

31/08/2000

Highlights: August 1999-August 2000

AUGUST 31, 1999: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launches the Petronas Twin Towers in conjunction with the National Day celebration. The 88-storey building of stainless steel, glass and concrete towers, the tallest in the world, is one of the most ambitious construction projects ever undertaken in the country.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1999: Malaysia wins admiration from the International Monetary Fund for its regime of selective capital controls implemented at the height of the region's economic crisis. Another august international financial body, the World Bank also lauded our country's efforts later in the month.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1999: Datuk Mazlan Othman is appointed director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, thus underlining the world body's recognition of Malaysia's contribution to the call for peaceful use of outer space and space technology. Dr Mazlan is also the first woman from a developing nation to be appointed to this post.

SEPTEMBER 16, 1999: The National Theatre (Istana Budaya) is officially opened by Dr Mahathir. The RM210 million building boasts state-of-the-art technology in lighting and sound systems, and is capable of seating 1,500 people. It is listed as one of the most modern concert halls in the world.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1999: Malaysia deploys an advance team under the United Nations banner to restore peace in East Timor despite requests not to do so from other Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia. Brigadier-General Datuk Mohamed Khalid Saad leads 30 Malaysian Armed Forces officials in joining the multinational force in Darwin, Australia.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1999: Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj Almarhum Sultan Hishamuddin Alam Shah Alhaj is installed as the 11th Yang Di-Pertuan Agong under the country's constitutional monarchy.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1999: Bank Negara Malaysia releases the new RM5 note. This is the fifth denomination of Malaysia's new currency note design (the third series, following the introduction of the RM2 note in February 1996, RM10 in January 1998, RM50 in July 1998, and RM100 in October 1998). The new RM5 depicts the Petronas Twin Towers and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. It has enhanced security features, though retaining its predominant green colour scheme.

OCTOBER 15-17, 1999: Malaysia plays host to the penultimate leg of the world Formula One championship of 1999, the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix, for the first time ever. Held at the Sepang International Circuit, the 5.442km circuit is the only purpose-built F1 racing circuit in the world. Costing RM286 million, it was built within an astonishingly brief 14 months and has set new standards for Formula One racing. It went on to win Malaysia the FIA Award for Best Grand Prix of 1999. Malaysia is only the second Asian country, apart from Japan, to be given the honour of staging this event.

OCTOBER 24, 1999: Malaysia hosts for the first time the Fifth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) at the Putra World Trade Centre. The five-day event was attended by 3,000 delegates from 67 countries.

OCTOBER 29, 1999: First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin presents Budget 2000, which includes a bonus of one month for government employees. Pension for 380,000 former civil servants residing in Malaysia was increased by 10 per cent. The salary hike takes effect from January 2000.

NOVEMBER 1, 1999: Selayang Hospital, the world's first state-of-the-art paperless and filmless medical facility, begins operations proper. The fully-funded government facility is the only hospital in the country with a Hand and Microsurgery and Hepatobiliary Surgery Department.

Equipped with 960 beds and 31 wards, the hospital also acts as a national training and referral centre for all related hand microsurgery cases. Built at a cost of RM540 million, the hospital boasts 22 operation theatres including 12 state-of-the-art main operation theatres linked by audio visual cables to the hospital auditorium and seminar rooms. Patients' records are maintained online. Blood samples are bar-coded for identification before and after being shipped to the laboratory via a pneumatic tube while X-rays can be viewed through high resolution monitors available in every one of the 81 consultation rooms.

NOVEMBER 18, 1999: World Cup Golf begins at the Mines Resort and Golf Club. This is Malaysia's first effort in hosting the tournament. Current world number one player, 23 year-old Tiger Woods, lends prestige to the championship.

NOVEMBER 29, 1999: The BN was returned to power with a comfortable two-thirds majority, winning 148 of the 193 parliamentary seats but failed to regain Kelantan and lost Terengganu to Pas. The BN also retained two-thirds majorities in nine State Legislative Assemblies while Pas, the leading partner of the Opposition front, collected all but two of the State constituencies in Kelantan. In Terengganu, Pas won 28 of the 32 State seats, leaving the BN with only four. The lion share of the 42 parliamentary seats collected by the front also went to Pas which won 27 seats. Of the front's other three partners, DAP picked up 10 parliamentary seats and Keadilan five. PRM returned home empty-handed.

JANUARY 1, 2000: After years of preparation and billions spent, the Y2K bug - the great computer hype of the century - makes no apparent impact on any of the nine critical computer systems throughout the country shortly after midnight. An estimated RM1.85 billion was spent by the Government and private sector on finding a solution to the simple yet far reaching Y2K problem.

FEBRUARY 1, 2000: The Government declared the third Saturday of every month a holiday for civil servants nationwide. Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said the holiday would boost domestic tourism. Meanwhile, the ministry's figures revealed a positive impact on the domestic tourism industry since the first Saturday of every month which was declared a holiday last year. Besides tourism, the additional holiday also provides more time for one's family and children.

FEBRUARY 14, 2000: The Kuala Lumpur Composite Index breaks the 1000-point resistance level to end at 1006.82, thus setting a record since August 1997. The last time the KLCI was above 1,000 points was on Aug 1, 1997, at 1002.63 points.

FEBRUARY 14, 2000: Bank Negara Malaysia grants approval for the formation of 10 banking groups, including their lead banks and respective partners. The move is aimed at reaping maximum synergy with the view of improving the profitability and efficiency of the resulting banking groups. The banks now have the tasks of completing the due diligence process and signing the sales and purchase agreements. Upon completion of the merger programme, each banking group will attain minimum shareholders funds of RM2 billion and asset base of at least RM25 billion. Bank Negara has set the date of end-December 2000 for the entire consolidation exercise to be completed.

MARCH 7, 2000: A shopping extravaganza to attract local bargain hunters and buyers in the region begins. Involving mega sale carnivals nationwide until the end of the year, the event is planned by the Culture, Arts and

Tourism Ministry and themed Malaysia Your Top Value Shopping Destination.

After the first month-long Mega Sale Carnival, the next carnival will be the Mega Merdeka Sale (August 7 to September 7) and with the final one from December 7 to January 7.

MARCH 29, 2000: The Education Ministry's survey on gangsterism in secondary schools reveals that 30 per cent of secondary schools are high-risk schools, with Selangor having the most high-risk schools (77), followed by Perak (60), Johor (51) and Penang (49).

Kelantan, Sabah and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur recorded 37 high-risk schools each, Pahang (35), Kedah (32), Negri Sembilan (14), Malacca (10), Terengganu (eight), Perlis (six) and Sarawak (six).

APRIL 3, 2000: Tan Sri Musa Hitam is appointed chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia. Musa previously led a Malaysian delegation to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights from 1993 to 1998, and was elected the commission's chairman in 1995. Since 1995, he has also been Prime Minister's Special Envoy to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. Besides increasing awareness of human rights, the commission assists the Government in formulating legislation and administrative procedures, recommending measures to be taken and giving suggestions on participation in treaties and international conventions relating to human rights. The commission is assisted by a secretariat, which provides the manpower for investigation, legal advice, administration and public relations service.

APRIL 23, 2000: Six Abu Sayyaf rebels from southern Philippines abduct 21 people from an island resort in Pulau Sipadan, off Sabah. Nine Malaysians and 12 foreigners are taken to Jolo. An American couple managed to escape under cover of darkness.

APRIL 23, 2000: Datuk Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz creates history when named as Bank Negara Malaysia's seventh governor. Taking effect from May 1, she will be the first woman appointed to the post. She succeeds Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman who retires at the end of the month.

MAY 8, 2000: Malaysia's first locally designed car, Proton Waja, was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

MAY 10-13, 2000: The 54th Umno General Assembly was held, during which elections to the party's supreme council were held. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi were returned unopposed.

MAY 18, 2000: Selayang Hospital goes down in the annals of medical history by performing the world's first whole-arm transplant. Fifty-five medical personnel successfully transplanted an arm to two-month-old baby Chong Lih Ying to replace the deformed stump she was born with. The 15-hour feat involved the connection and repair of the artery, veins and nerves which had to be connected before the skin was closed over the arm.

MAY 30, 2000: Aishah, the 7th generation descendant of Mahsuri, Langkawi's legendary beauty arrives with family members from Phuket as guests of the Langkawi Development Authority in conjunction with its 10th anniversary celebration. She is accompanied by her father Wan Nawawi (6th generation descendant), mother Sumaini Yazid and grandfather, Wan Hashim (5th generation descendant). Mahsuri's descendants were traced to Kampung Kamala in Phuket by an expedition comprising 28 historians and four Kedah Museum staff and led by a former museum director.

MAY 31, 2000: Malaysia celebrates World No Tobacco Day. The Health Ministry embarks on an advertising campaign to counter tobacco's promotion. The Ministry's Tobacco Control Unit promotes a no-smoking campaign through its 140 cessation clinics nationwide for smokers earnestly trying to quit.

Campaigns to discourage youth under 18 from smoking were also launched.

JUNE 15, 2000: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launches

the Kenari, Perodua's first new car in the 21st century. The car, with a forecast sales volume of 1,600 to 2,000 units per month, is expected to boost the second national car maker's sales past the 100,000 mark this year.

JULY 1, 2000: The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry launches Crackdown 2000 aimed at eradicating software piracy. It marks the start of continuous checks nationwide on organisations suspected of using illegal, pirated, and unlicensed software.

JULY 1, 2000: The increase in bus fare takes effect nationwide. The 33.33 per cent price hike is attributed to increasing operating costs including the price of chassis, spare parts, diesel and tyres, which on the average, had risen by 35 per cent since 1992.

The last approved fare increase was in 1992. The move is said to be in the interest of the public, as operators can earn more and provide better public transport services.

JULY 2, 2000: A deviationist group raided two army infantries in Grik and escaped with high calibre weapons.

The 27-member group held four men hostage - two policemen, a soldier and a farmer - in a five-day standoff before surrendering to security forces on July 6.

At the end of the five-day ordeal, two of the hostages, Det Kpl E. Sagadevan, 48, and Army ranger Mathew Medan were killed while another two, Det Kpl Mohamed Shah Mohamed, 52, and Jaafar Putih escaped with injuries.

The group, identified as Al-Maunah, a religious group whose members are ilmu batin practitioners and dedicated towards setting up an Islamic state, also lost one of its members, Abdul Halim Ali, 31.

JULY 16, 2000: Malaysia and other parts of the world experienced a total eclipse of the moon after a 141-year break. The last moon eclipse was sighted in 1859. After July 16, the next eclipse is expected in 1,000 years' time. The eclipse of the moon began at 8pm and ended at mid-night.

JULY 25, 2000: Parliament tables the Optical Disc Act 2000, to complement the Copyright Act 1987. It will be gazetted following the King's approval and enforced beginning Sept 15.

JULY 25, 2000: The Government approves RM200 million to set up 10 community colleges nationwide from next year. The colleges, which can accommodate up to 1,000 students each, will allow Form Five school leavers, including those who failed Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, to pursue diploma courses which are hands-on and technical in nature. The move is designed to address the high drop-out rate among Form Five school leavers. The courses will also be available to adults who wish to acquire or improve technical skills.

AUGUST 1, 2000: The Immigration Department introduces autogates at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport to speed up clearance at departure and arrival checkpoints. Malaysian smart passport holders need only to flash their passports against a sensor machine which will pick up the data contained in the document. The machine will be introduced in phases at the country's other major entry and exit points.

AUGUST 1, 2000: Malaysia's seven cellular phone service providers are now given the flexibility to increase, lower or abolish their customers' access fee following the Government's decision to revoke the ATUR (automatic telephone using radio) Regulations 1986. Previously, there was a standard RM60 cap on monthly access fees. With close to three million mobile phone users in the country, the Government hopes that the move will result in service providers taking initiatives to introduce more advanced services, products, pricing and new technologies to cater for the needs of a fast expanding and diverse market segment.

AUGUST 2, 2000: The Government has introduced a scheme called Prosper or

Projek Usahawan Bumiputera Dalam Bidang Peruncitan to boost Bumiputera participation in the retail sector. The project will implement measures to address perennial obstacles that have inhibited their active participation in the sector.

AUGUST 3, 2000: Sabah's Kinabalu Park becomes the first site in Malaysia to be included in the prestigious Unesco World Heritage List. It joins other famous sites like the Pyramids of Egypt, the Grand Canyon, the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall of China. Meanwhile, the Mulu National Park is just a small step away from being included in the nature category of the list.

AUGUST 8, 2000: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sentenced to nine years' jail by the High Court for sodomising former driver Azizan Abu Bakar. His adopted brother Sukma Darmawan Samitaat Madja was sentenced to six years' jail and four strokes of the rotan. Anwar's jail term will run consecutively with the six years' jail term he is serving for corrupt practice. Anwar and Sukma were convicted of sodomising Azizan at the Tivolli Villa apartment in Bangsar between January and March 1993.

AUGUST 10, 2000: Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar announces his resignation as Selangor Menteri Besar, citing health reasons and the need to devote more time to his family. However, he retains his post as the Permatang State Assemblyman and Kuala Selangor Umno division chief. Abu Hassan became Menteri Besar on June 6, 1997, after succeeding Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

AUGUST 11, 2000: MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, also Minister of Transport, said the party would go all out in efforts to eradicate ecstasy pills and slot-machine gambling which are becoming widespread among teenagers. The MCA has taken this drastic campaign because 90 per cent of Ecstasy users are Chinese youths.

Under the Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act, anyone caught taking five miligrammes of Ecstasy pills can be fined up to RM100,000 or jailed for up to five years.

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