, few were surprised as many had expected Najib to chicken out. Mahathir's ruthlessness is legendary and Najib's scandal-plagued record makes him vulnerable to exposure and therefore pressure from the older man, they said.

But Mahathir also sprang a surprise of his own. The former prime minister who ruled Malaysia with a fist of iron for 22 years made a rare departure from his racial rhetoric.

"Although we belong to different races and different ethnic groups but we feel that we are all Malaysians. We may have our differences but not so much that we do not regard this country as ours. Malaysia is our country. Whatever our differences, I am sure everyone in Malaysia will feel a real brotherhood between the people of Malaysia," Mahathir said in a speech that followed Najib's.

Hoping for Malaysians to take the bait

Political pundits whom *Malaysia Chronicle* spoke with were unimpressed. They believe Mahathir was playing to the gallery, pointing out that it was under his administration that the seeds for Malaysia's deepening racial polarization were sown.

That the Sarawak state polls had to be held within the next 10 months also made it expedient for Mahathir and Najib to put on a public show that all was well in Umno, they added.

"This is just another example of the depth of deception and duplicity at Umno. As we said many times, Najib's zero-tolerance for racism and the recent Umno rejection of Perkasa is just a *sandiwara* stage-managed by their newspapers and online portals," PKR strategic director Tian Chua told *Malaysia Chronicle*.

"They will need to keep up the pretence for the next few months so that Malaysians especially Sarawakians will start to believe that things have really changed. But it is easy to spot through the shadow-play. Just ask yourselves, before Perkasa, wasn't Umno racist. As it is now, can you trust them or MCA and MIC?"

Huge business scandals

There is widespread speculation that the recent brouhaha over ultra-Malay rights group Perkasa was also aimed to deflect attention from a series of business scandals involving Najib, Mahathir and another former prime minister Abdullah Badawi.

Controversial blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin had given Malaysians a taste of how deeply involved Mahathir and Badawi could be in the RM8 billion ringgit of losses racked up by national airline MAS. Raja Petra also accused Najib of wanting to cancel a Letter of Intent to China Railway Engineering Corp in favour of China Harbour Engineering Corp so that he could re-negotiate and benefit from a multi-billion ringgit double-tracking railway project.

"They are all holding pistols to each other's throat but nobody will be so silly as to pull the trigger because this is within Umno. If it involves Pakatan, that is a different story. But now as it is, they will give into negotiations with money the most important factor and how to settle with everyone more or less happy," a political watcher had told *Malaysia Chronicle*. He was referring to the Umno infighting between camps aligned to Najib, Mahathir and Badawi,

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