

WHEN it comes to being the butt of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's jokes, his son, Datuk Mokhzani, knows well the feeling. "Some times he makes remarks or jokes in public which can really stun people. I'll give you a good example:

"I joined Umno in Merbok in 1989. At his request, I would accompany him to the president's dinner which is always on the first night of the party's AGM. There was one year when my *ketua bahagian* (divisional head) was present and he made sure he sat with us at the dinner. He told my father that he and the others would bring me up nicely. He probably had good intentions and wanted to show my father that he was helping me in my political career.

"My father just turned around, looked at him and said, 'Why do you bother? In my family, I'm the

Daddy ha ha

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EVEN within his own family, the Prime Minister's sardonic wit has often left them nonplussed and occasionally disconcerted or even embarrassed, as JUNE H.L. WONG discovers.

only one with brains.'

"The guy was stunned and didn't know what to say. Now I know my father is being typically sarcastic but even I wasn't sure how to react. I was actually wondering whether my *ketua* would go back and tell everyone, '*PM kata anaknya tak ada otak*. (PM said his son has no brains)'

"He will say things like that and in such a deadpan way that people have no idea whether he is serious or not."

Datuk Mukhriz agrees when

asked about his relationship with his dad, and elaborates:

"Sometimes he is not as serious as we want him to be; he makes a joke out of everything. He's really heavy into sarcasm – you can tell that from his speeches – but he's also like that with us.

"So when we feel the need to talk to him about something important, he sometimes jokes about it or talks about it in a sarcastic way and we are like 'Are you taking me seriously or not?'

"Of course he is listening.

Sometimes he won't say anything but we know he's taken it in and he's mulling over it."

Dr Mahathir's humour, however, is more benign and indulgent when it comes to his youngest children.

"We are always joking," says Maizura, 19. "You want to hear the latest joke from Daddy? The other day he asked me: 'Where does the word *meja* (table) come from?'

"I said, 'Portuguese *lah*.'

"He replied, 'Yes from the word 'mesa'. Then he asked, 'What about *keju* (cheese)?'

"I said 'Portuguese'.

" 'Yes, it's from *kesu*. How about *mentega terbang*? I know *mentega* is also from the Portuguese but *terbang*? So I kept silent.

" 'So he said, 'You don't know? *Butterfly lah!*'

"He is full of such jokes. He is young at heart. That's his biggest

secret."

Perhaps the last word on Dr M's humour comes most appropriately from his wife.

Says Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali: "I always warn him that some people can't take jokes and take him seriously. Then they get hurt. But he still thinks that they know that he is joking.

"The thing about him is that he can be very stern, especially in the office. For example he told me of one person who came to see him. After waiting for a long time for an appointment, was shaking with fear. He pretended not to notice and put him at ease.

"I told him it's your face and he asked me 'what's wrong with my face?' I said, sometimes you look so fierce, people are afraid of you!

"After 47 years of marriage, I know him and can read his body language. But sometimes even I don't understand him!"