

**Resignation: Dr M goes for broke**  
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As a political tactician Dr Mahathir Mohamad never fails to surprise or disappoint. We had MCPX speculated yesterday that he would use an array of weapons in his arsenal to unseat Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, including playing the Malay race card. But we never expected him to use resignation as a weapon!

His strategy for undermining Abdullah has been at two levels. He has attacked Abdullah at the national-leadership level by asking Umno leaders to pressure him to step down or to contest against him in the Umno general assembly, scheduled for December. He has also attacked Abdullah at the grassroots level by trying to instigate disenchanted Umno members to rebel against Abdullah.

Mahathir's resignation is consistent with this strategy. He is asking top Umno leaders to follow his lead and to resign from Umno. At the same time, he is prompting the rank-and-file to do so as well.

However, we do not expect to see mass resignations either amongst either the current Umno leadership or the grassroots. There is just too much to lose for the cabinet members. As for the grassroots, unless the leaders start leaving, there is no catalyst for them to do the same.

Significantly, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah has emphasised that he will not be resigning from Umno. Unlike Mahathir, his aim is to become Umno president and by convention, prime minister. Mahathir, in contrast, just wants to get rid of Abdullah.

Although a masterful politician, Mahathir seems to be somewhat blinded by his single-mindedness in wanting to get rid of Abdullah. The proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back was the Royal Commission of Inquiry report on the VK Lingam case, which names Mahathir as one of the people who should be investigated.

After that report came out, he obviously decided it was time to go for broke. This is not the first in his career he's done this. He risked it all in his battles against the royalty, against the judiciary and against Anwar Ibrahim. But this time, the stakes are higher than ever before. If he succeeds, it could spell not only the end of Abdullah, but also Umno Baru – the party he founded – as well as Barisan Nasional, which is facing its biggest challenge in its history.

The person who would gain most from Mahathir's moves is none other than his nemesis, Anwar. It would be ironic indeed if Mahathir's actions ends up being instrumental in causing Umno's implosion and thereby giving momentum for Pakatan Rakyat to form the next government.

What Anwar might not have been able to achieve by himself, which is to entice enough Sabah and Sarawak MPs to cross over, might soon be realised thanks to Mahathir. As the prospects of an Umno implosion increases, the East Malaysian MPs would have more reason (and perhaps also a convenient excuse) to cross over to Pakatan. So would other Barisan MPs from Peninsular Malaysia.

## **Mukhriz put in a hard spot**

Mahathir's move also puts his son, Mukhriz (Jerlun MP) in a very difficult position. On the one hand, he will probably support his father's move. On the other hand, he himself probably will not resign from Umno for the same reasons Razaleigh won't. He wants to contest in December for a party leadership position. In his case, it's for Umno Youth chief. He will likely be goaded by opposition MPs, especially DAP's Lim Kit Siang, during parliamentary sessions. They will continuously ask him why he has not followed his father's footsteps and resign from Umno?

So, where does Mahathir go from here?

One strategy which he might employ is to team up with right-wing Malay NGOs to pressure Abdullah from outside Umno on the grounds that he is not defending Malay rights vigorously enough. This would put Abdullah in a quandary. If he gives into the demands on these NGOs, he would be pushing MCA, Gerakan and MIC away from BN. If he ignores these calls, there would naturally be some discontent within Umno.

If Mahathir were to take such a course, there would be danger not just to BN but to the country as such right-wing groups would no doubt be emboldened by Mahathir's support of them. Things could easily get out of hand. Mahathir, blinded by his hatred of Abdullah, could be treading on dangerous ground here.

The irony is that many of these pro-Ketuanan Melayu groups are banding together to support the royalty, a Malay institution whose power was severely circumscribed during Mahathir's tenure as PM. But like we said before, this is totally consistent with Mahathir's philosophy of political expediency. Anything and everything is possible if it can help him topple Abdullah.

Whatever thoughts or misgivings we have about Mahathir, we cannot deny that he is a masterful politician who, since the general election, has skillfully undermined Abdullah in ways that Anwar himself could not do. You can be sure that this is not the last we will hear from him.

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