

The making

STAR 31 OCT 2003

of Mahathir

The road to the top was rocky and often slippery but almost right from the start, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad already had well-defined ideas and steadfast principles which have virtually remained unchanged through the years, writes **AUDREY EDWARDS**.

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was born on July 10, 1925, in Alor Star, Kedah, the youngest of nine children.

His father Mohamad Iskandar was an English schoolteacher who was known as a strict disciplinarian and his mother was Wan Tampawan.

"As an adult with important decisions to make in life, he often sought his parents' views and consent as a gesture of love and respect," writes Aziz Zariza Ahmad in his book *Mahathir's Paradigm Shift: The Man Behind the Vision*.

Aziz also observed that the future Premier was "greatly influenced" by his father's resoluteness and determination.

His early education was at the Seberang Perak Malay School and later the Government English School (which became the Sultan Abdul Hamid College in Alor Star).

In school, he was the librarian of his class and constant winner of the English prize. A former teacher, Datuk J.F. Augustine, described him as an "above average" student.

"He was not very interested in sports. He was often with his books. His main hobby was reading and writing. In fact, he was so good in English that he was appointed the editor of the school magazine."

● TURN TO PAGE 4

My mentor, my friend

TO many people, Dr Mahathir might seem a hard man, even *cengis* (fierce), but there is the softer side to the man, the caring side, that only those close to him, like Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, know about.

When his wife Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood was diagnosed with cancer, Abdullah says Dr Mahathir would always ask about her health and welfare.

Abdullah has also noticed that Dr Mahathir never failed to visit any friend who fell sick or was hospitalised.

"There are so many fond memories of our time together that I don't think I can pinpoint one that is special," he says when asked what he considered as the fondest memory of his relationship with Dr Mahathir to date.

"We worked very well together," adds Abdullah of his tenure as Deputy Prime Minister. "We worked very closely in Umno and Barisan Nasional too."

Dr Mahathir, he says, is a very hard working leader who never seems to tire.

Of Dr Mahathir's many good qualities, Abdullah thinks the best are his superb time management and his ability to do many things at one time, and do them very well too.

"There are many things that I admire about him that inspire me. His dedication is one. He was a very dedicated leader and I could see that he liked his job tremendously.

"He also told me once, and I still remember it today, that two heads are better than one; which means that if I find difficulties in deciding on something, it is always good to consult someone else, to get differing views on the issue. On that basis, whatever decision made, will be the best," he says.

The close camaraderie that he enjoyed with Dr Mahathir as his deputy would be the thing that he would miss the most now.

"He has always been there to give me a helping hand. As a leader, he has been very helpful." - **by SA'ODAH ELIAS**

Mahathir got the most votes when he contested for a place in the party's Supreme Council but not a Cabinet position because of his defeat in the elections.

He was appointed Senator in 1973 and was appointed Education Minister after he won the Kubang Pasu seat in the 1974 general election.

The minister

AZIZ writes that, "education was the first step in Mahathir's plan to change the people and the nation. As a leader, his ambition was to eliminate poverty and create justice for all, and to see to it that every individual was given an opportunity to improve his or her standard of living."

Throughout his tenure as Education Minister, Dr Mahathir introduced reforms such as increasing the opportunities for Malays to further their education at institutions of higher learning, changing the admission quotas and other criteria in the selecting students for such centres.

Facilities such as scholarships and teaching institutions such as the Mara Junior Science Colleges were also set up.

He also amended the Universities and University Colleges Act, which was opposed by academicians and those involved in education.

"As a strict disciplinarian, he did not hesitate to use necessary measures to silence the critics of the education policies. Today, all centres of higher learning are managed under the guidance of the Ministry of Education," writes Morais.

He contested and won a vice-president seat during the Umno General Assembly in 1975.

All this contributed to the success of his political future.

Following the demise of Tun Abdul Razak and the appointment of Tun Hussein Onn as Prime Minister and Umno president, Dr Mahathir was appointed Deputy Prime Minister by Hussein.

Automatically, he was made Umno's deputy president.

"Despite common consent over the appointment, one could not forget that Mahathir was known as an extremist and it inevitably aroused distrust among Malaysians of Chinese descent.

"Nevertheless, Mahathir has proved that the allegations hurled at him by his political opponents were groundless," writes Aziz.

Dr Mahathir remained Education Minister after his appointment. He was the Cabinet's investment committee chairman and also Trade and Industry Minister, where he had a non-stop campaign promoting trade between Malaysia and other countries.

He retained his post in the Cabinet and party when he won in the 1978 general election.

His time finally came when Tun Hussein Onn stepped down as Umno president and Prime Minister due to health reasons.

At 55, Dr Mahathir became Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister on July 16, 1981.