

# Why few can claim to have done as much for the people as Dr M

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**F**OR the most part Malaysians are now reconciled to the imminent resignation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The 16-month transition period is the comfort zone that has made that reconciliation easier.

It is not that the country has no confidence in the rest of the leadership but rather after 21 years Malaysians have grown comfortable with the democratic paternalism that is the tone of the Mahathir era.

To many, these past years have been a simple pleasure. Democracy is a matter of making sure that Dr Mahathir is returned to office, for an X against the Barisan Nasional symbol means job security, prosperity and peaceful coexistence: an equation that requires little mental dexterity.

Hence the apprehension and the spontaneous rejection of his resignation by all the Umno delegates and more. Nobody, but nobody, wishes to relinquish the good life without a struggle, thus the Prime Minister was moved to relent.

For this the country is grateful, and in this is the essence of the man, a leader first and all else later.

The detractors will, of course, go on insisting that in relenting, Dr Mahathir stays true to their allegations that he wishes to stay in office for life. Even if this was true, the benefits to the nation far outweigh the innocuous idiosyncrasy of a man who has given to the nation more than what the nation can ever bestow on him.

No honours or monuments can depict his contributions to the Malays, especially, and Malaysians, generally.

Few leaders, no matter where they hail from, can claim to have done as much for the people they serve.

There are heroic figures all over the world. In Africa, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda are two presidents of unassailable stature to those whom they lead.

Neither man has, however, left a legacy as splendid as Malaysia.

Both Tanzania and Zambia are mired in poverty. A shame, really, when one considers how wonderfully hospitable Tanzanians and Zambians are.

## WEEKEND GUEST

By Askiah Adam

Lenin, the father of Soviet communism, did little to leave a lasting legacy.

Mao Zedong took China into communism only to have its economic policies overturned and its totalitarian politics exploited.

Closer to home, Sukarno returned to the Indonesians their independence and dignity without the economic wherewithal to sustain them.

Winston Churchill, hailed as an excellent war Prime Minister, had little to do with peaceful prosperity.

The list goes on. It is, therefore, understandable why the Malaysian public was stunned by the unexpected announcement. Even those who purport to have waited for a long time for the prospect wondered whether it might not be the wrong time for it to happen.

That such was the overwhelming sentiment speaks rough of the populace, a people gone soft. Or is it affection, no matter how well concealed, that colours the what is otherwise inexplicable, outpouring of public emotions captured by the cameras on that fateful day.

Copious tears rolling down the cheeks of those attending the Umno general assembly must surely mean something.

To the cynics it signifies fear: cronies will be left high and dry. Given that most were in tears, one can then make the assumption that the Prime Minister's cronies are spread far and wide and this is not a bad thing because the tears tell us that the so-called "trickle down" effect has been more like a "pouring down" effect.

However critics of contemporary politics allege that today's citizen measures success purely from the economics standpoint and that very little emphasis is given to social development. Would this apply to Malaysia?

For a newly developing country, Malaysia can lay claim to have laid down a comprehensive public health care programme well before putting

down the modern infrastructure that has allowed it to flourish economically. From the very onset of independence, monies were spent to bring good hygiene and medical support to the rural areas.

The *klinik bidan*, with fully trained midwives, brought ante- and post-natal care to the kampung folk. Today, public hospitals and clinics remain affordable to those who need them.

The same can be said for education. Although the Government has resisted declaring education to be universal, it is already *de facto*. For, education is completely out of reach to only the very few. Of course, some will insist that it is a few too many.

Generally, though, most Malaysians take their children's education for granted. It must, however, be admitted that in a generally well educated society the burden of education to tertiary level for all would be economically unbearable.

That which has defeated the Prime Minister to some extent, however, is the Malay psyche and this he has admitted to as much. He has attempted to pull the Malays, kicking and screaming, into the 21st century and the new millennium.

But their insistence, on the one hand to be utterly materialistic and on the other to be completely spiritual with few preferring the middle path, has brought scathing rebuke from the Prime Minister, a sign of his frustration.

Now that Dr Mahathir has clearly signalled his farewell, it may be the right time for those whom he had toiled unceasingly for to take heed. Islam, as he has tirelessly repeated, does not prevent progress. It is the Muslim individual's unwillingness to know his religion first-hand that makes him malleable to malignant political machinations.

Undoubtedly, the late Datuk Fadzil Noor was well liked and respected, but this does not mean he was any less fallible as all humans are.

He was a prominent Malay, an example and leader of those who refuse to know Islam for what it truly is: a spur to Muslims to make the most of this life so that the next will be better and best cannot be an existence of perpetual subjugation.