

Awaited is the publication of **The Life and Times of Dr Mahathir**, detailing Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's premiership over a period of almost 23 years with its record of the nation's achievements, challenges faced and trials endured.

They are the stuff of history which as acknowledged is never linear, with its ups and downs and zig-zags.

Providing a prologue of sorts to his reformist ideas for the Malays and his leadership of the country is *The Malay Dilemma*, published in 1970. Mahathir had written the book after he lost his Kota Star Selatan parliamentary seat in the 1969 general election and was expelled from Umno for criticising the party leadership.

He is a voracious reader as well as a writer of a number of newspaper articles and books.

In December 1945, as a young student who had just returned to school after four years of Japanese Occupation, he wrote in the editorial of his school (Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Star) magazine, *Darulaman*, of which he was editor:

"Humanity is on the threshold of the greatest Age of all the Age of Atomic Energy, and we, as members of the human race pray and hope that this revolutionary energy will be turned to peaceful usage. We hope that this marvellous discovery will enhance the progress of mankind, raise the standard of living and maintain Peace even as it stopped War."

Much indeed has been written about him. He was seen as a Malay ultra and there was much apprehension when he joined the government.

On the occasion of his being appointed deputy prime minister, one reporter asked him why some people described him as an extremist politician. Mahathir replied: "First of all, you have to decide what is an extremist Malay politician. I would consider myself as a very frank politician who likes to speak up whenever there is something that has to be said."

He has said much since then at national as well as international levels. So much so that he has often been referred to as an international gadfly by the international media.

While doing medical studies in University of Malaya, in Singapore, Mahathir wrote articles to the *Straits Times* under the pen-name of Che Det, a family pet name. Most of the articles focused on Malay poverty.

He returned to Kedah some four years before independence and joined the government medical service and was, therefore, not allowed to enter politics.

His desire to be in politics and to put into effect his ideas was so strong that it caused him to quit government service. In 1957 he established his own medical practice, MAHA clinic, in Alor Star. There were only five private clin-

The Life and Times of Dr Mahathir

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by MAZLAN NORDIN

Referring to Vision 2020 launched in 1990, Mahathir reminded that its success does not lie only in "growth figures" but that the vision galvanised the entire nation. Quote: "The words *dua puluh-dua puluh* in Malay and *ehrling-ehrling* in Chinese has fuelled the dreams of everyone in Malaysia.

Noting the "cut-and-thrust, dog-eat-dog global economy game" and its domination by the West, Mahathir embarked on a series of moves which changed Malaysia from a mere producer of raw materials to a manufacturing and exporting country.

He initiated the Look East policy focusing on learning and implementing Japanese and South Korean work ethics and management principles.

Meanwhile, several large Japanese corporations had become more competitive on the world markets selling goods in Malaysia. An example is Matsushita Electric which exports to 78 countries from Malaysia.

In matters political is the stance taken that in politics there are no permanent enemies. And that there can be happy reunions also. It explains the appointment of former deputy prime minister Datuk Musa Hitam as special envoy. There was the return of former finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah to the Umno Supreme Council and the return of Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, Datuk Rais Yatim and Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir as cabinet ministers. They were once stalwarts in Team B opposed to Mahathir.

That Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, formerly in Team B also, has been chosen by Mahathir to succeed him is further testimony.

Puzzling, therefore, is the suggestion from certain quarters that Mahathir be given some sort of special powers after the hand-over. Surely his own decision on the succession should be respected. As the old Malay saying reminds: A ship cannot have two captains (*Tiada kapal dengan dua nakhoda*).

Also awaited, therefore, after Mahathir's retirement is the publication of his memoirs filled with personal reflections, anecdotes and reminiscences - it will be part history, too.

Datuk Mazlan Nordin has a column in the Sun. He was former editor of Utusan Melayu and Bernama chairman.

ics in the town and MAHA was the first set up by a Malay. It is widely known in Alor Star that treatment was cheap: RM3 for an examination, RM5 for an injection and RM6 for housecalls.

An emergency call came one day from an old man at Batu 1, Diseberang Keretapi, Korok. During the house-call Mahathir was asked by the patient to state his fees. Noting the dilapidated condition of the house, he replied: "Whatever you can pay." He was given RM2.

It was a gesture forever remembered by the old man's teenage grandson, Zainuddin Maidin, later a journalist in *Utusan Melayu* and now deputy information minister.

As Mahathir later told *The Economist*, politics is a good profession for those with medical training since a doctor records the patient's medical history and after examination makes his diagnosis.

He added: "Another quality I gained from practising medicine was a certain compassion and sense of responsibility for people in need.

You try to understand people's ailments as well as their feelings - their depressions or their joys - and this has served me well in later years."

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Mahathir became a member of Parliament in 1964 at the age of 39. The following elections in 1969, however, saw the ruling Alliance winning a paper thin majority. The situation became volatile and unstable, and race riots erupted in Kuala Lumpur on May 13. Mahathir then wrote "a strong letter to Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, urging him to resign". It resulted in his expulsion from the party.

Mahathir was reinstated as a member of Umno and made senator three years

later. He was given his first cabinet post as education minister in 1974 after winning the general election. Just two years later, he was appointed deputy prime minister which set him on course to becoming prime minister in 1981.

Emphasised was his focus during the period to "the creation of an ethnically stable and economically and socially prosperous Malaysia".

Touching on the New Economic Policy which ended in 1990 after 20 years, Mahathir noted that it "changed the scene of Malaysia almost completely. No longer are the towns mainly Chinese and the rural areas populated mainly by Malays and other bumiputeras. More and more, the urban areas reflected the population structure of the entire nation". The NEP was followed by the National Development Policy.