

**Dr M predicts a sterner Najib after BN polls win**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad moved today to defend Datuk Seri Najib Razak against critics of the latter's perceived weak leadership, pointing out that the premier could not take a hardline stance yet as he had inherited a very fractured Barisan Nasional (BN) from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir explained that Najib's main duty today was to strengthen BN to ensure he leads the ruling coalition to a thumping victory in the coming polls.

This, he said, was likely the reason why the present government often appeared to pander to the wishes of civil society groups and activists, even appearing weak at times when harsher decisions are required.

"When the government is strong, only then he (Najib) can be firmer. Firmer in his actions.

"Now, he is not as firm because he inherited a weak government," Dr Mahathir told a tea-time session with the Lembah Pantai Retirees Club here this evening.

He was earlier asked to explain the government and its agencies' apparent failure to act more harshly against those who insulted the country's sovereignty or threatened national security.

It was pointed out several times during a question-and-answer session at the event that it was only in recent years that defiant Malaysians dared to commit acts like trampling on the pictures of the country's prime minister and raising a different flag instead of the Jalur Gemilang during Merdeka day.

Both incidents occurred last week.

The country's longest-serving prime minister, who ruled from 1981 to 2003, blamed himself for the "weak leadership" that Najib had inherited when the latter was appointed prime minister in 2009.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that it was his fault that Abdullah had taken on the role of prime minister after he stepped down in 2003.

"Actually this is my fault. I am not good at choosing my own replacement. And because I made a mistake, I tried to topple the person I chose. When I failed, I left Umno.

"But thank goodness, when the leadership changed, I returned to Umno and now I am in support of Najib to restore unity in Umno, restore BN so that we can form a stronger government," he said.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that during his 22-year tenure, no individual had dared to trample on his picture as prime minister.

This, he said, was because BN and the government had been stronger then than it is today.

"But I hope that after the 13th general election, we will form a very strong government and this will not happen again," he said.

Dr Mahathir agreed to a question from the floor that the recently-repealed Internal Security Act (ISA) should be restored, but added that he supported Najib's reasons to remove the controversial law from the country's statute books.

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