

07/08/1999

Dr M's capable leadership key to BN victory in last election

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WHEN Malaysia became a victim of currency traders in July 1997, and when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke and took a stand, he was unfairly and severely criticised by the foreign media and others including some Malaysian pandits.

They found fault with him and said that when he opened his "big mouth", our shares and the ringgit fell. He was urged to resign.

When he introduced the selective exchange rate controls, he was not spared either.

However, he proved them wrong. The US and others acknowledge now that speculative currency trading can have adverse effects on the global economy. Also, his call for a mechanism to control currency trading is gaining support in international fora.

Dr Mahathir met these challenges well and because of this we are able to weather the economic storm.

The Government is undergoing constant changes to keep pace with changing times. Dr Mahathir has introduced many innovative ideas and brought about radical changes in policies which ensured the civil service was attuned to the new era of development.

Under his leadership, the civil service has had to constantly find new ways to implement policies efficiently and be responsive to new developments.

He has taken a keen interest in the welfare of public employees. In 1976, he took charge of negotiations with Cuepacs to settle salary claims.

In the 1980 salary adjustments, Dr Mahathir, as chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Salaries, took Cuepacs by surprise by making an early decision on the claim for a general revision. For the first time, the Government acted without the unions having to "beat the war drum".

The privatisation concept drew considerable public interest. The whole case for privatisation is based on the assertion that the Government cannot efficiently perform its functions and ease external borrowings. By reducing the large bureaucracy, the Government would be able to focus on national development.

The unions feared that privatisation would lead to job reduction and thus unemployment, and consumers paying more for poor-quality services.

Dr Mahathir dispelled the fears. He kept his promise that no public employee would lose his job. The Pensions (Amendment) Act 1980 was introduced. Employees were able to retain their pensions and gratuities provided they opted to remain on similar salary scales applicable to the government service.

Those who opted for the privatised scheme were eligible for pension and gratuity on attaining the optional retirement age. Thus, the majority of employees chose to do this.

The methods adopted by the Government were different from Western countries. Despite shortcomings, privatisation has been found to be very successful and other countries have shown keen interest in Malaysia's experience.

In the long and frank discussions with the Prime Minister on a number of occasions during my tenure as the president of Cuepacs and the general secretary of the Malayan Technical Services Union, I had found that he never hesitated to explain the rationale of the decisions he had had to make in the interest of the nation.

His firmness has given us hope that we can live in dignity. Thus, it is no surprise that the Barisan Nasional did very well in the last general election.

To lead us ahead, we have a Prime Minister who firmly believes in the basic proposition that the worth and dignity of man is the strongest, the most creative force in the world.