

**Umno's end is nigh**  
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Abdullah Ahmad was acutely aware of his shaky position when he took over in Nov 2003. On one hand, his formidable predecessor Mahathir Mohammad was watching him from behind, while the powerful Najib Razak remained an immediate threat to his Umno presidency.

He never favoured Najib from day one. His ideal successor - pundits believed - was Muhyiddin Yassin. True to his pendulous character, Abdullah kept Najib waiting for two months before making him deputy. With Mahathir and much of the Umno membership behind Najib - Abdullah chickened out.

He then made his most loyal cabinet friend - Muhyiddin - agriculture minister. It was not seen as a blow to Muhyiddin given that Abdullah had been signaling his intention to revitalise Malaysia's agricultural industry. After five years of a hollow agricultural renaissance - Muhyiddin tenure ended with negligible achievements.

Ironically, the latest that the public heard of the industry was a hasty team of Barisan Nasional MPs to study agriculture in Taiwan.

muhyiddin yassin malaysian service development council pc 090908 02Muhyiddin's dream of succeeding Abdullah were dashed two months ago by the announcement of a two-year succession plan. Out of the picture and feeling betrayed, the former Johor menteri besar is now perhaps the most bitter man in cabinet.

Worse, Muhyiddin openly lobbied for Mahathir's return to Umno, but the issue was not even discussed at the Supreme Council meeting yesterday. It was yet another 'courtesy' of Abdullah to show he wants the thorn to remain out from the flesh while he is president - a humiliating snub of Muhyiddin, that will return to haunt.

musa hitamAbdullah clearly does not know how to reward loyalty. Knowing his lack of experience, Umno veterans such as Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam were eager to offer him advice and guidance in his early days as prime minister, but they all ended up marginalised, just as they were under Mahathir. Meantime the 'Fourth Floor Kids' were given a free hand to run the country on Abdullah's behalf.

Lackadaisical Abdullah habitually alienates allies and friends - Zaid Ibrahim being point in case.

### **Najib question-marks**

While Abdullah hints of retirement before the 2010 deadline - it is premature to see Najib as the ultimate winner. Their portfolio swap strengthens public perception that not all is well within Umno - more so with Anwar Ibrahim upping the ante day by day.

Najib's position may not be as solid as the mainstream media portray - otherwise he would not have to relinquish defence to get the finance portfolio. The fact that he did is indicative of his limited bargaining power vis-à-vis Abdullah.

Are Altantuya and the submarine scandal lurking in the background?

Abdullah's lacklustre economic management over the last few years contributed to Barisan Nasional's loss of two-thirds majority in Parliament. In his first budget in 2004, Abdullah pledged to eliminate the official fiscal deficit in six years' time. Today, it stands at 4.8%, a rise of 1.6% from last year. Meanwhile, our national debt has gone up to RM285 billion, up from RM192 billion when Mahathir stepped down.

Post-election, some MCA and Gerakan leaders have intimated worry for the economy's direction, erroneously deluding themselves that it is the single most important factor in winning back Chinese support.

They remain mired in false belief that Chinese Malaysians cannot afford to have zero Chinese representation in government. But a government that only promises to safeguard the Chinese if and when there are cabinet ministers of Chinese origin does not, in my view, deserve support in the first place.

Confronted with pressure from Umno as well as from other BN component parties, Abdullah had no choice but to give up the finance portfolio.

fnbkl dsa protest 210408 submarine posterBut would Najib make a difference? This is a man who has proved himself to be a fence-sitter at best, and survives largely on the legacy of his father Abdul Razak Hussein. Najib is so used to having things handed to him on a silver platter, but not challenging the status quo and turning things around.

The fact that he had wavered between supporting Abdullah and teaming up with Mahathir before settling down on – for now – the succession plan is instructive of his dearth of proven and dependable leadership.

Najib seems to believe that a stint in the finance ministry will lead to the highest political office in the country. Many like to differ.

### **Wrong horse again?**

Not true. Looking back Malaysia's chequered political history, none of those who had helmed the ministry of finance eventually made it to prime minister, Razaleigh and Anwar being the two most prominent losers. Despite being named by Euromoney as among the top finance ministers and by Asiamoney as Finance Minister of the Year in 1996, Anwar lost his bid to succeed Mahathir nonetheless.

mahathir dinar conference 240707 staresAre all the BN parties backing the wrong horse again? Or will the deeply disgruntled Muhyiddin fling down the gauntlet and seek to undermine the Abdullah-Najib pact by joining an unholy alliance of Mahathir, Razaleigh and Mukhriz?

In any case, Umno's implosion is already in the making, and all the desperate attempts by the protagonists to jostle for power can only hasten its demise. It will invariably be followed by unending debate on whether Abdullah is to blame or to thank.

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