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Fascinating politics points the way

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UMNO amazingly tolerates diverse opinions and dissent. Members share the same policy, but their personal objectives may be different. Hence, intense rivalry does contribute further to the complexity of Umno politics.

The stresses of a changing Umno politics, which have since become so much more personal and vexed, began to appear some time ago.

President Nixon's downfall was caused by the Watergate affair. Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar resigned as Menteri Besar of Selangor last Thursday over an alleged sexual relationship, as was Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Thamby Chik, a former Malacca Chief Minister.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, once a potential Prime Minister, was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, then arrested, tried, and eventually sentenced for abuse of power and sodomy.

The "Abu Hassan Affair" is no longer, I am afraid, a quiet affair. It is a good case study. In Great Britain in the early sixties, there was the celebrated Profumo affair.

Harold MacMillan was forced to spend a great deal of his time, as he later wrote in his memoirs, "over a silly scrape (over a woman) into which one of the ministers has got himself". "It's John Profumo - Secretary of State for War. It would not matter so much if it was just an affair of morality.

"But unfortunately, among the frequenters of this raffish and disreputable set, which centres at Lord Astor (Bill Astor), was the Russian Military Attache!

"... I must decide what I ought to do. All this is very bad for the reputation of the party (Conservative) and of the Government."

The Prime Minister and President of Umno Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, did exactly what MacMillan did.

In the case of Dr Mahathir, a good evening's work was devoted to Abu Hassan's case and subsequently meeting, reviewing, and evaluating the situation, and of the various candidates to lead and prepare Selangor Umno and Barisan Nasional for the next general election.

Politicians of considerable stature like the heads of state government, once impacted explosively by "believable" rumours, must leave office. They, of course, do not need to leave if there are no grounds to impugn the rumour.

I had an appointment with Abu Hassan on the day he resigned.

We had a good 15-20 minute chat about the engrossing Selangor politics which had engulfed him, at his official residence which he had been allowed to stay at until the end of September. This is Malay courtesy and graciousness.

In the United Kingdom at least, once you resign or lose office, you are evicted from the official residence straight away.

You move out through the back door as the new occupant arrives via the front door.

If one reads about the transfer of power in Britain, it is rather poignant, ruthless and impersonal.

Abu Hassan, after only slightly more than three years, was engulfed in the Selangor State political flames.

One day, if the politicians are not careful, the Selangor seat of power will be engulfed by the rising political and moral cost unless there are

winds of change in Shah Alam.

Abu Hassan's political life ended when he opted for "personal reasons" which must be very compelling, to resign rather than take on the fight against his opponents both within and without Umno.

If he had a good case, he was, I gathered, advised and I think rightly, to tell the true story once and for all. Instead, what he told the media has only fueled further speculation, doubts and more news-breaking stories, notwithstanding the appeal and supportive statements from Dr Mahathir.

Honestly, the more he or any member of his family talks, the more they are digging themselves into a deeper hole. Politicians should realise that "public events and issues" of these days are quite beyond the control of the Government or the media.

I have heard from reliable sources that all kinds of intrigues and "latent campaigns" are going on about who will be the next Menteri Besar of Selangor.

Dr Mahathir had said he would announce his choice soon. The sooner the better, if I may suggest.

I do wish that perhaps those who were so anxious to get Abu Hassan out, will now see the disadvantages besides the advantages.

Happy days are back for Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib. I saw it coming when he won the Umno vice president's post. It's amazing isn't it? Everything is possible in politics.

Muhammad may have lost three years but he is now on the right fast track. Umno members and leaders are being canvassed by his supporters to give their man another chance.

The unhappy stroke of fate for Abu Hassan could not have come at a better moment for Muhammad.

If what follows the "Abu Hassan Affair" causes the minimum of infighting and excitement and, alas, a corresponding injury to Selangor Umno, Muhammad will be looked upon whether one likes it, as a source for a "conciliator and facilitator".

This will, I am sure, be a relief to the Umno leadership.

What I do profoundly hope is that the image of Umno and the Barisan Nasional is not injured further by all this and by the intense jockeying and lobbying among the three serious candidates for the Menteri Besar's post.

Abu Hassan appeared to have been doing quite well, even after losing the Umno vice-presidential race. He was a confident man - smiling and laughing - when we met at a wedding reception two weeks ago.

And yet within a fourthnight, his fortune drastically changed.

Now, the deputy chairman of the Selangor Umno liaison committee Muhammad has emerged a "kingmaker" and I could see he relishes the job.

Despite what had happened to him and the perception people have of him, he is the man to watch in the next Umno election.

Umno politics is very fascinating and what occurs in Shah Alam any time soon may point the way to 2003.

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