

Don't turn your voice into a whisper, Pak Lah's supporters urge him
Malaysian Insider
Aug 10 , 2013
News analysis by The Malaysian Insider

Now that Tun Abdullah Badawi has served his appetiser, his supporters in Umno would like him to continue dishing it out to nemesis Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as payback for seven years of half-truths, humiliation and pain.

In the past few days, many members of the Abdullah camp have been congratulating him on the groundbreaking interview he gave the co-editors of a book on his years in office.

In the book, Abdullah (pic) finally defended himself and his government against the broadsides from his predecessor-turned-nemesis, Dr Mahathir.

Some of Abdullah's supporters who were sidelined in Umno and in the corporate world on account of being associated with him, now want to visit the former PM at his home near Carcosa Sri Negara and urge him to continue the fight.

One supporter, an Umno MP, told The Malaysian Insider, "Pak Lah will be doing Malaysia a favour if he tells Malaysians why he could not follow the path of Mahathir".

"It is important for Pak Lah to explain why he did certain things. Not everything will be favourable to Pak Lah but this debate will make people re-examine Mahathir's legacy."

Supporters like him know that Abdullah has held back all these years for the sake of Umno unity and to avoid adding to the ruling party's troubles in general election.

But there is no such concern now, they argue. The next general election is five years away so if there is any right time for Abdullah to tell Malaysians the hard truths about his five years as PM and his relationship with his predecessor, this is it.

Those who want Abdullah to give his side of the story include Umno MPs, Barisan Nasional politicians and associates who are still unhappy and perplexed today that Abdullah chose the path of silence when Dr Mahathir began attacking him in 2006, accusing him of weak leadership and cronyism, among other things.

They know there will be a comeback from Dr Mahathir on his successor's hard-hitting comments in the book and this time, they want Abdullah to give as good as he gets. They want him to go beyond general statements and finally talk about the backstories of Dr Mahathir's pet projects and his sons' deep involvement in business.

They believe that Abdullah should have exposed the real Dr Mahathir, the leader who during his 22 years in office, presided over the hollowing out of key institutions such as the judiciary, promoted skewed privatisation projects, and did little to fight corruption and racial polarisation.

But back then, Abdullah the Prime Minister felt that if he laid bare Dr Mahathir's skeletons, it would split Umno and ultimately hurt BN in GE12. Later, Abdullah the Former Prime Minister was also reluctant to open a war against Dr Mahathir in the run-up to GE13, once again concerned that a fresh round of verbal volleys between him and Dr Mahathir would hurt Umno.

So Umno and BN politicians aligned to Abdullah, or at least with empathy for him, were pleasantly surprised with the hard-hitting interview he gave the editors of the book titled "Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years In Malaysia". The book is a collection of essays and a few interviews assessing Abdullah's performance as Prime Minister between October 2003 and March 2009.

In it, Abdullah unloaded on Dr Mahathir, saying, among other things, that:

Dr Mahathir criticised him because Abdullah tried to do things differently. "He believes that his way is the only way... Mahathir's inability to accept any other view except his own."

Though Abdullah's son was a businessman, he didn't obtain any contracts through direct negotiations. Abdullah noted that it was hypocritical of Dr Mahathir to attack him on his son's involvement given that Mahathir's own children "were all heavily involved in business in a big way throughout the entire time he was Prime Minister".

Once a prime minister retires, he should not interfere with his successor. "If there is anything you are unhappy with, you can always offer your views privately. I didn't like what Mahathir did," Abdullah said.

Had Abdullah succumbed to Dr Mahathir's pressure to continue spending on mega-projects, the budget deficit would have widened and Malaysia would be bankrupt by now.

Dr Mahathir was a man of contradictions. When BN did well in 2004, he said such a strong mandate was not good for the country. When BN didn't do well in 2008, he blamed Abdullah. Yet "Mahathir cannot deny that he contributed to the erosion of Barisan Nasional's support in the 2008 elections through his open and unwarranted criticisms and attacks."

Abdullah informed Dr Mahathir of the sleep apnea condition he was suffering, which caused him to doze off. "So for him to say that I doze off because I am not interested in the job is most unkind," said Abdullah in the book.

Abdullah noted that even after the groundswell against him manufactured by the Mahathir-Muhyiddin combo, Abdullah's supporters in the party presented him with evidence that they had the "numbers to fight" and for him to remain as Umno president.

But he disappointed his supporters by walking away from a scrap with his critics for the sake of Umno unity.

There is some worry among Abdullah's supporters that Abdullah the Loyal Umno Man may yet defer to a plea for peace from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Or he may choose to once again hold his tongue out of concern for son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin's prospects in the coming Umno elections.

So expect a beeline of sorts to the former prime minister's home from his supporters to make a case that it's time for Abdullah to speak. They will hope that the first shot across the bow from Abdullah in the book will not just turn out to be like his five years as premier, something that promised much, but... – August 10, 2013.

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