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# Dr M's audience with the King

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Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad got his wish but he did not get his way when he met the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to hand over his Citizens' Declaration.

THE jigsaw puzzle pieces finally fell into place this week and a clearer picture has emerged about the meeting between the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir has been shooting from the hip at every opportunity but he has been strangely silent about the meeting - nothing in his blog and no press conference to talk about it.

Yet, this was a meeting which he had been chasing after for months. At one stage, he was so frustrated about not getting an appointment with the King that he had let go that tongue-in-cheek remark that the King was "under house arrest".

The remark was taken out of context by some quarters but it was merely Dr Mahathir's way of hitting out at the Government whom he thought was obstructing the meeting.

Anyway, this time around, it was his adversary Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak who did some shooting of his own.

On Monday evening, the Prime Minister released a press statement on what the King had conveyed to him about the meeting.

It was a very brief statement, only four paragraphs but they provided the final pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the much talked-about royal audience.

Najib indicated that Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah had informed him that he had received Dr Mahathir at the Istana Anak Bukit in Alor Setar during which he took note of what was raised by the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia adviser.

However, His Majesty explained that he cannot get involved with Bersatu or in the Citizens' Declaration because it is not in accordance to the Constitution, that any action should adhere to the parliamentary system of election and it was for the people to decide.

That kind of statement does not happen without the sanction of the King himself and it was apparent that the palace does not wish to be dragged into the politics of Dr Mahathir.

It is also evident that the King is mindful of the Constitution and the country's system of parliamentary democracy. Removing an elected Prime Minister via a signature campaign does not fall within that framework.

Some have claimed that it means the Palace has rejected the Citizens' Declaration although earlier media reports of the meeting had said that Dr Mahathir managed to hand over the Citizens' Declaration signed by 1.4 million people.

What is clear is that the King, who is also the Sultan of Kedah, is not going along with Dr Mahathir's grand design for political change and his demand for Najib's resignation.

News of the meeting had initially unnerved many Umno leaders. They were not sure what to expect or what the Kedah connection between the two elderly notables would lead to and they had tried to downplay its significance.

The tables have since been turned and those in the Dr Mahathir camp are the ones trying to downplay the meeting.

Anyway, they could hardly be expected to announce that the Palace did not agree with Dr Mahathir or had rejected the petition.

Those associated with Dr Mahathir have been eager to stress that the meeting lasted one hour and 15 minutes which meant that it must have been quite cordial with quite a bit of conversation involved.

But the earlier vacuum of information had led blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin to pen a rather imaginative account of what transpired during the meeting and which caused Mahathir loyalist Datuk Khairuddin Abu Hassan to explode in anger and call Raja



Petra a "liar".

Khairuddin had accompanied Dr Mahathir to the Anak Bukit palace and he was impeccably suited up, looking as though he had stepped out of the pages of a *GQ* magazine. He sportingly made available the photographs of Dr Mahathir signing the visitors' log and leaving the palace after the meeting.

But despite rubbishing Raja Petra's fanciful account, Khairuddin has been unable to come up with his own account of the meeting.

"The fact that Tun Mahathir did not say anything after the meeting says a lot. Knowing him, he would have been the first to say something, to call a press conference, had the meeting gone according to his plan," said a public affairs consultant.

The royals rarely say anything in a direct or specific fashion and, as such, little gestures mean a lot. The fact that the meeting took place at Istana Anak Bukit, the King's palace in Kedah, rather than at Istana Negara was probably not by chance.

"It would have been more significant, grander, with a bigger impact at the Istana Negara," said the consultant.

The King is 88, just three years younger than Dr Mahathir. They are from the same era but they come from different worlds.

The sovereign has a high regard for Dr Mahathir. He is proud that Kedah has produced two Prime Ministers.

But he is also fond of Najib and people who have had audiences with him say that he speaks of Najib in an endearing way.

Tuanku Abdul Halim was the Yang di-Pertuan Agong when Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was Prime Minister and being on the throne with Najib as Prime Minister is one of those historical coincidences that may never happen again. It is said to have brought back a lot of sentimental memories for the King.

There is also a high comfort level between the sovereign and the Prime Minister. During the recent National Day parade, the two of them were chatting away with Najib pointing out items of interest in the parade.

At the parade for the King's birthday in June, Najib could be seen using his handphone to snap pictures of the King and then showing it to him.

The joke in Umno circles is that Najib has taken from the Mahathir playbook on many



The King told us to focus on serving the people, says Tee.

Khairuddin could not produce his account of the meeting.

things, but one lesson Dr Mahathir could not pass on to Najib was how to handle the royals.

"Mahathir's approach was to clip their wings, pick a fight with them. That is not for Najib. It was a mistake for Mahathir to think he can beat Najib at court politics.

"Najib does not need lessons here, he is quite the master at court politics. He understands palace politics like no other, he knows how the royals think, he is familiar with the protocol and he is very respectful of them," said the above consultant.

The Malay Rulers are not out for revenge against Dr Mahathir for how he curtailed their Constitutional powers during his premiership but they are also not warm and cosy towards him. Old feelings die hard and the perception is that they take what he says with a degree of scepticism.

The exception perhaps is the Sultan of Johor who caused a stir on Wednesday when he made yet another strong remark that was widely seen as aimed at the former premier.

During his speech at a grand reception for Chinese community leaders at the Johor palace, he again touched on Bangsa Johor which he said was a unifying factor despite what those from outside the state may claim. He asked his audience not to listen to the "old man who has lost his mind".

Sultan Ibrahim Bni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar has revived an age-old practice to connect the palace with Chinese leaders. It was a tradition started by his ancestors back in the late 1800s.

He hosted the Chinese community figures to a grand sit-down lunch around a custom-designed circular table that can seat up to about 50 people. Spectacular crystal chandeliers glittered overhead, there were flowers everywhere, the crockery bore the

royal insignia and there was a butler standing behind each and every guest.

On top of that, the Sultan arrived in a pink Rolls Royce that matched his hot-pink Malay outfit.

It was curious that the Sultan chose that particular occasion to make a speech criticising politicians who raise sensitive issues and have narrow political ideology. He also criticised politicians who like to fight and who will do anything to attain power because they have an agenda.

He told his audience that these politicians will be the first to leave the country when things go out of control. He did not name names and it was anybody's guess who he could have been referring to.

"Tuanku's concern is the harmony of Johor and the people. I don't think the target is any single person but Tuanku he is saying that Johor does not welcome politicians who cause disunity among the people.

"Whenever he opens the state assembly sessions, he tells us not to play politics, to focus on serving the people," said Datuk Tee Siew Keong, the state exco member for tourism who was at the event.

Despite all this, Dr Mahathir is planning to continue his quest to bring down Najib by next petitioning the Conference of Malay Rulers.

This may be even more difficult because there are reportedly no precedents for audiences with the brotherhood of Rulers.

The next Conference of Malay Rulers is scheduled for October. It will be a momentous occasion because the Rulers will be electing the next King. The royals are unlikely to have time for Dr Mahathir until much later.

Former publisher Datuk A. Kadir Jasin wrote in his blog that Dr Mahathir had to charter a private jet to fly to Alor Setar for his meeting with the King.

He had complained to his close circle that when he was the Prime Minister, friends had competed to lend him their private planes but they are now afraid to be seen with him.

Dr Mahathir left for London several days after his royal audience where he gave talks in his new capacity as a leading member of the opposition.

Malaysia's most amazing 91-year-old is not the sort to give up or to be deterred by snubs and criticism even if it comes from the royal class. It will be a fight till the end.