

Newspaper	DENNIS IGNATIUS / DENNISIGNATIUS.COM
Date	22 JULY 2016

## Mahathir: A glimmer of hope

Dennis Ignatius – 22 July 2016

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is reportedly in the midst of forming a new political party to take on UMNO and challenge Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak. It comes after months of frustrating failure to cajole and shame the party he once led into changing its ways. And it follows on the heels of his “Save Malaysia” campaign which, thus far, has failed to catch fire.

Having effectively taken control of all the levers of state power, Najib remains as entrenched as ever. And, notwithstanding the long list of scandals, he still commands sufficient support within his party as well as amongst key segments of the population to stay afloat.

There is now speculation that Najib might call early elections to consolidate his hold on power following UMNO-BN’s recent by-election victories in Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar. If Najib gains another five years, and there’s a good chance he will given the gross distortions in the voting system, there will be no end in sight for Malaysia’s long nightmare.

Mahathir’s strategy may simply be to divide the Malay-Muslim vote with a new party in order to give a reconstituted opposition coalition under his general stewardship a chance to wrest power away from UMNO-BN or force it to compromise.

The whole country will, no doubt, be watching keenly to see how all this plays out and whether Mahathir will even be able to accomplish the formidable feat of cobbling together an opposition coalition against UMNO-BN.

### *Is Dr Mahathir the man?*

For many, the real issue, however, is not whether UMNO-BN needs to go; that’s already axiomatic. The gnawing question is whether Mahathir is the right person to lead the charge for change. Many rightly argue that much of the country’s present predicament is due to policies he initiated during his long tenure in office, the crony-capitalist culture he nourished, the people he appointed to high office, the manipulation of race and religion for political purposes.

His disrespect for democratic and other national institutions, particularly when they got in his way, also undermined the nation to such an extent that one man can now defy all the mores of democracy with absolute impunity. In a perfect world, Mahathir’s past record would, of course, disqualify him as a potential saviour.

### *Time is not on our side*

Unfortunately, we don’t inhabit a perfect world. Our nation is deteriorating rapidly. Our democracy is dying. A slew of oppressive laws have effectively curtailed many fundamental