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Mahathir-World

MALAYSIA IS KNOWN IN THE WORLD FOR ITS VOICE OF REASON AND JUSTICE

A News Focus by Kuah Guan Oo

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- Shamsurrijal Abdul Jalil cuts a lonely figure in his Proton Satria car in his quest to drive solo around the world.

When met in Algiers last August, "Sham", 38, as he is called, has driven through India, West Asia, Central Asia and Northern Africa, and among the many stories he has gathered along the way, one stands out in particular.

Of the many times that he was forced by the night to stop and rest in remote villages and small towns, the people had heard of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Malaysia.

Sham said not only did these people welcome him but they also provided him with food and shelter, asking for more information about the country as if to confirm what they had heard or read about Malaysia.

From Algiers where Dr Mahathir met Sham and encouraged him to complete his solo quest, the prime minister went to Damascus for talks with the Syrian leaders, ulamas and businessmen.

There, crowds gathered outside the hotels or the Government office to catch a glimpse of the Malaysian leader whom they had heard or read about.

TWIN TOWERS

The Petronas Twin Towers, a so-called mega project of Dr Mahathir that was belittled by the Western media, has certainly dispelled many notions harboured by the Western society about Malaysia, not least of which is that Malaysians still lived in trees.

"Malaysia? Petronas Twin Towers!" said comedian Harith Iskandar as he regaled his audience with his jokes about his encounters with the Western world who did not know about Malaysia before the twin towers graced the Malaysian sky.

But far more than the world's tallest building until it was replaced by Taiwan's Taipei 101 skyscrapers last Oct. 17, Malaysia is now known far and wide for its voice of reason and justice.

Dr Mahathir and Malaysia are known for their views and stance on many issues confronting Third World countries, be they political, economic or social in nature.

The latest salvo, much to the chagrin of the Western world, is against the Jews who seem to be above the law and international norms, killing the Palestinians, bombing out their homes and evicting them from their land.

REASON AND JUSTICE

Dr Mahathir has chosen the right venue, the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference here two weeks ago, to question the seemingly inviolable "right" of the Jews to kill and destroy while lambasting the Muslim extremists for their suicide bombing and senseless killing of innocent people.

It was a balanced and well thought-out speech but the Western press unwittingly chose to highlight only the Jewish part to brand him "anti-Semitic".

But this is not new in as far as Dr Mahathir is concerned. Of the many times in the international or national fora where he had spoken out for the developing world and the underdogs, the Western media chose to highlight only the more palatable points to the developed world.

They would chose to gloss over the plain truth that really hurts them by brushing off Dr Mahathir by saying that he was again ranting again the developed countries or Superpower.

"Are we not allowed to say that we are angry with the Jews? Are the Jews some kind of creature who cannot be condemned in any way?" asked Dr Mahathir last Monday after the Western press and governments condemned him for his remarks.

"I am not anti-Semitic ... I am against these Jews who kill Muslims and the Jews who support the killers of Muslims," he said.

Stressing that he condemned the Europeans as much as he condemned the Jews, Dr Mahathir said, "You say you are not under the influence of the Jews, and yet when I criticize the Jews, the whole of the European Union wants to condemn me.

"But when somebody condemns the Muslims, calls my prophet 'terrorist', did the European Union say anything? Which shows that they are under the thumb of the Jews."

EARLY SIGN

Over the last 22 years of his administration, Dr Mahathir has spoken out on many issues affecting not only Malaysia but also much of the developing world, adding more stature to himself as a statesman and prestige to Malaysia as a nation on the threshold of a developed status.

And if there is any inkling of the vocal if not blunt nature of Dr Mahathir in the early days, it must be in May 1978 when as Deputy Prime Minister and Trade and industry Minister, he indicated that Malaysia might launch a "trade war" against Australia over Canberra's protectionist trade policies and doubling of import duties on sawn and dressed timber.

Then came his "Look East" policy two decades ago as he mustered the rakyat to emulate the Japanese and South Koreans to work harder for the development of the country.

In 1992 when environmental issues came to the fore at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Dr Mahathir and other like-minded Third World leaders had "fought" tooth and nails to make sure that these environmental concerns did not undermine their trade, and the costs of keeping the world environmentally safe were at the feet of the developed countries.

Two years later, Dr Mahathir shook the world by announcing a three-month boycott of British firms or "Buy British Last" policy over allegations of corruption in Malaysia.

IMF DOUBTED FOR THE FIRST TIME

Of all his policies and actions over the past 22 years, the most profound should arguably be his defiance of the International Monetary Fund's prescription for an economy hit by the East Asian financial crisis of 1997.

Never before had the IMF remedies for ailing economies -- be it in South America, Africa or the Philippines -- been questioned and proven wrong until Dr Mahathir steered the ailing Malaysian economy back to health. It was a lesson that Malaysia would not ever forget and neither would be the rest of the world.

Just days before he steps down, Dr Mahathir did not mince his words when he equated "economic terrorism" like currency manipulation with terrorism because it impoverished a whole nation and people, causing untold misery and hardship without firing even a single bullet.

He has always argued that there should have been a better way for people and nations to live and trade and to prosper together. For this reason, he was instrumental in launching the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1985 and its sister forum, the Southern African

International Dialogue (SAID).

PROSPER THY NEIGHBOUR

His message in these fora was loud and clear: trade between nations and peoples should be on the basis of "prosper thy neighbour" and not "beggar thy neighbour".

His rationale is just as plain: it is better to have a rich neighbour than a poor one who could cause you trouble.

It was also because of trade that he hosted the first G-15 summit in 1990, with the aim of letting this select group of the more developed nations of the Third World to lead the way for more trade among themselves.

By now, most of the Third World countries and people know Dr Mahathir and Malaysia and what they stand for. They also know that Dr Mahathir has successfully developed Malaysia to a relatively rich nation.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?

Last July, a young Ugandan journalist came for the Langkawi International Dialogue and after taking in the sights around Kuala Lumpur, said he found it hard to believe about what Dr Mahathir had told his audience during the SAID in Kampala a year earlier -- that Kampala was more developed than Kuala Lumpur when Malaysia came into being.

"How is it possible?" he asked.

His more senior Ghanaian colleague who was in Kuala Lumpur in early 1970s covering a visit of his leader, shook his head and said, "ai-yai-yai, this is incredible!". -- Bernama

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