

THE STAR

DATE: 12 / 09 / 2007

Public fed on diet of updates on Dr Mahathir

The Star - 12/9/2007

THERE was quite a bit of curiosity when it was reported that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had roti canai and high-energy milk for breakfast at the National Heart Institute (IJN) where he is recovering from heart surgery.

What on earth is high-energy milk, someone had asked. Actually it was less about the milk than the fact that it was Dr Mahathir consuming it.

The former premier has always been a newsmaker and the intense interest among so many ordinary Malaysians about his coronary bypass and ongoing recovery shows that he makes news regardless of whether he is on his feet or flat on his back on an operating table.

His progress at IJN has been as closely watched-over like one would a relative or old friend. Yesterday, it was reported that after breakfast he had his first real shower and walked gingerly around his bed.

Mundane information? Not when you are the iconic Dr Mahathir.

The news was probably lapped up by people out there for as someone said, "Wah, already up and about."

The latest picture showed him sitting up, still a bit wan and frail around the edges but looking real good for an 82-year-old who had undergone his second bypass.

Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali who was seated beside her husband wore a mega-watt smile that said it all. The lady is the real champ because every time her husband is admitted into hospital, she packs her bags, moves into the ward and is there by his side till the day he is discharged.

The family had kept news about his operation pretty much under wraps. No one suspected it especially given the way he enjoyed himself at the 50th Merdeka parade, then just two days from his date with his heart surgeons.

Looking rather handsome in a grey suit and red tie, he had tapped his feet to the music and waved his flag like everyone else.

He could not have missed the thunderous applause when his name was mentioned and especially when the floats displaying his achievements as the "Era of Modernisation" went past the grand stand.

The slogan was no boast for the floats were almost overflowing with all the symbols of his achievements - the national car, KL Tower, Putrajaya, Twin Towers and so on.

Even Dr Mahathir could not stifle his amusement as the reminders of his years in power rumbled by. It was little wonder he had postponed his operation till after the Merdeka bash. He had every reason to be there - 50 years of independence, 22 of which was under his leadership.



Doctors had asked him to take it easy last year after he suffered the first of his three heart attacks that was to lead to his recent surgery.

According to his son Datuk Mukhriz, doctors had noted that although Dr Mahathir's chronological age was then 81, his biological age was only 65. On top of that, tests showed that he had an unusual level of growth hormones.

Still the family must have been deeply worried, something apparent from his first-born Datuk Paduka Marina's blog.

Marina has the unique advantage of being a ringside witness, or should we say bedside witness, to all this and her blog has been a well of insight into her father's recovery.

But sometimes a picture speaks more than words can say and many liked the snapshot taken a day after the operation showing her father's hand resting lightly over her own palm with the caption, "Me and dad holding hands, 3.30pm".

Father and daughter have the same shapely hand with tapered fingers. Likewise, the picture of his tycoon son Datuk Mokhzani's clean-shaven head, an act in fulfilment of his pledge to shave off his hair if his father got through the operation.

Marina also posted a video from a well-wisher that showed photo clips of her father, accompanied by Elvis' "Wooden Heart". It was so cute, yet so touching.

In the Parliament lobby, on the day of his operation on Sept 4, many MPs had approached reporters for news about the former premier.

The 2008 Budget was then just days away and for some of them, Dr Mahathir's health seemed on par with the significance of the Budget.

"Will the Budget go on if anything happens to Tun?" one of them had asked. No one even wanted to imagine the scenario.

But, thankfully, the operation went smoothly, the Budget was successfully tabled and Dr Mahathir is on the road to recovery.

And as Malaysia's most famous heart patient continues to recover, he will have to accept the public inquisitiveness over his health. And that includes whatever he may be having for breakfast next.

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