

The alternative view  
**M. SHANMUGAM**

starbiz@thestar.com.my



EVEN at 88 years old, the world's most successful value investor, Warren Buffett is unperturbed by who will succeed him as head of his company, Berkshire Hathaway.

Two candidates are lined up as his possible successor but none have so far taken centre stage with Buffett.

How long Buffett will go on managing Berkshire is anybody's guess. He describes his office as his paradise. He unabashedly declares his love for managing money as the main driver for him going into his office every day and working with his staff of 25 people.

The world's third richest man heads an insurance company that draws in US\$100mil cash every working day. It has assets of US\$700bil out of which US\$112bil is in cash.

His investments over the past 10 years have under-performed S&P Index. This means those who put money in the S&P Index fund would have got better returns over that period compared with what Berkshire Hathaway gave its shareholders.

Nevertheless, thousands wait for Buffett's annual speech in Omaha, Nebraska, that is due next week. They come to get directions for their investment decisions because Buffett is a brand name for value investing.

Doesn't the Buffett story ring a bell close to home?

Yes, we are talking about Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The 93-year old continues to astound his critics and draws support as he takes on frontiers that no other leader dares to venture.

The ongoing war of words between Dr Mahathir and the crown prince of Johor on whether the state has any influence over who heads the administration of the southern state has earned the Prime Minister brownie points.

Dr Mahathir's stance is that the government decides on the choice of *mentri besar* and not the palace. The crown prince feels otherwise.

Not happy with the way his Bersatu party handled matters in Johor, Dr Mahathir supposedly suggested he should quit, only to be persuaded by party leaders against making such a decision.

The clear signal that comes out from the episode is that Dr Mahathir has the political backing. Bersatu president and Johor political kingpin, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, threw

# Like it or not, Dr Mahathir sets his own exit timetable

## Like Warren Buffett, the PM seems to relish his job



**Love for managing money:** Buffett describes his office as his paradise. He unabashedly declares his love for managing money as the main driver for him going into his office every day and working with his staff of 25 people. — AFP

his support for the 93-year old Prime Minister. Without mincing his words, Muhyiddin said that the palace should stop interfering with the affairs of the state government.

No matter what some may feel, it's clear that Dr Mahathir still commands much respect and wields tremendous influence over not only his party, but the other parties within Pakatan Harapan.

A year after Pakatan Harapan took over the government, the question of who succeeds Dr Mahathir increasingly becomes a subject of discussion. So far, the only person named is Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Like Buffett, Dr Mahathir thrives on his work. He goes to work every day despite getting four hours of sleep sometimes. He sits in at meetings and rarely takes a toilet break.

He is sharp and witty in answering questions and hogs the limelight in any stage he shares. He comes from a family whose members live well into their late 90s.

Dr Mahathir has said that he will only hold the post of Prime Minister for two years. Looking at the pace Dr Mahathir is keeping, many have doubts he will step down in two years.

In the corporate world, it's a busy world in Menara Ilham where another old guard continues to find fame. It is the office of former finance minister and Council of Elders chairman, Tun Daim Zainuddin, who is 80 years old.

Daim worked out the revival of the East Coast Rail Link project with the Chinese government. It has earned him recognition from scores of corporate personalities looking for

an opportunity in what is the biggest infrastructure project for the country.

True to form, Daim stays away from the politics.

The settlement between Malaysia and China on the ECRL project came about after his visit in the first week of April. Coincidentally, last week, the Bandar Malaysia project was also announced. The project went to Iskandar Waterfront Holdings and China Railway Engineering Corporation.

News of ECRL and revival of Bandar Malaysia project got the stock market excited.

When Pakatan Harapan won the election last year, Daim told investors to keep faith with the new administration for three years and they would see results. Now year one is coming to an end and we are seeing where the activity is going to be.

At the moment, the outlook is still cautious due to domestic and external factors. We are now in the 11th year of a bull run cycle, which normally sees a correction after 10 years. The fear of a global crash and Malaysia being affected is holding back investors.

After the ECRL and other infrastructure projects such as the LRT3 get rolling, the economy should feel some vibrancy. The stock market should be abuzz with news.

Would we see a transition in the leadership of Malaysia then?

It's hard to say. But the geriatric set of leaders cannot be underestimated. They would not wait until being booted out. They know when to press the exit button.

Buffett will leave when he no longer enjoys his job. He probably is still looking to steer Berkshire Hathaway to giving better returns to its shareholders compared to the S&P Index.

Likewise Dr Mahathir will leave when the time is right. He knows there is still a lot of work to be done; In the meantime, there is no point second-guessing his exit timetable. It is something he only decides.