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Dr. Mahathir's return to Umno seems not to have caused any great stir. Yet a year or even six months ago, this would have attracted excited comment.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since Dr. Mahathir's expulsion from Umno in 1969. A new Umno has emerged. A leadership confident and more responsive to changes in mood and temper of the people controls government and party.

Dr. Mahathir, of course, has much to thank the Pemuda (Umno Youth) for. They had never been reconciled to his expulsion. Barely two months after he was expelled, the Pemuda of Kedah Utara passed a resolution urging for his return. The Pemuda worked patiently for his reconciliation with the party. And Dr. Mahathir for his part made the task that much easier by his public postures.

He had accepted his expulsion from the party with grace.

Principles

"My struggle and my principles have not changed," he said the day following his expulsion. There was no bitterness, no rancour. He accepted the party's decision without reservation. There was no doubt in his mind, he said that the rank and file would express their "full confidence in the party's leadership by endorsing the decision" (to expel him).

Throughout his days of separation from the party, he carried himself with dignity and detachment. And he kept his peace with the rank and file. He denied rumours that he was planning to form a political party or had plans to join another political party. "There is enough disunity among Malays without me making it worse," he had said.

BY SAMAD ISMAIL

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Dr. Mahathir

Mahathir played his part with diffidence. He could be a thorn had he wanted to. If he was a source of embarrassment it was not of his own making. He was not petty; he addressed himself to a larger audience, standing by the sidelines, aloof from party squabbles. He was critical without being hostile.

As the changes in the party and the nation gained momentum, Mahathir adjusted accordingly. He paid tribute to the leadership of Tun Razak and Tun Ismail. He had noted, he said, the changes both in the party and the government. But he still had his reservations. "There are still many obstacles in the way," he said.

Meanwhile the Pemuda pressed for his return. Mahathir did not reoffend them. He was polite and manifestly embarrassed.

"For the time being, I have no plans to rejoin Umno," he said.

"The question of whether I will rejoin Umno or not," he said later, "should be left to me to decide, not the Umno divisions. I am not an Umno member any more. It is strange that Umno divisions should be adopting resolutions nominating me as a candidate," he commented.

He maintained his independence. He spoke at the PMIP rally in the

Mahathir during the Yen-Merbok bye-elections in Kedah. It was a sign that the Pemuda had not given up hope to have Mahathir back in the party.

In July, 1971, he was invited by the Pemuda to write a Working Paper for their Seminar in Morib, Selangor.

Afterwards Mahathir said: "There is a possibility that I might return. If I am wanted, I will return." He noticed that the party had become more practical, and that both party and Government were paying more attention to the views and interests of the ra'ayat.

Then for the first time, Tun Razak made a public statement on Dr. Mahathir. Tun Razak said that Dr. Mahathir had not made any official application to rejoin the party. The Head of the Publicity Department of the Party, Haji Othman Abdullah, explained that Dr. Mahathir could make his application through the normal channel — either through a party branch or direct to the Umno Executive Council.

Forthright

Mahathir's last public statement last year before re-joining the party was more forthright.

He would not rejoin the party until he was "convinced that his application would be accepted." He was quite aware, he added, that the party would not invite him to rejoin. He hoped that if he returned he would be allowed to express his views without hindrance and that acceptance of his application would be unconditional so that "I can play my part to the full in the interests of the party and the nation."

Early this month, it was announced that he had rejoined Umno.

The Pemuda seeks his election as a vice president of the party, a post which would place him alongside such party stalwarts as Tan Sri Syed Nasir, Tan Sri Syed Ja'afar Albar and Inche Ghafar Baba.

Dr. Mahathir will undoubtedly play an in-

when agitation mounted for his return to the party, he said that while he did not want to re-join Umno, "I will not betray the ideals on which the Umno was formed."

His quarrel was not with the party but with its past. But the chapter with the Tengku was closed and Mahathir never revived it.

Meanwhile he continued to be active. His was the voice of a section of the people yet to be satisfied with the changes envisaged for them by a new leadership. But

Kapar bye-election but he spoke not as a partisan but as a Malay. And as if to reassure his audience, he said that he was not thinking of joining any opposition party.

Slowly he was finding his way back to the party. The Umno special delegates conference marked the turning point. Mahathir commented: "There are encouraging signs within the party. But I will not crawl back."

Dato Harun bin Idris, fresh from his election as Ketua Pemuda met

creasingly active role in the party, partly carried by the momentum of the support from the rank and file and partly by design on the part of the leadership.

The world of active politics in which Dr. Mahathir finds himself has changed. The Rukunegara, the New Economic Policy and the Second Malaysia Plan are now in the forefront of the nation's socio-economic and political scene. It is by these fundamentals that Government and Umno intend to shape Malaysia's future.