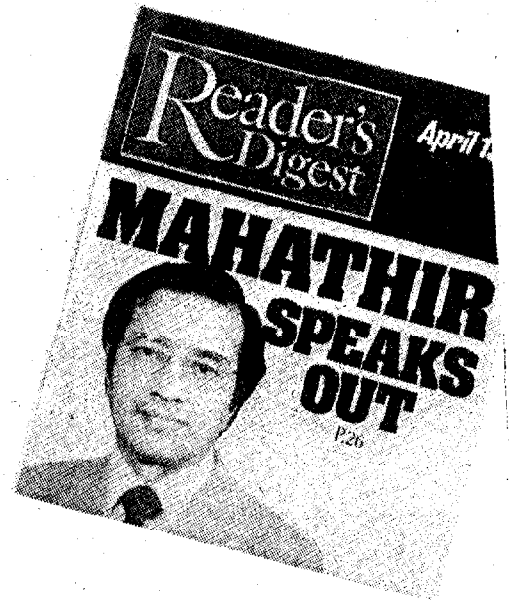


# A place in the sun for all Malaysians: Dr M



**Q.** You surprised many world leaders by refusing to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Australia last year, and since you've become Prime Minister it appears that relations between Malaysia and Britain have deteriorated. Are these differences with Britain an indication of a shift in attitude in Malaysia's dealings with western developed countries?

**A.** I have had some experience attending international conferences and I find that very little is actually achieved. It would be far better if we would concentrate on one or two items and see what we can do about them, rather than speaking about our good intentions and doing nothing. Considering I had a lot to do at home, I decided not to attend. It doesn't mean that I have no faith in the Commonwealth as an organisation. Within the Commonwealth itself there can be bilateral relations and when the bilateral relations are good, then I think we derive some benefit.

**Q.** At the moment, what is Malaysia's relationship with Britain?

**A.** It has tended to be strained, mainly because we don't get the kind of treatment we expect from a member of the Commonwealth. We feel we have been discriminated against unnecessarily, particularly with regard to student fees and educational facilities made available to Malaysian students in Britain.

I should hope there will be no further de-

terioration (in our relations) because I already see some signs that Britain is beginning to appreciate the need to be more positive in its approach.

**Q.** Apart from Britain, Mr Prime Minister, you have stated that, "There is no sincerity on the part of the North to do anything for the betterment of the South's economic progress." What prompted that statement?

**A.** Well, that is how it seems to me. There is

even a definite attempt to almost wreck the economy of the South. Let's take the current problem that we are facing in Malaysia. The United States has decided to sell its tin stockpile. Not because there is no tin on the market. There is plenty of tin on the market, and the price is not high either. But suddenly the United States has now decided to sell all over the world.

The only thing that we can assume is that the United States is purposefully trying to

depress the market. And since our economy depends so much upon tin, the direct effect would be to wreck our economy. Of course, the United States will say that is not its intention, but that is the result.

**Q.** The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Mr Prime Minister, is now in its fifteenth year. In your opinion, has Asean lived up to its stated goals?

**A.** Asean has definitely progressed. Of course, it could have done better, but one has

to remember the background of the Asean countries. They did not start the way the European Economic Community started. There you have economies which developed along similar lines and at almost the same rate. Here we have vast differences. We were colonised by different people, and therefore we inherited different systems. For a long time we had no links with each other and we knew very little about one another.

The idea of cooperating with our neighbours is quite new to us and

I will  
try

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to do  
what I  
think

is best: Mahathir

**DATUK SERI Dr Mahathir Mohamad, 56, has quickly carved a niche for himself in South-East Asian politics through forthright observations on both the political and economic fronts and policies intended to emphasise Malaysia's nonaligned posture. The Malaysian Prime Minister shared his thoughts on a variety of subjects in an exclusive interview with Victor Laniauskas, Editor-in-Chief of the Reader's Digest Asian Edition, and Robert Kiener, Deputy Editor.**

**“ We have to explain to the Malays why the Chinese are here and what they contribute, and we have to explain to the Chinese why we need to have our policy to help the “have nots”. People are now inclined to be more tolerant. They know that failure to achieve our targets might mean disasters like the racial outbreak in 1969. ”**

therefore progress must necessarily be slow. Despite all that, there is no doubt that Asean has become a major world grouping. We would like to do more, but we will have to be patient.

**Q. Where do you see Asean going from here?**

**A.** We think political cooperation will improve over time as we get to know each other even better and understand our common problems in relationship with the rest of the world. Also, as each country becomes more prosperous, the fears of making resources available to its neighbour — to its disadvantage — will disappear. For example, Indonesia has 150 million people. That's a huge market. Quite obviously, Indonesia doesn't want to become a market for Singapore, which cannot become a market for Indonesia. This kind of feeling will eventually wear off as we begin to understand the need to cooperate.

very insecure if the United States suddenly left this area entirely. We wouldn't like to see an increase (in the US military presence); we wouldn't like to see a decrease, either.

## Filipino insurgents

**Q. The Philippine claim on the Malaysian State of Sabah has never been formally withdrawn, and Sabah has been frequently reported as a training site for Filipino insurgents. How has this hampered regional cooperation, and what are your plans, if any, to resolve the Sabah claim question?**

**A.** The indications are that there might be some way we can settle this problem once and for all. We have Filipinos living in Sabah who are used to coming in and out of this border State. The people there are of the same race, and they never regarded the boundary as being a

Malaysia we had an incident in which a group of fanatics tried to kill people. That is not Islam. Islam is basically a peaceful, tolerant religion. But there will be fanatics, a lunatic fringe, that you will find anywhere.

**Q. Since the outbreak of racial violence in Malaysia in 1969, the Malaysian Government has worked very hard to promote harmony and unity. What steps are you taking to maintain good relations between the nation's three major racial groups?**

**A.** I've always believed that the lack of racial harmony in this country is due to a lack of understanding among the people of each other's culture, ethics and needs. We have to explain to the Malays why the Chinese are here and what they contribute, and we have to explain to the Chinese why we need to have our policy to help the “have nots.” People

are now inclined to be more tolerant. They know that failure to achieve our targets might mean disasters like the racial outbreak in 1969.

## Champion of the Malays

**Q. You have long been regarded as a champion of the Malays. Lately, how-**

**generally trimming bureaucratic fat. How successful do you hope to be?**

**A.** These are measures which are general-

ly approved by the people. This country is not a corrupt country, comparatively speaking. There is corruption, I will admit, but it is at the stage where people still do not openly accept bribes. The officers in the Government and the Ministers are not corrupt, but they have been allowed to do certain things because of a laissez-faire attitude. My feeling is that we should stop corruption before it gets to the stage when it becomes general practice. That is what I am doing and the people — including government employees — agree.

**Q. Malaysia has one of the more successful records of economic achievement in Asia, with a stable political environment over the past decade. What are your hopes for Malaysia's future?**

**A.** What I would like to see is, of course, the continuance of political stability, and with that political stability we expect further economic growth. Eventually, Malaysia may become one of the most developed of the developing countries.

very satisfied. I don't have very great ambitions. I don't know what people will think of me, but I try to do what I think is best in my view. I may be wrong, but if I am wrong people can always throw me out and find another one.

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## Bilateral arrangement

**Q.** Do you ever foresee Asean becoming a military alliance?

**A.** No. I hope not ever. It is against our principles to have a military grouping of that nature, although we can have bilateral arrangements.

**Q.** You have mentioned the adverse ef-

fect on Malaysia brought about by the United States' sale of its tin stockpile. What general feelings do you have of the Reagan Administration's dealings so far with Asean and Malaysia in particular?

**A.** We have the distinct feeling that there is not the keenness to be involved, or even to be sympathetic sometimes. This is perhaps a very harsh thing to say, but it is a feeling that I think the Reagan Administration has for all countries. It is almost isolationist in its attitude. There is not the kind of sensitivity that we had come to expect from the United States.

**Q.** Do you feel that the continued presence of US military bases in Asia is necessary for Asean security?

**A.** Perhaps it may contribute toward reminding the Russians that there are other people in the area. But we wouldn't like to have the whole of South-East Asia being controlled by the United States. Let's say we would feel

boundary for them. Thus, it is very difficult to keep track of everybody. Of course, among the Filipinos there may be people who belong to the Moro (National Liberation Front) or the Christian (opposition) group, or whatever group it is. We can't always oversee what they are talking about or doing. Certainly, if they started setting up a military camp we would know about it. If they were to plot among themselves, I don't think we can stop them any more than we can stop our own people from talking.

**Q.** Islam is playing an increasingly important, and at times controversial, role in the world's political and economic affairs. As the Prime Minister of a predominantly Muslim nation, how would you describe Islam's changing role in your own country's affairs?

**A.** With the resurgence of Islam there is a tendency for people to think again about today's extremely materialistic — and even hedonistic — attitude toward life, which in many cases has destroyed normal human relations and which, I think, will lead to the destruction of human society. The resurgence of Islam helps stabilize society.

We have, in Islam, some aberrations; interpretations which differ from the norm. These things are bound to happen. I don't think you regard the Spanish Inquisition as typical of Christianity. In

ever, you've indicated that Malaysia's bumiputras (sons of the soil) should do more to help themselves economically. Can you explain on that?

**A.** I've been called a champion of the Malays by others. I didn't call myself a champion of the Malays. I'm just asking for an equitable society in which the

Malays and the Chinese have a fair share of the wealth of this country — "a place in the Malaysian sun," so to speak.

The real champion of the Malays is the man who can bring up the Malays to the level of the Chinese and others. Merely talking about it doesn't get us anywhere. If I can only arouse their emotions and make them anti-Chinese, then I will not be their champion.

Even in 1970 after I was expelled from the party, I was talking about the same thing I am saying now. In my book (*The Malay Dilemma*) I talk about the faults of the Malays and the faults of the Chinese. But unfortunately the Chinese read what I say about their faults and the Malays read what I say about their faults, and I am condemned by the Malays as much as I am condemned by the Chinese.

**Q.** You've stressed the reform of government operations in your administration, such as ordering Cabinet Ministers to declare assets, telling government employees to give up moonlighting and

## Obstacles to growth

**Q.** What do you consider the major obstacles standing in the way of that continued growth?

**A.** Well, political stability can only be maintained if we succeed in enlightening the people on the policies we follow and explaining how they are good for them. But, of course, there will be people who will disagree with the Government, and if we allow extreme views to prevail among an increasing number of people, then that is a problem. At the moment we do not foresee such a problem.

Another potential obstacle is external. Malaysia's economy can progress only if we can sell our commodities and manufactured products. Commodities have a way of fluctuating in price. The price can go down very low, creating internal restlessness. That is why we look for the stabilisation of commodity prices throughout the world.

Also, we have a very small population and we need to sell some of our manufactured goods in the developed countries. The trend toward restriction of imports will affect our economic expansion.

**Q.** If there were one thing for which you would like the people to remember your administration, what would it be?

**A.** If it can be said that I have been able to lay the foundation for proper and harmonious development of this country, I would be