

Khairy reconciles with Dr M

Former Umno Youth chief faces his longtime nemesis' on podcast

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PETALING JAYA: Khairy Jamaluddin's podcast *Keluar Sekejap* has become recommended listening, but few could have predicted that the former health minister would bring on a long-time nemesis.

In a conversation that was more than a decade in the making, the former Umno Youth chief came face-to-face with former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a man who was a thorn in Khairy's side and who had fuelled the downfall of the latter's father-in-law, ex-prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Abdullah took over from Dr Mahathir in 2003, but what at first looked like an amicable handing over of power turned into a bitter feud when the latter mounted a public campaign to oust his successor.

Dr Mahathir and his supporters' criticism of the Abdullah administration in public and within Umno contributed to the 2008 political tsunami, where the party and Barisan Nasional lost its two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat, along with the control of five key states.

Abdullah resigned shortly after and paved the way for the ascension of Datuk Seri Najib Razak, a prime minister that Dr Mahathir would also later help bring down.

Throughout their rivalry, Dr Mahathir accused Khairy of having an outsize influence on Abdullah and branded the young leader and his team as the "fourth-floor boys" after their suite of offices in the Prime Minister's Office.

"To this day, that label has still stuck with me and I hope you can help wash it off," Khairy joked at the start of *Keluar Sekejap's* 65th episode that aired yesterday on YouTube.

But instead of trading barbs at



No-holds-barred session: Khairy (middle) and Shahril (right) interviewing Dr Mahathir on the *Keluar Sekejap* podcast.

each other, the two appeared to make peace between them as Dr Mahathir recounted the unique history he had with Abdullah, which later coloured their relationship.

Khairy, meanwhile, accepted Dr Mahathir's perspective on those tense times and concluded that the friction between Dr Mahathir and Abdullah's administration was due to differences of opinion over policies.

"We have talked about the economy, about politics, and me and Tun are now healing, I think," Khairy said light-heartedly after both men talked of their past.

Earlier, Khairy took the bull by the horns by asking: "Why didn't you like me?"

To which Dr Mahathir responded tongue-in-cheek: "Because you contested against my son for the Umno Youth chief's post. And because people told me that your mother-in-law had campaigned for you," drawing laughter from Khairy and his co-host Shahril Hamdan.

Khairy had contested and won his first term as Umno Youth chief in 2005 against Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

However, the plain-spoken Dr

Mahathir declined to elaborate on the second part of that statement - that Abdullah's wife, the late Tun Endon Mahmood, had campaigned for Khairy.

Instead, the special guest went on about how ambivalent he had been about Abdullah since the mid-1980s, despite the fact that he had picked the latter to succeed him as prime minister in 2003.

When Dr Mahathir was first challenged as Umno president in 1987 by ex-finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Abdullah had supported Tengku Razaleigh, even though he was part of Dr Mahathir's Cabinet.

Abdullah would subsequently be elected to the party's supreme council and become one of the three Umno vice-presidents, and it was because of this that Dr Mahathir continued to appoint him to the Cabinet, he added.

"So when the post of deputy prime minister became vacant (after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was expelled in 1998), I made him DPM with the realisation that he would be PM even though he had supported Tengku Razaleigh."

But within two weeks after becoming prime minister, Abdullah had cancelled his (Dr

Mahathir's) two national pet projects, said the nonagenarian.

These were a Singapore-Malaysia bridge to replace the Causeway and the double-tracking project for national railway KTMB.

Dr Mahathir was also upset that Abdullah had sold a Malaysian-owned motorcycle company MV Augusta.

"So I was disappointed. He promised. So I thought to myself, 'Abdullah still hates me but he promised (to continue these projects) and he did not fulfil his promises.'"

In response, Khairy defended the policies of Abdullah's administration.

"In defence, whatever policy differences we had, there was never any criminal element. I myself have been investigated and to this day, there has been nothing criminal," he said.

Both men then accepted that they had to agree to disagree on the policies of the Abdullah administration.

But before he signed off at the end of the episode, Khairy paid tribute to the 98-year-old leader despite their acrimonious past and their differing opinions.