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Malaysian politics comes full circle

It was an amazing day of contrasts that saw former enemies sit at the same table in Shah Alam while rivals shared the same stage in Titiwangsa. *The Star - 5/12/2016*

Analysis
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FIRST the historic handshake and now the historic appearance.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was not supposed to be at the DAP gathering yesterday but there was apparently a last-minute change of plans and he walked into the hall to huge applause from the DAP delegates.

The iconoclast politician had done it again, attending the national convention of a political party that he used to slam as un-Malaysian, racist and anti-Malay.

On the other side of town, by a scenic lake in Titiwangsa, another unprecedented event was unfolding as Umno and PAS leaders shared the same stage in the name of the plight of the Rohingya.

Once bitter political rivals, the leaders of the two Malay-Muslim parties seem to be having what some call a bromance.

Has the world turned upside-down?

Not really, just politicians doing what they do best – playing politics.

“Seeing these people together on the same stage, Malaysian politics has come full circle,” said Ivanpal S. Grewal, the vice-chairman of Selangor Gerakan Youth.

There had been quite a bit of publicity for the Titiwangsa gathering but it was still startling to see the Umno and PAS presidents, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Datuk Seri Hadi Awang looking so comfortable together.

Both men were flanked by top names in their respective parties.

It was for a big humanitarian and Muslim cause, aimed at bringing international attention to Myanmar’s persecution of Rohingya.

It is the sort of issue that Dr



New-found alliance: (From left) Lim, Dr Mahathir, Dr Chen, Tan Kok Wai, Lim Guan Eng and Datin Seri Wan Azizah at the DAP conference in Shah Alam.

Mahathir, who saw himself as an international Muslim leader, would have championed in his heyday.

But times have changed and Dr Mahathir is labouring under some sort of tunnel vision, obsessed with his cause against Najib.

Showing up at the DAP convention in Shah Alam showed just how far he is prepared to go to bring down Najib and defeat Umno in the general election.

“DAP has nothing to lose and all to gain from Mahathir,” said one DAP politician.

DAP insiders said the party decided to bring in Dr Mahathir to “spite Umno”.

DAP leaders were angered at being bashed alongside Dr Mahathir throughout the Umno general assembly.

His presence was a timely respite for DAP to counter Umno’s accusations that DAP is anti-Malay and anti-Islam.

DAP leaders complained that Umno is blaming them for everything which is amusing to say

the least given that DAP has made a career out of blaming Umno for every wrong imaginable.

Anyway, Dr Mahathir seemed all too willing to go along, flashing his charming smile when introduced as “the most special guest who is here for the first time”.

But the equally shocking part was how thrilled the DAP delegates were to have him in their midst.

These are the same people who have called the former premier even more colourful names than he has called them.

Dr Mahathir sat sandwiched between Lim Kit Siang and Dr Chen Man Hin, both of whom are younger but looked far older than him.

Their VIP guest later sang praises of DAP, saying that the Malaysian sentiment in DAP is higher because the speeches were in Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese and also because he could see Chinese, Indians and Malays in the audience.

It was another one of those classic moments in the politics of Dr Mahathir.

“It was a moment of clarity for me. In a way, it is also cathartic because it makes it easier to hold him accountable for all the things he did and to purge ourselves of Mahathirism,” said Ivanpal.

Ivanpal views the coming together of Umno and PAS as a seminal moment in politics in the sense that rivals can come together for issues close to their hearts.

It was quite apparent that the Rohingya gathering was a sort of show of strength by the two biggest Malay-Muslim parties in the country.

It was their way of saying that they have the numbers to defend threats to the religion and community.

It was truly a day of contrasts and also a showdown of sorts between the current and former presidents of Umno.

On the one hand, there was Najib bringing together the Malay-Muslim numbers for a cause that is very emotional for the Muslims while, at the same time, honing his creden-

tials as a regional Muslim leader.

On the other hand, there is Dr Mahathir trying to throw cold water on whatever Najib does, even if it means having to grace the national convention of a party that he used to denigrate.

It was as if he was trying to thumb his nose at Umno – ok, you don’t want me and attack me, I will go to DAP and praise them.

“It is a risky game but I guess they don’t have many more rabbits to pull out of the hat,” said Ivanpal.

Social media reacted in mixed fashion.

Comments ranged from, “Great man, salute,” to “90 years and only now you realise?”

But the comment that captured it best was: “Would he be doing this if Najib gave in to him?”

Knowing Dr Mahathir, this will not be his last historic move.



Dr M changes
tune about DAP:
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