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Thoughts of war, peace and political fortunes colour the days

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AGH! Back to the grind. KLites enjoyed a rare four-day break courtesy of Chinese New Year, Federal Territory Day and the first Saturday of the month. Four days of bliss, food, more food and merriment.

Then came Hari Raya Aidiladha. Even though it was not celebrated with the same fervour as Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Malaysians made their open house rounds, though in a somewhat subdued atmosphere. And with Valentine's Day and Chap Goh Mei, there was no shortage of fun and enjoyment.

But the prospect of war on Iraq loomed large over all of us. Hence, our prayers were not just repentance of sins past and present, but also that common sense would prevail, that the human race would not resort to barbaric ways to resolve conflict.

The world has seen enough of destruction, and not enough of enduring peace.

There's been no shortage of news, too. In the last fortnight, statements were made that triggered fresh speculation and rethinking of earlier conclusions.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared there would be no Cabinet reshuffle before he retired, and that his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, would pick the date for the next general election.

Wow! All the political pundits must have been bowled over. Students of politics probably went into caucus trying to figure out the impact of these statements. As for the aspirants, they probably flocked to lobby the Deputy Prime Minister.

Pak Lah, as Abdullah is fondly referred to, will now have to buy his own crystal ball and look for the inspiration for the right moment to hold the general election. This was Dr Mahathir's task for the last two decades.

Pak Lah may find this the less difficult task. The job of picking candidates for his national coalition for the polls is definitely more challenging. He will have to grapple with individuals who plead not to be dropped, individuals who will state why they should be picked, and others who will try to persuade him not to pick others but themselves.

With so many events coming up in the next few months, national politics commands the attention of many. In coffee houses and offices, questions as to when and whether Dr Mahathir will actually retire can still be heard, though this has lessened in recent months.

Many quarters are trying to figure out the plans Dr Mahathir may have for himself when he retires; or whether others have plans for him.

In fact, many senior Umno leaders have even begun to plan what to say when the party holds its annual assembly in the middle of the year.

But a little bird ventured that the assembly may even be held later so as to give everyone enough time to plan a better and more meaningful farewell.

Some may find it odd, but others are still trying to come to terms that this year's assembly will be Dr Mahathir's last, which means the gathering could end up as a massive tribute to a leader who, perhaps, has done the most for the country.

Anyway, national politics and the prospect of war are probably the hottest news now. One must congratulate the Peace campaign by young politicians and non-governmental organisations that has raised the level of awareness of the United States and Britains' push for military strikes against Iraq.

It remains to be seen whether world opinion will make a difference to the mounting talk of war. There seems to be an increasing show of unity against war, but the world's policeman and his sidekick seem bent on showing the rest of the world their latest toys of destruction.

Apart from lives, there'll be other casualties should war take place. Also killed will be sanity and common sense. Not to mention truth, of course.