

Is Monday the day for meeting?

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by Zainon Ahmad

SO FAR we only know two things about the impending meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad: That it is going to be before Aidilfitri, which is expected to fall on Tuesday, and that it is going to be a one-on-one affair.

We do not know the day yet. The most auspicious evening of Ramadan is the 27th, which is tonight. It is known as the Night of Power as it is said to be the occasion when Prophet Muhammad received his first

revelation from God.

But then surely they would want to spend the evening offering additional prayers and reflecting on their past deeds instead of being cooped up somewhere blustering away at each other.

The meeting could also very well be the eve of Hari Raya on Monday. By then the last *terawih* prayers (the additional non-obligatory evening prayers during Ramadan) were already performed on Sunday night. So Monday evening is a free evening.

This is, of course, if the meeting is not planned to take place during the day. The aides

of the two men who are planning the meeting are taking cognisance of the fact that Muslims must not be angry or lose their temper while fasting.

They are uncertain Abdullah and Mahathir will be as cool as cucumber and maintain their equanimity throughout so that the meeting could be held during the day? Everyone knows that the former PM is an angry man and has a long list of complaints and his successor is adamant that he is right in whatever he is doing and very unhappy with the barbs thrown at him.

As to the venue, Abdullah

said "the day when we meet, that will be the venue". It is, of course, going to be a room somewhere. It cannot be the PM's office or Mahathir's office at the Perdana Leadership Foundation. One possibility is one of the rooms at PWTC where Umno has its Hq.

After all, it is in the end about Umno. And it is to ensure that the party remains united that the veterans and the respected members of the party had nudged the two towards a meeting hinting that the spat between them had gone on long enough.

Now, who is to enter the room first? Abdullah is no longer the subservient deputy but a full-fledged PM, with all the power of the state at his command, and party president and so he should not be kept waiting. But he may want to be gracious and so enter first to wait for the elderly Tun.

If that happens, it could well set the tone for the meeting. It would also auger well if Mahathir, PM for 22 years, insisted that he will wait for the prime minister of Malaysia and the president of Umno.

It could also be planned so that the press cameras could record something as the press conference after the meeting - if one is planned - could not be expected to be much of a story.

This could take the form of the two men arriving at the same time, getting out from their cars almost at the same time, and walking up to each other, smiling and shaking hands and, possibly, even hugging.

After all, hugging is not uncommon among Umno leaders even if they are rivals, or especially if they are rivals. Sometimes they also hug to dispel rumours that they are rivals. The recent famous hugging is between Mahathir and International Trade and

Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz two years ago. It changed nothing.

Malaysians, especially Umno members, are probably very excited about the meeting after months of verbal war between the two even though many do not think it will end Mahathir's hounding of the PM - at least not yet.

But, nevertheless, it is a positive development. Umno supreme council member Datuk Shahrir Samad thinks so but is unwilling to put much store by it. Others approve of the one-on-one meeting. It could be the beginning of Abdullah and his former boss being on talking terms again instead of doing so through the press or their respective aides.

It could happen that Mahathir would accept what he told this writer a long time ago that different leaders have different styles and that the leadership had to be different also because of the changing times and circumstances.

It could also happen that Abdullah would accept Mahathir as an elder brother - or an elder statesman - who could be occasionally consulted on party as well as national matters and to also occasionally acknowledge publicly that he owed his position to the former PM.

Umno would certainly benefit from its two staunchest and most loyal members - Abdullah refused to abandon the party when the faction he was in lost its bid for power, and Mahathir showed such passion for the party that he was given the title Dr Umno - getting together again and probably working together.

It may be wishful thinking but everyone agrees that the consequences of continued acrimonious public row between the two could only be dire to the nation.

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