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# The gloves have come off

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For many in Umno, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's campaign against Umno in the recent by-elections was seen as the ultimate betrayal and the torching of the last bridge.

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad took his campaign against the Prime Minister to a new extreme when he hit the campaign trail with DAP and Amanah leaders.

It left people in Umno stunned and speechless to see him telling voters to ensure that Umno was defeated in Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar.

Malaysia's most iconoclastic politician had done it again.

Dr Mahathir's propensity to shock and shake up politics knows no boundaries. He has become some sort of Donald Trump of Malaysia – almost nothing is off limits for him.

He has burnt one bridge after another connecting him to his old party and the people within.

But it is possible he has torched the very last bridge by campaigning against Umno in the by-elections.

"He keeps saying he is not against Umno, then what do you call this?" said Kapar Umno division chief Datuk Faizal Abdullah.

It was painful for Faizal, who campaigned in Sungai Besar, to watch his former party president roll into town, climb onto the stage with DAP's Lim Kit Siang and urge the voters to support the Amanah man.

"For many months, we thought there was still a small window of hope that he still loves Umno. But standing there on stage with our opponent and wanting us to lose in both seats. It's all over, it was pure treachery," said Faizal.

Dr Mahathir's campaign speeches were no-holds barred and the attacks he levelled at the Prime Minister and his wife were very personal.

In fact, some of the remarks he made were quite inappropriate given that this is the fasting month nor was it what one might associate with an international statesman.

His feelings about Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak have gone beyond 1MDB or any of the issues he has raised so far.

He is extremely frustrated and bitter that he has been unable to dislodge Najib after more than a year of relentless attacks.

He also seems quite annoyed that the masses have not rallied to his cause and said that those who support Barisan Nasional were people who accept corruption.

Top Umno leaders had been quite reticent about taking on Dr Mahathir because of his stature and age. They did not want to come across as disrespectful or ungrateful. He had done a lot for the country and party in his time.

But the gloves finally came off on the Umno side after Dr Mahathir joined DAP commander Lim Kit Siang on the Pakatan Harapan campaign wagon in calling for Umno's defeat in the two by-elections.

It was the ultimate betrayal, the equivalent of the cardinal sin for the Umno rank-and-file.



**Man on a warpath:** Dr Mahathir, seen here at a by-election event in Kuala Kangsar, campaigned hard against the party he had led for 22 years.



**Dr Ahmad Zahid:** Came under attack by former Premier.



**Faizal:** Endorsing Amanah was act of pure treachery.



**Shahrir:** Life will go on without Dr Mahathir in Umno.

There was no need to tip toe around him anymore.

Najib fired back three days later when launching the new Proton Perdana in Putrajaya. He told his audience that he was happy to note the changes in the Proton administration.

"There will no longer be political interference like during the Mahathir administration," he said. The Prime Minister's remarks went viral.

A couple of days earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had also lashed out at Dr Mahathir: "It is advisable for him to keep his mouth closed or else he will be seen as senile, that is all I have to say".

Dr Mahathir had hit close to home when he campaigned in Kuala Kangsar, singling out the Deputy Prime Minister, who is from Bagan Datoh, for attack.

The former Premier, who claimed that Dr Ahmad Zahid had been worth RM250mil when he was Umno Youth chief, said the latter should have gone into business instead of politics.

He also told his audience that he was lenient on Dr Ahmad Zahid who had accused him of awarding projects to cronies and had not expelled the younger man.

What he did not say was that not long after the cronyism outburst, the then Prime Minister jailed Dr Ahmad Zahid under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

When the elder man left Umno in 2008, many in the party wanted him back.

But, said Shahrir, nobody wants him back after this.

Something has also happened on the PKR side. PKR was not visible at all, especially in Sungai Besar where their deputy president and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali was seen as being "torn between two loves".

PKR leaders have also been keeping a distance from Dr Mahathir.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's letter from prison had the effect of a "stop order" on cooperation with Dr Mahathir. PKR leaders who persist in being seen with Dr Mahathir risk being branded and everyone is cautious.

Azmin, the Selangor host, was nowhere in sight on the day Dr Mahathir made his grand entrance into Sungai Besar.

Azmin's trusted ally and party vice-president Shamsul Iskandar has been PKR's key representative at events involving Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir has been left with only DAP and Amanah as his main allies.

According to one young PKR youth wing leader, Anwar's letter is not the only reason for party leaders running off.

Politicians, he said, want to go with the winner, their aim is to win and many of them do not see Dr Mahathir being able to help them in that respect.

"I am okay with working with a former enemy but we will have to re-evaluate the situation. Do we hang on to a loser or do we look for a better way?" he said.

The situation is no different closer to home.

Dr Mahathir's strongest Umno ally Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin also seems to be keeping a low profile. It has been at least two months since the pair were seen together. Muhyiddin had attempted a few

public forums on his own but the disinterest shown was disheartening and embarrassing. He was seen doing his own walkabout in the Sungai Besar market on Friday.

Besides, Muhyiddin is now fighting off rumours about his personal and family life.

It is quite said that things have come to this but that is what politics can be like. Trying to topple the most powerful man in the country is a big risk that either results in big gains or ruin.

Another ally Datuk Shafie Apdal also seems to be doing his own thing.

The Umno vice-president and former minister caused a stir when he turned up to join his Barisan friends on nomination day in Sungai Besar.

Apparently, Najib at an Umno supreme council meeting a day earlier, had urged him to help out in Sungai Besar.

When Dr Ahmad Zahid, who was under the VIP tent, heard that Shafie was around, he sent someone to bring him to the VIP area but Shafie opted to mingle outside where he was the centre of attention and sought after for wives.

Dr Mahathir does not do things by halves and he will plough on. He fears no one and nothing is going to stop him.

"People like him don't stop. He arrested so many people during his time, yet he has joined them at rallies. There is nothing he will not do to get his way," said political analyst Khaw Veon Szu.

However, his main value now, said Khaw, is to the opposition front which is lacking a Malay statesman.

"Leaders come and go, in the end it is about the party. He will go on saying nasty things about us. We will run the government and the party and do our work. Life will go on," said Shahrir.