

## **MAHATHIR, THE TRUE FRENEMY!**

**Malaysia Today**

**May 28, 2015**

**By Super Admin**

**Yes, that is the genius of Mahathir. He messed up things in a way the victim has no idea of his malaise, just senses it and blames everyone except his very Torquemada.**

**Praba Ganesan, Malay Mail Online**

These are strange days indeed. So many Malaysians on both sides of the political divide are cheering on — even if silently — one ex-prime minister taking on the present prime minister.

Relentless form from Mahathir Mohamad, the largest shadow on Malaysian life for the past 45 years.

### **The impregnable Umno presidency**

It is an open boast that the real power to the country is not transferred or retained at the general elections, but at Umno general assemblies — when there are party elections.

While Tunku Abdul Rahman ensured Malayan primacy over Sarawak and Sabah soon after formation, using the Borneo states to render general elections ceremonial, Mahathir Mohamad faced demons from within his party in 1987.

As a key ring-member in the ouster of Tunku in 1969, he was well-acquainted with Umno's internal threats. Eighteen years later, after the acrimonious break-up and the ensuing creation of Umno Baru, Mahathir had a free hand to construct an iron-clad power grip for presidents in this new entity. Which he happily obliged.

Presidents became democratically infallible.

And even this was not enough. A doctor considers all angles. He then spread within the party a basic premise, that challenging power is antithetical to being Malay. And since all Umno members are expected to be Malay by virtue of being Muslim — irrespective of how they got here from Punjab — challenging is tantamount to forfeiting your Malayness.

Presidents were now both democratically and culturally infallible.

Which results in no open dissent, just a sea of rumours slicking up Umno's horizon — killing the wildlife, healthy dialogue and any chance of principled people rising to any meaningful office.

A place only for deceitful, two-faced sycophants who enjoy their silver coins in exchange for unerring obedience in public.

## **Centralised Federal power — ‘Fortress Putrajaya’**

Mahathir saw Anwar Ibrahim turn the Finance Ministry into a power base, and before that witnessed Daim Zainuddin doing the same.

One way for the prime minister not to look over his shoulder at a finance minister as competition is to unify the roles. Prime Minister is finance minister. Mahathir altered the dynamics and through today’s lens increased the likelihood of ventures like 1MDB.

Every prime minister since has adopted the same protocol.

This on top of the two decades of funnelling power to the prime minister’s department, which is a misleading title because all the ministers and ministries that matter, economic planning, PEMANDU and Islamic affairs are under that department, meaning under the prime minister.

They may as well do away with Cabinet meetings and send staff memos to the other ministers weekly, on what the “department” has decided for them.

## **Succession to a watery grave**

While the number of blind supporters in Umno growing to become leaders — with the independent minded dispatched to the fringe — those outside Umno were starved of a system promoting engagement.

When elections are managed, media distracting and an open policy of intimidating political opponents even if it stalls any engagement in Parliament or elsewhere, reducing opponents to react not dictate, most of the capable in the country stay away from all political parties.

It’s too damn hard to be involved. Too high a price.

From Operasi Lallang through Reformasi till the day Mahathir left in 2003, there was only hell to pay if you did not agree with Mahathir.

Mahathir’s obsession of no opposition, inside his party and outside, has turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The system has filtered out talent, and overqualified people are left over-observing about the people in the fray.

For example, people shrug that some DAP MPs speak Malay like it’s their third language. But when debate and discourse are one way-streets in Dewan Rakyat, and mainstream media not objectively analysing the issue and classrooms disallowed from dissecting the contentions, does it really matter how anyone speaks there?

The process is invisible to most Malaysians. So the only valuable asset is partisanship or what engenders it. So the more base the proponent the meatier his value-proposition

becomes. Speaking the right Hokkien in the right quarters brings votes and sympathy. Divides develop clearer contours. Us vs them, never about ideas.

This reduction of our democratic possibilities is Mahathir's gift to us.

### **The latent institutions**

The guardian angels of a democracy — checks and balances — courts, state prosecutors, financial regulators and corporate regulators have been tamed by Mahathir to wait for orders and not to act independently.

High Court, Bank Negara, Securities Commission, Registrar of Companies, Registrar of Societies, Human Rights Commission and the rest, they stand manacled after decades of one man in power.

### **Anything goes without a plan, if I say so**

Ex-US president Richard M. Nixon's was infamous for quoting, "If the president does it, that means it's not illegal."

Mahathir, the prime minister, must have paid attention to Nixon.

He was risk-friendly when it came to unconventional and new projects. Rolling the dice of all our fortunes on his gut feel.

Dayabumi Tower was a quick strike-out but that did not stop the even more ambitious KLCC twin-towers. The Proton car programme was initiated and the result was millions of lower income Malaysians having to subsidise the national car project. And the less said about Perwaja steel production the better. National electricity production was to be outsourced to new companies with all the protection guaranteed for the latter — the IPP era begun.

New poster boys for his empire were rushed out. Recipients like Halim Saad of Renong and Tajuddin Ramli of Celcom and later on Malaysia Airlines.

There were failures and colossal failures, and every time Mahathir comes out of it smelling like a rose, because the machinery of government repeats to us over and over that nothing bad ever happened.

Raised in such leadership, why would it be inconceivable for those following him in office to have the same level of impertinence to public opinion?

### **The convenient reversals**

The early Mahathir was aggressive about Malay medium education. The Malay ultra in him wanted even those teaching English to be Malays.

However, decades ago the vast majority of English teachers were educated in English medium schools and since the overwhelming majority at those schools were non-Malays, obviously the number who taught English thereafter was non-Malays.

In time that would have petered out, but Mahathir was in no mood to wait. There was an overnight policy shift to prioritise Malays to teach English.

Which is why when Mahathir lamented the drop in English instruction by students nationwide at the tail-end of his days in office, it was laughable. After decades of horror stories in schools already without a culture of speaking English denouncing English, Mahathir was playing victim.

In his final year in office he reintroduced English as medium of instruction for science and maths, so the next guy can be responsible for the policy' outcome.

### **The intolerance of faith**

There is a perpetual stalemate when discussing how much can Islam get into the secular lives of Malaysians, and much of it is Mahathir's doing.

His Machiavellian intention to outflank PAS invariably caused a period of encroachment without process or safeguards. He capped his stratagem by unilaterally declaring Malaysia an Islamic country in 2001.

Custodial rights, body-grabs and opposition to cultural expressions are ever justified by the claim this is a nation of one faith, not one people.

Thanks to Mahathir, so many argue openly that only after Islam's considerations are met can then other Malaysian's concerns can be listened to.

### **Ethnic engineering**

Has it not been palpable Mahathir's silence on the Rohingya boat people?

Reminds me of his book *The Challenge* (1976), Mahathir the home minister threatening to personally shoot Vietnamese boat people fleeing communists who wanted to land on Terengganu.

But refugees are not his forte, using immigrants and workers are.

When I was a banquet worker at the Shangri La Hotel 25 years ago, there were no foreigners.

Today, it would be difficult to find Malaysians among the banquet workers.

Mahathir opened Pandora's box so that he could keep wages low using foreign workers. While Singapore did the same in some industries, the *laisse faire* and unrestrained

manner of entry of immigrants into all sectors is now giving Malaysia a six million person headache and no policy to counter.

Migrants are also useful to alter political realities. The flooding of Muslim Filipinos to Sabah with state complicity enabled him in a generation to demote Kadazan-Dusun-Murut communities to second class status. He had other means to control the Ibans in Sarawak.

So now, Putrajaya confronts a labour situation, a population riddle and local resentment from Borneo, adding on the uphill challenges no government can surmount.

Which means, Mahathir can poke at those in power now for being powerless about situations he pre-meditated.

### **The doctor never leaves the house**

His real legacy might be in how he has positioned himself in the mind of those in the present, the very victims of his reign.

Someone in a Facebook post bemoaned the lack of Mahathir in power today. Many joined the chorus. I could not help myself, chancing the post, and said it was incredible that one who has manipulated, waylaid, compromised and used us can be missed.

The lad replied, "But he abused me so well I don't know he did."

Yes, that is the genius of Mahathir. He messed up things in a way the victim has no idea of his malaise, just senses it and blames everyone except his very Torquemada.

**Copyright (C) 2004 - 2015 Malaysia Today. All Rights Reserved.**

Source: <http://www.malaysia-today.net/mahathir-the-true-frenemy/>