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Tun Razak, a visionary leader

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ON Aug 20, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the book on Tun Razak by Datuk Zainuddin Maidin. In his speech, Dr Mahathir recalled the close camaraderie between him, Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn.

Razak had emphasised the importance of dependability among leaders. He said leaders must produce results. The impression he made had been so profound that Dr Mahathir effortlessly recounted Razak's leadership attributes. I believe many at the function had their own memories about their contact or relationship with Razak.

I myself had a brief encounter with the Tun, as he was fondly called, as I worked for him in a small unit when he was the Deputy Prime Minister. At that time, he was also the Minister for National and Rural Development.

Our unit comprised four officers. We had to look at the reports prepared by many ministries. There were two important aspects of the work - the organisation of the Malayan Railway and the Malaysian Airline.

We also drafted speeches, particularly on defence and foreign relations. It was an interesting time as Malaysia was beginning to undergo rapid transformation.

Razak toured the countryside tirelessly and kept abreast with the "Red Book" on development plans. The briefings at the national operations room and at the district level were always exciting and stimulating.

I also remember Tun before Independence at the golden jubilee of our school. We were all excited to welcome a well-known old boy who also had been a Minister of Education.

He had been our inspiration. We had heard so much about his scholastic and sporting prowess.

What really impressed my friends and I was his open display of nationalism even when the colonial power was still evident and Independence was still a couple of years away.

He had written in the autograph books the word Merdeka. We were astonished and were inspired by his daring.

Razak was definitely a man of destiny. He grabbed any opportunity that came his way after making his usual assessment. He boldly introduced the New Economic Policy.

The result of his bold acceptance of the plan can be seen in contemporary Malaysia such as Bank Bumiputra, and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The idea was to restructure Malaysian society into a modern, technically-oriented society.

He made two immense contributions towards Malaysia's international relations. He renewed the fraternal relations with Indonesia and forged close co-operation with China.

He was one of the founders of Asean and started Malaysia's close co-operation with neighbouring countries in economic and defence aspects. He articulated the proposal for ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality).

He managed to persuade Asean countries to accept the ZOPFAN concept. It was adopted in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration in 1971.

In 1974, Razak took the bold step of visiting China and establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. I was in the Wisma Putra that time and was Desk Officer for China. It was a hectic time preparing for Malaysia's opening of China.

It was the opening which put Malaysia on the road to an even-handed

foreign policy of equidistance and non-alignment. Razak also promoted relations with Islamic countries. Malaysia was active in the formation of the OIC or The Organisation of Islamic Countries. As a result, our first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman became the first secretary-general of the OIC.

Malaysia will always remember the contribution Razak made in consolidating the country and unifying its people. While he was active in the wider world of non-alignment, the OIC and the Commonwealth relations, Razak's singular legacy is the fostering of close co-operation among neighbouring countries, and the consolidation of Asean.

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