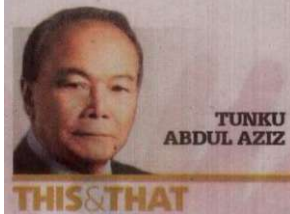


Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	27 APRIL 2015

Dr M's criticisms clearly going beyond the pale

POLITICAL ADVENTURISM: In his crusade against Najib, Dr M's actions have flown in the face of reason and common decency



TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not a spent force. In October 2003, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* ran a special report to mark the end of Dr Mahathir's tenure as prime minister of Malaysia after being in the saddle for 22 years.

I was among some half a dozen people or so who were invited to give their views on the man and his stewardship of this very complex society. I wrote:

"I have watched Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's brand of governance with a mixture of alarm, disbelief, despair, pride and joy — my senses and emotions continually thrown into a state of confusion and turmoil.

"His gamble with his personal integrity in outrageously questionable ventures — putting at risk the Employees Provident Fund and the national reserves, no less, in his forays into the international tin market and the world of currency speculation, so glibly described as being undertaken in the 'national interest', must rank as the most bizarre aspects of his premiership.

"It would be churlish to deny him the accolade he so richly deserves (his many inconsistencies and contradictions notwithstanding) for his brilliant stewardship of this difficult, dynamic, multiethnic, and potentially volatile nation in search of greatness.

"Even Dr Mahathir's worst detractors will readily admit that no one has done as much as he to instil a sense of national pride and confidence in his countrymen and countrywomen based on solid social, economic and political achievements."

The handover of power to his anointed successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, was seamless. It was without incident — no histrionics or rancour — in keeping with Malay tradition and practice which frowns upon open public spats or squabbles. Sadly, within months rather than years, something to-

tally unthinkable happened that threw the nation into a state of shock and despair.

• Dr Mahathir who had given up his perch on the totem pole of power and prestige had found it difficult, understandably so, to bridge the transition and make the vital mental adjustment. He felt keenly from all accounts the loss of power to "do it my way" which incidentally was a favourite with him. In a sudden blazing burst of energy, he busied himself in mounting an unremitting series of virulent personal attacks against the hapless prime minister of his choice.

Pak Lah, the genial and modest, unimposing, gentleman was well-respected for his consensual and non-confrontational approach to politics. He did not have a dog's chance; he was savagely mauled.

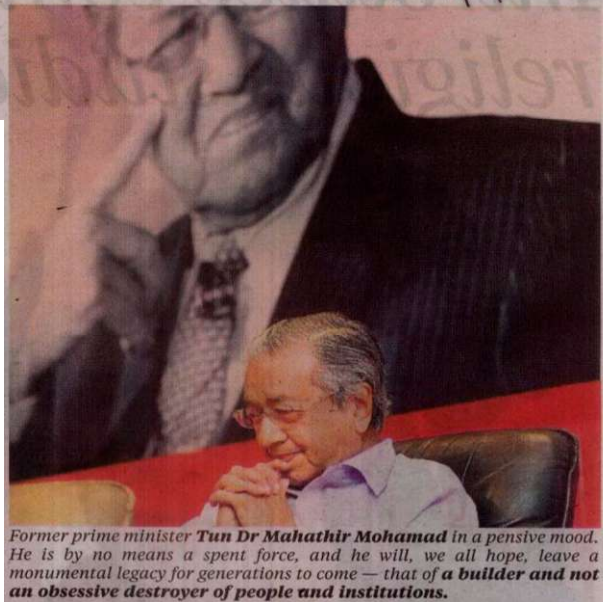
Throughout the entire period in office, he maintained his dignity in the face of extremely shabby and vicious provocation. In the event, he emerged the clear winner in the "dug eat dog" world of politics. He came out of the war of attrition with his reputation as a decent human being intact.

Just as we thought Dr Mahathir had mellowed and was ripe to assume the mantle of a statesman, he sprang another surprise, and this time round called on Datuk Seri Najib Razak to step down.

If Dr Mahathir succeeded in his latest political adventurism, he will have scalped three heads of government. The first in the series of political assassinations, lest we forget, was Tunku Abdul Rahman, our first prime minister, no less. What have the Tunku, Abdullah Badawi, and Najib in common? They had all committed the unpardonable sin of omission — omitting to do Dr Mahathir's bidding.

Tunku was perceived by misguided Umno ultras, including Dr Mahathir, as being soft on the Chinese; Abdullah turned out to be very much his own man and not the man with the feet of clay that the great man had hoped for. Abdullah refused to be manipulated.

Najib is being hounded for defying him, refusing to dance to his tune and putting a damper on his penchant for the absurd. I have no quarrel with him for asking questions about issues of public interest as a citizen, but I suspect his motives and regard his criticisms as clearly going beyond the pale. Therein lies the great yawning gap



Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a pensive mood. He is by no means a spent force, and he will, we all hope, leave a monumental legacy for generations to come — that of a builder and not an obsessive destroyer of people and institutions.

I believe the government must be held accountable for all of its actions and those actions must be put under the closest public scrutiny

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builder and not an obsessive destroyer of people and institutions.

In his crusade against Najib, Dr Mahathir's actions, even by his own standards, have flown in the face of reason and common decency. If he has even a shred of evidence of Najib's wrongdoing, please lodge a report with the police and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

Quoting the Sarawak Report as his source of information, and obviously accepting it as an article of faith without checking and verifying the truth of the allegations does not, I fear, reflect well on Dr Mahathir who seems to have allowed himself to become nothing more than a purveyor of rumours.

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We have to remember, though, that we should not short-circuit the systems and procedures that regulate the conduct of government business.

We will get the answers to the puzzle that is Malaysia Development Berhad, but not by hustling and imputing improper motives. Can't we wait until the allegations have been concluded and the justice system is brought into play? If we do not trust our existing institutions, what alternatives lie in our mind?

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between altruism and selfish self-centred behaviour.

I am disappointed that this great man of destiny should have allowed himself to fall from grace in the eyes of many Malays who had very much hoped that he would have used his considerable influence to unite Malaysians of all races, and the Malays in particular. He is in the best possible position to encourage Malaysians to accept the reality of a multiracial and multireligious Malaysia in good faith and in the spirit of common humanity.

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