



# Speak Now or Forever Hold Your Peace

It is time Malaysians from all walks of life be candid about what they feel is right and wrong with the country today so that they can work together to create a better future for us all.

AFTER BEING IN POWER FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS AND HAVING MADE a series of controversial decisions, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, now has a real chance to prove to the people that he is a worthy successor to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Months after belatedly tabling the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, Abdullah, in a span of several days in late July and early August, announced two major regional development projects, claiming one of them to be 'my idea'.

They are the RM15-billion 'foreign-funded' South Johor Super Corridor and the long overdue Penang public transportation projects comprising the 2<sup>nd</sup> Penang Bridge and the Georgetown monorail, which are also price-tagged at RM15 billion.

Announcing that 'this is my vision and my plan, my idea', the Prime Minister, who was described by the sensation-prone *New Straits Times* (*NST*) as being in a 'take-charge mood', told a crowd of 5,000 'crushing' supporters (also an *NST* term) of his massive brainwave.

He said (as reported by the *NST*): 'Let me stress that this is my idea. It did not come from anyone else. It is my own vision and plan to create this super corridor in south Johor to make it the nation's premier growth centre.'

Abdullah might have been in a 'take-charge mood', as the *NST*'s Ravi Nambiar so eloquently described him, but the way it was reported made the Prime Minister sound a tad arrogant.

All our past leaders had their great ideas and great moments, but the newspapers had not reported them in a manner that made these great people seem self-centered and arrogant.

When Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra took over the independence struggle from Datuk Onn Jaafar, he said that it was the movement of all Malaysians.

When the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussain promoted the concept of growth with equity that gave birth to the New Economic Policy (NEP), he attributed it to the aspirations of the people.

When the late Tun Hussein Onn named Dr Mahathir as his deputy in 1976 and sacked Pas from the Barisan Nasional (BN) in 1977, he did it *dengan nama Allah* (in the name of Allah).

And when Dr Mahathir presented his 'Way Forward' speech to the Malaysian Business Council in 1991, he didn't say it was his vision. In fact, the tagline 'Vision 2020' was not even his. It was the late Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee who suggested it.

But if that's what Abdullah had said, who are we to disagree, especially when it was presented in black and white by an officially sanctioned newspaper like the *NST*?

But where does that leave Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, the State Legislative Assembly and the state Economic Planning Unit? What role did they have in this great vision? Or the people of Johor for that matter.

### Don't make changes for the sake of change

I DON'T think anybody has a problem with the Prime Minister claiming the project to be his idea and vision. In fact, it's refreshing that he is starting to break his 'elegant silence' and talking about ideas and visions.

This is of singular importance because so far, the major decisions he has made were either to debunk, cancel or delay ideas and projects launched during his predecessor's era.

I am sure that having been a key civil servant in the early days of the NEP, when many original ideas were born and implemented, and having served in Dr Mahathir's Cabinet since 1981, Abdullah has no problem coming up with his own original ideas.

Until recently, Dr Mahathir had no reservations about the correctness of naming Abdullah as his successor. He has been Abdullah's mentor since 1981. Two days after becoming Prime Minister, he promoted Abdullah to a full minister and in 1984, gave him the key post of Education Minister. But in 1987, out of fear and, possibly, envy for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and under the constant spell of Tun Musa Hitam, he joined the futile attempt to unseat Dr Mahathir.

That's history. For the present, the challenge is for him to repay the massive mandate he received two years ago. And with the claim of originality comes the heavy responsibility of ensuring that these ideas are carried out in the manner that he has visualised and conceptualised in his head.

This requires the Prime Minister to coach the agencies and people responsible for implementing the project (or projects) on every detail and approach so that the originality of his idea is not lost in bureaucratic interpretation.

There is a ready lesson – a template – even. The only hurdle, if any, is the Prime Minister's willingness to learn from the past. Without reservations, we have to acknowledge that Dr Mahathir

is the best teacher a keen student can ever hope to have.

Many past leaders had originated many ideas. But what made Dr Mahathir special was his ability to think through every single step of their planning, implementation and monitoring. Over time, even his most strident critics came to accept that his ideas benefited the people.

Be it the launching of the National Car Project (Proton) or the building of the KL International Airport, the promotion of Johor as an international shipping hub, the hosting of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition and the more mundane undertakings like the greening of Kuala Lumpur and the creation of an artificial wetlands for Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir's handy work is apparent.

If some of these projects are today in a state of uncertainty and neglect, the blame lies squarely on the bad political and bureaucratic habit of changing things for the sake of change – very much like giving a perfectly good pumpkin to a mouse or a flower to a monkey.

### Give Pak Lah a chance

AT a time when an increasing number of people are entertaining the thought that only a change in the leadership of the country will change the increasingly dire situation that Malaysia is getting into, I would like to take a somewhat different stance.

Let us help the Prime Minister to make the change. I still harbour hopes that Abdullah will rise to the occasion. This must have been Dr Mahathir's hope when he appointed Abdullah as his successor over Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, whom he liked more.

The Prime Minister, when interviewed by his old friend Datuk Annuar Zaini over TV3 on Aug 7, tried very hard to convince the audience that he was not under anybody's spell – not his businessman son Kamaluddin or his businessman-politician son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin.

Let us give the Prime Minister the chance to prove by words and deeds that he is free from the stranglehold of these people, whom we believe are leading him astray and who are distracting him from his *niat ikhlas* (sincere intentions) and his clarion call of 'work with me and not for me'.

Who knows, if more people worked with him and told him things that he ought to know instead of keeping bad news from him, the better the chances that he might become the Prime Minister that we want him to be.

But if we are not willing to take this risk, or if we keep away from him, he may have no choice but to listen to those people, whom we now believe are not telling him the things he ought to hear but the things they believe he likes to hear.

It was for this reason that after agonising for many days, I decided to accept an invitation to speak at the annual 'Media Conference' organised by the Ministry of Internal Security – of which Abdullah is the Minister – last month.

I participated knowing that what I say might not go down well with the organisers and the ruling elite. But I thought it was better for me to speak out and hold my peace thereafter. So I told the conference that the Government should loosen control on the media.

Let us be frank about what we feel is right and what is wrong

with our country today, and treat this as our manifesto – the *raykat's* manifesto that tells the Prime Minister, Umno and the BN what we expect in the run-up to the next general election.

That includes stopping the insults against Dr Mahathir and making a real effort to explain to the people what's really happening to the economy, law and order and the promise of an improved delivery system.

The mainstream media should cease stopping people from airing their views and start reporting diligently instead of spinning every news item. Let us say this once and for all and hope to hold our peace thereon.

If nothing that I say here makes any sense, by all means consider me mad and allow me the freedom as a mad man. I promise, I will not run amok.

### The Reluctant Politician

DEPUTY Umno Youth Chief, Khairy Jamaluddin, was reported as saying that he was prepared to quit the post if the movement considered him a liability.

Nevertheless, said the 30-year-old, as a mark of respect for party members, any decision on his position 'could' be decided only by the movement's delegates 'as they were the ones who elected him'.

Going on the point of semantics, I wonder if Khairy can consider himself an elected official. I can't remember him being opposed by anybody for the post.

Had he been challenged and won like Anwar against Datuk Suhaimi Kamaruddin and Dr Mahathir against Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, I would agree totally with him that 'nobody can force a person to leave except those who elected the leader'.

If Khairy is a reluctant politician, as the Prime Minister and Umno President seemed to suggest in his TV3 interview, then I sincerely believe that he should immediately reconsider his position.

It is bad enough being a liability to one's political movement, but being a liability to one's own body and soul is worse.

In the interview, Abdullah said it was Umno Youth Chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein 'who insisted that Khairy contest the deputy chief's post' (*The Star*, Aug 8).

I am an older person. I have daughters and sons-in-law as old as Khairy. So I can say a thing or two for the benefit of the people of Khairy's age. And one of them is: Don't force yourself to serve the people if you think that's a burden and a liability.

So, if indeed Khairy, as the Prime Minister put it, was insisted by Hishammuddin to take up the Deputy Umno Youth Chief's post, then he has every right to withdraw. Why should he succumb to Hishammuddin's pressure and live a life of misery?

Hishammuddin has no right to insist that Khairy hold on to the job and cry his nights away (as was shown in a *Berita Harian* photograph).

The same applies to all other politicians, be they Cabinet Ministers, Menteri Besar or Chief Ministers. They cannot say one thing in a whisper and say 'yes we support' loudly when their lofty posts are at stake. **mb**

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