

# An orderly succession

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PTOLEMY was a little off the mark when he named the Malay peninsula *Aurea Chersonese* or the golden peninsula. There is no gold to be found in this country today, but that is just about the only thing lacking. What Malaysia does have are natural resources like tin, timber, oil and natural gas. It is also blessed with fertile soil and an equable climate with plenty of both rain and sun. Added to this cornucopia of natural wealth is the fact that the country has always had excellent leaders. The country's fourth premier, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who takes over from Datuk Hussein Onn today, will prove himself of the same class.

Judging from the various interviews that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir has given to the Press recently, it is clear that there will be no changes in the broad policy outlines, only perhaps in the mode of implementation and a slight shift in emphasis. In foreign affairs, he is likely to continue the search for a peaceful solution to the problem of Kampuchea. Malaysia will continue to adhere to the belief that the Asean countries in general, and Malaysia in particular, should maintain a political equidistance from all the superpowers. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir has publicly expressed reservations about the long-term goals of China which he views as a greater threat to regional stability than Vietnam, notwithstanding its recent record in Kampuchea. The consolidation of relations with other Asean countries will also remain a priority.

In economic affairs, the new premier will be faced with the challenging task of speeding up the implementation of the New Economic Policy in view of the shortfalls in several areas but without alienating the other races. The difficulty of this task is compounded by the fact that the country's economic growth is dependent on the vigour of the world economy, which at present is in the doldrums. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir will have to move fast for two reasons. Firstly, he has only 10 years left to fulfil the policy objectives of the NEP. Secondly, he will have to cope with the rising expectations of the Bumiputra community. This will not prevent him, however, from insisting that Bumiputras become more self-reliant economically. In view of his well-known dislike of inefficiency and bureaucratic red-tape, the government machinery will no doubt be streamlined to make it more responsive to government policy.

Credit must be given to the out-going premier, Datuk Hussein Onn, for handing over to his successor a country that is both politically and economically stable. Born into a family with a long tradition of service, Datuk Hussein Onn is a self-effacing man, who manages to combine the meticulousness of a lawyer with a soldier's love of action and sense of duty. He will be remembered for his graceful transfer of power when there was no need to do so. In so doing, he wanted to spare his successor the trauma he himself suffered on being abruptly thrust into the premiership on the death of Tun Razak in January 1976. Deeply etched in the nation's memory will be the image of a man of unyielding rectitude, a rigid adherence to the rule of law and an unrelenting dislike of corruption, tempered, however, with a deep sense of humility.