

The quiet man who brooks no nonsense

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WHEN Dr. Mahathir Mohamed accepted his first Cabinet post as Education Minister in late 1974, he said he wanted some time to get acclimatised to his job.

He wanted time to "listen and learn", professing not to know everything there is to know about his portfolio.

He also said he will hold discussions with the staff of his Ministry and students and teachers. He will look into their difficulties and dissatisfactions and give due weight to their ideas.

Exactly 18 months later, today, the 50-year-old Umno strongman from Kedah, takes over as Datuk Hussein Onn's No. 2 man.

But his style remains the same. Quiet and unassuming, the Deputy Prime Minister was in Segamat when the Prime Minister made the announcement.

His rise to the deputy premiership in so short a time is a tribute to the man whose name once spelt controversy and one who was viewed with suspicion in some quarters.

Student unrest

Few even expected to see him survive his expulsion from Umno seven years ago, but he played his part with diffidence.

Accepting his expulsion with grace and without any bitterness or rancour, he carried himself with dignity and detachment.

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.

Slowly he found his way back to the party. In early 1972 his appli-

cation to rejoin the party was successful.

Born in Alor Star on Dec. 20, 1925, "Dr. Umno" as he is popularly known in his birthplace, studied at the Seberang Perak Malay School and later at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College.

He joined the University of Malaya, Singapore and graduated with an MBBS degree. He served as a medical officer in Kedah and Perlis before resigning in 1957 to enter private practice.

He stood for election and became Member of Parliament for Kota Star Selatan in 1964. He lost his seat in the next general election to Haji

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Yusoff Rawa of PAS and his membership in Umno soon after.

After his readmission to Umno, he was elected a member of the party's Supreme Council. In 1973, he was made a Senator and appointed chairman of Food Industries of Malaysia (Fima) Sdn. Bhd.

In the last general election, he was returned unopposed in the Kubang Pasu constituency. He became Education

Minister in the late Tun Abdul Razak's National Front Government.

Of late, Dr. Mahathir won much praise and support for the manner in which he handled student unrest in the University of Malaya and the Mara Institute of Technology.

It is in his nature to be firm when necessary. In an interview, his wife Dr. Hasnah binti Mohamed Ali whom he married in 1956, laugh-

ingly said: "Mahathir is the one who canes the children. I can't do it."

He is a stickler for good work. He once said this was perhaps due to his strict upbringing by a teacher father who was as much a teacher as at home.

Coming from a family of 10, and himself a father of five, he believes in giving his children a lot of room to grow up in and be independent, but in things like studies and good manners, he tolerates no nonsense.

Changing scene

Soon after assuming his Education portfolio, Dr. Mahathir, talking to Adibah Amin, New Straits Times writer, said: "I will try to do a good job — for all Malaysians."

In an article on him earlier, Enck Samad Ismail said of the man:

"Dr. Mahathir will undoubtedly play an increasingly 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."