

MAHATHIR OF MALAYSIA

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Foreword

My readers may wish to know my qualifications and reasons for writing this book.

As a British officer of Gurkhas, I served in Malaysia during the Emergency, and later, as an Army pilot, I flew helicopters in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak during Confrontation. To me, Malaysia was "home" during so many of my most formative years that covered the period before and after the coming of "Merdeka". Since then I have been a photographer and writer, travelling on assignments all over the world.

My reasons for writing this book are varied. One was a strong desire to come back to Malaysia and to observe, as a photojournalist of twenty years' standing, what had happened in the years I had been away. Another was a need, deep-felt, to contribute something personal to Malaysia, which had given so much to me in the way of experience.

The most immediate reason became apparent when I was first introduced to Dr. Mahathir. I felt at once that I had met a truly honest person, incapable of deceit, who was sincerely committed to the goal of improving the condition of his country and its people. It seemed to me that such honesty is impossible to be understood by devious minds, and that his single-mindedness of aim would naturally be attacked by those critics with a self-interest to be served.

If this portrait of the Prime Minister seems to the reader to be stressed in his favour, it is because I believe him to be a man of shining integrity, underestimated by many of his countrymen and the Western world alike, a

Alongside the new, however, many of the older, traditional ways are still observed, harking back to the days when Kedah was an Unfederated Malay State within British-ruled Malaya. To be a Malay in pre-war Kedah implied a rural existence, living close to the land. The land was ploughed, the rice planted, grown and harvested, and the ploughing begun again. The rhythms of life were slow and measured, under the sun and the timely rains.

Tradition was everything, in religion, in customs, in schooling and in prospects for life. In the schools where teaching was in Malay, education was confined to primary levels, up to Standard Four. Secondary education was available only in the English-language schools, which although open to all, were attended only by the brighter students, who were able to pass the formidable entrance examination. For those who could not pass this examination, it meant the end of their formal education, and their working life had to begin while their cleverer friends went on to a better chance in life. Even for a pupil of the English-language school, the best career that he could hope for, as a young Malay, would be as a clerk in some form of government office. Business was generally in the hands of the Chinese or Indian shopkeepers, who seldom, if ever, employed Malays in any position where they could learn business principles.

Although the Malays were governed by their traditions, they were in no way a spiritless people. It takes more than mere spirit, however, to overcome the inertia of habit. In the case of the boy Mahathir, born on 20th December 1925 into the large and loving family of Encik Mohamad Iskandar and his wife Cik Wan Tempawan binti Cik Wan Hanapi, it may have been the combination of his strict but kindly upbringing as the youngest of nine children, and the high educational standards of his father. Encik Mohamad had been appointed a headmaster in 1908, and was the first