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ECONOMIC  
FORUM

COMMITTED TO  
IMPROVING THE STATE  
OF THE WORLD

Prefaces by  
**Mahathir bin  
Mohamad**  
and  
**Shintaro Ishihara**

**THE**  
**MALAYSIAN**  
**JOURNEY**  
PROGRESS IN DIVERSITY

**Frank-Jürgen Richter and Thang D. Nguyen**

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## Introduction

Frank-Jürgen Richter and Thang D. Nguyen



George Bernard Shaw once observed: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." If one looks at the progress that Malaysia has made, Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad might indeed be considered an 'unreasonable' man – in a good way, that is.

Few who are experienced in public administration would deny that managing a nation as diverse and vast as Malaysia is an extremely difficult task. Geographically, Malaysia lies at one of the most strategic locations in Southeast Asia. With an area of 329,750 sq km, it is surrounded by the Straits of Malacca, the Java Sea, and the South China Sea.

Culturally, Malaysia is one of the most diverse nations in Asia, with its 21 million strong population made up of Malays (48%), Chinese (36%) and Indians (9%).<sup>1</sup> In addition, Malaysia is a resource-rich country blessed with such materials as tin, petroleum, timber, copper, iron, natural gas, and bauxite.

Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia has gone from being a former British colony to one of Asia's advanced countries.

Malaysians today enjoy living standards almost as high as those in Singapore. As one lands at the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), drives on its highways, and sees the Petronas Towers, one cannot help but wonder how Malaysia did it all in such a short period of time. Like other great leaders of our time, Mahathir has been both criticized and praised for the work he has done and the policies he has implemented in his capacity as prime minister. It is not an exaggeration to say that had it not been for him, Malaysia would not be what it is today.

As Mahathir prepares to retire, we find it most appropriate to highlight the progress that Malaysia has made with him at the helm and celebrate his leadership, conviction, vision, and patriotism. At the same time, it is necessary to look to Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as he prepares to take over. To these ends, we have asked a group of experienced and informed individuals from various walks of life – many of whom are actively engaged in the activities of the World Economic Forum – to contribute to this book.

<sup>1</sup> Clark Neher, *Southeast Asia in the New International Era* (Colorado, US: Westview Press, 1991), p. 103.