

Mahathir's approach will be quite different

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AS a politician, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has tasted both defeat and victory. In spite of losing his parliamentary seat and being expelled from Umno, he was still able to come back to the fore of national politics.

Therefore his appointment as Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, succeeding Datuk Hussein Onn, must have been doubly satisfying.

When he first entered Parliament in 1964, he was one of the most promising backbenchers, articulate and outspoken, and was the darling of the extreme wing of Umno in those days.

Between 1964 and 1969, he was one of Malaysia's most controversial politicians, respected and feared at the same time. But the anti-Alliance tide of 1969 disrupted his political career for a time.

Being out of parliament was bad enough and when this was followed by attacks on the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, he was expelled from Umno. In frustration, he wrote *The Malay Dilemma* which is still banned in Malaysia.

As a medical practitioner, he belongs to one of the most sought-after and prestigious professions. Anyone who could get into the University of Malaya medical school in Singapore in the fifties had to be a cut above the others academically. This is true even today.

Sometimes, it is a pity the best brains in this country have gone into medicine since this is a waste. Such brilliance should be used for other more meaningful functions than taking a patient's pulse or temperature.

Dr. Mahathir does not lack the brain power for the post and he is also said to think fast on his feet. He rated as one of the finest debaters, in both Bahasa Malaysia and English, in the country.

Like most doctors,

he is a good listener and is patient with ordinary people he comes in contact with. While he will not hesitate to speak his mind, those who have dealings with him find him very calm even under very trying conditions.

The teachers, in

quent meetings with both local and foreign businessmen have helped to rebuild the confidence and thus improve the investment climate.

He will be the first Prime Minister who is not educated in the United Kingdom as his predecessors were.

Being such a controversial figure in the past, there are some who may harbour a doubt as to whether he is still an extremist, a label he picked up in the sixties.

But people do change and with age and political maturity, he has definitely mellowed. He is a far cry from the firebrand of the sixties and has moved his radical stance to the centre.

His defeat in 1969 will no doubt have an important effect on his political outlook and a constant reminder that no one can operate within a particular group or community or in isolation.

Such a person will be more sympathetic than those who have never suffered such an unfortunate fate. Unless a politician has tasted defeat, there will

It will be interesting to see how he views the National Front, whether it is a political party or merely an extension of the existing component parties.

During his day, the Tunku regarded it as a coalition in that the leaders of the MCA and the MIC had overall say as to who in their respective parties should be in the Government.

Tun Razak followed this line until 1973 when he disregarded the advice of Tun Tan Siew Sin as to who should be in the Cabinet. This policy was reversed by Datuk Hussein.

Dr Mahathir's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister created some problems in Umno and among the other component parties. When Encik Ghafar Baba, the front-runner, did not get the job, he resigned.

He needs the co-operation and backing of not only from Umno, but of the other National Front members as well. It is quite certain that he will get the support of the MCA and MIC.

As Prime Minister, he is almost all-powerful and calls the shots

During his sojourn from Umno, he flirted briefly with Pas but this did not last. When Tun Razak became Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir was able to return to the Umno fold.

It would appear that he had not lost his popularity in Umno and that his differences were only with the Tunku and not with the rank and file. He proved this when he obtained the highest votes in his bid for a Supreme Council seat in 1972.

A year later, he was appointed to the Senate but resigned in 1974 to contest the general elections. He won the Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat and Tun Razak appointed him Education Minister.

In Umno political terms, education is an important portfolio and no education minister has yet lost a bid as the party's vice-president. True to this tradition, Dr Mahathir was elected to this position in his first try in 1975.

DEBATERS

He was involved in another controversy when Tun Razak died in 1976 and his succes-

particular those from the Chinese-medium schools, have reasons to be satisfied with his term as Education Minister. He re-opened those teacher training colleges which had for some mysterious reasons been mothballed and new ones were started to train the thousands of teachers needed.

It was also Dr Mahathir who allowed those with Senior Middle Three education to continue their training under Datuk Hussein Onn made him deputy Prime Minister. His appointment came as a surprise to most people though he was as qualified as any to hold this important position.

the school holidays and their pay was also considerably improved.

As Trade and Industry Minister, he helped allay the fears of the Chinese businessmen over the Industrial Coordination Act that was responsible for the sharp drop in investment when it was introduced in 1976.

Dr. Mahatdir amended some of the more obnoxious clauses of The Act and his fre-

always be a lacuna in his political education.

For one thing, a person having undergone such an experience will be more humble though some will turn bitter. For another, he will realise that his stay in office is entirely in the hands of his electorate and so he must "jaga" his constituency properly.

Dr Mahathir's style will be quite different from that of his predecessor. He is more accessible and outspoken though he has steered clear of controversy for some time.

He is fully aware of the sensitivities of a multi-racial society and will take a middle course. He is expected to take a tougher line when it comes to implementation of Government policies. There may be changes in the upper echelon of the civil service to reflect this new direction.

He is likely to do all that is expected of him when it comes to providing greater opportunities for the underprivileged and even-handed in dealing with the other races.

and anyone who does not accept the situation is unlikely to be in the Government for long.

What remains unsettled is who is going to be the next Deputy Prime Minister. This is likely to be settled in next months' Umno election. The person who is elected as the party's president will automatically become the next Deputy Prime Minister.

Viewed from all angles, Dr Mahathir has the qualifications and experience to be a good and effective Prime Minister provided all the component parties in the National Front give him their unqualified support.