

Newspaper	The Star
Date	22 June 2015

He's not Bond, more like M, Dr M

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad does not like to lose but it looks like he is losing in the fight to take down Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak because Umno wants to give the Prime Minister time to sort out the 1MDB issue.

The Star - 22/6/2015

WHEN Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad started his attacks on the Prime Minister several months ago, a family member of the elder statesman said "he always goes for broke".

The family member was not kidding.

Dr Mahathir seems intent to go all the way in his fight against Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. He has stepped it up and taken his accusations to the international media, repeating everything he has said at home and more.

The Umno die-hards, especially Dr Mahathir's peers, are horrified.

They pointed out that he used to be so touchy about people criticising the country and its leaders on the international stage, almost to the point of it being taboo, and there he was doing the same thing.

The interviews he gave to several international publications have touched on the 1MDB issue, the Aashy lifestyle of the Prime Minister's wife, their daughter's lavish wedding and the murder of Altantuya Shaariibuu.

Well, times have changed and Dr Mahathir, as they say, "can do as he likes". He is like James Bond - he has a licence to kill, metaphorically speaking, of course.

Malaysia's James Bond is not used



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analysis

to losing but it does look like he is not going to win this fight.

And it is not solely because Najib has been able to resist the pushing but because the rest of Umno has refused to go along with the former prime minister.

Umno has chosen to go with Najib. It is crystal clear by now that the party has decided to rally around Najib and to give him a chance to resolve the 1MDB debacle.

Najib has had a series of meetings with party leaders at all levels, from division heads down to the three wings, and the word is that the party wants him to stay.

They want to give him time to sort out the 1MDB problems and put into effect the restructuring plans for the investment fund.

Umno's power starts at the division level and an overwhelming number of the division leaders are with Najib.

Equally important, says Titawangsa MP Datuk Johari Ghani, the

Cabinet and the Umno supreme council have also agreed to give him the breathing space to solve the issue.

They have agreed to wait for the outcome of the Auditor-General's report as well as the Public Accounts Committee inquiry.

"The support for the PM is quite total. This is the situation, we want to give him the chance to work things out," says Johari.

The Umno rationale, says Johari, is not unlike that in the years when the party gave Dr Mahathir the Benefit of the Doubt to resolve issues like the Perwaja Steel scandal and stood by him through his controversial fight with the Malay rulers.

There has also been a tipping point of sorts among the Umno rank-and-file.

The perception is that the former premier's attacks are damaging Umno and it has made the party that he dominated for 22 years uncomfortable.

"He says he loves the party and wants to strengthen the party but what he did has the opposite effect. You go and ask anyone in Umno, they will tell you: Enough is enough," says Temerloh Umno division chief Datuk Sharkar Shamudin.

There are a string of other reasons why Umno is not with Dr Mahathir this time.

For sure, they are not happy about 1MDB but they do not believe him when he says that it will bankrupt the country.

They also disagree with him that Umno will be a gone-case in the next general election. They think Pakatan Rakyat is the more likely gone-case given what is happening in the broken coalition.

They also do not want a half-way bridge to Singapore, it does not make sense to them. They do not mind what they think is the unspoken wish of Dr Mahathir - to see his son Datuk Seri Mukhriz rise in Umno - but it must not be at the expense of toppling a sitting Prime Minister.

And most of all, they do not agree that the 1MDB billions are "missing", as Dr Mahathir puts it.

Dr Mahathir taking the grievances to the international media has aggravated the situation. Umno politicians are essentially Malay nationalists and they see it as bad-mouthing the country.

"He will not stop until someone else takes over, then it may start all over again. Of course, I don't agree with that. The quarrelling is not

good for the country," says Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan.

Many in Umno think Dr Mahathir's bid to bring down Najib has turned obsessive.

He has started to introduce the perception that there is criminal wrongdoing in the 1MDB deals.

He told *The New York Times* that Najib wants to leave his own legacy and is "verging on criminal".

It is a hint of just how far below the belt this fight may go.

Some say that Dr Mahathir is the one who is worried about his legacy.

But his greatest legacy is taking the country from an agricultural economy to the industrial and modern age that will grow even stronger as Malaysia develops.

However, his attacks have damaged Najib as well as himself and his standing in Umno is not what it used to be.

Sharkar, who is also Lanchang assemblyman, pointed out that Dr Mahathir was able to stay up there for 22 years because Umno gave him 100% support.

"We did not try to push him down but he is now trying to push down the man who we elected as our leader."