

# The great meddler or the crisis inventor?

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IT is too much to expect Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to feel the slightest guilt for any of his more questionable actions when he was prime minister of Malaysia.

His resignation from Umno in a fit of spite has left the nation in a state of uncertainty at a time when we could all do without the kind of crisis that the former prime minister is exceptionally good at inventing.

It must be an emotionally bruising experience for Dr Mahathir, who once held sway over us, to be told bluntly that his tantrums and ravings were not getting him anywhere.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has made it clear that he has no intention of taking the taunts lying down. He will not allow the wily practitioner of confrontational politics to dislodge him from his perch.

Dr Mahathir has a long history of mounting vicious personal attacks against those, including Bapa Malaysia, he wanted to bring down.

He has recklessly propagated the politics of fear among the Malays following Umno's recent electoral reverses, with consequences too terrible to contemplate.

His championing of such unworthy causes as *ketuanan Melayu* and other forms of Malay chauvinism can lead to an exaggerated sense of insecurity among the Malays which could well lead to an escalation of racial frictions.

Many Malays question the motives of the man who claims to love the Malays and yet is apparently bent on weakening them even further. Does Dr Mahathir not care that the journey he is embarking on, to serve his selfish ends, will divide and destroy Umno?

I am on record in my column in August 2006 as telling Dr Mahathir, in terms more direct than usual even for me, to stop taking pot-shots at his anointed successor and to let Abdullah get on with the difficult job of governing a difficult country that has yet to find its identity 50 years after Merdeka.

By way of underlining my message, I took special care to tell him in the nicest possible way to start getting used to eating humble pie once out of office.

I did not say it would be easy to begin with, but I said it would not be impossible as both Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Hussein Onn had learnt to do it with inordinate charm and dignity.

For good measure, I told him to disabuse himself of any notion he might harbour about his indispensability to the Malaysian body politic.

Umno should consider itself fortunate to be rid of him. I hope history will be kinder to him than many Malaysians now think he deserves.

I am writing this column in the peace and quiet of the Goodenough Club of the University of London in Mecklenburgh Square WC1 which



TUNKU  
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has for sometime now become my favourite London base.

Here in civilised, understated surroundings I am allowed the luxury of detachment, be it ever so brief, from the Malaysian political scene that is getting more muddled and muddied by the day.

Distance allows us a priceless opportunity to stand back and reflect without the distorting influence of being too close to events. Malaysians must learn to recognise and distinguish the wanton destroyers from the true builders of our nation in the wider context.

Yesterday, London put on its best spring weather — bright sunshine bursting through some light cloud cover, with some lovely soft cool breezes caressing your face to put Londoners and visitors in good cheer.

I made my way to Buckingham Palace to fulfil a promise I made a few weeks ago to feast my eyes, together with thousands of tourists from all over the world, on an ancient British military ceremony of "Changing the Guard", an event that is steeped in the best British military traditions, marked by pomp and circumstance.

This was no run of the mill ceremony of changing the guard at the most famous palace in the world.

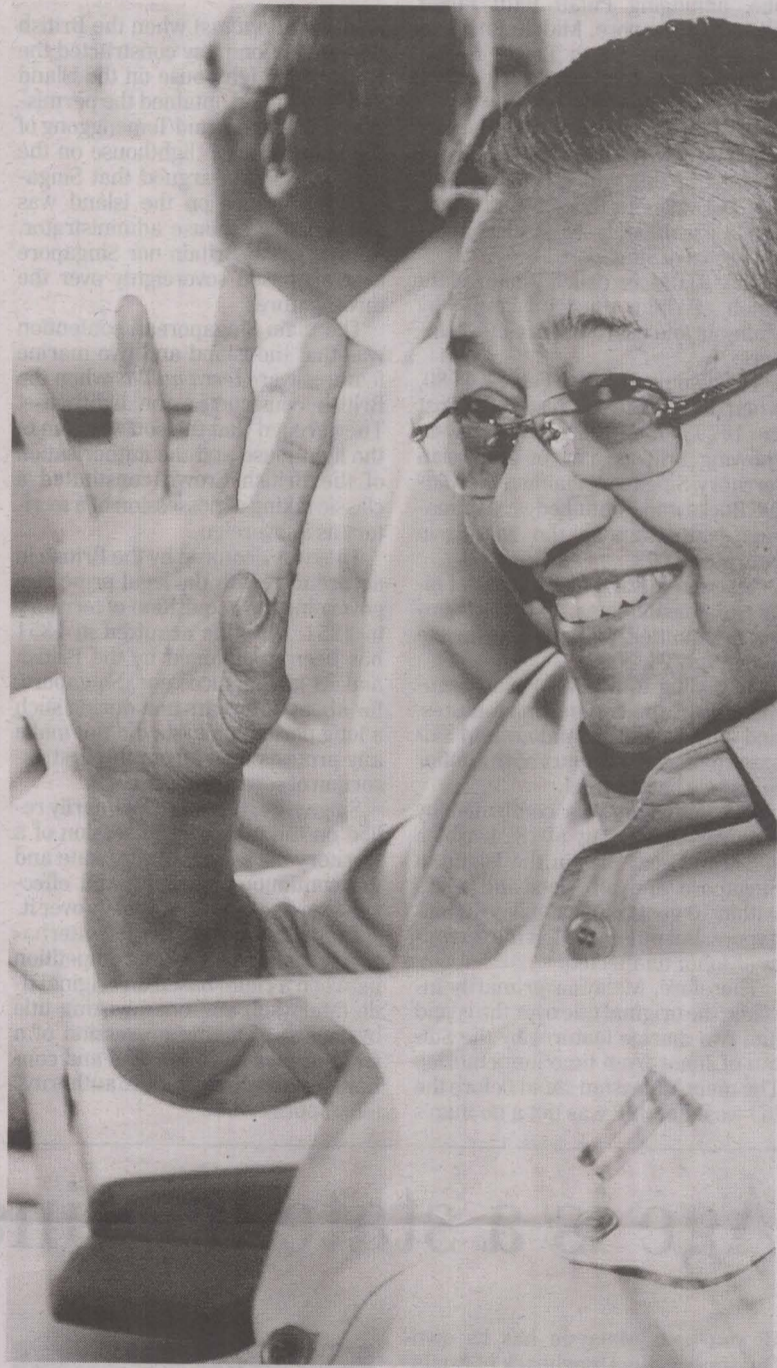
I was there to see the 120 officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the Malay ceremonial guard company on parade on the forecourt of Buckingham Palace, together with the red-coated Welsh Guards, with their respective bands in attendance, playing in the case of the Royal Malay Regiment selections from traditional Malay music.

It was an elaborate ceremony, and I had a lump in my throat to see how splendidly the Malays performed, in complete harmony with their Welsh counterparts. If they had been wearing the bearskin and the red coat, at a hundred paces, no one would have noticed anything out of turn.

They looked extremely smart in their pristine white ceremonial dress and the green gold-banded songkok. What a splendid way to showcase our military professionalism before thousands of admiring people every day of the week.

Those of us who seek refuge behind a false sense of national dignity should see the display of the highest degree of discipline and professionalism by our soldiers while carrying out their London Public Duties. The overall security of the palace is provided by a special elite police detachment.

There is nothing demeaning about



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these high-profile ceremonial duties. They are undertaken as a tribute to the sovereign of a friendly nation with which we have enjoyed close links for a very long time.

The fact that the Queen of England is Head of the Commonwealth should not be lost on those of us who value our commonwealth connections. Let us learn to appreciate and value true and trusted friends, and learn to be gracious in our dealings with those who have come to our aid on numerous occasions when the peace and security of our nation were at risk.

Those who say it is all a waste of money are missing the point completely, because the value of forging ever closer links with friends of

Malaysia cannot be measured solely in terms of money.

We have to put the London Public Duties in their proper context, and I have no doubt that the Malaysian Armed Forces Council made the right decision to put our magnificent soldiers on parade in the British capital as a tribute to the Queen of England as Head of the Commonwealth and also to the loyalty and professionalism of our armed forces. In a sense, it is a celebration of Malaysian and British Arms.

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