

Newspaper	THE STAR
Date	11 DECEMBER 2016

# Mahathir's past gets in the way

The Star - 11/12/2016

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad got the royal brush-off when he was dropped from the guest list for the installation ceremony for the new King but he was welcomed as a saviour by DAP leaders at their national party convention.

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad's relationship with the Malay Rulers has been one of ups and downs.

But it hit a new low this week when he was "disinvited" to the installation of Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan as the new Yang di-Pertuan Agong this Tuesday.

It appeared to be a slip-up that became an embarrassment for both sides.

An invitation letter had been sent to him but the former premier was apparently not supposed to be on the guest list and another letter retracting the invitation followed suit.

There are few secrets in the age of social media. The second letter went viral and it became quite clear that Dr Mahathir's past had once again caught up with the present.

The blame game for the faux pas is still on.

But those in the know would be aware of Dr Mahathir's stormy relationship with the Kelantan palace through much of the 1990s.

The "Lamborghini episode" is often singled out as epitomising how the Mahathir regime had made things difficult for the Kelantan palace because of its association with then Semangat 46 leader Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

It is likely that the slights and attacks on the Kelantan royal house during the Mahathir years have not been entirely forgotten.

"Mahathir should accept that his past acts may have been forgiven but not forgotten by the Kelantan palace. He is now at the receiving end, the wheel has turned," said Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad, assemblyman for Kok Lanas in Kelantan.

Several other well-known personalities have also been "disinvited" to the royal installation and among them was Keteherh MP and Umno information chief Tan Sri Annuar Musa, then a young, handsome and controversial minister who took on the Kelantan palace.

The royal snub could not have happened at a more inconvenient time for Dr Mahathir whose Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia is trying to establish itself as the Malay alternative to Umno.

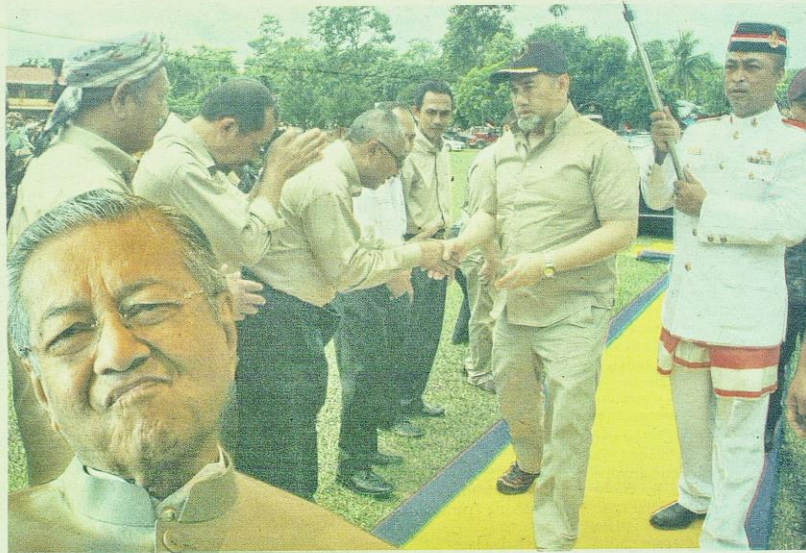
Dr Mahathir is already in the bad books of the Sultan of Johor who has made no bones of his disapproval of the elder man's brand of politics.

The Johor Sultan enjoys an exceptionally high rating among Johoreans and it will be difficult for Dr Mahathir to campaign in Johor the way he campaigns in other states.

The perception is that the royals regard Dr Mahathir with a mix of suspicion, scepticism and esteem.

Many of the Malay Rulers appreciate what Dr Mahathir did for the country during his years in power.

At the same time, they have never forgotten the humiliation of having their constitutional powers



**Not invited:** It was terribly awkward for Dr Mahathir (inset) to be excluded from the event to install Sultan Muhammad V as the new King. The Sultan, who will ascend the throne on Tuesday, is seen here at a royal environmental project in Manik Urai.



**Annuar:** The Umno big-gun was also 'disinvited' to the palace ceremony.



**Dr Azmi:** 'Mahathir is not senile or suffering from Alzheimer's, he's just desperate.'



**Alwi:** Kelantan palace may have forgiven Mahathir but has not forgotten his past.

Dr Mahathir's cameo appearance at the DAP national convention last Sunday showed just how far he is prepared to go to bring Najib down.

Some said he wanted to thumb his nose at Umno after the way he was criticised during the Umno general assembly.

The DAP side preferred to explain his attendance as proof that the party is not anti-Malay and Dr Mahathir rose to the occasion by praising DAP as more Malaysian than MCA and Gerakan.

But privately, some DAP politicians are gloating over how the once mighty leader has had to swallow his pride. It was quite a coup for DAP to have the former Umno president come to their national convention and wax lyrical about the party.

According to *Sin Chew Daily*, the delegate turnout for the convention was only about 31%, the lowest in years and the elder man's presence helped inject some oomph! to the gathering.

On the other hand, it is quite pathetic that the party had to bring in a former foe for their most important gathering of the year, whitewash his past and hang on to his every word of praise.

The man whom DAP used to condemn as the cause of the country's problems is now lauded as a man who can "save Malaysia".

It is more than politics coming full circle, as some have put it.

The opposition front then known as Pakatan Rakyat rode a popular wave by condemning Barisan Nasional and blaming Umno for all the ills in the country.

Yet, it is now clinging to former

Umno leaders for political leadership.

The sense is that the moral high ground is giving way under the feet of opposition politicians. The saying that there are no permanent friends or enemies in politics has become a convenient excuse for politicians to jump into bed with whoever can help them.

DAP has calculated that associating with Dr Mahathir will soften its Chinese image among the Malay middle-ground. The downside is that the party comes across as opportunistic and short on principles.

That is what the thinking class is saying out there, that there is little difference between the two sides and it will cause the opposition front to lose the moral high ground.

DAP leaders were clearly put on the defensive in trying to defend their newfound friendship with Dr Mahathir and a top party leader said those who could not agree with their new ties with Dr Mahathir should leave the party. Just three short years ago, DAP convinced the Chinese to put their faith in PAS. Now they are selling Dr Mahathir as the new saviour.

But what exactly did Dr Mahathir hope to gain out of the association? His party was formed to take on Umno and to deliver the Malay vote to Pakatan Harapan. It is unclear if the close association with DAP will help Parti Pribumi achieve that.

"Where Dr Mahathir is concerned, it is pure politics. People imagine he is senile or suffering from Alzheimer's. I think he is a smart operator except that he is running out of time and options. He has become desperate, like a car with no GPS, turning here and there," said political commentator Dr Azmi Omar.

The political landscape is in a state of flux. On one side, Umno and PAS are in the midst of a blooming romance and on the other side, Dr Mahathir has become the new BFF of the opposition front.

It is quite mortifying for the former premier to be shut out of the palace ceremony to usher in the new Yang di-Pertuan Agong. It has never happened before and he is somewhat of a *persona non grata* where the palace is concerned.

His supporters say this is not the way to treat an elder statesman but his critics say his actions and statements of late have been anything but that of a statesman.

To rub salt into injury, Najib recently praised Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi whom he said "has shown how a former prime minister should behave".

Dr Mahathir is a political animal par excellence but taking on Najib has turned out to be far more tortuous than he could have imagined.

Things will not get easier with the palace factor coming into play.

clipped and scaled back by the former premier.

Dr Mahathir has not given up trying to present the one million signatures that he collected for his Citizen's Declaration to the Conference of Rulers.

His audience with the outgoing Yang di-Pertuan Agong had not gone the way he wished because Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah is mindful of the Constitution and the country's system of parliamentary democracy and removing an elected Prime Minister via a signature campaign did not fall within that framework.

Palace sources said Dr Mahathir had subsequently tried to get an audience with the Kelantan Sultan but he evidently underestimated how the Kelantan royals feel about him.

It will be hard to live down the latest royal rebuff and he is fortunate that the monarchy's hold on the Malay mind is not what it used to be, otherwise his party would be dead in the water.

The conventional way of looking

at Dr Mahathir's actions is that he is a quarrelsome man with a super ego and who cannot accept it when he does not get his way.

He is more complicated than that and he will continue to confound people who try to define him. But one consistent trait is that he is always changing the rules.

He does not believe in playing by the conventional rules and most of all, he does not like to play by anybody else's rules but that of his own.

For instance, his problems with the Malay rulers was partly due to him refusing to play along with them.

His predecessors had been blue-bloods and aristocrats, he was the first commoner to become Prime Minister.

It is likely he wanted to show them who was in charge of the country and show them he did.

The trouble is that even though he is no longer in charge, he expects Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to play by his rules. But Najib was not having any of that.