

# Mahathir — well-groomed for top post

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AT THE peak of campaigning for the 1969 general elections, PAS canvassers warned party members and supporters against seeking medical treatment from a certain Maha Clinic in Pekan China, Alor Star, the story was spread that should the chief practitioner there discover that they were Pas members, he would administer a lethal injection to them. That chief practitioner was none other than Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He was an Alliance MP for a constituency then known as Kota Star Selatan. He was seeking re-election from it and was a pitched against Haji Yusof Rawa, presently Pas deputy president.

His was then the only Bumiputra-run private clinic in Alor Star and was very popular among the kampong people who were being gradually introduced to modern medicine.

When he failed to retain his seat, political analysts were convinced that he lost because he ignored their advice, i.e. to focus on religious issues as much as possible and quote as frequently as possible from the Koran and the Hadis regardless whether or not the citations were appropriate.

From the point of strategy, the analysts were right. Pas campaigners did just that. But apart from his unwillingness to be drawn into the "free-for-all" use of Islam for political gain, the non-Malay voters, the bulk of them Chinese, were also convinced that it was not in their best interest to vote him in.

He was seen as anti-Chinese because he often lamented how poorly the Malays had fared in the economic field, and that the wealth of the country was concentrated in other races. Pas was quick

to capitalise on this resentment. It not only drew the non-Malay votes away from Dr Mahathir but got some for itself.

Following the May 13 outbreak — a few days after the general elections on which the ruling Alliance suffered the worst blow in its history — Dr Mahathir got back to his clinic, treated whatever patients he had left and wrote a book.

*The Malay Dilemma* was an overnight success and was soon banned.

Is Dr Mahathir against the non-Malay? It is an unfair question to ask. Since his so called "rehabilitation" (following his return to Umno after period of expulsion) and in particular since he

was made a Cabinet member in 1974 by Tun Razak, any accusation of "ultra-ism" against him is totally unjustified.

His only "crime" was perhaps that he tried to bring into the open in a manner not done before, an issue critical to the survival of the country. He was very outspoken about the precarious situation the Malays were in economically before the implementation of the New Economic Policy.

Dr Mahathir, in particular since his elevation to the post of Deputy Prime Minister, is an adminis-

trator first, politician second. As far as foreign investment is concerned, he is the country's Number One salesman.

A close aide once lamented that Dr Mahathir appears to want to do everything to the point that he will say 'yes' to almost all invitations either to officiate at a factory opening, inaugurate a film festival, attend an annual dinner of some association or even a fashion show.

It cannot be denied that but for his relentless efforts at home and abroad, foreign and local investments would have not recovered so rapidly from the misgivings that arose in many minds following the promulgation of the Industrial Coordinator Act and the Petroleum Development Act in the mid-1970's.

As for his grooming for the highest job, a parallel can be drawn between Dr Mahathir and the late Tun Razak. After May 13, Tunku Abdul Rahman concentrated his effort on a goodwill campaign, trying to patch up the rift between the races, leaving the day-to-day affairs of the country to Tun Razak.

Similarly for Dr Mahathir. Due to the poor health of Datuk Hussein Onn in recent months, Dr Mahathir's task has been heavier

than what would normally have been the case. But he has no cause to complain about the rigorous apprenticeship. It will certainly serve him well in the years to come.