

Dr Mahathir rises to

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THE vigour with which he delivered his marathon opening address at the Umno general assembly on Thursday should make it amply clear to the Mahathir watchers that he is back in full fighting spirit.

And the frankness with which he told the delegates of the malaise Umno and the Malays are facing, suggests that he is not looking for popularity.

Many had come with a faint hope of hearing Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad giving hints of his retirement and setting in motion the succession process.

Instead he gave them a blast of his thoughts on what is right and wrong with the party and the Malays.

A Kedah delegate, who prides himself with representing his division for the last 20 assemblies, said he was pretty sure what went through the minds of those seated on the stage when Dr Mahathir was given a standing ovation at the end of his two-hour address — forget about an immediate transfer of the baton.

He observed that it would not be a surprise if the Umno president and Prime Minister stays beyond 2004, provided his health holds. Yet others warned that despite his crystal clear analysis of the problems facing Umno and the Malays, there will be those who will reject it. These are people who are driven by their hatred for him than by the power of reason.

A newly-elected Kelantan divisional chief warned that Dr Mahathir could not discount his strong message falling on deaf ears. But that, he said, was not the main concern. The real poser is, having spelt out the malaise, what is Dr Mahathir, as the head of the party and the Government, going to do.

He feels that both Umno and the Malays have been warned often enough of the dangers confronting them.

"If our education system is a failure, change it. If we have to make English a compulsory subject, go ahead and do it. We cannot do things just to please the Malays. What good are happy Malays if they cannot compete?" he said.

BEING liked is the least of Dr Mahathir's concern. By nature he thrives under pressure and speaks out his mind freely when challenged. Seeing what has been happening to the country since the 1997 economic crisis, it is easy for a lot of people to give up on Dr Mahathir.

But his performance at the assembly, his 20th as party president, should convince even his worst detractors that he is neither ready to be discounted nor has any intention of losing control of the party.

If anything, he is indicating to leaders

and members of the party that they will be seeing more of him on the ground from now on.

That, said a Padang Terap (Kedah) delegate, was a good thing. "He has to go directly to the people. The problem with far too many Umno leaders is they fail to capture his thinking. As such, they are unable to deliver his message effectively to the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir cannot afford to leave the scene and leave behind a divided and weak Umno. History will judge him harshly.

Embittered by the acrimonious 1987 leadership contest, when he was challenged by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Dr Mahathir had repeatedly said it was his intention to hand over the party whole to his successor instead of just factions of it.

He worked very hard and, in some instances, swallowed his own pride — like bringing back Tengku Razaleigh and his Semangat '46 followers into Umno's fold — to unite and strengthen the party.

It is a well-known fact that Dr Mahathir has always considered the Kelantan prince as a worthy opponent. In recent years, the two have been drawn closer together.

Still the question of succession is on everybody's mind. This is a fact recognised by Dr Mahathir himself when he said he would concentrate more efforts on politics and leave administration to his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

A smooth transition depends largely on how much time Dr Mahathir has to oversee the process at both the party and governmental levels, and the support of the membership for his anointed successor.

With Umno members, especially the younger ones, demanding greater say in

OTHER THOTS

By A. Kadir Jasin

various communities in this country seem to be mysteriously linked.

While Umno is struggling to recover from its most recent crisis, the MCA is heading towards one.

Since it was announced that the party's investment arm, Huaren Holdings, was buying control of Nanyang Press Bhd, the publisher of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* newspapers, the storm it whipped up is threatening to blow the MCA off its otherwise unassailable foundation.

The issue has become so political that the business aspects of it are all but forgotten. Two non-political Chinese groups had since expressed interest to buy the MCA's block at prices higher than originally offered by Huaren.

(A senior Chinese journalist told me that Huaren literally means wise or thoughtful Chinese.)

From the very beginning, the opponents of the deal had feared what they called the black hand. In brief, it refers to the pressure being applied on Hume Industries to sell its controlling stake in Nanyang Press Holdings and on the MCA to buy it.

The proponent of the black hand theory had suggested that when the Nanyang Press deal was done, it was a matter of time before other Chinese newspapers, including the mass selling *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, which belongs to Sarawak timber tycoon Tan Sri Tiong Hiew King, would come under

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the running of the party, no choice can be legitimate without their active participation.

THE Umno and Malay malaise is several years old. Hopefully, Dr Mahathir's harsh indictment will pry open the locked doors and allow the winds of change to blow through. The antithesis to this is Umno and the Malays are in danger of being blown away.

Ironically, however, the fortunes of the

an ultimate holding company controlled by the MCA.

The two offers may provide the answer to the MCA's dilemma — a face-saving device that MCA leaders on both ends of the pole may want to use.

The whole episode shows just how proud the Malaysian Chinese are of their independence and how astute they are in political power play. They see a free Chinese Press as a useful tool in this balancing act. They want as many voices as possible to

the challenge

represent them.

THANK you to readers who e-mailed, faxed and sent letters in response to this column. This week, I would like to recognise Tan Sri Nuraizah Abdul Hamid, chairman of Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission and Mr Lim Guan Eng, DAP Youth chief.

Nuraizah wrote: "I was very happy to note your comments in last Sunday's Other Thots column on the recent consumer satisfaction survey conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.

"At last, someone from the media is championing the rights of the consumers in getting high-quality service rather than getting into debates on the methodologies and the accuracy of the survey.

"Arising from the release of the survey

To get a higher confidence level, one has to collect more samples, implying higher costs and more time. Generally, 95 per cent confidence level is the one most commonly used in surveys.

Guan Eng wrote: "Your column on June 17 touching on the lack of customer satisfaction towards mobile phone service providers has struck a chord among consumers.

"The high marks mobile phone service providers received belie their failure to ensure even basic customer services such as answering phone calls on their complaints hotline.

"Lately, all 55 families in a small housing estate in Malacca — Taman Seri Songket in Batu Berendam — had complained to TMTouch about its transmission tower in their area.

"The residents, including a medical doctor, showed clearly the interference to

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results, I was disappointed to note that, instead of rising up to the challenge to improve their services to consumers, some service providers had chosen to build defensive walls by casting doubts on the survey methodology and airing these in the media.

"Even more glaring is that these doubts appear to be greatest amongst some of the mobile service providers only and not the other service providers who were also covered in the survey; maybe those who did not come out too well in the survey had the greatest problem in accepting the reality. Improvements can only start when one recognises and accepts one's shortcomings.

"Hence, the tone of Other Thots, in speaking up unreservedly for the consumers, came as a breath of fresh air and really made my Sunday. After all, where are we without consumers?

"I totally agree that consumer bodies should be more proactive in conducting consumer satisfaction surveys and hope they take up your challenge.

"Before concluding I would like to correct an error in one of your statements that the survey ... recorded an overall consumer confidence of 95 per cent"

Actually, the 95 per cent refers to the level of confidence one can place on the survey results. This means that the results quoted in the survey can be in error of up to five per cent.

their television reception and complained of headaches, after the tower was erected more than three months ago.

"Despite repeated complaints, TMTouch did not even respond to a petition signed by the residents. Their complaints to government departments and local authorities like the Majlis Perbandaran Melaka hit a wall of silence and studied indifference.

"Are all these good citizens, who are made up mainly of retired senior civil servants, to continue to suffer in silence?

"In contrast, Maxis responded immediately to a similar complaint from residents in another area. The company's quick response to and resolution of the problem is even more laudable as the complaint was made only a few days before the last Chinese New Year.

"While our telecommunications companies strive mightily with billions of ringgit in investment to provide First World technological capability, we still appear to be trapped in the Third World mentality when it comes to servicing the customers.

"Unless we marry the most modern technology with first-class customer services, Malaysians will be short-changed despite the huge investment."

I would also like to thank Tun Daim Zainuddin, Godfrey Loh, H.C. Yong, Afendy Abdullah and Bulbir Singh for their views, kind thoughts and reminders.

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