

LKY says he never undermined successors like Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 27 — Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew said in a recently published book that he never undermined his successor in the way former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad did in Malaysia, and that his only role was to advise the next generation of leaders in the republic.

"That was my intention. If the new PM fails, I have failed," Singapore's founding father said in his latest book, "Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going". The 458-page book was published by Straits Times Press this year and features a series of interviews with Singapore's minister mentor between December 2008 and October 2009. Comparing his attitude with that of Malaysia's fourth prime minister, he said: "Mahathir never thought that way. He undermined his successors."

Since leaving office in 2003, Dr Mahathir has consistently remained in the political spotlight. He became a vocal critic of his hand-picked successor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and constantly attacked the country's fifth prime minister by alleging the latter's administration was corrupt.

Dr Mahathir even took the drastic step of quitting Umno and his opposition to Abdullah contributed significantly to Barisan Nasional (BN) losing its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority in Election 2008. Since taking over as PM, Datuk Seri Najib Razak has had to be careful not to offend Dr Mahathir who has responded by toning down his criticisms of any government policies. Lee, who remained in the Singapore Cabinet first as senior minister and now as minister mentor, has in contrast kept out of the way of his successors Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, who is also his son. Lee Kuan Yew's shadow still looms large over Singapore as he remains an influential figure and according to his critics is still feared in the island republic. Speaking about his attitude towards his successor in his latest book, Lee quoted former British PM John Major.

"A Western correspondent put it to former British PM John Major — Margaret Thatcher on the sidelines made life difficult for you so you can say that you did not succeed because of her. But look at Lee Kuan Yew. He's in the new government and the new PM is succeeding.

"You should see his (Major's) answer. 'He is making sure the new PM succeeds'," he said.

In his interviews for the book, Lee spoke at length about Malaysia and had also commented about Najib and bilateral ties with Malaysia. He had described Najib as a rational leader who understands that Malaysia benefits from co-operating with its southern neighbour but is hampered by sentiments from the Malay grassroots.

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