

# Dr M calls TMJ 'a little boy' and stupid'

**PUTRAJAYA:** The souring relationship between Putrajaya and the Johor palace became all the more palpable yesterday when Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad labelled the state's crown prince as "stupid".

Commenting on Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim's recent outburst over his father Sultan of Johor Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar's unpublicised contributions, Dr Mahathir had earlier disagreed on notions of any animosity with the Johor ruler himself.

"No, I don't see it as anything, because I even went to see him (for an audience) and he drove me to the airport. I don't want to comment on the sultan, because if I say anything that is not good, it is not nice because he is the sultan.

"But this TMJ (Tunku Mahkota Johor), he is a little boy. He is stupid because he does not know what is happening. So don't talk. When you do not know anything, don't talk," Dr Mahathir said in a special interview at the Prime Minister's Office.

Tunku Ismail's string of comments lamenting his father's purportedly unappreciated contributions stemmed from a land dispute in Bukit Chagar involving the Rapid Transit System (RTS)

project connecting Johor Baru and Woodlands North in Singapore.

The matter became controversial when it was discovered that a 4.5ha parcel of the land earmarked for the project was found to be owned by Sultan Ibrahim, although Dr Mahathir had laid federal claim on the plot.

It remained unclear as to how the ruler had acquired the plot, which has been reported to be among federal land surrounding the Sultan Iskandar Building customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) complex, prior to the RTS project's realignment in 2017.

On his cabinet's performance, Dr Mahathir rated his team "five out of 10", but remained adamant that the line-up would not be reshuffled.

"I would say out of 10, I give them a five. I am very conservative (with the rating) because I have been in the government for 22 years and I know how the government functions. But these people are new. They don't know how a government functions.

"On top of that, they are afraid of being accused of wrongdoings. This makes decision-making for them very difficult. But

they are learning very fast. Sometimes they have to come to see me because I have the experience."

Dr Mahathir said while he had given pointers to his fellow cabinet members, they were holding on their own exceptionally well.

"I tried to teach them and guide them so that they can perform. But they are (indeed) performing. (So) I don't see any reason for me to restructure the cabinet.

"Eventually they will be as good as any experienced members. There will be no cabinet reshuffle. Am I clear?"

On education, Dr Mahathir said the racially-charged backlash that the government received after increasing matriculation students slots to 40,000 from 25,000 was an example of how no one could ever appease every quarter.

He reminded the people that the matriculation programme was meant to help Malay students who were lagging behind in obtaining pre-university certification.

Back then, a 90 per cent quota was allocated to Malays and Bumiputeras and the remainder was for other races.

"But now the question is: why

Malays only? Other people do much better but they cannot get into the matriculation programme. It is simply because they did not do much better.

"We created the matriculation programme for the Malays. So now we have agreed to give it to the non-Malays. So the whole idea to increase the Malay students in the universities by the matriculation programme is nullified because even Chinese and Indian students also go through the 'back door'.

"And they are not satisfied. This thing never cropped up before. But now somebody has played it up and of course, the press must report. And people think, 'oh this, the government is favouring the Malays'."

On April 24, the cabinet had agreed to increase the student intake into the pre-university matriculation programme to 40,000 from the present 25,000 but maintained its 90 per cent quota for Malay/Bumiputera students.

The decision earned a rebuke from several quarters and experts called for the abolition of the quota and to prioritise low-income students instead.

On the appointment of the

country's first woman chief justice, Datuk Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat, Dr Mahathir said the decision was made based on her professional capabilities instead of race or gender.

"If you have the ability (to lead), I think you deserve to be appointed. And apparently, not many people have condemned the appointment."

Concerning claims of Johor Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's leadership dispute, Dr Mahathir said he had yet to hear any complaints about former state exco Mazlan Bujang's appointment as the state's chapter head.

On the hunt for fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, who is better known as Jho Low, Dr Mahathir said the 38-year-old who is linked to the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) financial scandal was still at large.

"Much of the money is still lost and the amount returned to us is not, which is less than RM2 billion. He stole RM42 billion from 1MDB alone. Who is keeping the money now?"

"There is some evidence that Jho Low has taken the money for himself. We have problems of trying to detect where he is. But we are still going after him."