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From revered hero to outright enemy

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Umno delegates have likened Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's betrayal of their party to a Malay silat fight - with slow, flowery moves but without missing a punch.

KHAIRY Jamaluddin and his team thought long and hard about how to approach the subject of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's betrayal of Umno.

The former premier had long crossed the red line where Umno members were concerned, but Khairy did not want to cross that Malay cultural line of regard for the elderly and sympathy for the vanquished.

After much deliberation, they decided they could no longer beat around the bush because, as Khairy put it, it was a case of "kill or be killed".

Dr Mahathir and his new party are aiming for the same voter base as Umno, and he is working hand-in-glove with the enemy. The fact that DAP leaders have ticked off Umno for criticising Dr Mahathir says it all. But the point is that Dr Mahathir has been bashing Umno and its president non-stop for the last two years.

He had gone against everything he once preached in Umno.

It was time to hit back.

The Youth wing set the tone in taking on the man considered as Umno's greatest leader.

Their approach was to criticise with substance while acknowledging what Dr Mahathir had done for

Analysis
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the country.

Those at the Umno Youth assembly were treated to a video of Dr Mahathir and his contradictions.

Being in power for 22 years is an awfully long time and there is no shortage of instances of Dr Mahathir saying one thing previously and doing another thing now.

It was sort of like the seven deadly sins of Dr Mahathir - taking part in the Bersih protest, reconciling with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, endorsing Reformasi, befriending Mohamed Sabu, holding hands with Lim Kit Siang, aligning with PKR and being part of Pakatan Harapan.

It was quite an experience for the Umno crowd to watch how Dr Mahathir used to condemn the Bersih protests in the strongest terms and in the next instance, to hear him running down Najib at the recent Bersih demonstration wearing a yellow T-shirt.

Dr Mahathir, in the eyes of Umno members, had become the best

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example of “*Melayu mudah lupa*”, a phrase the former premier himself had coined out of frustration that Malays easily forget the contributions of past leaders.

Addressing Dr Mahathir's contradictions had actually begun at a closed-door briefing for delegates a day before the Umno General Assembly.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak told the delegates that the real reason for Dr Mahathir's action was not the economy or 1MDB.

He was angry because Najib could not agree to the crooked bridge linking Johor and Singapore.

“He lobbied so many times with me but I wanted everyone's opinion,

so I went back to the Cabinet. After much discussion, the Cabinet said it was a no-go,” Najib told the delegates.

But, he added, the turning point was “boi boi”, which caused the entire hall to erupt in laughter and catcalls.

“Boi boi” (boy boy) is the Umno nickname for Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, the implication being that the favoured son was meant to continue the Mahathir legacy.

Najib said Dr Mahathir wanted him to help Mukhriz win the vice-president post in the 2009 party election.

“At that time, I felt Mukhriz should perform as the Mentri Besar of Kedah, then we could assess his report card.

“He was not even the state Umno chairman, but he wanted him (Mukhriz) up there. Then the attacks began,” said Najib.

Many of the delegates are still trying to wrap their heads around what Dr Mahathir is doing to their party.

“I understand a father's love for his son, but surely not to the extent of jeopardising our race and party.

“He is now with people who have insulted him, called him names and attacked our party. We cannot accept that,” said Silam Wanita

Umno chief Mizma Appehdullah.

Almost every speaker touched on the “Mahathir betrayal”, yet not once was his name mentioned.

It was one of those unique traits of Malay politics - one does not know that the arrow has gone in until the wound starts to bleed.

“It's like Malay *silat*, lots of *bunga* (showy moves) and then bam! You get hit,” said Kapar Umno chief Datuk Faizal Abdullah.

The “Mahathir betrayal” has been an issue that delegates are completely in one mind about.

It was much easier than when Dr Mahathir struggled to persuade the party against Anwar.

Party members did not need further convincing about what Dr Mahathir had done, but it had to be said and it had to be heard on the big stage.

It was to cut the political and emotional ties, to send a message that the party cannot accept the betrayal.

“It was also to tell the Umno grassroots that they cannot accept Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia because it is led by a man who has betrayed the party.

It is the first time that Dr Mahathir has lost a big fight, but he is probably gearing up for the biggest fight of all - the general election.