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Dr M may well be goading us into thinking

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ONCE again we are left gasping in the wake of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Poor us! The Prime Minister has since moved on to other things, merrily churning out new ideas and embracing fresh thinking modes as he hectors the international audience on the flaws of globalisation.

His "non-Malay PM" reference at the MCA general assembly last week continues to induce alarmed looks and has attracted a dazzling array of spins.

The most common theme of interpretation says the reference is a warning. No consensus has, as yet been achieved, as to what precise warning it is.

The conventional wisdom dictates that it could be any style of warning, of varying severity, directed at anyone, veiled or otherwise.

Whatever the spin, one cannot help feeling that it is a sequel to Dr Mahathir's stirring speech at the closing of the Umno general assembly last month.

That was when the PM cajoled and stunned the delegates by raising yet again, the issue of quality thinking.

He said then that Umno now finds itself in a hostile environment.

The party has lost its allure, no longer able to inspire others to take up the cudgels for it.

Two things can be deduced from those two speeches, at Umno and then MCA. Firstly, possibly right from the time he penned Malay Dilemma, Dr Mahathir has remained unrivalled as the leading thinker or even ideologue, if you like, in the country.

That is an inspiring phenomenon. It is also worrying. By parading his awesome ability to think - his Umno speech received two standing ovations - the Prime Minister may well be goading the rest of us to partake in the joys of thinking.

A deficiency in thinking leads to potent flaws. In the realm of politics, the deficiency is manifested in the behaviour of the so-called "Yes Men". Traditionally, they would unquestionably and perpetually nod in agreement. Collectively, the power and quality of thinking diminishes.

Related to this defect is an inevitable question - Why is that there has been so much hype about Datuk Shahrir Samad? Is he very outstanding? Shahrir becomes the newest personality to be hailed by the foreign media as the "reformist" on the strength of his statements. The reformist tag is in fact ironic.

If we remember correctly, Shahrir's Johor Baru division was one of the seven that bucked the unstoppable winds of change, the marauding reformist movement led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in the 1993 Umno elections.

According to the formatted and simpleton's psyche of the foreign Press, Shahrir had then belonged to the "Old Turks". His JB division then nominated Tun Ghafar Baba for the No 2 post that in the end he chose not to defend.

Tens of thousands of other Umno personalities, at the division level and elsewhere, are brainy. Many though, are busy being mediocre.

In the bigger scheme of things, the quality of political speeches and political statements, which is how the public gauge politicians, suffer especially when they are reported verbatim in the newspapers.

A recent example - all Sik Umno needs to do is to perhaps quietly brace itself for a possible, though now unlikely, by-election and not admonish a

sick MP and his party to let him retire.

Many Malaysians say this - let's hear more original modes of thinking and quality ones at that. The idea of original thoughts within Umno, for instance, is not to bring the party to its heels, as some seem to think. It has to strengthen the party and raise the credibility of politicians. The scarcity of original thoughts, i.e. those not detrimental to the party may well leave Dr Mahathir unhappy.

The second deduction to the two speeches is that Dr Mahathir has to carefully couch his worries about the Malay race. He is deeply sensitive towards the feelings of others in a multi-ethnic populace. He could have been more forthright and vehement in references to the Malay race who cannot be propped up forever by a political arm that may well weaken.

A prominent figure puts forward these questions the other day - How many Malay lawyers appear in the courts? How many genuine Malay contractors don't hand over the newly secured contracts to others? How many Malays are grooming young, talented managers? We shall get busy thinking.

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