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# Boogeyman of Malaysian politics

**ODD MAN OUT:** Dr Mahathir's recent movements and machinations will not get him any support

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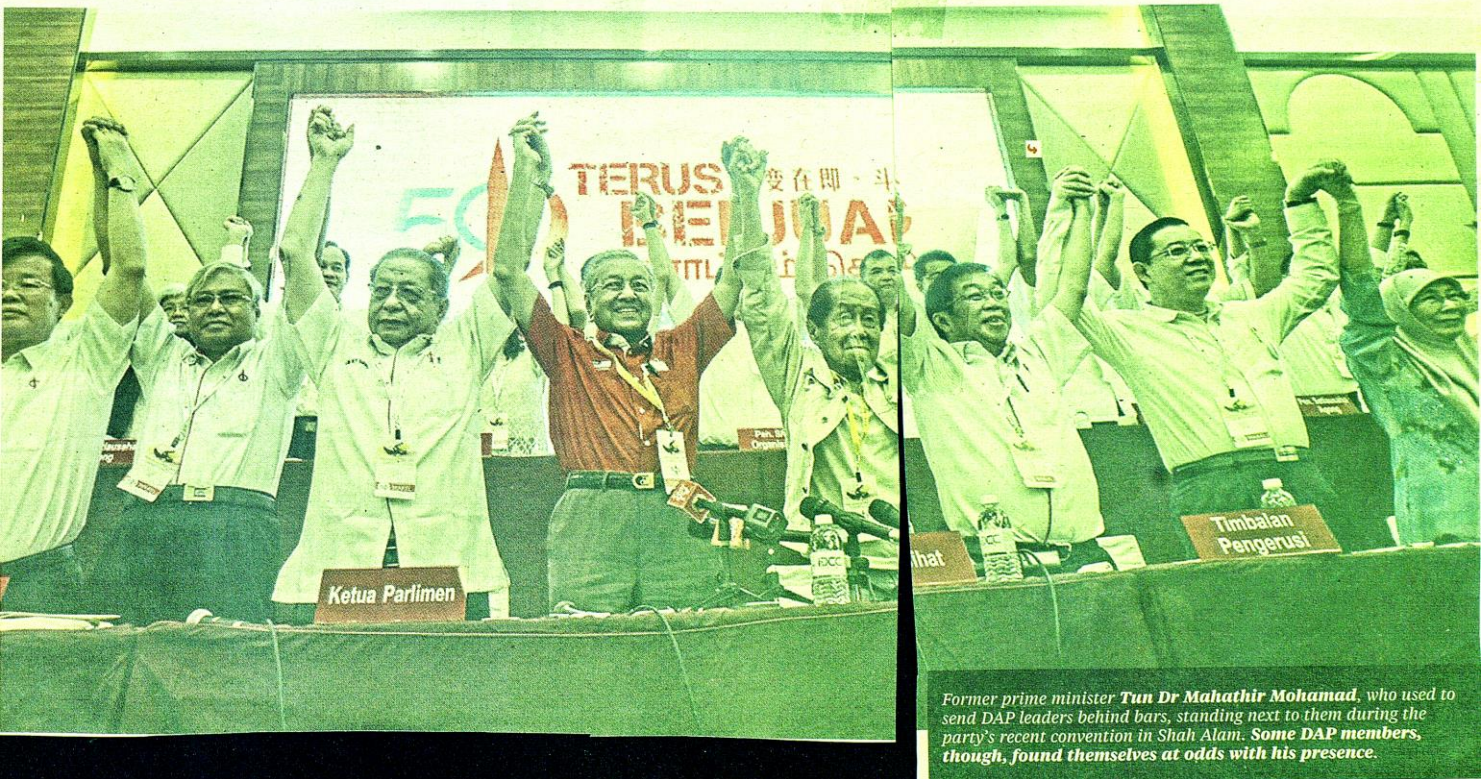
**I**t is a nightly creature usually used to imaginatively compel naughty children to behave themselves, just as the various types of *hantu* used in Malay folklore to scare the little ones to bed. In the modern world, the term boogeyman is also euphemistically employed to describe a haunting notion which serves as a caustic warning to any endeavours or set-ups. For some, the boogeymen can appear as school teachers, who are always on the move to stop you from playing truant, or the Road Transport Department officers setting up roadblocks to catch you just in time when your road tax expires — the latter has always been an unnerving annual affair for me. However, the loose term to describe a boogeyman is not necessarily a cautionary connotation of an imposing form, which must be covered upon.

In the current political climate, such an interpretation is rather medieval. Over the past couple of weeks, political parties have found a similar boogeyman in Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose presence since his personal rebellion against Datuk Seri Najib Razak took the spotlight off many political events. The recently-concluded Umno general assembly had propped up Dr Mahathir as the ultimate betrayer to the party he had once led, notwithstanding the government as its prime minister for a little more than two decades. Party members were warned of Dr Mahathir's efforts to topple the ruling party, his collusion with several pro-opposition bodies, and ultimately, a link with the man he had once called a *penyangak*, or a notorious rogue — currency speculator George Soros. Dr Mahathir is now the sworn enemy of Umno and Barisan Nasional, as much as he was their most respected and revered leader back then; understandably so since the Malay and Muslim political sentiments do not take treachery lightly, especially in instances said to involve slander, po-

litical expediency and disunity among the ummah. Awkwardly, Dr Mahathir turned — both figuratively and literally — to DAP as seen during the party's convention in Shah Alam five days ago. He was seated next to DAP's founding member and grand old man Dr Chen Man Hin, who at a glance did not look all, too, welcoming to the guest. While Dr Mahathir spewed favourable lines for DAP before the media, some party members found themselves at odds with his presence — the man who used to send DAP leaders behind bars is now sitting next to them during the party's convention. Some have voiced their dissatisfaction, some quit the party while others remain ruminating on whether the possible cooperation with Dr Mahathir is indeed feasible. It seems that Dr Mahathir has not been doing DAP a favour since the day he sent its leaders to check-in at Kamunting. Pas leaders, too, are not too fond of Dr Mahathir. Being labelled as bribe-takers is, of course, not the best way to court people into your cause, but perhaps Dr Mahathir knows best his methods, no matter how boorish they can be. He had held talks on measures to take Najib down but Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang could not agree with the proposals made. While it remains unclear as to what had been suggested, Hadi chose to brush off Dr Mahathir, who then heavily insinuated that Pas was a *pe-*

*makan dedak* (a person whose loyalties can be bought for a low price). And true to Pas's creed and style of response, party youth chief Nik Mohamad Abduh Nik Abdul Aziz said Dr Mahathir should spend more time on the prayer mat due to his advanced age, rather than getting embroiled in politicking. Now, Nik Abduh is a soft-spoken man who will only talk when it is necessary. Hence, it was probably necessary then for the Pasir Mas parliamentarian to advise Dr Mahathir to take a breather, smell the roses and turn to God. And as expected by Dr Mahathir's supporters, they described Nik Abduh as being "stupid" and "rude". They are being a little ironic there, I suppose. Being a political boogeyman in Malaysia's continuously shifting landscape will not necessarily gain you the desired attention as exemplified by Dr Mahathir's recent movements and machinations. While politics has been described as the art of the possible, the sentimental context of Malaysian politics and electorates can only deprive such a character from the desired results due to his or her baggage. Worse, the only similarity between the Western-themed boogeyman and the Malay *hantu*, is that both are best to be avoided. [sumar@nst.com.my](mailto:sumar@nst.com.my)

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Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who used to send DAP leaders behind bars, standing next to them during the party's recent convention in Shah Alam. Some DAP members, though, found themselves at odds with his presence.