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Man, image and people

iewed by U-En Ng

WORLD CLASS PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PRACTICE: TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

Institute of Public Relations Malaysia

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THINK as you will, but few words more inaccurate than "timid" can be used to describe Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Throughout his long career, his public presence has commanded the attention of Umno divisions, Wall Street financiers and ordinary Malaysians.

Politics aside, he has always refused, courageously if bluntly, to be cowed by the Press; and his statesmanship on the international stage has propelled him to the leadership of the Third World - when such a thing still existed.

That one might be a political leader and still fail dismally to communicate publicly is a well-attested fact - witness the succession of Conservative Party leaders after Margaret Thatcher.

How much, then, of Dr Mahathir's "visibility" is due to the mere fact of his being the Prime Minister, and how much is due to his being the person he is?

Amidst other published accolades now circulating in the market, World Class Public Relations in Practice dedicates itself to a subject mostly ignored by others: Dr Mahathir's employment of professional public relations skills.

"This book is intended both for local and overseas readers," said Shameem Abdul Jaleel in an interview with the New Straits Times. Shameem is president of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, the book's publisher.

"It presents Dr Mahathir's achievement in public relations - as Malaysia's leader, he was also its most important representative in the international field.

"While many might not agree with an approach to analyse a person's 'public relations', Dr Mahathir should be judged by what he promised and what he delivered - and how well he delivered it."

The book contains a collection of essays written by academics, industry leaders and various luminaries such as consultant Datuk Dr Paddy Bowie, veteran journalist Felix Abisheganaden and former Suhakam Commissioner Prof Datuk Hamdan Adnan.

"As the collection reflects, each author believes very strongly in his or her words," said Shameem. "The overall effect is to present Dr Mahathir's multifaceted role - for example, in his dealings with information technology policy, finance, and human rights."

On why the institute has embarked on this project, Shameem said the book has the dual effect of co-ordinating a professional assessment of Dr Mahathir's years in office, with the institute's own goals:

"Our current aim is to reposition the institute and ensure that it stands in the best possible position in this new millennium.

"It's a challenge to use the term 'world-class' - once used, we must live up to it. But it obliges us, as public relations professionals, to think out of the box and take the right risks at the right times," she said, adding that Dr Mahathir was an excellently illustrative subject.

"Also, we think that the institute should document the public relations achievements of all future Prime Ministers, thus charting the evolution of

a nation in terms of those who lead change."

World Class Public Relations in Practice was launched on Dec 20 by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail.

It is published in a limited edition of 1,000. Those interested in purchasing a copy should contact Mazlan Mahat at Tel: 03-7806-3629, e-mail: iprm@tm.net.my or Sue at Tel: 03-7955-6755, e-mail: cdcr@cdgroup.com.my