

Newspaper	The Star
Date	11 November 2015

# De facto PM role for Dr M?

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's plan to have a 'council of elders' to advise the Prime Minister of his choice is beyond bizarre and flies in the face of a modern democracy. *The Star - 11/11/2015*

MANY Malaysians have come to believe that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad regrets stepping down as prime minister.

But it was not until recently that they realised how determined he was to continue to have a say in the running of the Government.

Well, it is all out in the open now.

Dr Mahathir appears to have in mind a sort of de facto prime minister role for himself in the event that he succeeds in toppling Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He plans to have a "council of elders" to assist whoever becomes the next prime minister. He did not specify who would comprise this "council" but for sure, he would be the leading member of the body.

It was so bizarre and the whole notion flies in the face of a modern nation state.

That was what went through Tawfik Ismail's mind as he sat listening to Dr Mahathir. This happened at a meeting earlier this year between the former prime minister and the G25 group of moderates, of which Tawfik is a member.

"I was taken aback. It struck me as being very authoritarian. It wasn't something that would be

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analysis



considered in any democracy unless there was a state of emergency," said Tawfik, whose father Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman was once Malaysia's deputy prime minister.

At that time, the G25 members had requested to meet Dr Mahathir to discuss their concerns about Islam and the Constitution but Dr Mahathir was more interested in talking about why Najib should be replaced.

Dr Mahathir did not mention who he had in mind as the replacement but it was obvious it would be Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Months after the "council of elders" bombshell, Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin met separately with the G25 group. This time around, the pair wanted to enlist the support of the G25 in their quest against Najib or at least that was what Tawfik thought.

The irony, as Tawfik noted, was that Muhyiddin had snubbed the group when it wanted to meet

him last year.

At the time, the then deputy prime minister, who had famously declared himself as "Malay first and Malaysian second", regarded the group as too liberal for his comfort level.

During the recent meeting, Muhyiddin tried to win their sympathy for his sacking and asked whether the G25 would be willing to work with a party from east Malaysia to form some sort of a third force and include him in a role.

"The fact that they wanted to use the G25 intrigued me but we didn't want to take sides. It made us uncomfortable because we weren't expecting to be an audience to that kind of conversation," said Tawfik.

Tawfik's own conclusion was that the two Umno big-guns were expecting to be axed from Umno and were looking for an alternative platform or vehicle to operate from.

His account came out during his interview with an online news portal in conjunction with the launch of *Drifting into Politics*, a collection of articles by his late father.

He was sharing what had transpired during the encounters, although it is possible that members

of the G25 were quite flattered at being courted by Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin.

Tawfik had also inadvertently provided the most direct evidence yet of how closely Dr Mahathir and Muhyiddin – the 2Ms as some call them – are working together in their quest against Najib.

What most people cannot get over, however, is the idea of a council of elders working alongside the prime minister of the day.

"It's totally absurd. Why should we have something like that? We will have a lame duck PM who has to listen to someone else telling him what to do," said Terengganu researcher Dr Azmi Omar.

There is little doubt that Dr Mahathir will call the shots if the plan succeeds. It will be his version of the controversial "fifth floor boys" whom he had criticised for making decisions on behalf of Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

It will make Umno the laughing stock of the country. Umno will be in a situation similar to that in PKR with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim pulling the strings over Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

It is quite astounding that some-

one as level-headed and seasoned as Muhyiddin has gone along with it. Surely, he can see that he will struggle to get respect from inside and outside Umno if he has to take advice from a council of elders.

He will be what some would term as *roti tanpa telur* – a plain roti canai or a metaphor for someone without clout.

As for Dr Mahathir, the joke circulating on social media is that the council of elders will comprise "Mahathir, Tun M, Chedet, Marina's dad, Mokhzani's dad, Mukhriz's dad, Mirzan's dad and Siti Hasmah's hubby".

A former political secretary to Abdullah said the latter used to complain that Dr Mahathir would query him about why he did this and not that when they met.

"On one occasion, Pak Lah lost his cool and said: 'I am the Prime Minister. I am running the country, not you'," said the former aide.

It is quite amazing that Dr Mahathir has changed so little in the way he thinks and acts. But the fact that people are not going along with what he wants shows that the world around him has changed and moved on.