

*Mahathir Mohammad's Political Communications In Political Dynamics In Malaysia*

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## MAHATHIR MOHAMMAD'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS IN POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract.** *Political turmoil in Malaysia after the resignation of Mahathir Muhammad (February 2020) and the success of Muhyiddin Yassin in claiming the position of Prime Minister had made the political situation becoming more dynamic. It was seen that the current politics in Malaysia showed serious issues caused by the fights between politicians. There were also accusations saying about betrayal done by justifying all means only to achieve ones' ambitions. Muhyiddin Yassin as the president of Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) was accused of committing betrayal. Azmin Ali as the vice president of Partai Keadilan Rakyat was accused of committing betrayal by Anwar Ibrahim that resulted in Azmin Ali's dismissal from PKR. Mahathir Mohammad was a senior political figure with long experience in political field. Political communication built by Mahathir was very clever due to his success as a figure of UMNO and the Prime Minister of Malaysia for more than 20 years. As a doctor, he was already active in politics in UMNO party since he was 25. Mahathir understood that politics is very dynamic that politician should be able to adapt with the current political dynamics. This political dynamic itself is the reason why Mahathir left UMNO caused by the number of deviations he found in the political figures. Mahathir then formed a new political party which he called Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) Which ended the domination of UMNO in the 2018 national election. The political communication of Mahathir was strictly tested when he became a Prime Minister of Malaysia in his second period as a 92 years old politician. The political message delivered by Mahathir was able to convince the people of Malaysia about the direction of infrastructure development of the country. His succesful and sufficient experience gave him a title the Father of modernization of Malaysia. However, he was eventually gotten rid of by Muhyiddin Yassin (his own colleague) from his throne when he was 94 years old because essentially there is no eternal friend nor foe, the only eternity is merely for the personal interests.*

**Keyword:** *Mahathir Mohammad, political communication, political dynamic, Malay, Islam and Malay.*

**Abstraksi.** Gejolak politik Malaysia pasca pengunduran diri Mahathir Mohammad (Februari 2020), dan keberhasilan Muhyiddin Yassin menduduki posisi Perdana Menteri, membuat suasana politik semakin dinamis. Ada yang menilai, bahwa politik Malaysia saat ini menunjukkan persoalan serius dengan adanya pertarungan sengit antara tokoh-tokoh politik. Bahkan muncul berbagai tuduhan yang menyebut ada pengkhianatan yang menghalalkan segala cara untuk mencapai tujuan. Muhyiddin Yassin yang merupakan wakil Mahathir di Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) dituduh berkhianat. Demikian pula dengan Azmin Ali yang merupakan wakil ketua Partai Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) dituduh berkhianat oleh Anwar Ibrahim, sehingga Azmin dipecat dari PKR. Mahathir Mohammad adalah tokoh politik senior Malaysia yang telah memiliki pengalaman panjang dalam kancah politik. Komunikasi politik yang dibangun Mahathir sangat cerdas dengan kesuksesannya menjadi tokoh UMNO dan Perdana Menteri Malaysia lebih 20 tahun. Sebagai seorang dokter, sejak usia 25 tahun ia sudah aktif dalam politik melalui partai UMNO. Mahathir memahami bahwa politik sangat dinamis dan tokoh politik harus bisa menyesuaikan diri dengan dinamika politik yang ada. Dinamika politik itu pulalah yang membuat Mahathir meninggalkan UMNO, ketika ia melihat banyak penyimpangan yang dilakukan oleh tokoh-tokohnya. Mahathir kemudian membentuk partai baru, Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) yang berhasil mengakhiri dominasi UMNO pada Pemilu 2018. Komunikasi politik Mahathir betul-betul teruji ketika ia kembali berhasil menjadi Perdana Menteri Malaysia periode kedua diusia 92 tahun. Pesan politik yang disampaikan Mahathir mampu meyakinkan rakyat Malaysia tentang arah pembangunan negara. Pengalamannya yang cukup panjang dan sukses dalam politik, membuat dirinya disebut sebagai Bapak modernisasi Malaysia. Namun pada akhirnya ia disingkirkan oleh Muhyiddin Yassin (kawannya sendiri) dari

*kursi Perdana Menteri pada usia 94 tahun. Karena sesungguhnya dalam politik tidak ada kawan dan musuh yang abadi, justru yang abadi adalah kepentingan politik itu sendiri.*

**Kata kunci:** Mahathir Mohammad, komunikasi politik, dinamika politik, Melayu, Islam dan Melayu.

## INTRODUCTION

*Pilihan Raya Umum* (PRU) Malaysia done on May 9th 2018, became an important political momentum for Mahathir Mohammad because in his 92 years of living, he could once again become the Prime Minister of Malaysia for the second period which previously he became a prime minister in (1981 – 2003). So many were impressed with the political model of Mahathir that could last very long in a political condition that was always changing (Harold Crouch, 1996). The creation of masculinity construction by the media could affect his political communication, (Hasyim, 2017) that it convinces the society to believe in this senior politician. Not stopping there, he could even end the dominance of UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) that had lasted for 50 years.

The last PRU in 2018, nearly 15 million of Malaysians with electoral right could choose parliamentary members. There were 2222 parliamentary chairs to be distributed to political party in order to determine the political direction of Malaysia in the future. Political rivalry in the 2018 PRU was considered interesting

because there were two notable figures facing each other. They were Najib Razaq and Mahathir Mohammad (Daulay, 2018a). The leading party (UMNO and *Barisan Nasional*) appointed Najib Razaq as the candidate of Prime Minister. On the other hand, *Pakatan Harapan* appointed a senior figure of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad. New party established by Mahathir, PPBM (Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia) had agreed with the coalition party (DAP, PKR, etc.) to appoint Mahathir as the candidate of prime minister. Eventually Mahathir was elected, or can be said reelected as a prime minister at his 92nd year of living (Surat Kabar Harian Utusan Malaysia).

In the political system of Malaysia, one should previously be chosen as parliamentary member before he/ she could be elected as Prime Minister. In the 2018 PRU, Najib Razaq was appointed by the federal state of Pahang while Mahathir was appointed by the federal state of Kedah. Political record showed intriguing facts about how UMNO party had always been the winner since the Independence day of Malaysia in 1957 until 2018. Every single time PRU was held, UMNO had never lost.

Corruption had always become the

cause of the declining of the society's support for the government. Critical perception mostly said that the government were corrupt, middle class people were shallow, selfish and amoral, while labourers were easily bribed (Chilcote, 2007). The construction of media towards politician gave bad impact towards the judgment of public about politician (Syahputra, 2014). This was the kind of condition that emerged in the political turmoil in Malaysian people that resulted in them to swing their vote from Najib Razaq into Mahathir Mohammad. They saw that the government under Najib Razaq had done many corruption that he did not deserve the trust of the people.

Mahathir harshly criticised Najib Razaq of corruption cases and the increasing of external debt. Najib Razaq faced difficult times in the last two years of his governing along with the coming of endless demonstration that demanded him to leave his throne. Sensational reports caused political turmoil due to the unfiltered hoaxes (Setyo, 2021) which ended in the great demonstration as a new round in the political stage of Malaysia. Lately, great demonstrations were rarely found in Malaysia because of the influence of Sultans in every federal state that are revered by the society (D. Bin Zakaria,

personal communication, 19 November 2019).

However, the last two years in Najib Razaq's governance made the people hit the road more often demanding Najib Razaq to leave the parliamentary chair because he was presumed to be involved in a mega corruption case that reached \$700 million (9 trillion rupiah). Demonstration at that time was not only done by the opposition party follower (dissidents), but also done by the figures of UMNO as the governing party that also demanded his resignation. Even Dr. Mahathir Mohamad as an important political figure of Malaysia showed his overt criticism for Najib Razaq to resign (Surat Kabar Harian Utusan Malaysia, 2018a).

The ups and downs of political supports were happening in UMNO and its coalition *Barisan Nasional* (BN) caused by the fluctuation of parliamentary chair obtained in every PRU. From some PRUs, drastic declining of political support obtained by UMNO (*Barisan Nasional*) happened in 2018 PRU with electoral percentage ranging only about 79 chairs (38%), while on 2013 PRU the party got 140 chairs (63.10%) of 222 existing chairs. Besides 2013 PRU, UMNO and BN had ever gotten parliamentary chair under 75% which happened in PRU 1959 with 74

chairs (71.15%) out of 104 existing chairs. In 1969 PRU it won 95 chairs (66.00%) out of 144 existing chairs. In 1990 PRU, it won 127 chairs (70.55%) out of 180 existing chairs. Nevertheless, 2018 PRU was the only time UMNO/ BN won the least support from the voters (Daulay, 2018b).

UMNO led by Mahathir for more than 20 years had different political style compared to UMNO in the era of Najib Razaq (D. Bin Zakaria, personal communication, 20 November, 2019). Mahathir who led UMNO and Malaysia for more than twenty years had indeed considered to have many positive developments and guarantee the prosperity of the Malaysians. On the other hand, Mahathir was also considered to have negative sides caused by his authoritarian characteristic in leading and his negative way of getting rid of his political rivals. His political act towards Anwar Ibrahim for instance, was one of his dark past that could hardly be forgotten by Malaysians. Not becoming the leader of UMNO gave him more chance to criticise the leaders of UMNO.

After the period of Mahathir Mohammad and with the performance of Ahmad Badawi which was continued by Najib Razaq, political situation became unstable. The influence of UMNO as the

leading party in Malaysia slowly dimming along with many corruption cases done by the party elites. The glory of UMNO in the era of Mahathir Mohammad felt as if it would not be able to be continued by the next UMNO figures.

The popularity of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib Razak could not be compared to Mahathir Mohammad. The current political turmoil in Malaysia doomed the people endlessly. The mega corruption case done by Najib Razaq might be the end of the glory of UMNO in the political stage of Malaysia that had ruled for decades. Malaysian people got further from UMNO because of corruption cases done by the politicians (Z. Bin Adanan, personal communication, 20 November 2019).

The next stage of political dynamic in Malaysia happened after the resignation of Mahathir Mohammad from the throne of Prime Ministry on February 2020. The political turmoil happened caused by the political betrayal done by Muhyiddin Yassin et al. That ensured his resignation. Muhyiddin and some PPBM and PKR figures formed a new coalition with UMNO who was critically denounced by them for the mega corruption.

The political turmoil in Malaysia is currently analyzed by using many different means of analysis. The first group sees that

the politics in Malaysia shows some serious issues caused by the conflict between politicians. There were even some accusation of betrayal done blindly only to achieve some people's ambition. Muhyiddin Yassin was the former of vice president of Mahathir in the *Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (PPBM) who was accused of betraying him. Similarly with Azmin Ali who was the vice president of *Partai Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR) who was also accused of committing betrayal by Anwar Ibrahim, that it resulted in his dismissal from PKR. The betrayal of Azmin was highlighted by the secretary-general of PKR due to the option chosen by Azmin to form coalition with the opposition party (UMNO and PAS). That political movement was done to tackle Anwar Ibrahim from reaching the throne of Prime Ministry.

Furthermore, there were also people who sees that the current political turmoil was only a part of political gimmick (Khadziq, 2016) which sole purpose was to keep Anwar Ibrahim from becoming the Prime Minister. This political gimmick was intentionally designed by Mahathir by acting as if he was being betrayed by Muhyiddin Yassin so that he could still have the dignity to be a decent politician in Anwar Ibrahim's eyes. Genuinely,

Muhyiddin Yassin was the right hand of Mahathir since he became his vice president in PPBM, and it was already years he became Mahathir's best of friends in UMNO. Muhyiddin was originally been prepared by Mahathir to take his place as a Prime Minister. It is because morally, Muhyiddin was more viable as a Prime Minister than Anwar Ibrahim because of his case related to sodomy (A. Halim, personal communication, 2009).

Nevertheless, Anwar Ibrahim was a friend as well as a foe for Mahathir. When they were active in UMNO, Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim had never become a best of friend nor they had ever held an important role in UMNO, until the time Anwar became the deputy prime minister at the era of Mahathir (Z. Bin Adanan, personal communication, 20 November 2019). However, Mahathir was also the one who destroyed the political career of Anwar by suspecting him of committing corruption and sodomy in 1998. Twenty years later (2018), Mahathir asked Anwar Ibrahim to unite and put an end to Najib Razak, pleading that after 2 years of becoming the prime minister, Mahathir would resign and gave the authority to Anwar Ibrahim. However, it is always known that in politics 'today's enemy can be a tomorrow's friend'. It is all merely done for political



interests. This moment, they may become friends and at the other chance, they may become enemies.

The real politics is an art to achieve and to defend the power. When someone stays in the political stage for a long time, one will have more political arts to be used to defend the power. There are times that a gentle and beautiful political arts are played by a political actor and there are also times when vulgar and rough political arts are played. When a gentle and polite political arts are played, euphemism languages full of deceitful masks would emerge to make the opponents feel not offended and betrayed.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **THE PROFILE OF**

### **MAHATHIR MOHAMMAD**

Mahathir Mohammad was the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia (July, 16 1981 – October, 31 2003), (Surat Kabar Harian Utusan Malaysia, 2018b) for the first period and the seventh Prime Minister (2018 - 2020) for the second period. For the first period, he replaced Dato' Hussein Oon (14 January 1976 – 16 July 1981) and for the second period, he replaced Najib Razak. In Addition, the first and the second Prime Minister of Malaysia were Tun Abdul Rahman (31 August 1957 – 22 September

1970) and Tun Abdul Razak (22 September 1970 – 14 January 1976). Mahathir was known as the frontliner who led and made Malaysia acknowledged in the field of main industry power that this achievement of his made him called the Father of Modernization. Mahathir was born in Alor Star, Kedah, Malaysia on 20 December 1925. His father was Encik Muhammad bin Iskandar and his mother was Wan Tempawan binti Wan Hanafi. In his hands, Malaysia underwent very quick modernization and enjoyed prosperity in every aspect of society's life (Anwar, 2009a).

Reform movements in Indonesia that dethroned Suharto (1998) got Mahathir Mohammad wary. That first man of Malaysia was alarmed about being dethroned and being replaced by his deputy prime minister which position was held by Anwar Ibrahim (Daulay, 2018b). Suharto who held the power for 32 years was eventually replaced by his vice president, B.J. Habibie as a result of the demonstration. This was the reason of the conflict happened between him and Anwar Ibrahim who was his right hand. With his political tricks, in 1998 Mahathir got rid of Anwar and sent him to jail along with many accusations. Mahathir also got rid of every single person that he thought was potential

to be his opponent in politics for instance Datuk Musa Hitam, Tun Sri Gazali and even Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Anwar, 2009b).

Dismissing and getting rid of them were enough proof that Mahathir used a political strategy that was rather rough to break their power. Seemingly, Mahathir felt threatened of the popularity of his political rivals, especially Anwar Ibrahim. Similar to Suharto, Mahathir had also built his power for rather long time. In his era, Mahathir made up some policies that developed Malaysia, yet there were also applied nepotism. Mahathir gave his children chance to hold many big projects through special tender and bad credit in Malaysian banks (Daulay, 2018b).

Mahathir was one leader who really admired Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who built Turkey as a secular country. Mahathir quite often highlights people not to mix religion and politics up (Abdullah, 20017). Mahathir was a leader and a politician who liked to speak frankly, loudly and most of the time sounds 'harsh'. His way of leading was different from his predecessors, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, and Tun Hussein Oon. Mahathir was not a person who studied in UK, not a golfer, not including a civil servant, and not a lawyer. He was indeed a Prime Minister, but he was

not a person who had a background related to politics.

Those ideas of his mostly contradicted with the ideas of the leaders of UMNO at that time. That was not surprising if he was dismissed from UMNO. In 1969, Mahathir took an important role in his political experience because he was able to bring up Malay ethnicity into significant part of political identity of Malaysia (Nair, 2007).

His struggle in bringing up the dignity of Malayan people in Malaysia was never ending. Through his book *The Malay Dilemma*, Mahathir spoke of the problems faced by Malayan people and his analysis related to how a policy should be implemented for developing the people of Malay. However, the book was banned from being distributed in 1970 because it was filled with criticisms towards the government.

When he was once again active in a political stage in 1974, Mahathir got big attention from politicians around him in no time. His role and influence in the governmental system swiftly increased. Eventhough he was only a deputy prime minister, Hussein Oon let him and gave him permission in governing caused by his health issues. This made his authority getting wider and greater. He has an

important role in arranging and executing policies.

In 1976, Mahathir enters the governmental system. He became a minister of education, minister of trade and industry, deputy prime minister and eventually a prime minister of Malaysia in 1981. When he was a deputy prime minister, he was softer. His actions was quite hard to differentiate between a politician or a leader of Islam. Tradition and background associated to groups are able to be used as an effective means of communication in order to achieve goals (As'adi, 2020a). Realizing that his governmental coalition is formed of many ethnicities and backgrounds, he had no choice but to act moderately (Madjeed, 1999).

Nevertheless, Mahathir implemented many policies that were of great benefit and tended to take side on Islam in his era. His efforts to 'islamize' the government were sometimes greeted unwelcomely from his political rivals and sometimes even from his own people. He was so loud and vocal in supporting the interest of Islam that is pro-Malay. He led Malaysia with universal principles written in the Holy book of Quran. His islamization movement was referenced by the Charter of Medina (historical agreement of human

civilization in the era of Muhammad pbuh). For Mahathir, Islam and the culture of Malay are one, which he said was the reason why Malayan culture should become a basis for national culture (Mohammad, 2002). His commitment for Islam looked even stricter, when Mahathir managed to persuade Anwar Ibrahim, a President of ABIM (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*), to join him in UMNO, even though he was eventually kicked from being the deputy prime ministry chair because his political way, paradigm and thoughts are considered contradicting with Mahathir's. Together with Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir supported islamization in the body of UMNO. This islamization movement was bound from the motive to outwit PAS (*Partai Islam se-Malaysia*) and to measure the activity, so that islamic activity in Malaysia will not become the source of imbalance between ethnicities.

The other way of Mahathir's islamization was by revising the national law so that it could get along with the Islamic law. Mahathir implemented Islamic law for Muslim society by not having intention to hinder and to discriminate the rituals of non-muslim society. He changed the status of the islamic judge and Islamic court to be equal with the civil court.

In the educational field, he made



sure he used his authority as a leader in the cabinet committee for school curriculum. His policy in this field were for instance, implementing islamic studies as a subject of examination in national level. To support his efforts, Mahathir asked for support and help from Muslim intellectuals who were involved in islamization of science teaching in schools. He also standardized islamic textbooks of every level of education, establishing trainings for Islamic studies teachers, claiming the 10 best islamic schools, building the first islamic studies teacher, and building an International Islamic University.

In the field of da'wah, Mahathir highlighted in front of sixteen country representatives in the *Majelis Umum RISEAP I* in Kuala Lumpur that Malaysia should be active in the islamic da'wah movement in national and international level, should support islamic movements, and should help the struggle of muslims in order to obtain the right of living as a real muslim. Mahathir held a *Perayaan Bulan Dakwah Negara*, established *Dewan Dakwah Islamiah* and built Islamic research centre in South East Asia (Anwar, 2007)

Furthermore, he added more islamic programs and gave special allocation for programs in radio and television. He made islamic village development program,

added more mosques, and made a Qur'an memorizer (hafiz) competition. This shows that Mahathir was a politician who supported Islam. Hijri new year commemoration was also commemorated greatly and was made as an islamic new year calendar. Mahathir also made many activities such as: Islamic Book Expo, Hijri Commemoration Stamp printing and organized an Internasional Islamic Seminar in Kuala Lumpur. Mahathir also built Islamic Bank, Islamic pawnshop, islamic insurance, islamic economical foundation, and formed islamic resources and special groups of islamic enforcement since 1981 (Farouk, 2003).

Because of his maturity in political world, he was known as a political teacher for the political elites of Malaysia. He could do many political art models ranging from the roughest to the softest for his political oppositions. (Z. Hasyim, personal communication, 23 November, 2019)

Only recently, there were political turmoil and its drama, the society once again saw the political intelligence of Mahathir. It started with his resignation. Next he accused Muhyiddin Yassin of betraying him. Eventually, his promise for Anwar Ibrahim ended unilaterally. This shows a Malayan political drama that tries not to hurt the person's feeling of breaking

a promise. It was only natural that Mahathir prioritize the people in his party (PPBM) to sit on a prime ministerial chair instead of politicians of other party.

Important notes should be understood that seen from the Malaysian political map, Mahathir up to now is still a person who is very admired and a person of great insight, as well as a person who can direct the politics in Malaysia. In his late elderly age (94 years old), he could make many political scenarios that can determine the next Prime Minister. At the same time, he could also get rid of politician who he disliked. Mahathir's great experience in the politics of Malaysia who had been active in UMNO for more than 20 years as a prime minister gave him strong influence towards the society. Mahathir in the eyes of Malaysian was a father of modernization as well as an influential Malay and Muslim figure (Hamid, 2006).

## **POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN MALAYSIA**

Political dynamics in Malaysia kept changing after the resignation of Mahathir Muhammad on the last February 2020. With Muhyiddin Yassin being appointed to replace Mahathir, the turmoil got even worse in the politics of Malaysia. There were even motion of no confidence threat in

the Mahathir's party who considered that appointing Muhyiddin was illegitimate. The political map of Malaysia looked even more delicate and got further away from the idealism and tended to be quite pragmatic. In politics, it is indeed a challenge in order to get an idealism because the pragmatism authority is always the top priority. There is no eternal enemy in politics and there is no eternal friend as well but there is only politics interests.

Initially, Mahathir, Anwar Ibrahim, Muhyiddin Yassin, Azmin Ali and the other politicians united in the 2018 election in order to defeat UMNO under the authority of Najib Razak who was considered committing many corruption cases. However, two year later (Februari 2020) Mahathir was the one being dethroned by Muhyiddin Yassin and his party. They chose to form a coalition with their ex-enemy (UMNO) to create a new order. Not only did he brought the *Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (PPBM) created by Mahathir to unite with UMNO, but Muhyiddin also dismissed Mahathir from the committee of PPBM. It was only natural that Mahathir felt betrayed by the scheme of Muhyiddin with Najib Razak that he said it was felt like being backstabbed. Even more tragically, Najib Razak who was bound to mega corruption case was

officially free of charge after UMNO reunited with the leading party.

Observed from the political movement flashback of Mahathir from 1980s until 2000s, there were found so many dynamics (Mahmood, 2002). There were many figures of UMNO he had gotten rid of before they got rid of him. Politicians such as Tun Sri Gazali, Datuk Musa Hitam, Anwar Ibrahim and Abdulah Ahmad Badawi are the 'victims' of Mahathir's political movement. In 1990s, he was so close to Anwar Ibrahim and he even made him his deputy prime minister. However, because Anwar's popularity was skyrocketing in the eyes of Malaysian people, he worried and it started a conflict between them. With his political tricks, in 1998 Mahathir got rid of Anwar and sent him to jail together with many accusations. Mahathir also dismissed everyone who he thought was potential to be his opposition in politics (Mat, 2009).

Dismissing and getting rid of them were the proof that Mahathir was quite clever in building defense mechanism for his throne. Seemingly, Mahathir felt threatened of the popularity and the position of his political oppositions, especially Anwar Ibrahim. This may be the political style of Mahathir which was practiced by Muhyiddin in order to betray

Mahathir, his own political mentor. Muhyiddin surely had learnt long enough about the political movement of Mahathir in defending his throne. Sometimes, seizing and defending the authority do not need ethics and respect for the mentor. Mentors or even best friends should be sacrificed if they are threatening the throne. In other words, in politics, it is already natural to do everything needed to achieve one's ambition.

The political turmoil in Malaysia after the resignation of Mahathir Mohammad on February 2020 and the success of Muhyiddin Yassin in achieving the Prime Ministerial throne could be faced with many different kinds of paradigm. The first group saw that the current politics in Malaysia showed some serious problem caused by the great fight between older figures. Some even said that political fights in Malaysia was essentially the fight between Mahathir Mohammad and Najib Razak. In this political fight, Najib managed to defeat Mahathir caused by the betrayal done by Muhyiddin Yassin.

If only there were no betrayal done by Muhyiddin by uniting with UMNO, Anwar Ibrahim should be the one replacing Mahathir on May 2020. Najib Razak cleverly and slyly took an opportunity after seeing the turmoil existing in the *Pakatan*

*Harapan* who wanted to stop Anwar Ibrahim. The success of Najib Razak in influencing Muhyiddin to form a coalition was not for free. Only few months away from Muhyiddin getting his throne of being a Prime Minister, Najib Razak had been released from every charge of corruption that he had done (Daulay, 2020a)

On the other hand, there were people who saw that the current political turmoil, was only part of political gimmick which main purpose was to prevent Anwar Ibrahim of becoming the prime minister. This political gimmick was intentionally designed by Mahathir by playing victim as a person being betrayed by Muhyiddin Yassin so that he could save his own skin and still be considered as a good man in the eyes of Anwar Ibrahim. In fact, Muhyiddin Yassin was initially the closest person to Mahathir in UMNO. Muhyiddin was always been prepared by Mahathir to replace him as the prime minister. It was because in his point of view, Mahathir saw that Muhyiddin morally deserved to be a Prime minister than Anwar Ibrahim who had ever been charged of committing sodomy.

Anwar Ibrahim was a friend as well as a foe of Mahathir. When they both were active in UMNO, Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim had ever become the best of friend

with important duties in the committee of UMNO until Anwar Ibrahim became the deputy prime minister of Mahathir in his era. However, Mahathir was also the one who destroyed the political career of Anwar by accusing him of committing corruption and sodomy in 1998. Twenty years later (2018), Mahathir asked Anwar Ibrahim to unite and end the authority of Najib Razak, by promising him that two years after becoming the prime minister, the throne would be given to Anwar Ibrahim and he would replace Mahathir. However, in reality, the politics in Malaysia was full of dynamics because of Mahathir's political communication which was relatively difficult to be understood. As a result, the political promises longed by Anwar after a long time was merely a political promise that was difficult to be realized (Daulay, 2020).

After Mahathir's era ended on his first period (1981 – 2003), the emergence of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib Razak caused an unstable political situation. The influence of UMNO as a leading party in Malaysia slowly dimmed along with many cases of corruption committed by the party elites. The glory of UMNO in the era of Mahathir Mohammad was not able to be continued by the next UMNO figures. The popularity of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and

Najib Razak could not be compared to Mahathir Mohammad. Now that the political turmoil in Malaysia seemed like a disaster that could hardly be ended. The mega corruption committed by Najib Razak became the last round of the glory of UMNO in the politics of Malaysia that had led Malaysia for decades.

On the last May 2018, Malaysia held *Pilihan Raya Umum* (PRU) to determine the leader of politics for the next five years. After its independence in 1957 to 2018, UMNO had always been the winner and reigned Malaysia. However, on the last PRU 2018, UMNO was unexpectedly lost against *Pakatan Harapan* which was led by Mahathir Mohammad. Mahathir who had created a new party (PPBM) formed a coalition with *Partai Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR) which was created by Anwar Ibrahim. With issues on corruption done by Najib Razak became the issues to be brought up in the campaign of Mahathir and his companion that this strategy managed to bring them to their first win. Their success in defeating UMNO became an important historical record in the politics of Malaysia (Daulay, 2018c).

The political rivalry in Malaysia is always associated with the dominant influence of Malay and Islam culture. Malayan culture and the influence of

existing monarch made the politics in Malaysia more polite and uncontrolled demonstration done is almost never found. The diverse people of Malaysia in terms of religion, culture and ethnicity did not prevent the government from building a country that is strong, harmonious and full of tolerance. The implementation of discipline, patience and sincerity had better relevance than mere rhetoric (Daulay & Septiani T.H., 2020). Malayan culture and the dominant value of Islam in Malaysia got stronger because of the sultan who supported the existence of Islam and Malay culture (Saad, 2003).

Recently, the potential of conflict that may happen in Malaysia was commonly happened between UMNO as secular party against PAS as an Islamic party. Moreover in the time of campaign, the potential of conflict happened even clearer. UMNO as a secular party with basis on Malay ethnicity claimed that they had strong commitment to actualize the value of Islam and accused PAS of hindering the development because it was a traditional party. Furthermore, PAS as an Islamic party claimed that it was more Islam and accused UMNO as a secular party which deviated the value of Islam.

The source of conflict emerged between both parties were commonly

Malay-based that brought Islamic issues based on each of their own representation. Such political strategies were natural to be seen because they were persuading their voters which were Malaysians who had strong commitment to Islam (Anwar, 2009a). For Malaysian people, their culture are inseparable from Islam. That was the reason why Malaysian-based parties such as UMNO, PAS and PKR always brought Islamic issues in every political strategy used. Even UMNO in the era of Mahathir Mohammad, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi until Najib Razak brought up new ideas with concept called *Islam Hadhari*. This *Islam Hadhari* concept was valued as an interesting thought and was seen as a decent political strategy because it might increase the support of Malaysian voters (Daulay, 2019).

Many real actions were done by UMNO until now by still staying on its idea about pluralism, so that their campaign would not bring turmoil. As the leading party, UMNO could freely made any policy that could benefit the society of every religion and ethnicity. UMNO which was dominant with Malay ethnicity was not only prioritizing on the development for Malay and Islam but also for Chinese and Indian ethnicity. This was done so that the value of plurality in Malaysia could be

managed well based on the principle of unity.

The political rivalry happened between UMNO and PAS by bringing up Islamic issues is in fact more dominant in the aspect of interpretation. For UMNO, the political struggle to develop Islam in Malaysia did not necessarily mean that Malaysia must become an Islamic country. The most important thing is the essence of Islamic value that can be actualized in many political policies. For PAS, the Islamic struggle must be actualized formally by making Malaysia an Islamic country. Thus, UMNO looked more realistic and practical in applying its political strategy that was based on Islam in the middle of Malaysian people which are diverse.

## **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF MAHATHIR MOHAMMAD**

As a senior politician, Mahathir knows well about the theory of political communication. The strategy of a communicator is to be favored or to be despised by the society, the way of delivering a message so that it can be approved or disapproved by the society and how to face a condition of audience (the society) so that they would applaud or be offended by the message delivered (Nimmo, 2005). The book "*Komunikasi*



*Politik*”, explained that options in delivering a message may make the audience offended which is part of the art of communication chosen by the communicator of politics.

Transparency, faith, responsibility and custom in sharing information may increase the quality of group communication and the maturity of the communication built (As’adi, 2020b). It is similar with Mahathir’s understanding about the sociology of Malaysian society which consists of Malayan and Muslim as majority so that he could swing the support of the Malayan voters from being fanatical UMNO supporters into becoming the supporters of his new party (PPMB). A communicator of politics would be able to manage the essence of communication, starting from the communicator, the message, the media, the audience and the political effect.

The popularity of Mahathir as a political communicator is unquestionable because of his political experience after becoming the figure of UMNO for more than 20 years and the Prime Minister of Malaysia (1981 – 2003). Even his success brought Malaysia towards a modern country, that this achievement had given him a title as the Father of Modernization of Malaysia (Anwar, 2009a). Furthermore,

Mahathir’s cleverness in managing messages has been tested well. Every message he delivered could be accepted by the society and they could believe in the power of his message.

In terms of media usage, Mahathir was also very clever because mass media said that he was believed as a leader needed by the society. Mass media made Mahathir an interesting news source. It was because the ideas delivered by Mahathir were actual, bold and worth that Mahathir became the idol of journalists (Daulay, 2013). Next, Mahathir knows well about the characteristics of the audiences (society) because of his experience leading Malaysia for decades. Mahathir understood the character of the voters which in majority consisted of Malay and Muslim people, so that issues related to Muslim and Malay could be relevant to be delivered to the voters. By understanding these elements of communication, the political effect targeted by Mahathir could be achieved.

Many criticisms delivered by Mahathir towards Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib Razak, Anwar Ibrahim and Muhyiddin Yassin were often considered quite rough. In democraton, criticism is indeed needed. As suggested by Nurkholis Madjid (Madjid, 2003), criticism is the breath of democraton. Without the

existence of criticism, democraton will die. Political communication is required for giving enlightenment for living as a society of a country. Sometimes there are criticisms that is packed “softly” and “sweetly” which in fact could be misleading and dangerous for the society. Furthermore, sometimes there are models of criticisms that sounded rough that may make the society feels indignant, but in reality is full of kindness and honesty. Similar with medicine, not every sweetness is healthy and not every bitterness is harmful. In conclusion, many “critical” criticisms delivered by Mahathir all this time could be part of his love towards his country and nation.

Most of the time, the factor of hatred is the reason why a person could easily deliver a harsh criticism and intentionally build the anger of the society. It is similar with the condition of the society (audience) which was also started by the factor of hatred that made them easily offended by the message delivered by the communicator. The main problem actually is in the good, polite and peaceful communication and how to scrape the hatred between people and the hatred between groups in order to build a communication process that is polite, warm and peaceful. Do not ever let hatred grow in ourselves which in the end will start bad

thought towards everyone considered as opposition. In a polite political communication, everybody should be considered as bestfriend that gives and accepts each other (Daulay, 2020b).

The society as part of certain political element surely feels tired and bored of ‘harsh’ model of communication, hate speech and feud (D. bin Zakaria, personal communication, 20 November, 2019). Hate speech towards each citizen that shows anger and variety of suspicions should be ended at once. Libellous accusations and hate speech are very unproductive and has only fatigued the body and mind. Moreover, in the middle of many problems faced by the nation, starting from corruption and poverty needs intensive care from unity and peace from every citizen. Keeping excessive hatred and suspicion caused by different political choice will give disadvantages to all. Hence, excessive hatred and suspicion should be scraped in order to give advantageous enlightenment towards the country and the nation.

## **POLITICAL POLICY**

The foreign policy done by Mahathir on his first period was different with his predecessors. His statements was very clear in standing up for Islam.

Mahathir called Muslim nations to realize the slogan related to the solidarity in Islam and called Muslim countries to count on themselves and not to cling on foreign power, especially West countries in terms of defence and security. In 1983, Mahathir declared to be non-aligned and commonwealth nation which now becomes part of Muslim block (Shaharuddin, 2008).

In his 22 years leading Malaysia on his first period (1981 – 2003), Mahathir had made many progressions for his country. He at last chose to receive his pension on October 31st, 2003 and chose Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to replace him. However, he then said that choosing Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was such a letdown. His criticisms were even harsher towards Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and it resulted in problem that became harder to solve. Because there was no more point of political policy done by Abdullah, Mahathir eventually announced his resignation from UMNO on 19 May 2008, that signified his demand for Abdullah to resign from his authority.

The peak of Mahathir's disappointment towards Abdullah was caused by many development projects of Mahathir which were cancelled by Abdullah. One of them is the construction of bridge that should be done in order to

replace the causeway that connected Malaysia and Singapore. Mahathir also said that Abdullah committed corruption through his cronies. Never ending strikes launched by Mahathir towards Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made the fame of Abdullah dimmed, that it resulted in great disadvantages for UMNO. This was proven by the declining of votes obtained for UMNO on 2008 PRU (D. bin Zakaria, personal communication, 20 November 2019).

The rise of Global Islam in Malaysia happened simultaneously with the emergence of new type of leadership under the authority of Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad to the peak of authority in the body of UMNO in 1981. He had leadership that was very 'nonaristocratic' who studied local education, anti-western and more acceptable than the previous leader who mixed Islam and politics in a background of society with multiple ethnicities and religion. In result, the government dominated by UMNO accepted the Islam challenge from Malay opposition challenged by *Partai Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS) by promoting islamization programs which in the same time slightly giving warning to nonmuslims, and allowing UMNO to place PAS 'outside of Islam'

(Shaharuddin, 2008).

The leaders of UMNO wanted to get votes from important figures of Islam which made UMNO created some policies to spread, increase, and bring up 'The perfection of islam'. In order to achieve this goal, the authorities in UMNO distributed some budget to construct and repair mosques and the smaller mosques, sponsoring Islamic conference and National level Quran recitation competition as well as supporting Islamic education. UMNO also highlighted the importance of islamic morality and struggled to convince its follower that regulating lottery, allowing bank interest of savings, or using the 'zakat' contribution of the farmers for economical investation, are not about being 'non-islamic'.

Even so, the special commitment of UMNO for Islam was slightly limited. Constitutionally, islam firstly became the prerogative right of each leader from each state which was very wary in defending this authority. Those leaders are then guided by Islam Council which consists of the *ulama* (islamic cleric). This is why, the top authority of formal structure and administration of islamic affairs are in the federal state level (D. bin Zakaria, personal communication, 20 November, 2019) which UMNO leader chose to leave it.

Furthermore, the leader of UMNO did not believe that the forming of islamic country in Malaysia was something that can be achieved merely caused by desire only. They were interested in creating a secular country that is progressive and modern and following the principle of parliamentary democratic system.

In order to realize this idealism, Malaysian political figures must be able to erase the aspect of political antagonism. Antagonism is the most necessary element in politics. Because of the existence of antagonism, there should also be effort to erase it or at the very least should be reduced in order to achieve social integration (Dhakidae, 2003). For every democratic country, strengthening social integration in the middle of plural citizen should be prioritized so that there will be ease of realizing the planned political policy.

Mahathir's policy in creating big scale islamic bureaucracy infrastructure in federal level and enlarging the strength of National Council was needed for solving Islamic problems. He also Strengthened the custom law that regulated the organization and giving amendment to constitution in 1983 to give federal government an absolute right to interpret the Quran, sharia law, and islamic teachings (so that they can

be responsible for deviant teachings and incorrect interpretation which may charge them), and sponsored da'wah programs and conference. Mahathir also claimed that Malaysia had become an Islamic country, even though not in the form of a theocracy, and UMNO started to depict itself as 'the third biggest and the oldest Muslim political party in the world' (Khalid, 2007).

Islamization process was also done. It was proven with the establishment of some new institutions such as Malaysian Islamic Bank, International Islamic University, *Pembangunan Islam Malaysia* Foundation and Islamic Teacher Training Academy. Moreover, the government decided to increase the status of *qadi* (religious judge) and sharia court to be equal as magistrate and civil court. More symbolically, there were bans to import non-halal beef as well as bans for smoking in every governmental office, the introductions of Malay-arabic writings, reimplementation of supplementar food in public elementary schools which will be stopped in fasting month even for non-muslim students. The tendency of this islamization process showed that Islam is a dynamic need and could be adapted for current era, and that decent and disciplined citizen could do modernization without sacrificing the value of Islam (Saad, 2003).

Steps chosen by Mahathir had repaired the mandate of UMNO as an Islamic political party and helped UMNO in the election to place his rival PAS 'outside of Islam'. However, it was not clear whether the extensive islamization done that far would reduce the determination of fundamentalist groups to changing the constitution which will allow the law enforcement and islam administration federally or not. If UMNO felt that continuing islamization was an obligation, this will bear issues. Inevitably, the rights of nonmuslim people will be ignored if the islamic morality law was applied (D. bin Zakaria, personal communication, 19 November, 2019).

Mahathir Mohammad was a unique Malaysian political figure which is full of dynamics. When he became a Prime Minister for his first period (1981 – 2003), he gave many progressions for the country that gave him the title the Father of Modernization. In politics, he was known very clever and had vision for far future. That is why, he was admired and could last for 20 years as a prime minister. However, along with his keep increasing age, the political communication of Mahathir was not as sharp as before. The second period of Mahathir as a Prime Minister only lasted for 2 years (2018 – 2020). More tragically, he

was dethroned by Muhyiddin which was his best friend in *Partai Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (PPBM).

## CONCLUSION

Discussion about political communication of Mahathir Mohammad in the political dynamics of Malaysia is interesting and requires critical and objective research. As a senior political figure of Malaysia, Mahathir had significant influence in it. He had long experience in politics starting from becoming the prime minister in his first period (1981 – 2003) and his second period (2018 – 2020). Many successes were achieved by Mahathir for developing Malaysia in many fields. His success brought Malaysia to many developments which gives him title as the Father of Modernization of Malaysia. This is the conclusion related to the political communication of Mahathir Mohammad in the political dynamics of Malaysia: First, as a senior politician, Mahathir Mohammad was a communicator that is clever, assertive and brave as well as having strong commitment to develop his nation. Having a chance to be the Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years (1981 – 2003) allowed him to give many developments for his country. Political communication of

UMNO as a party that he led at that time made him known as a harsh and strict political actor for his political opponents. The politicians he considered not in accordance with his policies would be dismissed with many ways. Political figures such as Datuk Musa Hitam, Anwar Ibrahim, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib Razak were the friends as well as the foe that he had ever gotten rid of.

Second, the success of Mahathir on his second period of becoming a Prime Minister of Malaysia (2018 – 2020) on his late elderly age (92 years old) became a legitimate proof of his strong influence in the politics of Malaysia. *Pilihan Raya Umum* (PRU) in 2018 became an important historical record in the politics of Malaysia because the coalition party led by Mahathir (Pakatan Harapan) managed to defeat UMNO which had led for 50 years. However, eventually he resigned because of his best friend's betrayal (Muhyiddin Yassin) who conspired with Najib Razak to subvert Pakatan Harapan in order to prevent Anwar Ibrahim from becoming the next Prime Minister as what Mahathir had promised him.

Third, the political dynamics of Malaysia had always given attention to Islamic group and Malay ethnic which were important parts to obtain the votes of the



supporters. Mahathir understood well about the way to obtain supports of Muslim and Malay voters as the major voters in Malaysia. Islamic issues were cleverly shown by Mahathir by giving political policies that could benefit Malaysians and Muslims. In Malaysia, Islam is identical with Malay and Malay is identical with Islam. This is the reason why the political figures of Malaysia must make political policy that is beneficial for Islam and Malay.

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Zulkifli bin Adanan (supporter of Mahathir) in Kedah Malaysia

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Dr. Zainuddin Hasyim (Lecturer of University of Malaya) in Kuala Lumpur