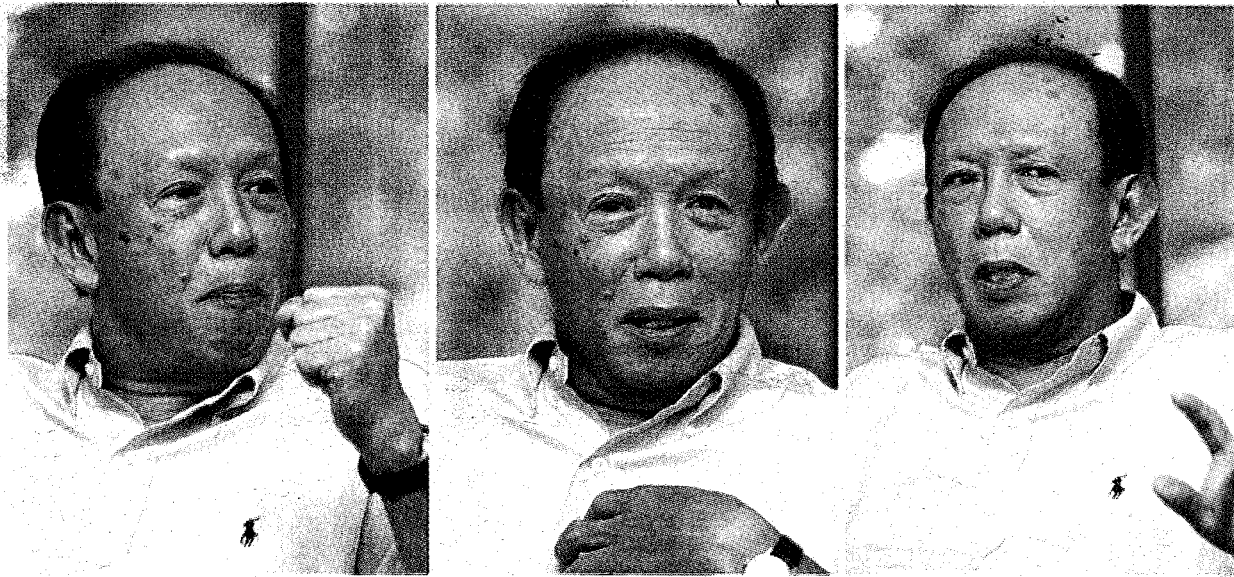


Musa: Dr M's criticism improper

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HAVING HIS SAY: Musa showing various emotions during the interview where he said he decided to speak up because he did not want the situation to get out of hand. — Bernamapic

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Musa Hitam, who stepped down as deputy prime minister in February 1986 following differences of opinion with former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, knows very well the outspoken style of his former boss.

To him, Dr Mahathir's open criticism of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi recently is not only improper, but also does not augur well for the party and the nation.

In an interview with *Bernama* at his residence in Bukit Tunku here, Musa said he decided to speak up because he did not want the situation to get out of hand.

Below are excerpts from the interview:

Q: Tun, please share with us your views on this conflict of opinion between the former Prime Minister and the current administration.

A: I feel a sense of remorse over Tun Dr Mahathir's criticism levelled directly or indirectly at the administration of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

On a direct level, I have had a conversation with him at one time and heard his views, which were seen as criticism, too. Indirectly, I heard people talking, and reports in the newspapers on his criticism.

But in the past one to two months, Tun Dr Mahathir seems to be unabashed. He cast aside the ethics or traditions long known to Umno members in general when he blatantly and openly criticised Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The most unkind words were that he (Abdullah) was not his (Mahathir's) first choice and that (Datuk Seri) Najib (Tun Razak) was the one who had garnered the highest votes.

By saying that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was not his first choice, and that Najib was better, he appeared to have directly wanted to split the two. I am very much saddened by this. I am worried it may bring negative effects.

Q: Negative implications? What do you mean?

A: Yes, negative implications, which seem to be telling Najib, "I like you actually. You are better but not Pak Lah." Under the present situation, I feel it is not proper, and it is the opinion of a former prime minister, which can only weaken the morale in Umno and the Government.

I realise that Datuk Seri Abdullah

Badawi has his own weaknesses. Dr Mahathir, in my opinion, also has many weaknesses but was given the support of the party and the people at large who had trust in the party. The people believe that the party can provide the leadership and administration, in accordance with the aspirations of the people to develop the nation.

Dr Mahathir says he is an ordinary person, hence, he is an ordinary member. As such, he should behave like an ordinary member, that is, follow tradition. Dr Mahathir would not tolerate those who made statements, criticised the government outside the party or did not go through the (right) channels.

Q: Did you expect this to happen?

A: Yes I did. I am not surprised because I used to joke that Dr Mahathir was suffering post-prime ministerial syndrome. Now I have the impression that he is suffering from severe post-prime ministerial syndrome. That only he is right.

You cannot go on doing this. Let the others take over. They have been given the full support of the party and the people.

Q: Among the points raised by Tun Dr Mahathir was that his successor has turned back on his promises to him. Is it wrong for a succeeding government to make adjustments and invoke changes to policies or plans set by the previous government?

A: I don't know what was promised or had been said, or happened between the two leaders.

Assuming that Pak Lah had made a promise to him, to me, what is important is not what he had promised the former Prime Minister, but what was promised to the people. Whatever promises and pledges made when they took the reins of power, were done in the interest of the people, nation, race and religion.

When he first became the prime minister, he probably did not know then. Now he knows in depth. He says this is wrong, this is not suitable, in the national interest, this is not good. What's wrong in making changes?

In my opinion, Dr Mahathir is supremely confident of himself, of his capability, to the extent that he could not find anybody who could be better than him. The fact that he had four deputy prime ministers, and each one whom he claimed had stabbed him in

the back, speaks quite a lot about this man.

Q: Did you have any gentlemen's agreement, when you stepped down, to keep quiet?

A: Never. Never. I used my common sense, my principles, my democratic principles, I am no longer the representative of the people, I am no more in the government, I have retired. So I speak for myself. No agreement, but I saw Dr Mahathir often enough.

I never went to see him to praise him and he knew it. He always had time for me. Never tried to curry favour with him. Never did. Never asked for anything either. We discussed issues, a lot on international relations. I conveyed issues I thought necessary and important matters to him.

Once in a while, we had arguments but it was always in good spirit. So I don't see why he cannot do the same thing with the current prime minister. Maybe he thinks he is too superior. That is not our problem. That will be his biggest problem to overcome. If he is really sincere.

Q: Perhaps Tun Dr Mahathir sees Pak Lah as too soft and unable to make decisions?

A: It is not good to say something like that about someone. Then, the intentions are not good.

Q: Assuming this scenario, if you were in the Prime Minister's chair today, what would you do?

A: If I were the prime minister, I can tell you I would not be as polite as Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Enough is enough. Don't say you don't want to interfere and the next moment keep making statements to the contrary.

Habit of choosing the wrong people. Had it ever occurred to him that he had been wrong, rather the people wrong? The people cannot be wrong. The boss was wrong.

Petronas money is not government money. Petronas money is the people's money and the government should know it must be used. The people's money should not be abused. In this matter, surely Dr Mahathir will say Putrajaya is a very good project. OK, he was the prime minister, he built it. If the current prime minister says no, then it should not be. He can't start condemning Abdullah for that.