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Unwise to sensationalise MB issue

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THE front page headlines of three major Malaysian newspapers on Tuesday regarding the appointment of the new Selangor Menteri Besar were reminiscent of the screaming banners during the dark days of the 1983 and 1993 constitutional crises that pitted the Rulers against the Government.

The Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian, reporting on the meeting between the Sultan of Selangor and the Prime Minister, both had Sultan Tidak Berkenan (Sultan did not consent) as headlines.

They quoted the Sultan as purportedly saying that he disagreed with the list of candidates presented by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The tabloid Sun went a step further to suggest that the Sultan and the Prime Minister were at loggerheads when it headlined its report MB Deadlock.

The headlines could have come as a surprise to some because in his Press conference immediately after the meeting, Dr Mahathir stated that he had not shortlisted anyone for the post and that he needed a bit more time to select a suitable candidate.

Assuming for a moment that the Sultan, in his impromptu Press conference following that of the Prime Minister, had indicated something to the effect that he disagreed with Dr Mahathir's choice, one would have given some weight to the Prime Minister's statement.

On the following day, the Sultan, through his confidential secretary, Mohd Munir Bani, issued a statement saying that the question of his not consenting to the name submitted by Dr Mahathir did not arise because the Prime Minister had yet to name a candidate.

In a matter as important as this, and with the memory of two constitutional crises still fresh, the confusion can be unnerving. Of course, any attempt at sensationalising the issue is unwise, unless of course, the intention is to suggest that the Prime Minister had proposed a bad candidate (or candidates), the Sultan was interfering in politics or Selangor no longer has a suitable person to be appointed Menteri Besar.

Sure enough, the headlines prompted the French news agency, AFP, to report on April 22 that "a constitutional crisis loomed in Malaysia as Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and a Malay ruler deadlocked over a successor to the chief minister of wealthy Selangor state".