

by A Kadir Jasin

A Fresh Perspective

Will Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi use the next general election as the basis for the formation of his team?

ONE OF THE most important decisions taken by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he became prime minister in 1981 was to continue with the leadership line-up left behind by his predecessor, Tun Hussein Onn.

He did not reshuffle the Cabinet until after the general election. After the 1982 general election, two ministers 'left' the Cabinet. They were Foreign Minister Tan Sri Mohd Ghazali Shafie, who was openly hostile to him, and Agriculture Minister Datuk Abdul Manan Othman.

Ghazali, better known as 'King Ghaz' for his extensive power and demanding attitude as Home Affairs Minister in the Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Cabinets, was seen as trying to sabotage Dr Mahathir's ascendancy by arresting his political secretary Sidik Ghouse on allegations of spying for the Russians just days before Dr Mahathir was to become prime minister.

As for Abdul Manan, a close ally of Tun Hussein and a good friend of Tun Daim Zainuddin (who would later serve Dr Mahathir twice as Finance Minister), he was blamed for mishandling the introduction of the padi price subsidy that led to one of the largest demonstrations by rice farmers the country had even seen.

It took place in front of the state secretariat in Alor Star. The mishandling of the

subsidy, which is still in force today, had been blamed for providing PAS the impetus to strengthen its challenge against the Barisan Nasional (BN) in Kedah and other rice-growing states, namely, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis.

Dr Mahathir started to stamp his mark on the Umno leadership and the government only during the 1982 general election when many new faces, including Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, were brought in to contest in key constituencies.

Like Anwar, many of them were young and inexperienced. But Dr Mahathir took the risk of fielding and later appointing them to important posts.

In the desire to build his own team and launch his 'think big' programmes, he gave almost unlimited power to his deputy Tan Sri Musa Hitam. Whenever he left the country, Musa was proclaimed Acting Prime Minister.

His administration was soon dubbed the '2M' administration – Mahathir and Musa. For at least five years, he was taken up by the *mantra* although he himself often said it was a slogan created by the Press.

But in many ways Dr Mahathir and Musa were incompatible. While Dr Mahathir was driven by his commitment to his dreams and schemes, anything from the 'Buy British Last' policy to the 'Look East' policy and the national car project, Musa was well-

known for his cynicism and skepticism.

The differences blew open in 1986 with Musa announcing his resignation citing irreconcilable differences with Dr Mahathir.

Although there were other casualties along the way, most of the people he brought in and those he inherited from Tun Hussein's administration are still around. Thus, if they were 30 years old when Dr Mahathir became prime minister, today they would be 52. If they were then 40, they would be today 62. They literally grew old with his administration.

OF POLITICS, WIVES AND OFFSPRING

THUS, it is not unexpected that many people are hoping that Abdullah would do likewise when he takes over next month – that is to use the general election as the basis for the formation of his team.

Umno, the BN and the government would do well to introduce young blood, regenerate and reinvent.

Since many of today's senior leaders have been in office as long as, or, in the case of some, longer than Dr Mahathir, they have become set in their ways.

While the longevity of their political careers says a lot about their ability as politicians and administrators, many of them

have been reduced to defending their actions instead of advancing the interest of the party, government and the people.

Sad as it may be, this is only to be expected. When they first became ministers, *menteris besar* or chief ministers, they were young, enthusiastic and, in rare cases, even idealistic.

Their children were still in school and their spouses were just plain *isteri Yang Berhormat* (wives of honourable members).

Today, their children are influential politicians and big-time businessmen. Their wives are the power behind the throne. For some of them, their children and spouses have become a political liability.

Even as we speak of the succession, the wife factor seems not to escape public attention. For the good or evil, the wife factor seems to be of great significance to the public.

Whereas Malaysians in general have come to expect their leaders to have a stable – for the lack of a better word – family life, the wife factor has, in recent years, become an important factor as more and more politicians' wives are drawn into their husbands' political activities.

Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali are seen as the perfect political couple. Although Dr Siti Hasmah participates in her husband's political and social activities, she is seen as being above, any personal or private agenda.

The reality is Dr Siti Hasmah has played an important role in Dr Mahathir's political career from the very beginning. When Dr Mahathir first became an MP in the Kota Star Selatan constituency in 1964, it was Dr Siti Hasmah who helped draw the women-folk to his cause. She was seen as being more approachable and down to earth than the shy and sometimes aloof Dr Mahathir.

With so many important things ahead, let us pray that Abdullah is spared the headache of having to deal with *politik isteri dan anak menteri* (the politics of ministers' wives and children).

BRING ON THE FRESH BLOOD

ONE positive development that is unlikely to escape Abdullah's attention is the fact that an increasing number of young men and women are getting involved in active poli-

tics, while others are being employed in key positions in government-owned companies.

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Whether they are in politics or business, they should be given room to grow with minimum interference. This involves a change of culture and attitude. The failure to do so would drive them away faster than it would take to draw them to the government's side. These are young men and women who could survive without political crutches.

Yet, these are the kind of people whom we need the most in politics and business. They are the people without blinkered views brought about by narrowness of thought and a dependency on the *tongkat*.

Like it or not, we have to acknowledge

that while the National Education System has democratised education, it has not been altogether successful in producing high-quality, open-minded young people. In reality, many local graduates are incapable of competing in the rapidly globalising employment market because they lack competency in English. Thus, many end up scurrying for government jobs.

Fortunately, however, we still have a sizeable pool of multi-lingual graduates and diploma holders from private institutions of higher learning and the better public universities.

These are the people on whom we can pin our hopes for helping the country continue to become a global player in business and diplomacy.

As for the young politicians and managers, they should be willing to break away from the norm and resist the temptation of money politics and other excesses.

OSAMA, OSAMA, WHEREFORE ART THOU OSAMA?

THE hunt for Osama bin Laden has entered its third year. The world's number one terrorist, as he is called by the United States Government and media, is nowhere to be seen – not in person at least.

The hefty - US\$ 25 million – price tag put on his head still has no takers. Occasionally, he appears on Arab television networks and newspapers, calling for the continuation of the war against the US.

While questioning the authenticity of these tapes, the Western media, as succinctly put by journalist/writer Tariq Ali, in his book *The Clash Of Fundamentalisms – Crusades, Jihads And Modernity*, 'Eagerly sought, bought, carefully edited and showed the al-Jazeera footage (of Osama) on CNN, BBC and every major European network.'

In the meantime, Osama, who was generally despised by the rational world after the Sept 11, 2001 bombing of the New York World Trade Center and the Pentagon, is fast becoming a hero to an increasing number of the same people.

Osama does not seem to be any more ter-

rible than President George W Bush and his new conservative hawks in Washington who waged war against Iraq and are threatening the same against Iran, North Korea and Syria.

In recent days, the Bush Administration has effectively gone back to the dark days of the Cold War by vetoing a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution urging its lapdog, Israel, not to expel Palestinian President Yasser Arafat from the West Bank and to lift threats of death against him.

In a symbolic opposition to the US military and political domination of the Post-Cold War world, the UN General Assembly, a few days later, voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution calling for the lifting of threats against the Palestinian President.

UNHAPPILY RESCUED

THE unpopularity of US policies and actions is growing clearer by the day. While its attempt to pacify those members of the UN Security Council that did not support its attack on Iraq - France, Russia and China - by proposing a new Security Council resolution has met with skepticism, its position in Iraq is growing more precarious by the day. American soldiers are being attacked, killed and wounded on a daily basis.

With no weapons of mass destruction found and the restoration of law and order grindingly slow, even the Iraqis who were opposed to Saddam Hussein are becoming discontent with the occupiers. Thus, one cannot help but be cynical about US allegations that Saddam loyalists are behind the attacks.

On the contrary, if one is to believe in the capacity of the US secret and intelligent services to launch worldwide campaigns of disinformation, one will not dismiss lightly the possibility of the purported Saddam tapes being part and parcel of the US' psychological warfare.

By blaming the rising opposition on Saddam, the US is deflecting the world's attention away from the fact that its occupation of Iraq is not welcomed by a large segment of the Iraqi people.

Saddam is as good as dead. But if the memory of his regime is being kept alive, it is because the lives of the majority of the Iraqi people were better off during his time than under US occupation.

BIG BULLY BUSH

WITH the race for the second term impending and the US economy, in particular the budget deficit, worsening, the Bush Administration is desperate.

Bush cannot expect to be too popular with American voters when more body bags arrive from Iraq and the cost of maintaining the occupation of the country eats into the budget.

Still, Bush and his neo-cons are unwilling to give up military and civilian power in Iraq. While urging the UN to play a greater role in Iraq, including organising a multinational force, the US insists that it should be under the US command. In other words, the UN is subservient to the US.


Only dumb France, Russia or China would agree to send their soldiers to be shot and killed because the big chief commanding them in the safety of the bunkers were American generals.

But these permanent members of the Security Council are not likely to fall for the trick. The Russians have already said they are not sending their troops to Iraq.

This leaves the satellite states of the US, including a handful in the Muslim world, to be intimidated into sending troops to Iraq or risk losing US subsidies.

Those countries that have contributed troops to assist the US occupation of Iraq are beginning to learn a bitter lesson. While their soldiers and policemen are being barely tolerated by the Iraqis, they are being gunned down by trigger-happy US soldiers. Just as many British soldiers were killed by American forces as they were by the enemy.

But they are not alone in being the targets of US friendly fire. It was reported by AFP that a drunken US soldier had shot dead a rare tiger in Baghdad recently.

And what is so unexpected about one drunken US soldier killing a zoo tiger when his commander-in-chief, who once had a drinking problem, commanded the bombing of Iraq, killing and maiming thousands? 

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Besides 'Malaysian Business', Kadir also contributes to local Bahasa Malaysia and English newspapers. These articles can be accessed at www.beritapublishing.com.my under the heading 'In My Own Write'.