

21/08/1997

Dr M: I owe a lot to Tun Razak for being chosen DPM

Ramlan Said; Yoon Su-Ann

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he owed a lot to the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, adding that the late second Prime Minister's words could have influenced his rise in Government.

The Prime Minister said Tun Razak's remarks to his then deputy, the late Tun Hussein Onn, could have influenced the latter in picking him (Dr Mahathir) as Deputy Prime Minister over other candidates.

"I think Tun Hussein selected me as his deputy because he was influenced by Tun Razak's favourable comments on my performance as Education Minister at that time," he said.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir admitted that he did not know how true his assessment is.

"But I think it had in a way influenced Tun Hussein in selecting me as his deputy," he said.

"I am still sometimes surprised by this as there were others closer to Tun Hussein at that time".

The Prime Minister said this when paying tribute to Razak, who died in 1976, at the launching of a pictorial biography of the late Prime Minister entitled, Tun Razak: Jejak Bertapak Seorang Patriot, at the Putra World Trade Centre.

On Tun Razak, Mahathir said it was difficult to be a leader then.

"There were no cars and roads then but Tun Razak used to cycle to the kampungs on dirt roads".

"We are fortunate that our nation's founders were farsighted and all the more so Tun Razak who saw the importance of national unity and co-operation between the races," he said.

"He realised the pressing need to fulfil the real meaning of independence.

"It was imperative that there was economic development to sustain the young enthusiasm of an independent nation."

Dr Mahathir said Tun Razak realised the plight of the Malays and Bumiputeras at that time and saw that it was important to balance the economies between the Malays and non-Malays to ensure lasting peace.

"His New Economic Policy was criticised at that time as a means to legalise discrimination but this did not deter him," Dr Mahathir said.

"The result of this policy is what we see today, the success and economic wealth that we enjoy".

The Prime Minister said he felt that a book was inadequate to relate the history of the country's leaders and their immense contribution but it was a good starting point.

He expressed the hope that the book would be read especially by schoolchildren.

The book, written by former editor-in-chief of the Utusan Group, Datuk Zainuddin Maidin, is published by Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd and sold at RM195 each.

Later, when asked by reporters on foreign reports that the country's economy was going under, Dr Mahathir said these foreigners could predict whatever they want.

"But the Government will do the best for the country.

"They (foreign journalists) have no interest in the country ... they love to see Malaysia go under."

There are measures to strengthen the economy but Dr Mahathir said the

Government need not have to disclose everything.

Asked by a foreign journalist as to why he continued to blame the foreign speculators, Dr Mahathir said:

"Because we know it. Are you going to deny that Soros was involved? We know exactly who is doing all this," he said.

Dr Mahathir had identified American financier George Soros as the person responsible for the speculative attacks against the Asean currencies.

(END)