

## And here's to the next time ...

**G**racefully stepping down, vanquished Umno deputy president Musa left no doubt that he would return — most likely to take a stab at the top post next time. Already, many eyes are looking ahead to 1990, when the next party elections are due.

Protestations of unity aside, the closeness of the party election underscored its division into three major factions — that of re-elected party president Mahathir, his defeated challenger Razaleigh and Musa himself.

The three obviously figure prominently in tentative scenarios for 1990, which might even see a three-cornered fight for party president, with Musa's newly elected successor Ghafar and vice-president Anwar playing important secondary roles.

Whether or not Mahathir himself will stand again in 1990 is pivotal to the question of a repeated, probably more bitter, attempt to overthrow him.

Many — particularly his detractors

— suggest that Mahathir, given his narrow margin of victory, will step down within the next three years, realising he would not survive another challenge. Others disagree. Never one to shun a challenge, Mahathir is not the type of man who would want to go down in history with a 43-vote margin dogging him. He will want to redeem his reputation, according to one political observer.

If Mahathir does stay on — and there seem to be more arguments for this than against it — he will almost certainly choose Anwar as his running-mate. It is no secret that Mahathir would like to hand the reins of power directly to Anwar, who shares some of his own visions of a Malaysian future. But at 39, Anwar is still very young and, among today's top leaders, has put in the least number of years of service in Umno. His rapid promotion in the party has attracted jealousy, making any attempt to jump straight from being the most junior of the three vice-presidents

to the president's post a dangerous, if not fatal, move.

There is another theory, however, which while at first seems far-fetched, is attracting some attention. In this scenario, Mahathir would either complete his three-year term, or have Ghafar complete it for him as a stop-gap president, on the understanding that Ghafar himself would step down in 1990. Mahathir would then endorse Razaleigh as party president, who would in turn take on Anwar as his running-mate — leaving Musa in the cold.

**A**fter all, according to a Mahathir political aide, Mahathir had once wondered aloud why Razaleigh had allowed himself to get caught in the middle of something that began as a private contest between Musa and himself. Mahathir's quarrel had been with Musa, not Razaleigh, he said.

Mahathir and Razaleigh were both vice-presidents when former prime minister Tun Hussein Onn picked Mahathir, the most junior of the three

elected vice-presidents, as his deputy in 1978. If Razaleigh was slighted, he did not show it. He continued to serve as finance minister in Hussein's cabinet and in Mahathir's until Mahathir brought in Daim Zainuddin for the job and moved him to the Trade and Industry Ministry in 1984. Despite Musa's anxieties over Razaleigh's retention — as revealed in Musa's private letters to Mahathir which were released after his resignation as deputy prime minister in 1986 — Mahathir refused to remove Razaleigh completely.

Significantly for this theory, Razaleigh and Anwar can get on with each other, and in Anwar's first stab at the Umno Youth chief's post in late 1982, rumours were rife that he had Razaleigh's tacit backing while Musa backed then incumbent Datuk Suhaimi Kamaruddin.

Even more interestingly, several delegates voluntarily admitted to being Razaleigh supporters while also favouring Anwar. The loyalty across tickets was curious, especially since the two

have rather diverse constituencies — businessmen for Razaleigh and Islamists for Anwar.

It is still too early to predict how the power and succession game will be played, but 1990 is an emotive year for Malaysians, as it marks the end — or the renewal, under a new name — of the New Economic Policy, a reverse discrimination policy in favour of the numerically stronger but economically poorer bumiputra (Indigenous Malays). As defenders of Malay interests, Umno factions may be persuaded not to indulge in a fractious internecine war at that time, for fear of giving an advantage to the country's Chinese and Indian communities.

However, that sort of situation could also be used by one Umno faction to show itself as being more Malay than another — in which case, the power struggle would be truly stormy, suggested an Umno delegate. "The knives are already being sharpened," one senior Malay journalist said.

— Suhaini Aznam