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`Daddy knows best'

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SOME time in the early 70's, a Malay doctor from Alor Star took his young family

It was a boat he had built and the journey was from Kuala Kedah to Pulau Payar. You see, Mokhzani had no anchor and while the good doctor was very confident, the fishermen were not about to let anything happen to the doctor and his family in Alor Star, after all, was not a big town. And Che Det was a well-loved doctor. Needless to say, Che Det and his family anchored safely at the island and sailed. He was known as Che Det to his family, friends and the people of Alor Star. B And yachting is a passion in which he will be able to indulge in during retirement. "We grew up loving the sea," said Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, 39, the fifth of Dr Mahathir. He said his father was so eager to take Mokhzani out to sea even though it was not the first boat his father built. He had earlier built both boats were named after his children.

Mukhriz says his father is someone who is passionate about "building, making a boat. Dr Mahathir had also designed a jetty in Sungai Kedah. The children did not think of it. Mukhriz also remembers his father's fascination with fibreglass with which he built the boat. "That was way back in the 70s. He must have been the first Malaysian to experiment with it. He can now look back in amazement at his father's hobbies which turned out not to be so practical. Marina, Mirzan, Melinda, Mokhzani and Mukhriz - the five older children of Dr Mahathir. All five older ones are married with children while Mazhar and Maizura are in their own homes. The children are close-knit despite their parents' busy schedule as doctors. D For Mukhriz and his older siblings, Alor Star was "our whole world". Kuala Lumpur Train rides with Daddy, Mummy and the whole family were always exciting and when they were in "Before boarding the train in Butterworth, I got to buy my favourite comics. I In KL, the Mahathir family would either be at their relatives' homes or at well as. Later on, it was the children's first visit abroad to London that, according to Mukhriz, "It opened up our minds. London was a totally different world. It was not Alor Star. Mukhriz, who runs his own company, is married to Datin Norzieta Zakaria. They are For the Mahathir children, it is easier to ask them what their father was not, but certainly, he was not a regular dad. Dr Mahathir, to begin with, was very busy. But it was clear that as a father, Dr Mahathir tried his best to spend as much time as possible. For Mokhzani, 42, fourth in the family, the weekends spent in the dusun (orchard) were "I really enjoyed the weekends we spent in our dusun, picking rambutans, mangosteens and durians."

Businessman Mokhzani, who was Umno Youth treasurer and Merbok Umno Youth chief. The natural assumption is, of course, that he turns to his father for advice. This, Mokhzani said, could not be further from the truth. Yes, they are close. "When I was Umno Youth treasurer and Merbok Umno Youth chief, I dealt directly with Mokhzani, who is now Kedah Umno treasurer, said Dr Mahathir was "very clear about it. "He gives us the respect of being what we are," he said.

He said he respected his father's sense of fairness in dealing with matters that affect the family. When Dr Mahathir hears something unpleasant about any of them, he will call them to him. "He is very professional. He would ask "Are you involved?" If yes, he will ask them to deal with it. Mokhzani, of course, being a businessman, had, on occasions, such conversations with his father. So, did Dr Mahathir impose his will on his children's academic, career and marriage. On education, except for Mukhriz, the rest were left pretty much on their own. As far as Mukhriz was concerned, it was a case of "daddy knows best."

By his own admission, he was not "quite focused" then and his father probably was. "It was at the time when he had just launched the Look East Policy. I had just started my business. I went to see him in his study at home. I told him of my interest in music. He said, "I have always loved music. Today, Mukhriz, the businessman, owes much to his Japanese education. "I have always loved music. On marriage, Dr Mahathir had, for a long time, left it to his children on the

But there was probably a limit to his patience. His sons decided to end their "He must have been concerned after our two sisters got married and there seeme Marisa, who was with her daddy and mummy at the interview, said she loved her If he was a strict father to his children - "no TV after 9pm" - he is now the "Tok Det always gives me a hug when I see him at his house. I like going with Marina, Dr Mahathir's eldest child, said that she is the product of her father So, if he regards her as being "very liberal", then she credits him for having Marina, a newspaper columnist and social activist, said she also learnt the be One thing she remembers well was how strict her father was about school.

"Going to school was non-negotiable. We would get a spanking if we refused to go But that was as far as her father would go in punishing his children and only Today, his children will get a telling-off if they so much as lay a finger on "He would say, `Don't touch my grandchild,' remarked Marina, who has two daugh Now, as the nation prepares itself for Dr Mahathir's retirement to civilian li As Prime Minister, he was not able to spend as much time with his children as Whenever the children wanted to see him, they had to check with his office. "We don't get VIP treatment when it comes to making an appointment with him," Marina said they hope to see more of him after he retires. A holiday abroad "w "And that will really be nice," she said.

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