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One man, one rule

ERA'S END: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad led the country for 22 years as prime minister and the fourth Umno president. Later, he appeared to have an axe to grind with his successors, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Despite recent adversities, Umno remains strong and continues to thrive, write Hana Naz Harun and Laili Ismail

TUN Dr Mahathir was a maverick politician and his talent for poetics was evident from a young age.

He was seen as the man who put Malaysia on the world map.

Dr Mahathir's persistence helped propel the country to become amongst the fastest developing nations in the world, including the introduction of his handiwork, Vision 2020, which calls for Malaysia to be a self-sufficient industrialised nation by 2020.

He was a leader who dreamt big. His legacies — the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, national car brand Proton, the Penang bridge and the administrative centre of Putrajaya, among others — are testaments to his achievements as the country's longest-serving prime minister.

It was also under his administration that the implementation of the Printing Presses and Publications Act, Official Secrets Act and Internal Security Act (ISA) were tightened. In Op Lalang in 1987, more than 100 people were detained under the ISA.

During Umno's Team A-Team B rivalry, Dr Mahathir ousted the entire Team B faction, both in Umno and in the cabinet.

Team B leader Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah then formed Semangat 46 in 1988 to challenge Dr Mahathir and the new Umno Baru leadership. Semangat 46 even had the personal support of former Umno leaders Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Hussein Onn.

The 1990 election saw Semangat 46, under the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU) ticket going up against Umno. Semangat 46 did poorly in the elections, winning only 8 seats. Umno, on the other hand, won 71 out of the 86 it contested.

Although Barisan Nasional did not fare as well as in previous years, it remained in power and Dr Mahathir continued to lead Umno and the government.

In the early 1990s, the country's economic performance under Dr Mahathir's leadership soared. He outlined his economic vision for the country and introduced the National Development Policy, which replaced the New Economic Policy.

Meanwhile, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, former founding leader of Angkatan Beiba Islam Malaysia, had moved up the political ranks quickly after joining Umno in 1982.

At the November 1993 Umno

General Assembly, Anwar won the deputy president's post, defeating Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba, after an aggressive campaign. He was subsequently appointed as deputy prime minister and finance minister in December 1993.

In the 1995 elections, Semangat 46 again suffered a crushing defeat. Umno won 89 Parliamentary seats from the 102 that it contested.

Dr Mahathir went on two-month leave in May 1997, leaving Anwar as acting prime minister during his absence. At the time, Dr Mahathir had said that both Umno and the country's conditions were stable and said it was the "right time" for him to go on holiday.

Just a year later, Anwar was sacked from all government posts and from Umno for alleged moral misconduct. He was arrested on Sept 20, 1998, charged with corruption and allegations of sexual misconduct, and sentenced to jail in April 1999.

This was a speed bump for Umno, as it braced for the 10th General Election in November 1999. Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, formed Parti Keadilan Nasional (now PKR) on April 4, 1999, just in time to contest in the general election.

Umno won 72 seats out of the 104 it contested, losing two states, Kelantan and Terengganu, to Pas. The bulk of Malay voters flocked to the Islamic party and PKR, in protest against Anwar's sacking.

At the Umno general assembly in 2000, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (now Tun) took the post as party deputy president, succeeding Anwar. Just two years later, Dr Mahathir shocked delegates at the 56th Umno General Assembly by announcing his resignation from the party presidency and chairmanship of BN.

Dr Mahathir then resigned as the country's prime minister in October 2003, handing over his responsibilities to Abdullah.

Abdullah, upon coming into power, had promised to clamp down on corruption and advocated Islam Hadhari, or values of progressive Muslims.

In the 2004 General Election, Abdullah showed stunning performance during his first term as Prime Minister, with a landslide victory for BN. The party won 198 out of 220 Parliamentary seats and wrested control of Terengganu from Pas.

As prime minister, Abdullah focused on agriculture and biotechnology, believing that the sectors would be able to generate wealth for Malaysians, especially those in rural areas.

BN won the 2008 elections but with a reduced majority and lost four additional states to the opposition — Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor. This prompted campaigns asking for Abdullah's resignation.

Dr Mahathir had openly asked Abdullah to take full responsibility for BN's declining performance in the election. Mounting pressure on Abdullah, Dr Mahathir resigned from Umno in May 2008, saying that he had lost confidence in the party he led for 22 years.

Under tremendous pressure, Abdullah announced on July 2008 that he would step down as Umno president and prime minister in June 2009.

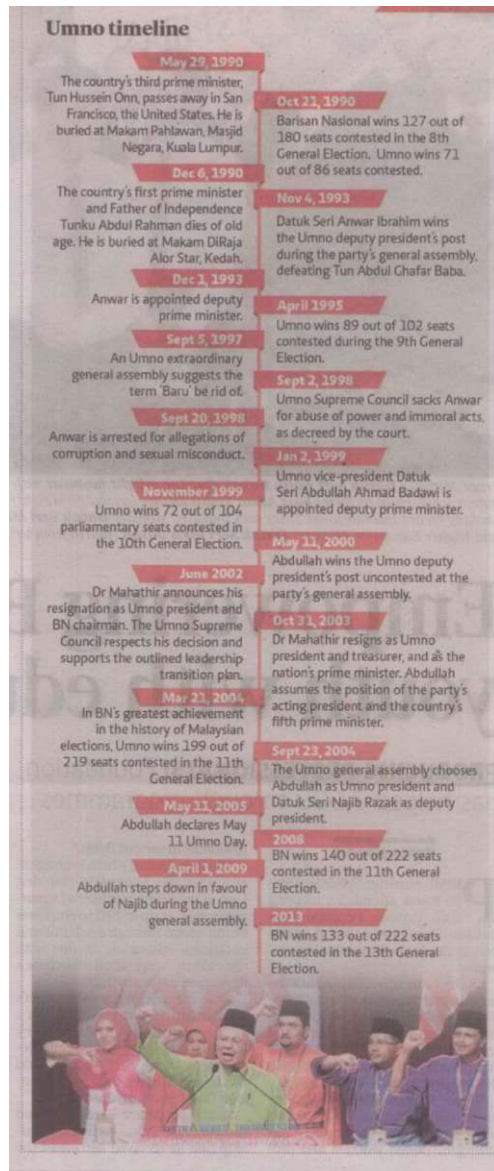
The then deputy prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, was sworn in as prime minister on April 3, after Abdullah handed his resignation to the then Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin the day before. Dr Mahathir rejoined Umno on April 4, handing over his application form and RM2 fee to Najib in Putrajaya.

Najib ran for the Umno presidency and won uncontested. He entered office with a focus on domestic economic issues and political reform. One of his earliest moves was the removal of printing bans on two opposition party organs, *Suara Keadilan* and *Harakahdaily*, and the release of 13 people held under the ISA.

Najib pledged to conduct a comprehensive review of the law, and subsequently repealed the act.

Under his stewardship, Umno gained nine seats in the 13th General Election, regaining control of Kedah and solidifying its footing in Perak.

He also transformed the party's polling system, which opened the door for anyone registered as a party member for at least one term (three years) to contest at the divisional level. The contest for the Supreme Council — members, vice presidents, deputy president and even president — was also open to be contested. This new "electoral college" system, which merges the election systems from the United States and the United Kingdom, expanded the voting base and gave 150,000 members the power to vote.



He also introduced a slew of transformation plans, including the New Economic Model, to speed Malaysia's transition to a high-income country, and the Malaysia People's Housing Programme affordable homes scheme, or PRIMA.

While Umno still has its fair share of challenges, the party remains strong in the face of adversities. It still remains relevant to society and the nation at large.

The fact that Umno continues to enjoy the mandate of the people demonstrates that it is accepted by the people, in particularly the Malays.

"Umno is now faced with an un-

precedented challenge that was not faced by previous leaders: a war of perception, because of the change of technology.

"The party needs to manage how people perceive it, which is becoming more and more important in politics," said National Professors' Council political cluster head and analyst Professor Datuk Dr Mustafa Ishak.

He said Umno could not take things for granted and must address the critical issues that they were currently facing.

"If they can do that, given their strong track record, it will be able to consolidate its position."