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Why Mahathir quit Umno

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MOHAN: I still can't figure out why Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad quit Umno last week. For a man who was a member since the beginning and was even at one time referred to as Dr Umno, it is difficult to fathom why he did what he did. Any idea Cikgu?

Zain: I can only guess.

Chong: Yes, since we are not privy to his thoughts, that's all we can do - guess. I am sure some who are very close to him know his motive. But for the moment they are not saying.

Mohan: I am not sure about him confiding in others. He is known to be a loner. He plans alone and keeps everything to himself. Maybe he confides in his wife, I do not know.

Chong: Maybe.

Azman: Strange indeed! Having risen through the ranks to become his party's president and the country's prime minister, one would have thought Mahathir would want to be an Umno member till the end of his life.

Chong: And to have "Here lies an Umno member" on his tombstone. I feel sad for him. Whatever mistakes he made, to me there is no doubt at all that he was a great prime minister. So why?

Mohan: Why indeed? In fact when he began criticising Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi - his chosen successor - many people thought he should not have done so. He should have just kept quiet and said nothing about the new government unless his counsel or advice was sought. That way he maintains his dignity as an elder statesman.

Chong: He should have kept quiet like he said he would when he stepped down. But it must be



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difficult for him when things he thought was wrong were being implemented.

Mohan: What? Must he jump every time he thinks his successors are taking a wrong turn? Let them be. Let others make an effort to right the wrong. Anyway, he should recognise the fact that people are entitled to make some

mistakes. During his 22 years, he must admit that he made quite a few. Therefore as a former prime minister, he should just keep his views to himself. Just maintain an elegant silence like his successor is doing most of the time he criticises him.

Azman: Britain too at one time had a former prime minister who was publicly critical of the new man at the helm. Remember Margaret Thatcher. She was very critical of John Major, her successor.

“Must he jump every time he thinks his successors are taking a wrong turn? Let others make an effort to right the wrong. He should recognise that people are entitled to make some mistakes. During his 22 years, he must admit that he made quite a few.”

Chong: But not the way Mahathir has been going after Abdullah. Here Mahathir has been practically bludgeoning Abdullah every opportunity he got and telling him - no more subtlety mind you - he has lost the right to rule and, therefore, he must go.

Azman: Maybe it's because things are really bad but no one is doing anything about it. Maybe he is doing it because no one else has the guts to do it. He wants to save the country he loves from being wrecked by Abdullah's policies.

Chong: That's a lot of hogwash!

Mohan: Well, that's our view. For him, he is single-minded that

Abdullah must go and he is doing everything to make him go.

Chong: Sometimes I think Mahathir forgets. He thinks he still wields a lot of power. Abdullah is the incumbent numero uno. And incumbency gives him a lot of power. Mahathir knows that only too well.

Azman: Maybe he expects people to rally to him so that he could effect change though "people power". But it didn't happen. When Tun Musa Hitam resigned as deputy prime minister in 1986, he expected people to come out and protest. Nothing much happened. Only a small group saw him off at the airport. As incumbent, Mahathir held all the cards. And when many people rallied to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when he was sacked as deputy prime minister, Mahathir used the immense power of the state against him.

Chong: Thus, and unfortunately for Mahathir, nothing happened when he announced he was going to

resign from Umno and would rejoin only when a new government is in place.

Azman: What a way to go. And not only that. Now he is called all sorts of names - gutter politician, meddler, destroyer and a thorn in the flesh.

Mohan: He must have known that many party leaders would revile him and heap scorn on him. Why did he do it?

Zain: I think all he wanted was for people to sit up and take notice of what he was trying to do. And we all agree that by his resigning, people did sit up. In fact the whole nation did sit up. If that was the objective of his resigning, he achieved it. But to what end?