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# 'Dr M should not talk about trust'

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**BEHIND THE CURTAIN:** G25 member Tawfik Ismail reveals a number of details mentioned during meetings between the group, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. He tells Syed Umar Ariff how Dr Mahathir was on a power trip and had betrayed the trust of the Malays, and that Muhyiddin believed he could be the next prime minister

**Question:** What was discussed during the first meeting between the G25 and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Albukhary Foundation?

**Answer:** The meeting took place between April and March. We wanted to talk to him about Islam and the Constitution, but he kept talking about Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB) instead. So, I told him we were there not to talk about IMDB.

We were there to talk about Pas' attempts to include a hudud (related) bill in the Parliament then. Dr Mahathir talked about Islam for a while, but then went back to IMDB and about (Datuk Seri) Najib (Razak), whom he described as a "thief", among others.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to replace Najib with another candidate and wanted to make sure that it would happen.

Then he said the replacement would be advised by a "Council of Elders".

I said that was undemocratic, because we elected a prime minister, and we do not have a council of elders in the Constitution. Then he talked again about the money purportedly lost in IMDB.

However, I told him again that if we look back at the present value of what Dr Mahathir had lost during his time as prime minister, I am sure the amount of money would be more than what was alleged to be lost in IMDB. He kept quiet after I said that.

Dr Mahathir tried to persuade us that he was right. The discussion was muddled by his obsession to get rid of Najib.

**Question:** Obviously the first meeting did not end in Dr Mahathir's favour. What happened then during the second meeting at the Perdana Leadership Foundation?

**Answer:** We met him on the day of his press conference with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and (Tan Sri) Sanusi (Junid). He only asked for four people from G25 to be present, and I was among them. Dr Mahathir described how difficult it was to get rid of Najib, as he has "all the powers as a prime minister at his disposal".

Dr Mahathir then asked G25 whether we would like to talk with another Chinese group on problems affecting businesses and the economy. I replied that we should not take a racial view on the issue, because, otherwise, other races in the country would not be represented. The Indians would not have anyone to represent them, just like the Dayaks, Ibans and Eurasians.

Why should G25 as a Malay group,



Tawfik Ismail at his home in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Khairul Azry Bidin

work only with a Chinese counterpart? We should instead bring West and East Malaysians together.

So, I suggested to him we should follow (Datuk Seri) Nazir Razak's idea to set up a National Consultative Council. Dr Mahathir did not make any further comments on the matter. The meeting was cut short as he was unwell and coughing quite badly.

**Question:** What do you think of Dr Mahathir after the meetings?

**Answer:** Personally, I think probably Dr Mahathir is someone who wants things to go his way. He is on a power trip.

Some of his legacy were not carried out by Pak Lah (Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) and Najib.

He had often mentioned the Crooked Bridge (to replace the Johor-Singapore Causeway). That is one of his pet topics.

**Question:** What about Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin? Did he seek similar support from G25?

**Answer:** Muhyiddin met eight of us six days after the second meeting (with Dr Mahathir) at his residence.

He asked us whether we could form something like a third force (in the country's politics), with one East Malaysian personality that he had in mind. He said he wanted to

see how he could play a role in that structure.

**Question:** Do you think Muhyiddin is working together with Dr Mahathir against Najib?

**Answer:** Well, I think it was pretty obvious as he was present during Dr Mahathir's press conference on (Datuk Seri) Khairuddin (Abu Hassan) and Matthias Chang.

We told Muhyiddin that he and Dr Mahathir had too many skeletons in the closet. He was rather taken aback by our response.

Earlier, Muhyiddin had said he should be taking over Najib's place (as prime minister and Umno president), following his position as Umno deputy president.

I reminded Muhyiddin that there were so many things that he and Dr Mahathir did, that people have not forgotten. I told him the problem was that the players were not being straight with the public. If you played a role in this, where would it lead the country to?

I said Malays would be confused, people would not know who is telling the truth. It would be a fractious affair.

**Question:** You mentioned that Muhyiddin, too, had skeletons in the closet.

**Answer:** There are examples of

what people have been speculating about.

There is dissatisfaction among Johoreans as well, concerning land acquisition, right before Iskandar Malaysia took place when the government acquired lands in Gelang Patah for a developer. There were issues on how many plots of land were taken over. Those issues were linked to Muhyiddin.

Politically, when Muhyiddin was Johor menteri besar and the state Umno chief, many grassroots members and leaders felt he did not push the state's interest to the central party. At the same time, during the 1987 Umno crisis (which led the party to be declared unlawful by the court), many state leaders were thrown into the wilderness.

**Question:** Dr Mahathir today (yesterday) responded to your comments about him in recent days. He said you came to the meetings with "bad intentions", and reports suggested you had betrayed his trust.

**Answer:** Well, when it comes to trust, I think Dr Mahathir had betrayed the trust of the Malays when Umno was declared unlawful. He allowed for the party to be declared unlawful. It was an excuse to reconstitute Umno, so he could exclude and include (certain person-

alities). I think that is a big betrayal of trust.

He damaged the judiciary (the Malaysian constitutional crisis) and that is a betrayal. Now, the judiciary cannot act as independently as it had, before the late (former Lord President) Tun Salleh Abas' episode.

**Question:** On the surface, does it seem that Dr Mahathir is garnering the support he wanted?

**Answer:** It seems that many things that we are paying for is because Dr Mahathir had allowed for a non-transparent way of operating. Take the toll hike for example. Whose fault is that? Who made the initial agreement between the government and the concessionaires? Why did the late Tan Sri Ani Arope resign from LLN (now Tenaga Nasional Bhd)? Because of the privatisation of power plants.

When Tun Musa Hitam had a tiff with Dr Mahathir over his position as deputy president, Musa had sent a private and confidential letter to Dr Mahathir, who then decided to reveal it during a supreme council meeting.

So, I think he shouldn't be talking about trust. In terms of his ability to do good and keep the trust of the people, I think he has failed in many ways.