

**Tuesday, October 30, 2001**

## **PM to focus more on international issues**

**SUN, 30 OCT 2001**  
One week is a long time in the life of a politician. For Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his meeting in Shanghai last week was a significant turning point. There is no doubt the West is now taking more seriously his interpretation of world events. He can also feel somewhat vindicated now that the US and other countries are considering adopting measures which were once considered taboo to protect their economies and national security.

So it was a week of triumph of sorts for the prime minister. But what has he come back to?

On the economic front, there has been criticism of the Budget 2002 proposals, mostly reflecting fears that higher petrol prices will fuel a hike in the cost of goods and services. Politically, a naughty PAS continues to play the Islamic card, trying to convince that a Barisan Nasional-led government is no Islamic government. And closer home, there is continued bickering in the MCA, a matter that will surely tax Mahathir's patience.

These issues, however, will not deflect the prime minister from his own priorities. As his Shanghai trip has shown, he will need to devote more attention now to international and strategic issues. That will require him to free up more time from his current routine for these matters.

So we should not be surprised if Mahathir soon decides to take a less onerous role in the Finance Ministry, or even give up responsibility for this portfolio. Whether such a move will also presage a more extensive cabinet reshuffle remains to be seen.