

Why am I a dictator?
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By RK Anand
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Dr Mahathir Mohamad is puzzled why he has been branded a dictator and asks for proof.

PETALING JAYA: Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who celebrated his 87th birthday recently, cannot fathom being branded a dictator and pointed to others who were more deserving of the title such as Adolf Hitler.

In his latest blog posting, the former premier lamented that such labels, given with basis or otherwise, were difficult to erase and remained with a person for a lifetime.

"So labels are essential in politics, especially those which run down an opponent. Whatever you do, the opponents will not cease using the labels," he said.

"When I was prime minister, I was given numerous titles. 'Mahazalim', 'Firaun' and 'dictator' were among the titles invented by my political foes," he added.

Mahathir had been accused of ruling with an iron fist as critics claimed that under his 22-year watch, the independence of key institutions such as the media and judiciary was shackled.

The doctor-turned-politician's tenure was also marred by the Internal Security Act crackdown on opposition politicians and activists as well as allegations of widespread corruption.

Mahathir had denied the alleged transgressions and claimed that whatever bank balance he had, resulted from his savings.

But what dealt an indelible taint to his reputation both here and abroad was the sacking and jailing of deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim.

It is said that the latter's successful smear campaign had led Mahathir to despise him.

Look at Mubarak

The former premier said that when he is interviewed now, the questions posed indicated that those fielding them believed the labels used to describe him, especially that he was a dictator.

"What have I done that equates me with the qualities and actions of a dictator?" he asked.

Travelling as far as Egypt to substantiate his argument, Mahathir cited the rule of Hosni Mubarak who was accused of massacring thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members and amassing a wealth amounting to US\$70 billion.

The former premier recounted that when he was in Cairo during the Mubarak era, streets were vacated for the president's motorcade and armed troops lined the sidewalks.

"Mubarak's enemies were not allowed to be political, they were often arrested, imprisoned without trial and eventually vanished. During the 30 years that he was president, the post was never contested by anyone else and he obtained 99% of the votes.

"There was no press freedom nor freedom of expression... Mubarak could elect anyone to be a minister and terminate their services whenever he wanted," Mahathir added.

The former premier also listed the names of several other dictators such as Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Ferdinand Marcos, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein.

"I want to know from the visitors to my blog, what is it that I have done as prime minister which can prove that I am a dictator," he said.

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