

# GEARING UP FOR THE

IF THE life of the fifth Parliament was to run its normal course, the general elections would be held next year. But with the world economic situation getting from bad to worse with every passing month and with our balance of trade running deeper in the red, it would be prudent for any government to hold the general elections now rather than allow the situation to worsen.

Besides, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, like all Prime Ministers before him, would like to have the stamp of legitimacy on his administration as soon as possible.

Thus as he himself has said, the elections will most probably be held in late March or early April when the schools are closed and the classrooms can be used as polling stations.

The opening shots of the coming election battle were first fired last year when all the major parties of both the Barisan Nasional and the opposition held their general assemblies.

In all the major components of the Barisan Nasional there was some blood letting in the fight for power within the party but in the end the quarrels were patched up and ranks closed in the interest of party unity.

The first party to prepare for the coming battle was Umno. The Presidents, Tun Hussein Onn announced

his intention to resign as Prime Minister and with it the presidency of the Umno as well in order to allow his successor as Prime Minister and president of Umno to be fairly saddled before leading the barisan into battle.

For his successor, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, it was plain sailing, as he slipped into the shoes of Tun Hussein Onn without any trouble and he is firmly in the saddle now.

But for the Umno deputy presidency, the fight between Musa and Razaleigh



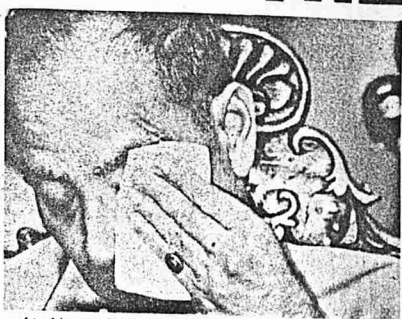
was a titanic one. Although the cracks of that battle have been papered over, the scars have not healed as yet. Now is the turn of the lower echelon of leaders to flex their muscles in the fight for the divisional leadership. Umno is now providing the way for the edification of the people of this country.

There have been charges and counter-charges of cheating, chicanery, vote buying and influence peddling. Opponents even de-

scended to fist fights and throwing of chairs at meetings.

This divisive force has formed the top leadership and Umno president Datuk Seri Mahathir warned against a house divided. But since the spoils of the coming battle are great for the successful ones it will be very difficult to contain such internecine warfare.

There is the added problem of the change of old guard, especially for the post of Menteri Besar, and



A tearful moment for Hussein as he announces his decision to step down as PM.

the infusion of "young" blood to take the place of the ageing veterans.

If Umno is to survive there must be a continuous infusion of new blood, particularly of the technocraticity of the technocrats introduced by Tun Razak and Tun Hussein. And there is a need to bring some of the MBs to the centre to strengthen the Cabinet.

Right now the divisional elections are being held and the fracas at Rantau Panjang Division meeting has caused deep concern to the cabinet leadership.

The party faithful and hopefuls are all queuing up for selection either as state or federal candidates. Hence the lively interest taken by these prospective candidates in the various elections that are taking place all over the country.

Over the years, since the national elections were first introduced in 1955, the quality of our candidates and hence of our elected representatives has steadily improved. It was the late Tuan Hj Abdul Razak who first introduced the opponents of Umno to stand for elections.

The outstanding example was Tun Hussein Onn who later succeeded his predecessor, Under Tun Razak too, top civil servants, Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyuan and Datuk K. Patmanaban, entered the political arena and stood for elections. They have now become minister and deputy minister respectively.

In the coming elections, I am confident that both Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Datuk Musa will take the opportunity to ease out veterans and introduce technocrats and other new blood as candidates.

While I agree that a university education is an advantage in an elected representative of the people, it is not a sine qua non. A candidate with no tertiary education but with a proven ability will make an excellent State Assemblyman or Member of Parliament. He may even end up as Prime Minister.

A glance at the list of Prime Ministers of Britain will bear me out. In Malaysia many of our ministers have served our country with distinction although they have not had the benefit of a tertiary education.

The MCA was the second component of the Barisan to hold it's general

assembly. Months before it was held, there was a running fight between the faction supporting the President, Datuk Lee San Choon and those supporting Datuk Michael Chen. It only ended when the latter left the MCA to join the Gerakan.

When I interviewed Datuk Lee San Choon on Aug 1, I pointed out to him how the MCA was making a laughing stock of itself with its internecine warfare.

However, the bickering have stopped and the MCA held the opening of the new headquarters and its general assembly in peace. The MCA now has a war of words with the Gerakan which threatens to break out into open warfare. This is despite the mediation efforts by Datuk Musa, Tengku Razaleigh and Encheh Ghaffar Baki.

In the last general elections in 1978, especially in Penang, the only independent candidates against the Gerakan and Vice versa. The only beneficiary was the DAP.

Now the MCA has come out with the suggestion that the component parties be allowed to contest under their own banner — a la Sabah.

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There is no doubt that Datuk Michael Chen is fairly popular with the Chinese community in Ulu Selangor and he has kept his links with Umno there as well. On the other hand it is no secret that the support for Dr Tan Tiong Hong is slowly slipping away in Kepong and he is reported to be seeking to stand in another constituency in the Federal Territory — or will he jump to Ulu Selangor?

Elsewhere in the country the Gerakan has built up

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# BIG BATTLE



A gallant Tengku Razaleigh congratulating Datuk Musa after the results for the Umno deputy presidency were announced. Both had contested for the post but Datuk Musa emerged the victor.

some strength particularly in Perak, Malacca and Johore. They can expand their representation only at the expense of the MCA.

The MCA has always made it clear that they are determined at all cost to maintain the status quo where seats are concerned. If they will not budge a centimeter, where will the Gerakan have the chance to enter the political fray?

Datuk Musa and his colleagues will need the wisdom of Solomon to resolve the conflict between the MCA and the Gerakan. Penang is another problem state at dispute between these two components of the Barisan. The defeat of the MCA under Tan Sri Wong Pow Nee by the Gerakan in 1969 has rankled in the hearts of the MCA since that fateful year and this year it is no secret that the MCA has sought to displace the Gerakan in Penang.

They reckon this is the most propitious time with the DAP in disarray and the ageing Dr Lim Chong Eu quite likely to retire from the political arena.

But the MCA must not count their chickens before they are hatched for Dr Lim Chong Eu may decide not to retire and the DAP has recovered much of their lost ground. Though they have abandoned their plans to capture Penang by 1982, that has been postponed to a later date.

Apart from the MCA-Gerakan mix-up, the MCA has difficulties with the choice of candidates throughout the country. The Member for Raub, Tan Koon Swan, is the chairman of the MCA Federal Territory.

His business interests are in Kuala Lumpur and it is inconvenient for him to be the MP of a constituency that is more than 160 kilometres away from Kuala Lumpur.

Will he take on Lee Lam Thee, in Bandar Kuala Lumpur and risk defeat that may well spell political oblivion for him? Or will he try to arrange an exchange with the MIC in Damansara and take on V. David? Of the two challenges there is no doubt that the latter is the less formidable fighter. He is well advised to take on V. David where he need not face a goliath and where his prospects may well be good.

Yeoh Poh San, the budding youth leader may well want to stand in Sungai Besi against Chan Kok Kit or in Petaling against Lim Kit Siang. Either way the prospect is very daunting for while in prison in 1978 Chan Kok Kit got 40,307 votes with a majority of 33,687, the highest in the 1978 elections, while Lim Kit Siang, standing in a constituency of 90,611 votes got 41,405 votes and a majority of 16,754. But Yeoh Poh San has youth on his side and the MCA is much better organised now and there is less internal bickering.

In other parts of the country, the MCA has to face the DAP and perhaps PAS. But the PSRM may well put up the odd non-Malay candidate and being the only long-standing left-wing party may well snatch a seat or two from the MCA.

The new threat that the MCA faces will be the Gerakan which has organised itself on a Pan-Malaysia basis and it certainly is not prepared to twiddle its thumbs and sit out the coming elections in areas where it had not fought before.

If the DAP cannot get the MCA to concede a few seats in mixed areas now held by the MCA or which the MCA contested in 1978 and lost to the DAP, it will put up independent candidates and after the elections, if the DAP wins, the elected ones can then declare their allegiance for the Gerakan.

This was done fairly extensively in Penang in 1978, but I am sure it will be widespread in 1982, given the structure of the Barisan which prohibits expansion of component parties in constituencies that were allocated to them before. As Nomination Day draws nearer, the struggle between the MCA and the Gerakan will grow in intensity if not overtly then covertly.

The MCA will go into the coming general elections in a better shape than as compared with other election battles. It is reasonably united behind Datuk Lee San Choon. It has topped up a fair record of achievement for the community and the only fly in the ointment is its relations with the Gerakan.

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## Sabah and Sarawak