

The accent's on fair play and hard work

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FOR more than a decade the intertwine between the fate of the nation and that of her Premier, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has been strikingly close.

The events of May 1969 that brought uncertainties to the future of the country has also cast a temporary shadow over the political career of Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir.

For both the traumatic experience served only to to strengthen the spirit and the

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Responding to the growth of public investment the private sector expanded quickly. Rapid growth in both accounted for a steady growth of the GDP. During the period 1971-79 it grew at the rate of about 7.8 per cent per year.

As can be expected rapid growth also facilitated important structural changes, thereby promoting the emergence of a modern economy with greatly expanded employment choices and opportunities.

Thus in the last 10 years the contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP declined and that of the modern sectors such as manufacturing and construction increased significantly. An important outcome of these changes is the reduction in the rate of unemployment — 7.8 per cent in 1970 to 5.3 per cent in 1980.

However, despite the general improvement in the social and economic welfare of the nation the goals of development as set in the NEP are still far from being fully realised.

Although the rate of poverty declined sharply from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 29.2 per cent in 1980, yet the remaining percentage is still uncomfortably high.

Despite the increase in the average income of the Malays, by far the poorest sector, it is still more than 30 per cent below that of the corresponding national figure.

The writers of the FMP report rated the success of the restructuring efforts in the last 10 years as only moderately successful.

Short break

Indeed, as of the end of last year the country was not even half way yet towards meeting the 30 per cent bumiputra equity participation target stipulated by the Outline Perspective Plan (OPP).

For Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir the short break following his defeat in the 1969 general elections and his subsequent expulsion from Umno for spearheading an unsuccessful bid to depose Tunku Abdul Rahman offered him a unique opportunity to crystallise his ideas on the problems of the Malays and their leadership.

His *Malay Dilemma*, published in 1970, was essentially an extended diagnosis of the socio-economic ills of the Malay society. The Malays, he felt, were held back by colonial policies, inbreeding and certain deficiencies in their own culture.

His prescription was simple and decisive. To put them on par with the others he argues for a deliberate policy of "constructive protection".

resolve to create a more dynamic and integrated society.

The adoption of Rukunegara and the New Economic Policy (NEP) gave the country the two basic elements that it needed most urgently — a national ideology and a long-term growth philosophy — to foster national unity.

Economic progress prior to 1971 which concentrated primarily on infrastructural, agricultural and rural development, while contributory to growth, was found wanting in its ability to reduce effectively the existing socio-economic imbalance in the country.

The lessons of the riots suggested that a strategy of growth alone without sufficiently bridging the ethnic gaps would only serve to perpetuate, if not widen, the disparities between the communities.

Such growth would only pit the 'haves' against the 'have-nots' in a situation of perpetual conflict and instability.

Hence, what the country needed was a development strategy that must be tempered, indeed dominated, by a higher order goal — that of fostering national solidarity.

Rapid growth

The key instrument for pursuing the goal of solidarity is the NEP with its twin objectives of poverty eradication and societal restructuring.

The implementation of the NEP during the 1970s under the leadership of Tun Abdul Razak and subsequently Tun Hussein Onn has obviously brought the country tremendous gains.

The national economy grew rapidly. The per capita income is reported to have increased at the rate of about 12 per cent a year, at current prices.

The overall quality of life as reflected by the rising standards of health, housing and education for the people showed remarkable improvement.

His unflinching loyalty to the party and his apparent leadership qualities won him a quick re-entry and rapid promotion up the ladder of Umno leadership.

Soon after his return to the fold in 1972 he was back in the Supreme Council. In 1974 he was returned unopposed to the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency and within the same year he joined the Cabinet of Tun Abdul Razak as the Minister of Education.

During the party's elections in 1975 he was elected one of the three Umno vice-presidents. His advancement to his apparent status, however, came only in 1976 when Tun Hussein Onn chose him to be Deputy Prime Minister.

Thus for both the country and the Prime Minister the 1970s were decidedly a decade of recovery and rapid progress. The stage is therefore set for a more fortunate partnership.

On July 16 Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir became the nation's 4th Prime Minister following the retirement of Tun Hussein Onn.

The 1980s promise to be a decade of tremendous significance to the country. Its overlap with the second half of the OPP period means that by 1990 definitive targets of development will have to be met. It has also been dubbed the decade of high technology heavy industries.

Hence much is expected of the next 10 years. One of the most pertinent questions often asked today has to do with how Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's stewardship of the government will affect the future of the nation.

Admittedly, there is no simple answer to this question. Nevertheless there are some pointers that may indicate where the coun-

try will be headed at least in the next few years.

First, while Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's rise up the party hierarchy during the last decade might have been meteoric, he is a newcomer neither to the leadership of Umno nor to that of the government.

Second, his graduation to the premiership is anything but sudden. While his most vigorous grooming could have come during the five years of his tenure as the DPM, there is little doubt that the stage had been set long before that.

Heir apparent

The fact that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir has spent almost a decade in various top leadership positions of the party and government suggests at least two things: first, he must have had a fair share of the moulding of party and governmental goals and policies; second, he must have been generously exposed to the working of vital party as well as government institutions.

This and the fact that the path of national development has been explicitly charted by the various development plans and the NEP provide a strong basis for continuity in the general direction and thrust of government.

But if no major policy shifts are to be expected this does not mean that the country will have more of the same kind of leadership. Indications are that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir will bring about a refreshing style of his own.

As he is pragmatic and essentially result-oriented, there is every likelihood that the tempo of government will increase with a greater sense of urgency.

Since he has initiated the setting up of the Manpower Planning Unit (MAMPU), it can be expected that the need for greater efficiency in the civil service will be given added emphasis.

As a firm believer in balanced growth he will see that the pursuit of the NEP objective will be undertaken with more vigour.

Fair play

As a strong advocate of fair play and hard work, he has a simple prescription for Malay development. To the extent necessary for them to match the economic power of their non-bumiputra counterparts, they would enjoy government aid and protection. They are not to be pampered.

Bumiputra progress, therefore, would be dependent mainly on their willingness to work hard and to adopt positive values and attitudes.

It is noteworthy that the same principles of pragmatism, fair play and hard work that he advocated for the country are also to be emphasised in our external relations.

For instance, at the Third Islamic Conference in January he blasted members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries

(OIC) for their failure to establish effective economic cooperation among themselves.

He typified the amount invested in other Islamic countries by Islamic nations as "a mere drop in the ocean." Talking of Islamic brotherhood alone is not enough, he argued. What they needed most is the establishment of meaningful economic relations that are mutually beneficial.

In a hard-hitting speech delivered at the 11th Special Session of the United Nations' General Assembly, he condemned the attitudes of some developed nations for their "blatant negativeness and the inexplicable resentment" they held against the proposal for establishing a new, fair and just international economic order.

He argued that the developing countries are not seeking benevolence from the affluent ones, merely a "state of mutual survival under conditions of peace and stability."

Indeed, if the publicly expressed views and feelings of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are any indication of the kind of leader he would make for the nation as it enters another critical era in its move in history, we have good reason to believe that the country will enjoy a fair and forceful leadership.

There is little to suggest that the "ultra" (meaning extremist) label that has been stamped on him, which he himself has refuted often, is even remotely relevant.