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STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Politicians leap-frog into history

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There is no loyalty to the party; it's every man for his own benefit

FORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad once said during a packed hustings event in Serendah, Selangor, on the night of April 22, 2010, that it was dangerous to trust "frogs", for one would never know where they would jump to next.

"Do not put your trust in this frog. What happens if he is drunk? How is he going to do his work?" he said during that hot and sultry night, leaving the crowd that had turned up in stitches.

"He leapt into Umno, and even made it to become a minister. Then he jumped into PKR, and then to Sabah and when he was promised a candidacy, he jumped back here.

"This frog truly has strong hind legs, I tell you. He is like superman, he can jump from here to the roof, too," Dr Mahathir said further in his signature no holds barred banter.

If you are familiar with Malaysian political lingo, then you would have realised that Dr Mahathir was not referring to the actual amphibian, but instead describing the act of a certain politician, who had hopped from one party to another.

While the term "frog" or "political frog" itself is not defamatory or malicious, it was clear that Dr Mahathir was not a big fan of Datuk Zaid Ibrahim, who was contesting in the

Hulu Selangor parliamentary by-election that year against Barisan Nasional's Datuk P. Kamalanathan.

Zaid, at the time, had recently joined PKR after being sacked from Umno in 2008 whereas Dr Mahathir, the grand old man of Malaysian politics, was still an Umno member and had campaigned heavily for BN.

So, it came as a bit of a shock to some when Dr Mahathir, seven years later, sat side by side with Zaid in front of the press and announced the latter's entry into DAP, a party that used to condemn Dr Mahathir as the cause of the country's problems.

Is Dr Mahathir still telling us not to trust "frogs", or has he changed his tune?

Even he could not help but poke fun at Zaid, who was urged to stay in DAP longer than his previous stints.

Dr Mahathir also called for the party-hopping culture to be buried.

But, by definition, Dr Mahathir can now be described as a "frog" himself, after leaving Umno and co-founding Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, which he now chairs.

His party has even signed an electoral pact with DAP and PKR, whose leaders include some of Dr Mahathir's staunchest critics like DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang, who was seated next to Dr Mahathir and Zaid during the announcement.

But Lim is no longer Dr Mahathir's loudest gadfly, at least for the time being. Just as how Dr Mahathir was willing to set aside Zaid's "jumping" habit, Lim, too, is trying his level best to maintain a cordial relationship with his former enemy.

Which is why Lim continues to wince every time the Bumiputera

Malaysia Finance Ltd (BMF) scandal, an issue he has spoken out against in two books, is brought up by the press and detractors.

He even lost his cool and started berating a TV3 journalist, who had asked whether Lim was still in favour of a Royal Commission of Inquiry to look into the BMF scandal and Bank Negara Malaysia's alleged foreign exchange losses, which both occurred during Dr Mahathir's rule.

Towards the end of his tongue-lashing, Lim said he stood by every word he said in his books. But, if that was the case, then it's no wonder why Lim's cooperation with Dr Mahathir would be continually questioned, criticised and denounced.

While it is difficult to predict how long the alliance between the two veterans (Lim and Dr Mahathir) will last before they fall out due to irreconcilable differences, a former Malay DAP leader is willing to bet his bottom dollar that Zaid will not last long in the party.

"He (Zaid) will find out about DAP's true nature the hard way. The party is not what it is made out to be. You have to be in the party to know what it is all about," former DAP vice-chairman Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim told this newspaper recently.

Nonetheless, the events that took place at Zaid's home on Tuesday only proved further the point that many philosophers and statesmen had made about politics — there are no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.

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Datuk Zaid Ibrahim announcing his membership in the DAP. With him are former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang. PIC BY SAIRIEN NAFIS