

Dr Mahathir, 'political terminator' taking on issues close to people's heart, says Musa Hitam

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Despite having retired from active politics 12 years ago, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has regained popularity for speaking up on problems the public are concerned about, says his former deputy Tun Musa Hitam.

Musa also believed that his ex-boss would succeed in securing the ouster of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak over the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) scandal, as the former prime minister was an ardent student of Sun Tzu's "The Art of War".

"He has struck a good chord with the public and has become a popular hero overnight because he taken on issues that have touched the hearts and minds of the people," Musa told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview recently.

Musa, who left government in 1986 due to "irreconcilable differences" with Dr Mahathir, said his former boss's outspokenness against the current administration was in sync with his personality.

Musa was commenting on Dr Mahathir's criticism towards Najib's leadership, including calling for the prime minister's resignation over state-owned 1MDB's debts.

"He is a lifetime critic of any government that does not conform to his mould," said Musa, who rose to prominence during the tenure of second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak, who is Najib's father.

Musa also described Dr Mahathir, who turned 90 on Friday, a "political terminator" who had successfully brought down two prime ministers and deputy prime ministers, including himself.

Dr Mahathir was responsible for the resignation of first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman after the racial riots on May 13, 1969, and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the nation's fifth prime minister after the 2008 general election where Barisan Nasional failed to retain its super majority in the Dewan Rakyat.

Former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who held office between 1993 and 1998, was sacked for corruption and alleged sexual misconduct.

"This is the third prime minister (Najib) that he is going after and I think he is going to succeed, one way or another," Musa said, adding that Dr Mahathir's guru is Sun Tzu, the famous 6th century Chinese military strategist and philosopher who authored the book on warfare.

"Dr Mahathir is brilliant and supremely confident of himself in politics."

Musa said even before the 1MDB issue cropped up, he told Najib that Dr Mahathir was already uncomfortable with him.

"It has come to a situation where a plan was hatched on how to get Najib out," he said.

He added that he had also advised Najib to be firm, rational and decisive in running the government to stop Dr Mahathir.

Musa said Najib could not be voted out as party president, and this was due to Dr Mahathir's own doing.

"Dr Mahathir has made it impossible for party members to remove Najib as party president because he ensured it could not happen," he added.

Musa said Dr Mahathir faced potential challenges to his leadership during his time, but made sure that the Umno constitution was so tight that nobody could get the support to displace the president.

Najib's leadership has come under tremendous pressure following the 1MDB fiasco and this escalated with The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) expose on July 2 that some US\$700 million was transferred into Najib's personal bank accounts at AmBank in Kuala Lumpur between 2013 and 2015.

The WSJ reported that US\$681 million (RM2.6 billion) originating from Tanore Finance, a company in the British Virgin Islands, was deposited into Najib's accounts in two transactions on March 21 and 25 in 2013, ahead of the general election in May.

Another sum of US\$11.1 million (RM42 million) originating from Finance Ministry-owned SRC International Sdn Bhd was moved in two tranches between December 2014 and February this year.

A special government task force investigating this allegation revealed that Najib had accounts at AmBank, but added that the two accounts were closed before the WSJ broke the story last week.

The task force has also frozen six accounts in relation to its investigation.

Najib has denied taking money for personal gain, but has not commented directly on the fund transfers to his accounts.

The task force consists of Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail, Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission chief commissioner Tan Sri Abu Kassim Mohamed.

In the first part of this interview with The Malaysian Insider, Musa said that under the

current circumstances, the best option for Najib now was to go on leave pending the investigations by the task force.

Student group Gerakan Mahasiswa Selamatkan Negara has held demonstrations two days in a row at the federal administrative capital, Putrajaya, on Friday, and in the heart of Kuala Lumpur yesterday to call for Najib's resignation over the alleged transfer of funds to his accounts. – July 12, 2015.

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