

Getting to the heart of Dr M's unhappiness

What's the endgame for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his strident criticism of the Government? ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD weighs the views of observers and Umno officials.

IN the row between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his successor's administration, the big question has got to be how far he is willing to go.

Will he continue to question, after the last answer is given by the relevant ministers on the issues he raised, ranging from Proton to the bridge replacing the Causeway?

If he does, will he be expelled from Umno and repeal the chapter in 1969, when he was booted out of the party for his criticisms of Tunku Abdul Rahman?

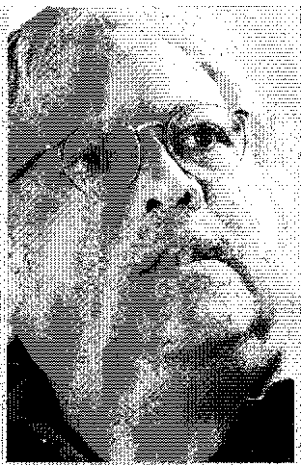
For Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Professor Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, getting to the answers means understanding what the spat is about at its core.

"In essence, this is about Dr Mahathir being unhappy with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's performance, and about Abdullah wanting to do his own thing, and what that means."

Shamsul, who heads UKM's Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation, says "doing his own thing" means Abdullah has to bear two major elements in mind.

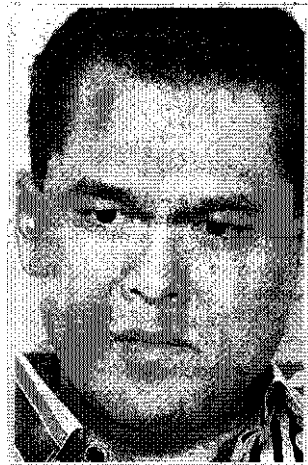
First, his management style, which differs from Dr Mahathir's. The Prime Minister is "informed by the need for transparency, ethics, and responsibility".

"It's tough to pull off The style



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• Shamsul



'Different leaders will have different styles of leadership. The way one leader prioritises his duties will of course be different from his predecessor.'

Azimi



'No Government in the world can explain everything in detail. When the answers don't satisfy and the questions cause confusion, it will lead to no good.'

Muhammad

in the judiciary and in measures like the National Integrity Plan and a National Integrity

of Abdullah's new style is yet to be seen." Shamsul believes no amount

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...the ministry also hopes to achieve the target of having 80 per cent of Malaysians leading healthy lifestyles within the next five years." He said the thalassemia awareness campaign was a new initiative to educate the public on the disease. "Awareness of the disease is still low in Malaysia. We will encourage parents to screen their children for the disease as it is preventable if detected early."

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia headquarters-level family day at the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia yesterday.

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Grassroots seek Dr M-Pak Lah reconciliation

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His speech last Saturday at a function in Kuala Lumpur with Pas leaders in the audience led to this impression.

"It's causing confusion among the public and party members, because Dr Mahathir is not just anybody," says Muhammad.

He says that some in the party believe that because Dr Mahathir has done so much for the country he should not be censured. "But if we're no longer aligned to party interests and associate with the Opposition, some say that's a clear ethical breach, and there is a mechanism to deal with such offences."

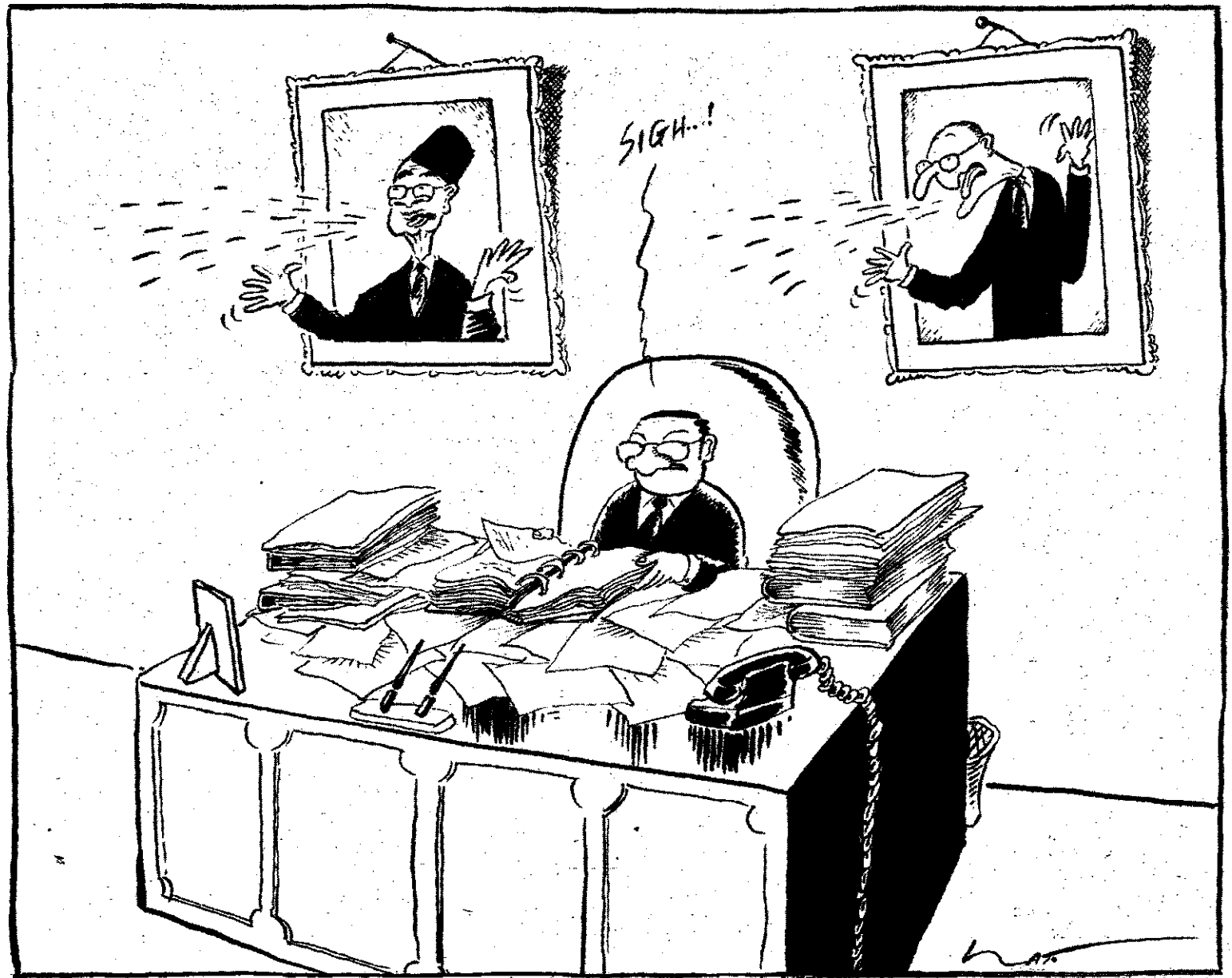
Therein lies the dilemma for some in the party.

"Should we take disciplinary action? If we do, then some will object because Dr Mahathir did so much for us. But does that then mean that someone who has contributed much is free to go against party discipline and can do as he pleases, like having a *ceramah* with Pas?"

"Does toleration and transparency reach that level? This is what some are confused about. It's an interesting development," he says.

Muhammad says he's not suggesting that action should be taken against Dr Mahathir. "But when he was prime minister and party president, all of us were *diasuh* (trained) to be loyal to the party first. I was Menteri Besar for 11 years, and Dr Mahathir taught me that when we're loyal to the party, no action by any individual can affect Umno," he says.

At one point, rumours, fuelled by the Opposition, surfaced that the party was mulling Dr Mahathir's expulsion. The Umno leadership denied it, but there is a precedent.



This Lat cartoon first appeared in the NST on Dec 14, 1985.

Tunku Abdul Rahman following the race riots in May. He was then a supreme council member who had lost narrowly in the general election to Pas' Datuk Yusuf Rawa.

He continued to express his strident views. But some, notably Tunku's successor, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, saw a larger potential in Dr Mahathir, and on March 7, 1972, he was re-admitted into the party, and began a meteoric rise to the top.

Is history about to repeat itself?

UKM political science lecturer Muhammad Agus Yusoff thinks not.

"The scenario is different. Back then, Dr Mahathir was mainly seen as an Umno activist and ultra-Malay. He held strong views on race matters, which were seen by the establishment as threatening to the country's stability.

"But who is Dr Mahathir now? A former national leader at the helm of the country and party for over two decades. Many in the current Cabinet were under his tutelage (*anak didik*).

"It's illogical for Umno to simply sack and cast him aside. The differences then and now are like sky and earth," says Agus, who attended Dr Mahathir's talk last Saturday.

For Shamsul, the expulsion of Dr Mahathir from Umno isn't the issue.

"Dr Mahathir is going through

something similar to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when he got together with non-governmental organisations and Pas leaders. By doing this, he seems to be pandering to the more informed segment of his supporters. But expelling Dr Mahathir will not change anything. He will continue talking anyway. It will be too narrow a response.

"What needs to be done now is for the issues to be seen in their proper context. Anything beyond that is purely emotional."

Umno's supreme council has expressed full support for the leadership of Abdullah, but on the ground, views are mixed.

A divisional committee member in Dr Mahathir's home State of Kedah, contacted during a break in his branch meeting which went on well into the evening on Friday, explains.

"Dr Mahathir is our *tok* (elder). We feel that the way we respond to him must not be too excessive. There is sadness at the grassroots over the current state of affairs. We're appealing to Pak Lah and Dr Mahathir to find a resolution."

Terengganu Umno information chief Ahmad Shabery Cheek says he's been meeting and listening to

many lower-line party and community leaders in the past three weeks, since Dr Mahathir made an earlier round of criticism.

"Initially, there were mixed feelings. Some felt we should not react to Dr Mahathir's criticism, because if we did, the issue could escalate into an open conflict between him and the top party leaders.

"My impression was that the grassroots wanted things to remain sober. They wanted Umno and the Government to look more closely at possibilities for reconciliation."

But things started changing after Dr Mahathir's talk last Saturday.

"In my division now (he is Kemaman Umno deputy chief), I notice that sentiments are shifting. People are getting confused when they see and hear Dr Mahathir appearing at the same event as Pas leaders and Datuk Ibrahim Ali, someone about whom they have strong reservations. They are asking why Dr Mahathir is doing this."

Ahmad Shabery says that the grassroots' primary concerns are not the minutiae of the bridge issue or Proton, which many are not familiar with in the first place.

"They're not happy when Dr M ap-

pears with the Opposition. They say Dr Mahathir seems to be slowly moving away from his core followers, not the Malay mass outside the party, but the people at ground level in Umno who've endeared themselves to him."

Ahmad Shabery, who as Foreign Ministry parliamentary secretary has been helping to prepare answers on the bridge issue, says providing the explanations on the questions Dr Mahathir raised is not a problem.

"In fact, if Dr Mahathir has created the impression that he's criticising Abdullah's performance in managing the economy, then we can also explain how Dr Mahathir, in the early part of his administration, faced similar challenges.

The problem, says Ahmad Shabery, is in trying to describe why Dr Mahathir has gone on the warpath.

"It's harder to explain why he is coming out like this, why he didn't raise this behind closed doors, why he's associating with people like Ibrahim Ali and Pas, and whether Dr Mahathir is going to end up like Datuk Onn Jaafar, who founded Umno but did not die an Umno member. All that we also have to explain," he says.

Dr Mahathir's recent criticisms

have caught many by surprise. But some who know him well, like former party secretary-general Tan Sri Sabbaruddin Chik, could sense something amiss early on.

"I've seen him since he retired ... and although he never said it out loud, I could sense he believed that something was not right."

Sabbaruddin, now a member of Umno's appeals panel, was among the many civil servants Dr Mahathir picked out and groomed.

The former Cabinet minister says opinions about Dr Mahathir's criticisms are mixed among party veterans and members. But he believes there's still "room" for a resolution.

"Let's try to give answers to all that he's asking. No need to 'whack' him. Once we answer him properly, then he won't be able to do anything."

But what if Dr Mahathir is still dissatisfied with answers?

"Then I think many people will, well, people like me, will definitely think again.

"But that's something we shouldn't think about now. Let's cross that bridge when we get to it," says Sabbaruddin.

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