

Najib 'hero' now after firing Dr Mahathir from Petronas, say analysts
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By Jennifer Gomez

Removing Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Petroliam Nasional Bhd (Petronas) adviser is reinforcing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's strongman image and has little impact on sentiments towards the retired politician, observers say.

Many would also think it was fair game, since [Dr Mahathir would have done the same thing](#) if the roles were reversed, political analysts said of the former prime minister, who ran the country for 22 years and was credited with both modernising Malaysia but also eroding its institutions and freedoms.

Penang Institute political and social analysis head Dr Wong Chin Huat said many would be resigned to the fact that this was how the game was played in Malaysian politics.

He added that Najib was merely sending out a message to Umno rebels that they would have to pay the price for dissent.

"This will scare those whose financial survival depends on the regime, that they need to be more careful," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Wong said Dr Mahathir would have expected this and be more determined now to defeat the "monster he created".

"I don't think Mahathir can complain (about being sacked), after all, the system where power is concentrated in the hands of the prime minister was started by him.

"Some would be sympathetic towards him, but many will think that those who played by the sword must die by the sword. This will strengthen his resolve to fight the monster he created," Wong said.

A statement from the Prime Minister's Office on Friday said the Cabinet agreed to sack Dr Mahathir from his post as Petronas adviser, which he assumed in 2003, following the launch of the Citizens' Declaration to [demand Najib's removal](#).

Putrajaya said the declaration was aimed at "toppling a democratically elected government" and that Dr Mahathir had collaborated with the opposition. The movement against Najib is now trying to push the declaration out to the public and obtain more signatures.

Political scientist Dr James Chin of Australia's Tasmania University also felt that Dr Mahathir could not hope to get more sympathy with the loss of his Petronas post.

"No impact. Dr Mahathir knew it was coming.

"In fact, it shows (support for) Najib as the decision was made by the Cabinet."

Chin added that the next thing to watch for would be whether Najib would go after Dr Mahathir's children's businesses.

It has also made the prime minister appear as a bigger "hero" among his supporters and reinforced his image as a strongman.

"The message is don't mess with Najib," Chin said.

Centre for Policy Initiatives head Dr Lim Teck Ghee, however, said Dr Mahathir still has quite a bit of support among the middle-aged and older generation, adding that Putrajaya's latest move was a battle for the hearts and minds of the Malay electorate.

For the longest time, Umno and the official media have portrayed Dr Mahathir as the "super leader for more than two decades", even after his retirement from politics in 2003, and Lim said this "sustained brainwashing" would not be easy to counter.

"Umno is trying to marginalise Dr Mahathir from his sphere of influence in the party.

"Dr Mahathir and his supporters should expect harsher treatment and greater spinning against him and the opposition in the days ahead.

"This is a battle for the hearts and minds of the Malay electorate ahead of (the next elections)." – March 13, 2016.

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