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A gracious evening after the trauma of the Umno assembly

DKL

TO appreciate what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad did, it is necessary to look back at history. The British administrators did not take Tunku Abdul Rahman seriously as a politician.

They put their money on Datuk Onn Jaafar, Umno's founding president. When Onn sulked and resigned, Umno elected Tunku to replace him. When he called it quits, Umno unanimously chose Tun Razak and when he died prematurely, Datuk Hussein, Onn's eldest son, became PM. In July 1981, Hussein, citing health reasons, resigned.

What Dr Mahathir did was in line with Umno tradition. The only difference is that the delegates wept and their pleas won the day.

A long-time Mahathir critic, Datuk Shahrir Samad, said "irresponsible people" alleged he was the cause of Dr Mahathir's sudden decision because he had written an epistle berating him on Saturday morning. Shahrir wished it was true, then he would have been a guaranteed footnote in Umno's history.

Tan Sri Musa Hitam said it was not true. On the contrary, he jokingly added, "when Dr M glimpsed Shahrir laughing, he retracted".

Among Umno's top guns, cynicism and banter are the norm, and all bear them as gracefully as they can. A source said Shahrir told his peers during the Supreme Council meeting that while he disapproved of the way the PM tendered his resignation, he would not want to be the guy who refused to let him go.

Friends and strangers the diarist met at the assembly had an earful of praise for him, but what he enjoyed most was the eyeful of beautiful women as he tottered through the crowd to meet old friends and make new ones.

The Umno princesses in high heels will be a potent force along with Wanita Umno. Just be careful not to sink into the grass, ladies!