

Quayle wants to be the top potato



NOTES FROM THE UNITED NATIONS

By **Abdullah Ahmad**

In 211 years of the United States presidential election history only George Washington was returned unopposed for the post in 1789 and 1792.

John Adams was elected Vice President and he subsequently succeeded Washington in 1797.

In November next year Americans will be electing their 43rd president. Though it is still nearly two years away there is no shortage of candidates who have already offered themselves to be America's chief executive in the new millennium. One of them is Dan Quayle.

You are forgiven if you asked Quayle who? Even in the US his name is not exactly a household name. However, he is well remembered by Americans as the man who could not spell potato. Quayle, 51, a lawyer, now wants, against all odds, to be America's next top potato. He told CNN's *Larry King Live* last week that he wanted to live in the White House.

Quayle who? He became a favourite target of talk-show comedians and his detractors when he served as Vice President under President George Bush from 1988-1992 - thanks to a series of embarrassing gaffes, such as when he told a primary pupil during a visit to a school in New Jersey that "potato" is spelled with an "e" at the end. The pupil told him in his face that he was a bad speller.

Following the eruption of the Monica Lewinsky-Bill Clinton sex scandal early last

ident George Bush will be a formidable candidate against Gore, the front runner among the Democrats. Bush is known as a "compassionate conservative" which makes him acceptable to a broad number of Americans besides those within his own Republican party. His other advantage is he also speaks Spanish, a great asset in American politics these days.

Gore will claim some credit for the general improvement in American life since he joined the Clinton administration which began in 1993.

In American presidential history there were many Vice Presidents who eventually occupied 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Amongst them were Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Johnson, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson and George Bush. Well, I think a dozen out of 42 made it to the top.

Before Bill Clinton from Arkansas, Andrew Jackson, another Southerner from Tennessee, was the only president ever impeached though he was not convicted. A single vote saved him.

The fate of Clinton is still being debated. I do not expect him to be convicted even if accusations of perjury and obstruction of justice are proven because the Republicans do not have a two-thirds majority in the Senate. Furthermore, the Democrats will never help the Republicans convict their man in the White House because they do not believe perjury over sex, even before a grand jury, and

ton, though guilty, would not be punished!

On a personal level, I was an intern in Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson's office in the spring of 1962. My assignment in Johnson's office was chronicled in the

By way of comparison, in our brief history of independence we have had eight Deputy Prime Ministers but only three of them eventually moved on to Jalan Dato' Onn - Tun Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and Datuk Seri

is required for the long campaigns is a minor problem. Indeed, one or two candidates in the now postponed Umno presidential election would have no trouble raising the huge funds needed for the high geared hustings.

Mahathir's choice, adding: "I am keeping all options open." Another refused to discuss anything, merely saying: "Everything is fair in politics."

Mahathir has survived three serious scrapes in his 18 years of power (to date at least), each time, to his credit, emerging with triumph, albeit narrowly.

The Government and Umno, he said, would continue to serve and protect the nation; each time intoning confidently that, we would survive the political adventurism and machinations of those who wanted to make our nation a pawn of the superpower.

Mahathir - as I see - is far from approaching collapse as wished for by his enemies both local and foreign. Even though he is far from being infallible, he has led Malaysia well and made it respected and recognised. Mahathir's calmness and his benevolent and stubborn self-righteousness has saved his premiership more than twice or thrice when most "experts" considered it lost.

In Mahathir's political life, even when he was a student, the fixation in his mind has always been the survival of his people and the nation. He is devoting all his waking hours to the survival and prosperity of Umno and the nation. This is his perceived strength which is helping to consolidate the nation and rally the people.

In American history, unlike the office of the President, the post of the Vice President has sometimes been left vacant on the death of the Vice President or his assumption of the presidency on the death or resignation of the President. Johnson succeeded the

year, Quayle, whose wife, Marilyn, has long been considered one of his key political advisers, said that "adultery will be the question for anyone running for president in 2000", smugly adding: "I can pass that test."

Quayle's announcement came two weeks after Elizabeth Dole (she definitely can spell potato having been a scholar at Harvard), the wife of the former senator and defeated Republican candidate against Bill Clinton in 1996, hinted that she might run for president.

The favourite candidate among the Republicans is the popular governor of Texas, George W. Bush, who has not as yet made up his mind. The eldest son of former pres-

his other attempts to conceal his liaison with Monica Lewinsky warrant his sacking, thus overturning an election result.

The Senate - at the time of writing - divided almost precisely along party lines, had voted to summon Monica Lewinsky and two other witnesses for depositions in the impeachment trial of Clinton. It also voted against dismissing the charges against the President. However, as I said, Clinton would survive because the Republicans could never muster anything approaching the 67 votes required to convict him, unless of course, Lewinsky or one or both of the two other witnesses drop a bombshell, a real dynamite. Otherwise Clin-

Washington Post, and one or two Malaysian newspapers and other periodicals. LBJ, as he was popularly known, became the first president to visit Malaysia in the late 60s, and in honour of his visit to the Felda scheme in Labu, it was renamed Kampong LBJ.

Had Clinton come as planned to the Apec meeting in Kuala Lumpur last December (cancelled only at the very last moment purportedly because of the impending US-Iraqi crisis), he would have been the second US President to experience our famous hospitality.

Instead, his Vice-President, Al Gore, came. He gored us and made his name infamous in our country for a fortnight.

Dr Mahathir. Had Tun Dr Ismail not died in office he would have succeeded Razak.

Mahathir has had four deputies and Razak had two. The question is whether Mahathir's fourth deputy, Datuk Abdullah Badawi, will succeed him. It depends on timing and political development in the new millennium, especially the results of the general election which must be held, unless a catastrophe strikes Malaysia meanwhile, before April 2000. It is too premature to talk about Mahathir's early retirement.

Running for presidency is a hugely expensive business. But for credible candidates, especially those considered probable winners, raising the hundreds of millions that

When the Umno presidential poll is held, I believe none will try to go against the incumbent. However, there will be a fierce tussle for the deputy's post. Though Abdullah is now Deputy Prime Minister he is not deputy president of Umno, so I predict at least two candidates will try to snare the vacant spot.

Abdullah's appointment has been well received. He has to make the desired impact to minimise the chances of his probable opponents from seizing the coveted deputy's post in Umno from under his feet. A probable candidate told me, without discussing the specifics of his intention and political strategy, that he accepted

assassinated John F. Kennedy. When Richard Nixon resigned following the Watergate scandal, his second Vice President Gerald Ford moved into the White House. Ford became Nixon's second Vice President when Spiro Agnew resigned because of corruption.

In our history, Razak chose Ismail first and then Hussein, speedily after Ismail died in office. Hussein took slightly more than two months to finally opt for Mahathir and Mahathir four months to determine his fourth deputy. All's well that ends well.

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