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Quick look at Dr M's thoughts in his new book

"I WILL present my view of the situation in East Asia ... and try to look beyond the surface and discover the underlying forces at work," says Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the prologue of A New Deal for Asia.

For as the Prime Minister says, he was a firsthand witness to the wave of financial destruction which spread across the region.

He was, after all, Prime Minister of Malaysia, one of the prime targets of the attacks.

"This cannot be the way the world should be," he writes as he looks back at the episode and then, turns to look ahead.

The book was launched by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

It begins on a personal note - Dr Mahathir's early life and experiences, a narrative which helps explain the forces which shaped the man who in 1999, clocked his 19th year as Malaysia's Prime Minister.

He writes of growing up in a family which treasured education and discipline and recounted life under British rule and then the Japanese occupation.

For once, he saw how the Japanese were able to defeat the British and how disciplined the Japanese were.

"This somehow impressed upon me and later convinced me that with discipline you can master almost anything," he writes. "Thus, there was a new awakening amongst us that if we wanted to, we could be like the Japanese."

Leaping ahead, he analyses "Asia's Road to Prosperity". To him, the real driving force behind the "miracle" was not foreign aid, but foreign direct investment did play a crucial role.

In Malaysia, it was the Japanese companies which came in droves. Today, the economic output of Japanese corporations in Malaysia comprise 23 per cent of Malaysia's gross domestic product.

He also writes about the New Asia with a culture and democracy with its own flavour.

"This was the new Asia. Was. The end of an Era?" was the question with which Dr Mahathir leads the reader onto "Who Spoiled the Asian Dream?"

Dr Mahathir writes of his views of currency speculators and the inexplicable and sudden loss of "investor confidence". He recounts how healthy economies were suddenly deemed as rotten to the core and also looked at the conspiracy theory.

Did a conspiracy topple Asia?

"I do not believe there was a conspiracy against East Asian nations, at least not in the conventional sense of the word," he writes. "But obviously, their troubles have afforded an opportunity to force open their economies and allow domination by more powerful nations.

"Currency traders did not work in concert, nor did they put their heads together to consciously impoverish countries. But they did, and do, behave like herds. The effect is not unlike acting in concert."

Dr Mahathir writes of his fears of desperate East Asian economies coming under foreign dominance.

In the next two chapters, Dr Mahathir analyses "Asian Values" and Japan's role in reviving Asia.

He goes on to look at "Rebuilding East Asia for the New Millennium", first by analysing the conventional medicine prescribed by the

International Monetary Fund and its failure to cure.

Thus, he says Malaysia decided to take "extreme measures for extreme times".

"To invent new ways of doing anything, it is worthwhile to re-examine old ways to identify their strengths and their faults, and then to modify them or invent totally new methods.

"This is exactly what Malaysia did in September 1998," he writes.

In Chapter Seven, the last chapter, Dr Mahathir moves on to the future: "Will the 21st Century still be the Asian Century?"

"The Asian century will not come, and the era of Asian dominance over this planet will not arrive, and we in Asia should never aspire to a new hegemony, thus merely replacing one evil with another," he writes.

He says he had hoped for a genuine "World Century", one of prosperity for everyone but believes now that he had been too idealistic.

"A World Century is now possible for the first time. No single nation, no single people and no single region should inherit the future; all nations, all people, all regions should have the same opportunities," he writes.

The book closes on a note of hope for the future, an ending which recalls a sentence which he had penned in the early pages of the book.

"Looking back at my years as prime minister," he writes, "I think it is fair to say that my single greatest achievement has been focusing the entire nation on the future."

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