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Speculation over Daim's quitting

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NOW that Tun Daim Zainuddin is gone, everybody seems to be saying just how great he is. Some say he should not go. Others say he should not have been allowed to go. And there are voices saying he still has a role to play.

There is a fascination with Daim. In particular, his relationship with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Hence, there is no shortage of speculation as to why he eventually threw in the towel.

But Daim is the last person to live with the illusion that everybody loved him as Finance Minister and that the welcome extended to him was without limit.

Still, no matter what explanation is given to justify his decision to quit all government and party posts, not even by the man himself, there will continue to be speculation that he and the Prime Minister parted company in less than favourable circumstances.

What is easier to understand is the fact that Daim, despite having served the Government or, as some people would like to think, the Prime Minister, twice as Finance Minister, has never been interested in politics.

He came into the political scene so suddenly that he immediately became a source of fascination and an object of hatred. To use everyday language, he came out of nowhere when Dr Mahathir made him Finance Minister in 1984 when the economy was heading for a slump.

But with his intelligence, his intimate knowledge of the economy and business, and his shrewd political manoeuvring, he went on to become the most successful and, at times, controversial economic manager the country ever had.

Despite his impatience with bureaucracy and protocol, he managed to turn himself into a highly effective Finance Minister and a consummate political operator of the Mahathir era. A lot of people in and outside the Government have no hesitation in giving him the coveted title of "Mr Fix It".

The question is who will the Prime Minister appoint to take over Daim's multiple task - Finance Minister, Minister of Special Functions, executive director of the National Economic Action Council and Umno treasurer.

The most important is, understandably, the finance portfolio. The country needs a highly capable economic and financial manager to see it through this very challenging time.

Depending on who is selected for the job, his (or her) appointment will also be seen as the establishment of a new pecking order in the Government and Umno. Despite Daim's disinterest in politics, the finance post continues to be considered a likely route to the top.

Umno continues to be reminded of how two Finance Ministers - Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim - became politically powerful when appointed to the job.

Unless the Prime Minister is ready to move on to the next step in the transition process, he may choose not to appoint any of the senior Minister to the post.

He may, as he is now doing, hold the post himself and appoint a younger and more junior person to become second Finance Minister as the case was with Datuk Mustapa Mohamed (1998-99).

Another question is: will Daim continue to play the Mr Fix It role or will somebody else emerge as the power broker?

These and other considerations will affect the confidence of our own people and outsiders in our economy and politics in the years to come.

As for Daim, I believe he is savouring every second of his "liberation". He told friends that he may spend his time travelling. Others, however, believe that he will go back to doing what he does best - business.

Former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor was released from prison yesterday after serving 40 days out of his two months' sentence.

He was sent to jail after being found guilty of punching Anwar when the latter was in police custody after being detained under the Internal Security Act in 1998.

Much had been said about the incident that gave the police the biggest black eye in its history. But there had also been many people who not only thought highly of Rahim but even defended his action.

This is what e-mailer Bahiki Tepoli had to say about the former police chief: "The recent jailing of Tan Sri Rahim, the ex-IGP, was a blow to him personally but more so to those like me who considered him a strong and no-nonsense law enforcer.

"Being a law enforcer most of his life, Rahim was understandably furious that attempts were made which could turn Malaysia into a fireball, resulting in destruction of properties and loss of lives, leaving the people scared and terrified.

"I still respect Rahim for what he is. I hope when he comes out, the Government will compensate him for averting a situation that could have turned Malaysia into a killing field."

Whatever one may say of Rahim, he had served the country well. He was instrumental in working out the peaceful end to the Malayan Communist Party armed rebellion.

But peace in the post-Cold War era, it seems, is as fragile as it was during the violent days of the Cold War. In fact, the threats of militancy and terrorism are on the rise worldwide as fringe organisations and extremist elements scramble to fill the ideological void left behind by the collapse of communism a decade ago.

Hence, the revelation a few days ago that the police might have crippled a militant group responsible for murders, bombings and armed robberies is not to be taken lightly.

While congratulating the police for their success, we must urge the Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Norain Mai, and his team to think more seriously of the new threats.

We seem to be taking too lightly the strangely dressed foreigners, who speak none of the familiar languages, now roaming the streets of Kuala Lumpur and the villages seeking donations for anything from the Afghan mujahidin to the refugees in India and Pakistan.

It is useful for the police to take these people in for questioning to determine their origins. They could be commencing preying on our generosity or purveyors of some extremist ideologies.

Rahim is not alone in facing public scrutiny. With the people becoming more aware of their rights and are more willing to express their views, the whole police force is under examination.

They are not about to believe or agree with everything said or done by the police, not any more.

Hence, it is not surprising that the statement a few days ago by Norain that the police is capable of solving murder cases has been greeted with some amount of scepticism.

The sceptics found themselves in good company when Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heong told the Dewan Negara that the percentage of unsolved murder cases had risen to 64 per cent in the first four months of

this year.

He said the figure had been on the rise and "police were not happy with the results". My question is, if the police are not happy with the results, what are they doing about it?

I am very sure that if the police are unhappy, the rakyat are even more unhappy because they are more likely to become victims of crime than the armed policemen and women.

But it not the serious crimes alone that are putting the image of the police at stake. The average rakyat are more likely to become victims of less serious crimes like theft and burglary.

It is so disheartening to see with your own eyes helpless women having their handbags snatched in broad daylight in a supposedly safe and classy location like Lucky Garden in Bangsar.

I saw with my own eyes, not once but twice, the patrons of a corner pastry shop having their handbags snatched as they sat to enjoy the shop's delicious offering of strudel and aromatic cinnamon tea.

The last one that I saw happened on June 3 at about 11pm as I was having teh tarik at the nearby mamak shop - alone. I must stress alone. I know the victim. She comes from a prominent Kuala Lumpur family. I appealed to her to use her "influence" to get the police to patrol the area more regularly.

I blame not just insufficient policing (incidentally the police have a nice beat base in nearby Bangsar Baru) but also the shop owner for failing to warn his patrons of the prevalence of snatch thefts in the area.

Victims of snatch thefts were lucky not to have died or suffered serious injuries. So ladies, next time you go to Lucky Garden or Bangsar, do not bring your loaded handbags. If you have to, take good care of them.

I dare not suggest that while in Bangsar you put your valuables in the cups of your bra. But something like that will help.

So Tan Sri IGP, please do more to protect us, not just in Bangsar but also in Tobiar and Pondok Chegar. Or for that matter wherever we may be in this beautiful country.

It was reported that Bank Pembangunan dan Infrastruktur Malaysia Bhd had provided a loan of RM620 million to the Kuala Lumpur monorail project.

If I am not mistaken, the monorail was a quid pro quo for the linear city project which was later rejected by the Government. It was originally franchised to tycoon Tan Sri Vincent Tan. The controlling shareholder now is businessman David Chew.

The project, which is supposed to help ease Kuala Lumpur's traffic problem, has in fact contributed towards worsening it due to its much delayed completion. It is both an eyesore as well as hindrance to traffic.

With so many privatised public transportation projects facing financial difficulties and, in some cases, forcing the Government to intervene financially, the loan to the monorail project must be carefully monitored.

What seems to be the priority now is not more privatised public transportation projects but their consolidation and the streamlining of the opposing public transport policies.

As for the judges, their unique position has long been recognised. But judges are human beings too. Hence to say that it is a contempt to comment on their judgments is to say that they are incapable of making mistakes.

Judges are known to have not complied with the most basic rules of their job, like not writing or delaying the writing of judgments. This was recently pointed out by none other than Chief Justice Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah himself.

In the US and UK, judges are regularly criticised for their judgments as was the case in the trial of British nanny Louise Woodward for murder in the US and the extradition trial of former Chilean President Augusto

Pinochet in the UK.

The choice is whether we make a habit out of it or the judges themselves stay above the fray and heed the advice of the Chief Justice.

As for Balan Kumar, I think he should direct his complain against a Deputy Health Minister who, he claimed, smoked publicly at the KLCC to the Prime Minister. Dr Mahathir is against smoking and KLCC is one of his pet projects.

Yeoh Kim Kee was probably confused when he asked me to reveal the identity of "YB Zig Zag". There is no such character in my column.