

# DR M: I'M CONFIDENT OF KEEPING TOP POST

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ALOR STAR, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today he is confident of retaining his post as Umno president in the party elections.

"If I am not confident, I would not have contested at all," he told reporters at the Mentri Besar's residence in Mentan here.

"I cannot search the hearts of the delegates to see whom they support or how sincere their support is. We can only know on April 24," said the Prime Minister who is being challenged by Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for the top post.

Dr Mahathir said that from his visit to various States, it appeared that party delegates were satisfied with the explanations that he had given to their questions.

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"Most had asked about allegations that were made by the other side. The delegates only want to know the truth, and are satisfied with my answers," he added.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Federal Territory Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar and parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister's Department Raja Ariffin Raja Sulaiman, flew to Alor Star in the evening to meet the 154 delegates from Kedah.

Also present was Kedah Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Haji Osman Aroff, Perlis Mentri Besar Dr Abdul Hamid Pawan-  
teh, Kedah and Perlis State executive councillors, and Umno division heads from Perlis and Kedah.

The Prime Minister will return to Kuala Lumpur tomorrow morning.

# Poll Proves Bruising for Malaysian Party

By STEPHEN DUTHIE 22 APR. 87

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KUALA LUMPUR — Many analysts are claiming to have the inside political track on the most dramatic party election in Malaysia's history. But few, it seems, actually do.

A Malaysian political analyst disclosed last week that the country's Special Branch places Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad "54% to 46% ahead" of his challenger, Trade and Industry Minister Razaleigh Hamzah, in the run-up to Friday's election for the presidency of the United Malays National Organization. "And the gap is growing, they tell me," the analyst added.

Several hours later, another analyst confided that the same national police intelligence unit had "Razaleigh 100 votes ahead."

Confronted with the discrepancy, both analysts admit that the outcome is anybody's guess. What is clear, however, is that UMNO, the dominant party in the

country's ruling coalition, will be badly bruised whoever wins.

"I wouldn't relish the chore of patching up the party after this fight," says a longtime admirer of Dr. Mahathir. "Whoever comes in will have a problem, not only with a divided cabinet but also with a split party hierarchy."

This is the most serious leadership challenge in UMNO's 41-year history, and the margin of victory is expected to be slim. Many UMNO members and most independent analysts reckon that the 61-year-old Dr. Mahathir will be reelected. He is the incumbent, they argue, and that still carries plenty of weight for a party steeped in Malay political tradition, keen on avoiding confrontation and upholding a united front behind their elected leaders.

But after this campaign, Malay politics may never be the same.

Both political camps — headed by Dr. Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba in one and Tunku Razaleigh and UMNO Deputy President Musa Hitam in the other — have secured solid blocks of supporters among the roughly 1,500 delegates who will vote at the party's triennial elections. But neither side appears yet to have garnered a clear-cut majority for the party presidency, which customarily se-

cures the premiership of the country. (The Malaysian constitution doesn't specify whether Dr. Mahathir would have to give up the premiership if he lost the party leadership. Many analysts, however, say it is highly unlikely that he could survive as premier if he did lose.)

Analysts estimate that from 225 to 300 delegates remain undecided. It's those delegates who will determine the outcome of the election and who are being most heavily courted by both camps.



Razaleigh Hamzah

It's possible, some analysts argue, that the uncertainty may prevail until the delegates begin casting votes in Friday's secret ballot. Before the three-hour voting period begins, Dr. Mahathir, who has held the party presidency and premiership since 1981, will have one last opportunity to coax the uncommitted into his camp through his opening address to the three-day assembly, which will debate numerous issues as well as to elect party officials.

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Mahathir Mohamad

# Mahathir Engaged in Tough Fight To Win Malaysian Party Election

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Analysts and even some supporters of Dr. Mahathir maintain that Datuk Musa, who abruptly resigned last year as deputy prime minister, will withstand a challenge by Mr. Ghafar for the party's deputy presidency, UMNO's No. 2 post. Mr. Ghafar, currently one of the party's three vice-presidents, was tapped by the prime minister to replace Datuk Musa as his deputy.

The reelection of Dr. Mahathir and Datuk Musa, say analysts, would likely perpetuate the party rift for the next three years. That split could be reflected in subsequent voting for UMNO's 38-member Supreme Council, the party's chief policy-making body.

Following Dr. Mahathir's strong general election victory last August, few analysts would have been prepared to predict he would within a few months face a threatening party split and the possible demise of his political career.

But, says a Western analyst: "During the general election, the threat was from outside the party and, though divided somewhat by Musa's resignation, they all rallied to the party. This election is an internal family affair."

It also was unlikely several months ago that Tunku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa, both of whom control strong party factions, could have buried their differences and allied themselves in a well-coordinated attempt to unseat Dr. Mahathir. Tunku Razaleigh, a prince from the Kelantan state royal family and a 10-year cabinet veteran, lost two bitter battles to Datuk Musa for the party's deputy presidency in 1981 and 1984.

For both Tunku Razaleigh, who is 50, and Datuk Musa, 52, it may be politically essential to make a play now for the party's leadership. Given another three years as party and national leader, Dr. Mahathir could prove impossible to dislodge. Furthermore, he would be well-placed to ensure his chosen successor replaces him.

Party members and political analysts predict Dr. Mahathir will prefer to skip a political generation by giving the nod to his 39-year-old protege, Anwar Ibrahim, the education minister and UMNO youth leader, before the premier's term expires in 1991. (Mr. Anwar is vying for a vice-presidential post.) Such a development could crush the chances of Tunku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa ever leading the party and the country.

prime minister can decide whether he wants to step down or not," the prime minister said on April 13. "And if he doesn't want to step down but others want him to step down, then they have to move a vote of no confidence" in Parliament.

## 'Acting Un-Malay'

A Mahathir supporter responds that the prime minister "has been flouting the laws of the tribe. He's been acting un-Malay by saying he might not accept the wishes of the party."

The Razaleigh-Musa team, however, hasn't escaped criticism. Mahathir supporters accuse the two of political self-interest and disregard for Malay unity within a racially diverse society, which also includes Chinese, Indians and other races.

"UMNO, in a sense, is a very democratic party, a party of compromise," says an Asian diplomat. "But you see the possible signs that with the Razaleigh-Musa challenge, compromise will be capsized."

Dr. Mahathir and his backers also maintain that charges by the Razaleigh-Musa team of mismanagement and spendthrift grandiose public-works projects are blatant electioneering. They argue that discussions of such projects began before Dr. Mahathir became premier, and construction was begun with the approval of his cabinet.

Dr. Mahathir last week announced that he would declassify documents pertaining to three controversial projects concerning the money-losing national car, the Dayabumi office complex in Kuala Lumpur and Penang Bridge.

Still, analysts say that the Mahathir camp has been hard pressed to avert charges of favoritism. Many analysts maintain that a few friends and associates of the premier have benefited in business from state largess.

Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin, a personal friend of Dr. Mahathir and an influential adviser, is one of those most often accused of mixing his role as a public servant with his personal business interests. Even some Mahathir supporters maintain that Mr. Daim has become a liability and may be dropped from the cabinet if Dr. Mahathir is reelected as party leader.

Tunku Razaleigh also has been dogged in recent years by his association with the scandal surrounding Bank Bumiputra's controversial loans to the defunct Hong Kong-based Carrian group. The loans, which

Dr. Mahathir's rivals have steadily reaped political gains by bringing to the forefront of the party a debate on the prime minister's style of governing and the economic policies he has espoused. Critics outside the party have in recent years accused him of being autocratic and abrasive, while charging that his refusal to heed advice has led to rash and costly decisions for the economy. Now that debate is raging within the party itself.

#### Above the Fray

Until the past two weeks, the prime minister had largely remained above the fray. He had left it to his lieutenants to counter the charges of his detractors. Some of Dr. Mahathir's supporters say he had no choice. Until April 11, the deadline for accepting party nominations and the day Tunku Razaleigh formally declared his opposition, Dr. Mahathir didn't face a declared rival.

"The president of the party and the country's prime minister couldn't at the time be seen to be scrambling against an undeclared opponent," argues a Western diplomat. "It may have made him look weak and defensive."

Some analysts say recent statements by the premier may lose him votes among the party's urban constituency, particularly the business community, which makes up roughly a quarter of the delegates to the assembly. Mahathir supporters note that the prime minister's hardcore support will come from members of Parliament and state assemblymen, who make up about a fifth of the delegates.

Earlier this month, Dr. Mahathir said he intended to remain the party president even if he wins "by only one vote."

Soon after that, he stated that even if Ghafar Baba lost to Datuk Musa for the deputy presidency, Mr. Ghafar would remain as his deputy premier. The deputy premiership customarily goes to the No. 2 in the party. The premier said "it would be better" for Mr. Ghafar to remain as his deputy. "I have trust in him. I chose him, didn't I?" Dr. Mahathir said.

While his unyielding support for Mr. Ghafar has irritated some UMNO members, Dr. Mahathir's suggestion earlier this month that he could remain prime minister even if he lost the party presidency has outraged many delegates.

"If we talk about technicalities, the

involved nearly US\$1 billion, occurred while Tunku Razaleigh was finance minister. Reports of links between him and officials at Bank Bumiputra's Hong Kong subsidiary, Bumiputra Malaysia Finance, have periodically surfaced to haunt the UMNO politician, although he has never been officially accused of wrongdoing and steadfastly denies any illegalities.

#### Razaleigh Speech

On Sunday, Tunku Razaleigh delivered his long-awaited campaign manifesto, declaring for the first time his reasons for contesting the presidency.

In his 30-page speech to a crowd of several thousand, he accused Dr. Mahathir of economic mismanagement and favoritism, but the gathering lacked the spark and enthusiasm that many analysts were expecting. Some analysts wonder whether the rival campaign may have peaked too early for Tunku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa, thereby frightening off potential supporters.

"I don't see the same momentum (for the Razaleigh-Musa campaign) that I saw earlier," says a Western diplomat. He adds, however, that the sensation of a dramatic challenge may have given way to the more tedious face-to-face chore of trying to recruit the remaining uncommitted delegates.

Another Malaysian analyst argues that "there is a high insecurity level when the party is faced with drastic change." The analyst adds, "A typical UMNO member has been grilled to be obedient, and he's conditioned to conservatism."