

Behind closed doors, Dr M keeps his promise on Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 - Talking to senior Johor Umno politicians behind closed doors weeks before the general election last month, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad called for everyone to unite behind Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to ensure a big win for Barisan Nasional.

The former prime minister pointed out then that it was not the time to talk about Najib's weak leadership or penchant for not moving on policies until he had a consensus.

But a senior Johor Umno official recalled that Dr Mahathir did make it clear at that forum that once the polls were over, he would speak up and criticise Najib openly if necessary.

Politicians in Kedah too also remember Dr Mahathir speaking in a similar vein about Najib at closed-door sessions before the elections.

Dr Mahathir appears to be keeping his promise.

The country's longest-serving prime minister has been critical of Najib's election strategy, the incompetence of Najib's advisors and the general direction of the administration since the May 5 general election that returned Barisan to power without the desired two-thirds majority or victory in Selangor or Penang.

Dr Mahathir has also made it clear that there should be a contest for the top Umno position, saying that it would show Malaysians that democracy is alive in the dominant Malay nationalist party.

So far, the pugnacious Dr Mahathir has not used a public forum to speak about Najib. But he has done so at closed-door sessions with finance executives and politicians and also in correspondence.

He also repeated the need for a contest for the Umno president's position when speaking to a group of fund managers in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir continues to enjoy some influence in the party and is infamous for leading the charge which eventually led to Tun Abdullah Badawi resigning as PM a year after the 2008 elections.

There is no evidence that Dr Mahathir wants to see Najib hounded out, but there are suggestions that he would like more input into policies and decision-making at the highest level, even the setting up of a new economic advisory body.

Pro-Umno bloggers aligned to the former PM have also slammed those politicians who have said there should be no contest for the top two posts in the party – a move which if endorsed by the party's Supreme Council would see Najib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin remain as PM and DPM.

One blogger even had an online poll on whether Najib should remain Umno president, with some 75 percent of the respondents not supportive of Najib.

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