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# Millennial view of Dr Mahathir

They were the angry young voters who helped the Opposition win big in the last general election but the millennials have grown disenchanted by the twists and turns they see in politics.

It has been a very public spat that has not spared both men of damage.

Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamid's attempt to remind the Umno grassroots of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's mixed ancestry backfired, and is still bubbling like a hotpot.

The charismatic Deputy Prime Minister had been on a roll at a string of Umno division meetings, needing his former party boss, referring to him as a leader who is "gila talak tiga" (someone who goes through repeated divorces).

But when he claimed that Dr Mahathir's real name was Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty, that was when everything sort of went boom! in his face.

Dr Mahathir's Indian side was one of those no-go zones for the mainstream media throughout his 22-year premiership. It was deemed politically incorrect and no one dared to broach the subject because he was a very powerful Prime Minister. Besides, the perception then was that the man himself did not wish that part of his family tree to be made public.

It is still politically incorrect in the sense that such remarks are inappropriate in polite society and the DPM has suffered for it.

But Dr Mahathir's subsequent response also cast him in a poor light. He is supposed to be a statesman but his action was that of someone who hits below the belt when under attack.

He dredged out a private discussion he had with Dr Ahmad Zahid to imply that the latter was not loyal to Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, and reshaped an allegation about the younger man's wealth.

It was not the first time he had broken confidentiality to use against an opponent - he had put Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia in a spot by exposing a private conversation they had about Najib.

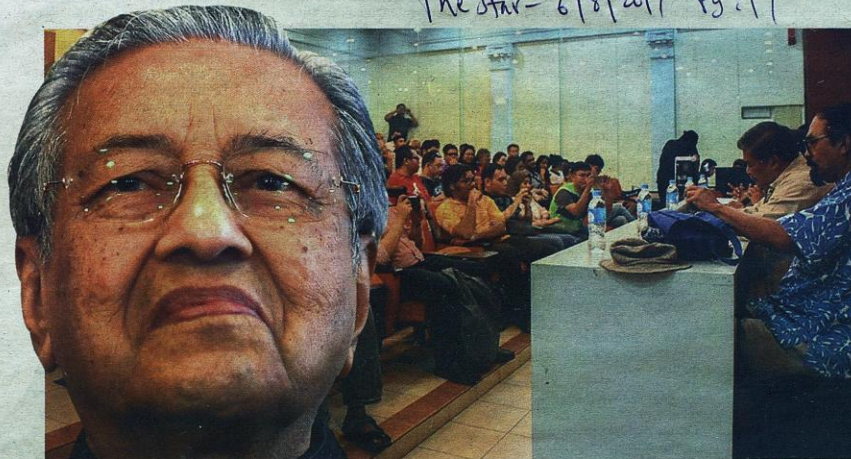
Politics is a dirty game and the moral of the story is to remember that Dr Mahathir remembers everything despite his "selective amnesia", as long-time Mahathir critic Tawfik Ismail put it.

Dr Mahathir has come full circle in his career, and many are still coming to terms with his new role as the leader of the Opposition.

The day Dr Mahathir was made chairman of Pakatan Harapan must have been what Tawfik termed as a "through the looking glass" phenomenon - finding oneself in a strange parallel world.

"I've always felt that this fight against Najib, the wrong people are fighting it. People like Mahathir and Muhyiddin (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin), they were part of the background to the country's problems.

"You can't get the guy who created the rubbish to clear rubbish. The young generation are looking to newer faces like Nik Nazri Nik Ahmad, Liew Chin Tong and Khairy Jamaluddin," said Tawfik, a former Barisan Nasional MP who now sits on the board of governors of a leading international school.



**Polemic figure:** It was quite impossible to find consensus about Dr Mahathir at a recent forum to debate whether the former premier was an agent of change or an agent of destruction.

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**Tawfik:** 'You can't get the guy who created the rubbish to clear the rubbish.'



**Shahril:** 'All these U-turns, it's hard to reconcile what Dr Mahathir is doing.'



**Syahredzan:** 'Not looking for the perfect politician, just a better Malaysia.'

Dr Mahathir has turned out to be as polemic as ever on the Opposition side.

The "angry young people" cohort was Pakatan's fixed deposit in the last two general elections. But disenchantment, even disillusionment, has crept in and this was apparent at a recent political forum to discuss whether Dr Mahathir is an agent for change or destruction.

According to lawyer activist Syahredzan Johan, the audience comprised largely millennials, middle-class folk and the converted, in the sense that they are Pakatan-leaning.

"There were already misgivings when Mahathir joined the Opposition but it deepened with his appointment as Pakatan chairman. They are divided on whether he is the best person to lead the Opposition. They are quite set on not supporting BN. The question now is whether they can be persuaded to come out for Pakatan," said Syahredzan.

The divide was apparent among the panellists as well as those firing questions from the floor. Amanah president Mohamad Sabu and the radical activist Hishamuddin Rais went all out to defend working with Dr Mahathir. Another panellist Dr Michael Jeyakumar was critical of Dr Mahathir while lawyer Harris Ibrahim rejected the idea. It is

intriguing to watch these leading players who used to condemn Dr Mahathir now praising him. But with just a few more months to the general election, Pakatan is still struggling to defend their alliance with Dr Mahathir and that is not a good place to be.

Those who asked questions were mostly young people who had grown up on a propagandist diet of how cruel and corrupt Dr Mahathir was and it was not easy to change all of that overnight.

Some could not accept him while some directed their disappointment at the Pakatan leaders for the U-turns made on Dr Mahathir.

These millennials can see through the twists and turns of politics. There is also a sense that they feel politicians are insulting their intelligence with their newfound friendship with Dr Mahathir.

This cohort grew up in a time of relative affluence. They have had education - some more than others - and their expectations are higher than that of any other generation before them.

They also do not like to be patronised. Hishamuddin's opinion that there was no need for Pakatan to name their Prime Minister candidate because "you haven't even bought the cow but you want to argue where to put it" did not sit down well.

One of the audience rebutted that

even when shopping online, one is able to check out the item in 3D, turn it around, magnify the view.

The storyline that Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail will be the Prime Minister while Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's pardon is being secured, also does not sell and one of them described it as "b\*\*\*\*\*t".

They found it ironic that Pakatan leaders had taught them to hate Dr Mahathir but now to bring down Najib, they have to embrace Dr Mahathir. One of the questions posed was whether they would also have to accept Najib one of these days.

Millennials are those who are now in their 20s and 30s. The upper half of this cohort grew up in the Mahathir era, while the lower half reached adulthood in the post-Mahathir years.

"I am 31, I had just finished my SPM when Mahathir left office. By the time we reached political maturity, we could look back at his era without the tinted lenses. By then Pak Lah (Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) was opening up our society, he was my PM even though he did not leave office as the most popular PM," said Umno Youth exco member Shahril Hamdan.

Democracy and openness are important to this generation and that explains why many of them were drawn to the Opposition after the sacking of Anwar.

"There is no hate or disrespect on our part, just fatigue. It's hard to reconcile all these U-turns. Personally, I feel amused and also annoyed. I don't understand the way he has changed his stand on what he had fought for," said Shahril who is also the CEO of a gas and oil company.

The millennials are a complex crop but it seems like they are not as admiring of the Mahathir era as has been made out to be. They appreciate the development he brought but the thinking ones also see the faults and contradictions of

that era.

"Of course, there are contradictions. There are no angels in politics. We're not looking for the perfect politician, we are looking for a better Malaysia," said Syahredzan.

According to a young political risk consultant, many millennials follow the careers of young politicians of their generation, watching what they do and what they say.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin ranks high among them and they think Parti Pribumi Youth chief Syed Saddiq Abdul Rahman is smart and has potential but tends to talk too much about things he does not know much of.

PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli was admired until the disastrous Kajang Move happened.

They also admire PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar but found her claim about Pakatan building a cheaper MRT laughable. This cohort could see that the newly completed MRT was costly but it was completed on time and without cost overruns and that impressed the professionals among them.

Neither Pakatan nor Barisan will have an easy ride with the millennials. They are a discerning generation, and they can tell when politicians are talking sense or dishing out nonsense.

For a start, Dr Mahathir should stop talking about reforming the judiciary. He is not the best person to talk about that and his image will sink the more he tries to blame others for what happened to the judges during his time.

Pakatan put Dr Mahathir up there to make inroads into the Malay heartland and he is said to be making some progress in that respect. They will make some new ground and lose some old ground.

But will having a 92-year-old man as the "top dog" inspire continued support among the millennials who make up more than 30% of Malaysian voters?