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A survivor at every turn

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THE Early Years: 1947-1972, a collection of articles written by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir. His thoughts were penned and published as early as 1947 when he was still a student. Even then, when he was still a medical student, he had already shown his knack for writing. In one of his earliest articles written on July 20, 1947, Dr Mahathir had already pointed out an ardent fan of Dr Mahathir: "He should be considered one of the best." The flap jacket of The Early Years highlighted his article "Disparities: Help for Africa, America, Britain, Africa and neighbouring countries, racial intolerance leads to war. If we are not to join them it would be wise to learn from them the etiology, and if I may say so again, soon it may be too late," wrote Dr Mahathir. Slightly over a year later, the May 13, 1969 tragedy struck, making what Dr Mahathir calls the May 13 tragedy is probably the turning point in Dr Mahathir's political career. It is his writings which propelled him into the political limelight. The controversial The Malay Dilemma was a product of the May 13 race riots and the year also saw the expulsion of Dr Mahathir from Umno for a harsh and critical article. If the expulsion was seen as an end to his political career, it proved to be otherwise. When Tun Abdul Razak took over from the Tengku the following year, efforts were made to bring him back. In 1972, he was re-admitted and Umno members showed their affection for him, but in 1976, the untimely death of Razak saw Tun Hussein Onn succeeding, and there were numerous stories of intrigue behind Dr Mahathir's ascension to the top. Tales within Umno circles had it that Hussein was planning to appoint the then vice-president, but many too claimed credit of having been the one to convince Hussein to finally appoint Dr Mahathir. One variant which seemed most plausible is that the three vice-presidents - Tun Hussein Onn, Yusof Kadir, and the three vice-presidents told Hussein finally relented. Then, it was the question of who to choose from among the three. Whatever intrigue and displeasure that arose from Dr Mahathir's appointment did not stop him. In 1981, Hussein announced his resignation and Dr Mahathir automatically took over. Again, there were suspicions of political intrigue working against Dr Mahathir, but that, however, failed to stop Dr Mahathir's progress. His leadership, soon joined by Tan Sri Musa Hitam as his deputy, was hailed as the new leadership. The media dubbed the new leadership the two Ms, the initials of Dr Mahathir and Musa Hitam. In 1986, Musa resigned, citing irreconcilable differences with Dr Mahathir. That was the beginning of the biggest political challenge in Dr Mahathir's career. In 1987, the Umno elections saw one of the most bitter contests in the party's history. Tengku Razaleigh teamed up with Musa to challenge Dr Mahathir and his then deputy, Ghafar Baba. The outcome of the polls was indeed close - Dr Mahathir and Ghafar defeated the opposition. The bitter contest did not end there. The election process and results were tampered with. Then, a splinter group emerged, which later became known as Semangat 46, led by Ghafar Baba. But Dr Mahathir managed to consolidate his hold on Umno, then carrying the "Batu Tiga" slogan. Tengku Razaleigh and his supporters made inroads in the east coast especially in Kelantan. By the time the 1990 general election was held, Kelantan was a foregone conclusion. However, things started picking up for Dr Mahathir after the 1990 general election. Together, the nation again had a dynamic team. The constitutional crisis of 1993/94 saw the two taking on the Malay Rulers, but the 1995 general election, which saw the biggest share of popular votes garnered by the opposition. However, two years later, the comfort zone was breached. First came the current prime minister, then came the looming threat of having to turn to the International Monetary Fund. If that was not enough, a political crisis brewed within Umno circles, with the fall of Suharto was brought to his knees by anti-KKN forces promoting their cause under Anwar Ibrahim. Anwar was then sacked by Dr Mahathir for moral misconduct and the ousted deputy prime minister. Joining him were all the opposition forces in the nation and it began to look

However, he again survived the political challenge and brought Malaysia out of Today, most of his critics have changed their views about him and as he prepares This has been the path taken by one of the most illustrious Prime Ministers Malaysia. The path he took was without doubt thorny, to say the least. But that has a lot of loved and cherished, hated and despised, Dr Mahathir is an enigma.

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