

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	9 NOVEMBER 2016

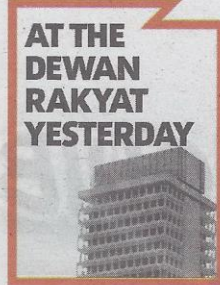
Dr M's presence 'irrelevant'

NST- 9/11/2016

'DESPERATE':

Opposition's move mere gimmick, say Barisan MPs

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(From left) **Lim Kit Siang, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal and Lim Guan Eng** during a press conference at Parliament yesterday. Pic by Aizzuddin Saad

OPPOSITION members of parliament have shown how desperate they are by inviting former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the Parliament House.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman the act of inviting Dr Mahathir, who is chairman of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), was nothing more than a political gimmick.

She said the opposition MPs should have made use of the Standing Orders if they were unhappy with matters in the Dewan Rakyat.

Azalina said the late MP for Bukit Gelugor, Karpal Singh, had tabled a motion on Feb 26, 2009, in the Dewan Rakyat on his detention, and the motion was approved and a select committee was set up to investigate the matter.

"The committee comprised Barisan Nasional and opposition MPs. Lim Kit Siang (then DAP MP for Ipoh Timur) was among them.

"The Dewan Rakyat has its own mechanism and procedures to look into any matter in a fair and just manner," she said in a statement.

Azalina said Dr Mahathir's presence at the Parliament House would not change anything in the parliamentary system.

"Would the parliamentary reforms we have implemented under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak seen realisation when he (Dr Mahathir) was prime minister?" she asked.

Umno Information chief Tan Sri Annuar Musa deemed Dr Mahathir's visit to Parliament as "irrelevant".

He said the former premier's pres-

ence there was akin to "an antique car's appearance in a Formula 1 race".

"It is nice to see, but it is not relevant for racing," he said at Parliament lobby.

Annuar said it was "petty" for the opposition members of Parliament and Dr Mahathir to have a resolution purportedly to uphold the immunity and special privileges of MPs.

Dr Mahathir made his first visit to parliament as an opposition member and attended a special meeting on parliamentary privileges and immunity of MPs and spoke to the media at Parliament lobby.

He arrived in Parliament with PPBM president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Semporna MP and Parti Warisan Sabah president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang.

At their press conference, they criticised Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia for allegedly being biased in addressing questions and debates related to Malaysia Development Bhd.

Annuar said there was no such thing as absolute immunity in parliament and that MPs' statements were governed by limitations and parliamentary rules.

"I suggest those who have issue with this to go back and read the house rules," he said.

Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek said he was perplexed that Dr Mahathir was harping on the same issues that were untouchable during his time in office.

He said the former leader had re-

inforced the Official Secrets Act, which had led to a big protest among journalists.

"They (reporters) could be arrested for publishing certain statements. The same applied for MPs during his time."

"The Sedition Act was also among the untouchable subjects in Parliament during that era."

"If all these were not good, he should have used the opportunity to repeal or change these laws when he was prime minister."

The Kemaman MP said the resolution by opposition MPs was a gimmick to draw public attention so that the aging leader would not be forgotten in the national political arena.

On accusations that the speaker was biased, he said it was natural for the opposition to disagree with the Dewan Rakyat Speaker.

"A person will be called biased by someone whose actions he does not permit or support," he said, adding it was natural for politicians to claim polls were rigged when they did not win.

Asked if Dr Mahathir was now the de facto opposition leader, Shabery said that would depend on the opposition.

"This is because they do not have a respectable voice among them. And they need Tun to play this role."

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said there was nothing unusual with Dr Mahathir's presence at Parliament yesterday and that the party's main focus was the general assembly at the end of this month.

"On whether his presence could affect Parliament, it is not my concern. He has condemned and accused Umno leaders of many things.

"We want to look ahead towards the general assembly and we want to prove that despite whatever you do to the party, we will remain united as an inclusive party and respectful of the party's leadership.

"If this is something that we inherited from his leadership, how can he say his leadership is better?"

He said only the public should decide if his statement was true.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan also "welcomed" Dr Mahathir to Parliament.

He shot down an allegation made by Dr Mahathir that Parliament today was no longer enshrined with the freedom of speech.

"He says this, but he is not sitting in Parliament. I, who sit in Parliament, have had headaches and earaches as the debates and question and answer sessions are so robust now compared to his time."