

## **My father's daughter: Dr M redeeming his unpopularity thru' Marina?**

**Blogger**

**June 16, 2012**

THE world knows him as the former prime minister of Malaysia but to Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is the man she calls dad.

He was strict about matters pertaining to school but, at the same time, very affectionate towards his children, says this writer and human rights activist about her father.

"He cannot tolerate bad manners and rudeness," adds Marina, 55, who is the first of seven children of the 86-year-old Mahathir and Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

"I remember as a child, he spanked me because I stuck my tongue out at our gardener."

But when it comes to his 17 grandchildren, it is a totally different picture. The strict father turns into a much more lenient and indulgent grandfather.

"Once I smacked one of my children lightly and he scolded me: 'Don't smack my granddaughter'!

### **I respect his opinions, he respects mine**

But like any child growing up with strong opinions, Marina's obvious support for the Bersih street demonstrations last year and this year had set some tongues wagging that it had caused a serious rift between father and daughter.

Marina, however, denies this. "I took part in Bersih because I believe in fair and clean elections. I don't think I've done anything wrong.

"I've stated my opinions and my dad has stated his opinions. Our opinions happen to be different.

"But both my father and I believe that it's okay to have different opinions."

She feels that some people are making a big deal out of their differences in their opinions.

"They want me to say that my dad's opinion is wrong. I'm not going to do that. He is my father. Would you do that to your father?

"I respect his opinions the way he respects mine."

### **Other Asians yearn for leader like Mahathir!**

Marina also feels that her father had brought about much progress to the nation during his tenure as prime minister.

"I know people would say that I only have good things to say about him because he's my father.

"But I'm sure that our history would reflect a much more balanced account of his contributions to this country.

"As people enjoy the fruits of development, they want more. In particular, they want more space for different ideas to be aired and for that, they need the freedom of expression and speech."

Marina says Malaysians generally do not appreciate her father until they travel and meet foreigners, especially other Asians, who yearn for a leader like him.

Recalling a 2008 visit to the Asian University for Women, on whose International Advisory Committee she sits, in Chittagong, Bangladesh, she says the people there looked up to her father and regarded him with respect and admiration.

"I was treated like a rock star's daughter when I was there," she recalls. "Everywhere I went, I was greeted by journalists and people eager to meet me just because I was related to him."

"They admired dad for what he had done for Malaysia. They wished they could have a leader like him."

### **Work first, popularity second**

On allegations that Mahathir had curbed press freedom in Malaysia when he was the prime minister, Marina has this to offer: "He had, shall we say, a fractious relationship with the media. It was one of those things I'd always disagreed with him."

"But he was always far-sighted when it came to new technology."

"I remember one of his ministers wanted to ban the use of fax machines but he would not allow it."

"We must also not forget that he set up the Multimedia Super Corridor."

"Whatever you may say about my dad, you cannot deny that he has an intellect far superior to that of most people today. He certainly reads more than almost anyone in public office too."

When asked about her opinion on internet forums that criticise her father, she says: "I don't read what they say. What's the point of reading them? They are not going to change their opinions, no matter what you do."

"My father had never gone around thinking that he's the most popular guy on earth. If you do your job with the idea of being popular, you already have the wrong approach."

"For that matter, I don't even read his fan forums either."

### **Defending women's rights or political opportunist?**

She also points out that her father was a strong supporter of women's rights and one of the few leaders around who had the guts to stand up against those religious scholars who used religion to deny women their rights.

"Once, my friend told me that she had heard an Ustaz declaring in his religious sermon that 'it's better to roll in mud with a pig than shake hands with a woman'."

"Later, I told this to my mum and she related it to dad."

"Then, at the very next Umno general assembly, my father brought up what the Ustaz had said and asked how he could have forgotten that his mother, sisters and wife were also women and how he could have spoken of them in such a degrading manner.

"For saying that, my father received a standing ovation, including from those women who really should have stood up against men who have such a sexist attitude."

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