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# Najib gains upper hand after opposition's walkout

**DR M'S PLAN BACKFIRES:** Despite being a gentleman, PM knows when to attack and when it hurts the most

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**I**T was no ordinary budget speech and it was no ordinary Budget Day in Parliament on Friday.

But as events unfolded, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak showed he was very much in control as he demolished his biggest detractor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, on live television.

Despite being a gentleman, Najib knows when to attack and when it hurts the most.

And the walkout by opposition members of parliament aligned to Dr Mahathir was no coincidence. It was staged by Dr Mahathir to publicly embarrass Najib, but the plan backfired.

Their uncouth act garnered no public sympathy.

It was for Dr Mahathir to show Najib that he had control of Pakatan and could tell it what to do, according to commentator Raja Petra Kamarudin.

"This was merely a show of strength or, as they say in the West, a pissing contest," he wrote.

Najib called the walkout, which Pas lawmakers chose to stay away from, a disgrace to parliamentary democracy.

The Najib-Mahathir all-out war, after all, reached another unprecedented level on Friday.

In the end, Najib gained the upper hand, telling Malaysians that Dr Mahathir's grip on Malaysia was long over and that there would be another long-term vision to replace the latter's Vision 2020.

Najib made no apologies to Dr Mahathir, whom he did not refer to by name in his speech, when he said: "Let the old legacy pass. The future of Malaysia, we recreate."

In his speech, Najib made sharp remarks against Dr Mahathir, especially over his meeting with former nemesis, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, at the High Court recently.

He recalled the late Pas leader Datuk Dr Haron Din saying that feelings of love and hatred should not be too extreme.

Najib said: "*Itulah dia jadinya, barangkali kerana itulah sampai ke mahkamah cari seorang yang pernah dia benci.*" (So, perhaps because of that (he) went to the court to look for the person he once hated.)

On the eve of the 2017 Budget, Dr Mahathir pissed off Najib by saying that the government's budget was meaningless as the government was short of money.

"No doubt huge sums of money will be allocated to the ministries and agencies. Parliament will surely pass the budget because it is the budget presented by the ruling party which has the majority in Parliament.

"But, the people know that the government has not got the money to meet the budget.



**Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad**

"They know that ministries in the last two years have been told that the money is not available and, therefore, they must spend less than what is budgeted for," he wrote in his blog with his usual tinge of sarcasm.

In his budget speech, Najib issued a strong rejoinder, saying that it was just another of Dr Mahathir's scaremongering tactic to cause public confusion and to paint a bad picture of the economy.

He said bankruptcy was never in Malaysia's economic dictionary.

Najib, in his speech, also told the world that he had fixed some of the Mahathir-era economic largesse, such as raking up huge subsidies, budget deficits and the lopsided privatisation policy.

He had made fiscal consolidation the hallmark of his administration.

Since he took over in 2009, the country's fiscal deficit had dropped from 6.7 per cent of the gross domestic product to a targeted 3.1 per cent in 2016, and a balanced budget by 2020.

Foreign fund managers and economists have lauded Malaysia's fiscal policy.

"We believe the actual 2016 fiscal deficit figure will come in at around the low 3.0 per cent region and we think that is still an acceptable rate to international rating agencies, given the challenging global economic climate," said Franklin Templeton Investments Malaysian Fixed Income and Sukuk executive director/head Hanifah Hashim.

The government put fiscal deficit at three per cent of GDP next year.

Najib also decisively used the budget not to look back but look firmly towards the future when he concluded his speech with an amazing vision — the 2050 National Transformation or 'TN50, a Najib

legacy in the making.

He threw down the gauntlet to Malaysians on how to chart a new course for the nation through a national discourse.

He said the narrative must be spearheaded by a multiracial group of young Malaysians.

Making no reference at all to Dr Mahathir's Vision 2020 to make Malaysia a developed nation, the prime minister said the time had come to put the past aside.

"From now on, TN50 is our lucky charm. Let the old legacy pass. The future of Malaysia, we recreate," he said.

Dr Mahathir had accused his former protégé Najib and his administration of erasing his legacy, such as his pet project Proton.

"The New Economic Policy under (Najib's late father and second prime minister) Allahyarham Tun Razak was planned to create a successful new generation within 30 years.

"So is TN50, which will span three decades to form a calibre nation state with excellent mindset," Najib said.

Najib's TN50 Vision, no doubt, will have to give a lot of attention to rejigging Malaysia's economic strategies going forward.

The rapid pace of technological change will also put Malaysia at risk if it does not move fast enough.

Najib has put Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, one of the youngest cabinet ministers, in charge of conducting the discourse — a sign of Najib's growing confidence in younger, not ageing, leaders.

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A veteran newsman, the writer believes that a good journalist should be curious and sceptical at the same time



**Hanifah Hashim**