

Many more years

HAVING milk pudding *kazandibi* with fruit at 10pm did not seem like anything unusual provided, of course, one likes something milky and sweet.

In appearance, it looked unexciting and the taste was common enough for the first timer to partake of without any problem. The milk must have been fresh from the cow for it had a very rich milky taste.

The taste instantly reminded me of the fresh milk from the cow and buffalo that my late grandfather milked almost every morning when I was a boy in Kedah.

The pudding was served as the last dish in the three-course dinner given by Turkish Prime Minister Mrs Tansu Ciller in honour of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Ankara on Tuesday.

The pudding was served at 10pm Turkish time, which was not unusual for an official dinner to end. But for the Malaysian visitors whose time orientation was still Malaysian, it was four in the morning.

Here lies the catch. For Dr Mahathir and members of his delegation, they had been awake for at least 24 hours. Leaving Kuala Lumpur on a chartered Malaysia Airlines DC10-30 at 7.45am, most members of the delegation were already awake by 4am.

But since Turkey is six hours behind Malaysia, 10pm on Tuesday in Turkey corresponded to 4am in Malaysia the following day.

One would have expected an adjustment to be made to take account of the time difference and the length of time that the Malaysian visitors had been awake. But the Prime Minister plunged right into the programme.

The first timers in the Prime Minister's delegation might have found the schedule unreasonably tight and taxing. They were right. Even those familiar with and seasoned by Dr Mahathir's penchant for hectic schedules found such a pace highly punishing.

At the end of the 24 hours of chasing after Dr Mahathir, they were ready to collapse in bed and fall asleep.

While most members of the delegation followed him

to make up the number and fulfil protocol obligations, the man himself had to work from the moment he stepped out of the plane.

The first day's schedule went like this: 11.15am Turkey time (5.15pm Malaysian time) — arrived at Ankara's Esenboga Airport and driven to Sheraton Hotel in downtown Ankara; 2pm — laid wreath at Ataturk's grave; 2.30pm — official welcoming ceremony at the Prime Minister's office during which Dr Mahathir inspected the guard of honour and made a brief statement to Malaysian and Turkish Press; 3pm — attended bilateral talks; 6pm — received Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Murat Karayalcin at his suite; and 8pm — attended official dinner given by Ciller.

To this must be added briefings by senior Malaysian officials and members of the business delegation of the day's progress and the next day's programmes.

□ ONE will not blame the first timers for struggling to keep pace with the Prime Minister. That kind of hectic schedule requires some training and mental conditioning to get used to.

But they are not the only ones to grumble, and at the same time, marvel at Dr Mahathir's seemingly boundless energy and enthusiasm.

Even the seasoned fellow travellers, journalists included, who have followed him many a time around the world continue to be amazed.

One would have expected Dr Mahathir to slow down after being in the top office for more than 13 years. But that does not seem to be happening. If anything, the pace has quickened.

I am reminded of Dr Mahathir's first general election as the Prime Minister in 1982. He was 12 years younger then and had all the prowess of a newly appointed Prime Minister.

He travelled extensively during the two-week campaigning period to cover as much of the country as possible. The election was the first test of his leadership and a precursor to the tragic 2M administration.

One such trip was to Sarawak when he was accompanied by a sizeable group of journalists. Press photogra-

phers and television cameramen. At that time, the Prime Minister's official aircraft was a Fokker-28 jet which was big enough to accommodate the accompanying Press corps.

Quite often we were given the opportunity to hitch a ride from him or his then deputy, Datuk Musa Hitam (now Tan Sri).

So, off we flew to Sarawak for a day and a night of campaigning. His schedule started almost immediately after his arrival. After dinner that evening in Kuching, the programme did not end until well past midnight. There were hushed meetings, speeches and walkabouts.

The next day's programme started at daybreak when some journalists had hardly recovered from the previous night's hangover. We had to rush to the airport to take a ride in a Nuri helicopter to chase him all over Sarawak.

We followed him the whole day to no less than three remote places where he met the voters, made speeches and visited development projects. These places could then be reached only by small aeroplane, helicopter or boat.

At dusk, we reboarded the jet, this time in the oil town of Miri, for a flight to Alor Star. The journey turned out to be the roughest most of us had ever experienced.

The twin-engine jet flew right into a turbulence over the South China Sea that sent it heaving up and down and sideways.

Fortunately or otherwise, we were served early dinner and were told not to make too much noise as the Prime Minister was going to take a nap. The turbulence made the "silence please" instruction much easier to enforce.

While some passengers were trying to nurse their stomachs to avoid throwing up, others were saying their prayers. That was the worst turbulence I have ever encountered in many years of flying.

In all that time, we were later told, Dr Mahathir was blissfully in the dream world.

When the plane landed safely at the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport in Alor Star some two hours later, Dr Mahathir went straight into consultation with the local

to chase after Dr M

OTHER THOTS

By A. Kadir Jasin

Barisan Nasional leaders and visited several operations rooms in his Kubang Pasu constituency to the north of the town well into the wee hours of the next day.

We were then saying that we wished Dr Mahathir would slow down a bit or we would tell our editors not to assign us to cover his trips so often. We did not even have enough time to file our reports properly. It was always chasing after him.

Well, some of us are still around and chasing after Dr Mahathir not only at home but also all over the world.

Several senior journalists who used to follow him in those early days of his premiership have either retired, forced to retire or are doing non-journalistic jobs like running a multi-million ringgit company, chairing the Securities Commission and managing the think-tank ISIS. But Dr Mahathir goes on.

Even younger journalists, those in their 20s and 30s, complain that keeping pace with Dr Mahathir's routine, especially when he is on a tour, is not easy. You have to have energy and perseverance to do that.

□ DR Mahathir recently remarked that he would be 70 soon. But chasing after him in Ankara, Istanbul and

that attracts their attention, but its success in managing inflation. Malaysia is among the few countries in the world that enjoy a high growth rate with moderate inflation.

This was one of the questions asked by Turkish businessmen in a question-and-answer session with Dr Mahathir in Istanbul on Thursday. They wanted to know what advice he has for a country like Turkey that is experiencing double-digit inflation.

Dr Mahathir's typical response is that inflation is more of a psychological state of mind rather than an economic imperative linked to growth. But mind-set is hard to break.

He told the audience that even in a country that had successfully curbed inflation in the midst of high economic growth like Malaysia, many people, including some of the most learned economists and financial experts, still thought that inflation could not be avoided.

"When I proposed to our own economists, financial experts and bureaucrats recently that they should fantasise with me on the theory of growth without inflation or even minus inflation, some sniggered at me," he said.

Some so-called economists and financial experts had privately said that Dr Mahathir was not only dreaming but also being silly to propose the theory. I wish they have enough guts to say that openly and debate it intelligently.

That would probably not come as a surprise to Dr Mahathir who some years ago said that had he believed everything an economist told him, he would have drowned in a pool with an average depth of two inches.

So, by the look of things, we may still have many years of chasing after Dr Mahathir at home and

Amman in the last few days suggests that age is no obstacle and he is not likely to slow down anytime soon.

On the contrary, he enjoys his new role as a senior politician on the world stage and among the longest serving heads of government of democratic countries.

This recognition was repeatedly stressed by the Turkish Prime Minister in her speeches and statements during Dr Mahathir's visit.

Ciller said: "Dr Mahathir is the symbol of modern and dynamic Malaysia. His policies have propelled Malaysia into an influential role in the Asia-Pacific region. Due to its impressive economic growth and increasing share of international trade, Malaysia is destined to become a major player in international forums."

Malaysia's economic success, which was erroneously described as a miracle by some, is largely attributable to Dr Mahathir's unconventional management of politics and the economy.

There is no miracle in the Malaysian economy. It is the product of the most vigorously planned political, social and economic engineering in the developing world.

For many outside observers, however, it is not Malaysia's high growth rate