

Mahathir Barely Survives as Party Head

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deposited unmarked into the ballot boxes, according to the deputy chairman of UMNO's elections committee, Abdul Kadir Yusof.

UMNO members were perplexed by the number of spoiled ballots, which could have swayed the outcome. None of the ballots for the presidency was returned unmarked by the delegates.

Several members and independent observers suggested that the unmarked ballots were deposited by Tunku Razaleigh supporters, still smarting from Datuk Musa's deputy presidential victories in 1981 and 1984 over Tunku Razaleigh, who is a prince from the Kelantan state royal family. Others argue that some UMNO delegates may have resented Datuk Musa for orchestrating the party split.

Tunku Razaleigh disclosed Saturday that "I didn't even consider it (a challenge to Dr. Mahathir) until Datuk Musa asked me to consider it in January." He added that he didn't decide to run until February.

The Razaleigh-Musa team also received little solace from the election results for other senior party posts. Of the three elected vice-presidents, only one, Defense Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, actively supported the rival effort to wrest control of the party from Dr. Mahathir.

Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, the chief minister from Trengganu state who maintained his neutrality despite being heavily wooed by both camps, and Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the 39-year-old protege of Dr. Mahathir, also secured vice-presidential posts in the six-candidate field. The heads of the women's and young men's wings of the party supported Dr. Mahathir and automatically assumed ex-officio vice-presidential posts under party rules.

In the voting for the 25 elective posts on UMNO's Supreme Council, the party's policy-making body, only eight of those selected are clearly associated with the Razaleigh-Musa camp. Most of the remaining posts on the 42-member body will be filled by Mahathir appointees and pro-Mahathir executives chosen by the party.

UMNO members beseeched the two factions to bury their differences and rally behind a united party. But many of them agreed that the healing may take some time and that it's up to Dr. Mahathir and Tunku Razaleigh to reconcile their differences.

That may be difficult given the bitterness of the campaign.

Dr. Mahathir's rivals and other critics portrayed the prime minister's leadership style as autocratic and abrasive. They complained that his refusal to heed advice from party colleagues and government professionals led to rash decisions and costly mistakes.

Critics also targeted the prime minister's management of the economy, mired in a recession or lackluster growth since 1985. Some of Dr. Mahathir's strongest detractors in the party come from the country's business community, which argued that the prime minister's policies have dampened new investments from local and foreign businessmen.

Critics also leveled charges of political favoritism at Dr. Mahathir and accused him of allowing cabinet ministers and other officials to mix political roles with business interests. Such criticisms may prompt Dr. Mahathir to change his roster of economic advisers, say party members and Mahathir supporters, many of whom cite Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin as likely to be among the first to go.

Until the election campaign, UMNO rivals remained publicly silent on such issues. But they later made such allegations of mismanagement, corruption and cronyism central themes in their campaign against Dr. Mahathir.

UMNO opponents similarly criticized Dr. Mahathir's party leadership, charging that he and his closest supporters froze out dissenting opinions on party matters and that he isolated himself from some segments of UMNO.

Dr. Mahathir and his supporters, on the other hand, dismissed the rivals as power-hungry rebels who risked undermining UMNO unity and political tradition to serve their own selfish interests.

"Where would our credibility be if in contests for party posts we accuse a person

population.

UMNO members and independent analysts foresee Dr. Mahathir skipping a political generation by establishing Mr. Anwar, who resigned as UMNO Youth leader before Friday's vote, as his heir apparent. A faction in UMNO maintains that Mr. Anwar hasn't paid his political dues and isn't yet seasoned enough to assume the party's leadership. Other UMNO members, however, say Mr. Anwar's vice-presidential victory should be viewed as a significant step toward higher party and national posts. "That course will insure that the discord will still be there, and a feeling of uncertainty within the party will linger," says Chandra Muzaffar, president of Aliran, a Penang-based social reform movement. "If that happens, there will be another contest in 1990."

'Endorsed Leadership'

Dr. Mahathir said soon after the election results were released that delegates — by however narrow a margin — had endorsed his leadership and had reinstated his mandate to rule. "I had promised that even if I had won by one vote I would continue to serve, and I have got more than one."

Some analysts say that Dr. Mahathir may simply ignore the election results and carry on as he has, without punishing the rival camp. In the past, the prime minister has tolerated the presence of party and government officials not closely allied with his faction.

"I'd hate to think that the fight will carry on, even if it goes underground for the time being," says a longtime Mahathir supporter. "If it does, then we lose the stability UMNO has provided, whether you like Dr. Mahathir or not."

The option favored by many observers and UMNO members calls for Dr. Mahathir to recognize the discontent within the party and the reasons for the challenge, as well as making a sincere effort to cooperate with his rivals by nominating party members from the Razaleigh-Musa camp to responsible government posts or the Supreme Council.

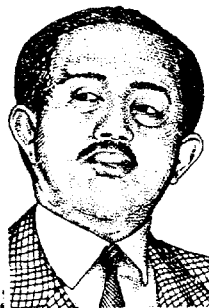
By doing so, the premier "could extricate himself from the party cliques and factional feuds, while rising statesmanlike above the fray," says Aliran's Mr. Chandra.

Musa the Big Loser

Political observers were in general agreement that Datuk Musa was the election's big loser. Once widely considered the



Musa Hitam



Razaleigh Hamzah

Mahathir Faces Hard Job on Party Unity

By STEPHEN DUTHE

Special to THE ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, after narrowly escaping defeat in the closest election of his party's 41-year history, must now grapple with the implications of his near political demise.

At stake, say political analysts, may be the continued stability of Malaysia and the preservation of the United Malays National Organization, the dominant party in the ruling coalition, as guardian of the country's largest ethnic group.

Given the outcome of Friday's triennial party elections, those aims could present a formidable task for



Mahathir Mohamad

Dr. Mahathir. He garnered the support of only 51% of the 1,479 election delegates for a third term as party president. Had he lost, analysts say he would almost certainly have had to give up the premiership. The balance of the vote was won by his opponent, Trade and Industry Minister Razaleigh Hamzah. In Dr. Mahathir's two previous elections

for the party's presidency, in 1981 and 1984, he wasn't opposed.)

Tunku Razaleigh, contending that he and his backers can expect to maintain their base of support until the next party elections in 1990, said Saturday that he will assist in patching up the party's rift. "provided the hand of cooperation" is extended by Dr. Mahathir. If not, he added, "things that should be said must be said."

The threat was barely veiled. With nearly 50% of the support of the delegates backing his unprecedented serious challenge of an incumbent, Tunku Razaleigh, who is 50 years old, has staked out a leadership role among party critics, who could shatter UMNO's unity in the years ahead.

Party and independent observers said it's too early to tell whether the prime minister will seek political revenge against his rivals or embrace them in a gesture of party unity.

Sunday night at a post-convention press conference, Dr. Mahathir gave little indication of his plans. Whatever he decides, the prime minister faces a new political environment, where the rules against open party dissent have been broken and a challenge to the leadership is no longer considered taboo.

"His legitimacy as a leader of UMNO

and Malaysia has been denied," says Michael Leiffer, a political scientist specializing in Southeast Asia.

Surprising even Dr. Mahathir's supporters, Musa Hitam, UMNO's deputy president, was unseated from his party post by Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba, who had been one of UMNO's three vice-presidents. Tunku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa had joined forces in February to



Abdul Ghafar Baba

try to seize control of the party — and the national leadership which customarily goes with it — from the prime minister. Dr. Mahathir appointed Mr. Ghafar, 62, as his deputy prime minister last year after Datuk Musa abruptly resigned from that post, citing differences with the prime minister.

Mr. Ghafar, a leading Mahathir ally and a 31-year party veteran, won by a 739-699 margin, even though he received slightly less than half of the valid votes cast. Forty-one ballots for the deputy presidency were declared spoiled because they were

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'One of Our Weaknesses'

Failure to promote more Supreme Council candidates allied with the Razaleigh-Musa camp "was one of our weaknesses," Tunku Razaleigh admits. "That's why I suppose the results were so lopsided."

A strong showing by candidates supportive of Tunku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa could have presented a source of embarrassment and frustration for Dr. Mahathir's ability to implement decisions not largely in accord with the party hierarchy.

Despite those setbacks, Tunku Razaleigh has emerged as a force to be reckoned with, party members and independent analysts agree. Though many analysts had figured Dr. Mahathir would win, they were surprised by the slimness of his victory.

"Dr. Mahathir has to acknowledge the 50% of UMNO who threw in their lot with his challenger," says a Malaysian analyst. "At this point, he must plan on another Razaleigh challenge in 1990."

In the aftermath of the election, most

of being bad or corrupt and then in the general election he isn't?" asked Dr. Mahathir last month, referring to the strong party support he received in last year's landslide general election.

At that time, UMNO and the rest of the 13-party National Front rallied behind the premier to fight off a threat to the coalition from, in particular, Islamic fundamentalists.

Party members and political observers say Dr. Mahathir can choose from several possible courses of action to mend the UMNO rift, while securing his party and national leadership.

Several pundits suggest that Dr. Mahathir may decide to freeze his rivals from the party and national leadership, thereby hampering their efforts to mount a future challenge. Such a strategy might clear the way for Dr. Mahathir to anoint his successor and proceed with his ambitious and often personal vision for rapidly modernizing Malaysia and the ethnic Malay

favorite to succeed Dr. Mahathir as party president and prime minister, the 10-year cabinet veteran, now 52, now finds himself out of the party leadership and government. He continues to be a member of Parliament, however, representing his home state of Johore.

"I don't want to think about politics," Datuk Musa said after his defeat. He added that he will ponder his political future in May, during the Islamic fasting month.

As for Tunku Razaleigh, he contended that Dr. Mahathir is in a position to dictate what political role the prince may play.

"The results show that I lost and I accept that," said Tunku Razaleigh. "We are not the chosen ones, so I don't think it's up to us to decide anything."

And if Dr. Mahathir's moves don't suit him, Tunku Razaleigh said he is prepared to mount yet another challenge.

"We have the bases — Musa's base, my base," he said. "It's still there. It'll be there in three years."