

Mahathir explains his stand in press conference

Excerpts of the press conference held by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his house at The Mines Resort, just outside of Kuala Lumpur, on Monday - a day after his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Q: Did you ask him to step down for the good of the country?

A: I didn't.

Q: Do you want that to happen?

A: I was there to tell him what I was not happy with. I was not there to suggest what he should do, and it is up to him to decide what he should do.

He did say that as a result of what I have done I have become unpopular and he has become unpopular and that the only people who benefited were (former deputy prime minister) Anwar Ibrahim and Nik Aziz (Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat).

It is wrong what TV3 reported that I said I agreed with him that what I had done had made me unpopular and him unpopular and only Anwar Ibrahim and Nik Aziz benefited. This is what he said, not what I said.

Q: What is you, feeling on the comment that you have become unpopular?

A: He says that they have done a survey before I met him. And they had given him a briefing of the survey - that shows this result. If he wants to believe that, it is his right. I said I don't care about being popular or not, but if anybody does things not benefiting the country and Malays in particular, I reserve my right to criticise whenever I think necessary.

And I pointed out to him that firstly, this has become a police state. Because every time anybody invites me to give a talk, they would be called up by the police and warned, called up by the police and told to withdraw the invitation. Someone was not allowed to hold any meeting at all which involved me.

This happened to many. They were very shy to tell me about it but they were called up by the police and of course they were also called up by the Menteri Besar as well. I did not tell him about this so I don't think it is right for me to tell you what is said. But I consider this a police state.

Q: Do you still plan to attend the Umno general meeting and to speak?

A: I have not decided. But I have not been given any slot to speak so I don't know how I am going to speak.

Q: You are the founder of modern

The full transcript of Dr Mahathir's press conference can be found online at www.thestar.com.my

Malaysia. Are you concerned that your legacy is being chipped away by this controversy?

A: It is not being chipped away by the controversy. It is being chipped away by the actions of the Government. For the past three years, there has been no move. The economy has not been doing well. People have not been able to have jobs and unemployment is still high. Nothing has been done really to improve the economy.

Although of course we read of very good figures, but we see retail business is not good, contracts are not easy to come by - Class F people have no jobs and a lot of contractors have folded.

Q: Are you giving yourself a time frame to see changes after your meeting with Pak Lah.

A: Well, I don't talk about time-frames. But if I am scheduled to meet people, if I am allowed to meet people, and I talk, I will mention why certain things are wrong. Just like I am telling you.

Q: What do you want to achieve? You didn't ask the Prime Minister to step down and you didn't set a time frame.

A: The Government has been criti-

cised before: and a Government which is sensitive would take into consideration criticisms. It may take the form of resignation: it may take other forms like stopping all these wrong things, the things that people criticise.

Q: From your point of view, what is the state of the economy?

A: The economy is bad. I know because a lot of Chinese business people are very unhappy. Some of them, and I told this to Pak Lah, some of them have said they will not vote for Barisan Nasional at the next election. And some of them said today they preferred to go to China to do business because there are more opportunities in China than there are in Malaysia because they don't find it easy to do business in Malaysia.

Q: Are you convinced by or satisfied with any of Pak Lah's responses?

A: At the moment, no.

Q: Why?

A: Well, no, because he said he didn't think his children were involved. He said that Khairy (Jamaluddin) was his son-in-law and he was working with him before and suddenly became his son-in-law. And he says he will ask them, that's all.

Q: Does that mean that Pak Lah's responses and reactions to what you had to tell him, your assessment is that you have not actually achieved much in this meeting?

A: I have achieved the objective of telling him in quite substantial detail. So to that extent I am satisfied, no spinning, saying that thing was not going like that (makes spinning motion with finger).

Q: Do you wish that you had never stepped down?

A: I wish I had stepped down in 1998, if it had been possible. I could have stepped down in 2002 but I was asked to... He did tell me that he willingly asked me to stay on for another year, which is something I appreciate.

But this is not a question of what you do or a character thing. This is not about his or my character. This is about what is happening. I must admit that what is happening is, something I never suspected at all or expected. I didn't expect any family involvement. I pointed out to him that it is wrong to have family involvement.

I also spoke about this oil-for-food thing, which is wrong. It was during the time when he was deputy prime minister and there was his name, in this list published by the UN, that he was involved in oil-for-food. Although they say that he was a beneficiary he

did not gain anything. But that is the oil-for-food report from the US. But as you know the US excluded all the American companies involved in the oil for food so the US publication contains elements of cover-up.

But I don't know whether the US is covering up or not in this particular case. But he admitted that he wrote a recommendation for this chap Taufik or whatever it is, who happens to be a distant relative of his, married to his sister-in-law. And when he did that, of course he was the deputy prime minister.

Q: So when you met Pak Lah to back up your statements, did you show him any documents that you have?

A: No documents.

Q: So you raise this one about his son in-law and his involvement in the oil-for-food, are you accusing the Prime Minister of corruption?

A: Well, it is up to the public to assess. It is up to the legal people to decide on this but as far as I am concerned, it is wrong that a serving deputy prime minister should get his name listed among the companies in the oil-for-food trade with Iraq.

Q: But Pak Lah never denied he recommended two or three companies that are related to him. In fact he said it is quite normal for businessmen to come to see him for letters of recommendation, so he didn't deny, he said it's quite normal.

A: As far as I am concerned, if you are in the Government you should not form any company in which you are listed as the beneficiary. You should not write letters of recommendation for your own relative. You can write letters of recommendation in a very general way or for some other company.

Q: What is next for you after this?

A: I told him I will continue to make criticism and I will continue in my usual way. But I do hope the habit of asking the police to frighten people should stop, and my civic rights should be restored... that I have the right to speak to Umno, the right to speak to any audience that I like.

Q: You said the Chinese would vote for the Opposition, aren't you afraid that the Opposition will have bigger majority?

A: I think it is not possible, my assessment is that it is not possible for the Opposition to win but they may be

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Dr M: I am a loyal Umno member

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contest is something which happens in Umno but it happens when someone has long served Umno and proven his worth. But this is someone who had just joined Umno and who has not done any deeds for Umno but won without contest.

Q: How much longer are you going to be patient?

A: I will continue. Until there's some change, until I achieve some result. Of course, I am 82 years old, people believe that if they delay long enough, this interfering Nosy Parker will disappear or would not be able to speak.

O: Would you like to see the PM leading for a second term?

A: Depends on how he performs.

Q: Are you saying that Pak Lah is losing control?

A: It's some people's opinion that he has lost control?

Q: During your time, you did not see eye-to-eye all the time with Tun Hussein Onn or Tunku Abdul Rahman. Don't you think it seems like one big cycle going round and round?

A: But when Tunku and Tun Hussein sided with Semangat 46, I never stopped them, they went around, they spoke, they

criticised me; but I never stopped them.

But why are they stopping me from speaking, censoring me in the mainstream media, why are they spinning stories about me, digging up something that happened during my time to prove that I was a bad PM?

I didn't do those things. Did I dig up stories on Tunku Abdul Rahman, can you show evidence I dug up stories about Tun Hussein committing whatever?

Q: In the 22 years (as prime minister), you had no rival...

A: Despite all people trying to pull me down. You know (Tun) Musa (Hitam) tried to pull me

down, he thought he was more popular and he would win but he lost And Tengku Razaleigh (Hamzah) tried to pull me down and of course Anwar Ibrahim also.

Despite all these I survived, because this is democracy. You have to allow for people to criticise you and if you have a good answer you win, if you don't have a good answer, you lose;

Q: Would you like to form an Opposition party with like-minded people?

A: No, I don't I am a loyal Umno member. What I am trying to do - people might not believe it - is to save Umno from bad leadership.