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# Dr M's strange apology

It's not clear whether he was saying sorry to the Malay Rulers or the rakyat. Probably, he was apologising to himself.

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TAY TIAN YAN  
Sin Chew Daily



星洲日報  
SIN CHEW DAILY

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad apologised for the actions he took years ago to amend the Constitution, curtailing the role of royalty in Malaysia. On the same day he apologised, he was censured by the Sultan of Johor, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, for criticising "Bangsa Johor".

Back then, Dr Mahathir amended the Federal Constitution to pave the way for a government bill to automatically become law without the need for royal consent.

At that time, he had all the powers to himself and was bold enough to take on the Malay Rulers who had, and still have, a very noble status in Malay society.

He could even rally the whole nation and the media to stand by him as he banked on the bruised image royalty suffered over a hockey incident in the 1990s, successfully making a Constitutional amend-

ment "legitimate".

That could be the feather in the cap for Dr Mahathir during his 22-year reign. Compared to his other iron-fisted actions such as *Ops Lalang*, the removal of Tun Musa Hitam, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Tun Salleh Abbas – which caused him dearly following a public outcry – his Constitutional move was a total success with zero negative repercussions, not to mention a decisive boost to his popularity and credibility as a consequence.

On the other hand, the power of the Malay Rulers has since suffered until after the 2008 general election when royalty emerged once again as a third force to balance things out between the ruling coalition and opposition front.

Dr Mahathir's first ever apology has been for his most successful



**Stern rebuke:**  
Sultan Ibrahim gave Dr Mahathir a stern rebuke for criticising 'Bangsa Johor'.

battle in decades.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's National Security Council Act came into effect automatically despite the disapproval of the Conference of Rulers and the failure of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to grant his royal consent within the stipulated period of time.

Prior to the Constitutional amendment in 1994, the Bill could have no chance of going into effect without the consent of the King.

Ironically, given the confronta-

tion between Dr Mahathir and Najib, the former PM's action two decades ago has done the incumbent a huge favour today.

A careful inspection of his apology reveals no apparent theme or principle, especially in view of the fact that the apology was targeted neither at the Malay Rulers nor the rakyat, as if he was apologising to himself, all for himself only.

In the meantime, his criticism of "Bangsa Johor" has invited a backlash not only from state royalty but ordinary Johoreans as well.

Under normal circumstances, "Bangsa Johor" is more of a controversy between federalism and statism. If federalism becomes more dominant, then localism will have to take a back seat and vice versa.

Whether federalism or statism should take precedence depends on which of the two is more powerful.

Given the fact that the Federal Government is suffering from poor credibility and public image while Johor royalty enjoys unprecedented popularity, it is natural that Johoreans will feel more attached to, and take pride in, their "Bangsa Johor" identity.

Sure enough, the acceptance of the "Bangsa Johor" concept cannot be construed as a rejection of the Federation. The two can live side by side in peace if a Johorean is both proud of his state and his country.

Dr Mahathir couldn't be more embarrassed by the Sultan's words: "He goes around dividing the people, including the Malays, while I do my utmost to unite Malaysians of all races, including the Malays." – Asia News Network