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Dr M a statesman ahead of his time

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad served Malaysia and its people for 22 years, three months and 15 days as Prime Minister, from July 16, 1981 until he retired on Oct 31, 2003. His record of service can be traced back well before his tenure as this nation's leader.

His firm and articulate voice was first heard in this august house when he became a Member of Parliament after winning the Kota Setar Selatan seat in the 1964 general election.

His parliamentary career was interrupted briefly after the defeat in the general election in May 1969. On Feb 12, 1973, he was appointed to the Dewan Negara. In the August 1974 general election, he contested and won in the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency and was appointed Education Minister by the late Tun Abdul Razak.

After the passing of Tun Abdul Razak in 1976, the next Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn, appointed the Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu as Deputy Prime Minister.

During this period, he also served as Minister of International Trade and Industry. When he became Prime Minister, he held at different times the portfolios of Defence, Home Affairs and Finance.

The Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu is the longest serving Member of Parliament after the Member of Parliament for Batu Berendam.

In the 36 years he served as a Member of Parliament, the Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu served in the Cabinet for 29 years, of which he was Prime Minister for 22 years. Since his early days as legislator, he has been known to voice his opinions and criticisms openly and frankly.

He has a reputation as a man who articulates his views with discipline. He has always advocated renewal and possesses a vision that is ahead of his time.

When he was appointed Prime Minister, the country was in its 24th year of Independence. And when he retired, we had just celebrated our 46th Independence day. He inherited a stable country and a prosperous economy. On these building blocks, he brought the country to a higher level of success and prosperity.

The development of our infrastructure and human resources grew at its fastest pace during his premiership. More importantly, he placed our country on the world map and has made Malaysia an example of political stability, economic prosperity, racial unity and religious tolerance. We are now widely acknowledged as a progressive Islamic country.

Under his leadership, this small nation wielded a big voice in international forums. South-south co-operation was infused with a new lease of life. The membership of Asean was successfully expanded. The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and the summit meetings of the G-15, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference were all held in Malaysia. Today, Malaysia is the 18th largest trading nation in the world.

Malaysia possesses a clear vision to become a developed nation by 2020. Malaysia successfully weathered the financial crisis of 1998.

The Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu has imbued us with self-confidence, dignity and national pride. He is a hero to his nation and to his people - a hero who elevated his country in the eyes of the world.

The former Prime Minister is a visionary leader. More importantly, he has the tenacity and capacity to convert his vision into reality. He is a

statesman who has inspired his people to achieve their aspirations. He is a statesman ahead of his time and has enabled the hopes of the future to become reality today. He has transformed a country solely dependent on its agrarian resources to become one of the most industrialised nations in the developing world.

The people and the country greatly appreciate his services, which he has discharged with integrity and responsibility. He has brought this country to the altar of excellence and allowed us to emerge as a nation that is respected throughout the world.

This House records its highest appreciation and thanks to the Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu, for his selfless service to the nation, for all his ideas and articulate opinions, for his sacrifices and dedication.

This House also records its highest appreciation and gratitude to Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and her family, who have sacrificed to allow the Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu to devote his energies, thoughts and time in service to his country, his people, the region and the Muslim and developing world.

We pray for his health and contentment in his retirement. We wish him, Dr Siti Hasmah and their family much happiness.

May his services to the nation be recognised in this world and in the here-after. The biggest retirement gift that the people can present him is to continue towards achieving his vision and his dream to make Malaysia a peaceful, stable and prosperous developed nation. I am grateful that the former Prime Minister has left behind a legacy of success.

A legacy that has sustained political stability, strengthened national unity, promoted economic development and given meaning to our independence. With Allah's guidance, I shall build on this foundation to achieve excellence, glory and distinction for Malaysia.

In fulfilling this responsibility, I shall take stock and guidance from the successes of the leaders who came before me and seek the co-operation of my Cabinet colleagues and from all segments of society.

Allow me to recite a Hadith: "If Allah wishes peace on a people, then God will grant them a good leader." We are grateful that Allah has always granted us good leaders. All four Prime Ministers before me - Tengku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and the Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad - passed on to their successors a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation, enabling them to strive for greater heights. Each of these men was successful in his time.

It is therefore fitting for this House to remember and acknowledge the contributions of each Prime Minister who left a legacy of a peaceful and prosperous country to the people. In this holy month of Ramadan, may peace be upon them.

On the afternoon of Friday Oct 31, by the will of Allah, I was sworn in as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. This determination demonstrated the greatness of Allah. Man proposes, but God disposes. Allah is the divine power that decides everything.

Allah has declared in the Quran in Surah al Qasas, verse 68: "And your lord creates whatsoever he wills and chooses: no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified is Allah, and exalted above all they associate (as partners with him.)"

I realise that in our collective effort to manage and build upon the success that we have today to greater heights of excellence, I have to play the leading role as the head of our Government.

It is based on this realisation that I have decided to speak in this august chamber to outline and clarify the principles that we have to hold on to together in our efforts to achieve excellence and glory for our country.

I am fully aware of the need for me to carry out my duties with integrity, trustworthiness, efficiency and fairness. I am aware that I will be assessed by the members of this House, by the people and above all, by the Almighty. The position and the power that have been entrusted to me is a test from God for this humble servant.

If this can be carried out with integrity, honesty and fairness, then this humble servant will have succeeded in passing the test. But failure to do so will be a heavy burden for me to bear in this world and the next.

I have chosen this House to deliver my maiden official speech in my capacity as leader of this nation. This is a symbol of my respect for this august institution; an institution of public trust, an institution based on consultation, an institution where laws are made and where policies are debated.

Since the first elections were held in this country in 1955, we have upheld and defended our democracy, apart from a lapse of 21 months during the days of the national operations council after the May 13 riots. But we quickly restored parliamentary democracy and have the distinction of being one of few countries in the world where the government has been returned to the people. We believe democracy is the best system of governance to ensure the participation of the people and for their voices to be heard.

It is incumbent upon us as elected representatives to display exemplary political leadership, which can only be effective if we are respected. We must inculcate the values of honesty, determination and dedication if we wish to be held up as examples for others to emulate.

We must be open and ready to accept criticism and contrary views to ensure that the culture of democracy thrives. We must cultivate an image that is clean, incorruptible, modest and beyond suspicion.

Democracy will flourish if all its participants behave responsibly. Democracy does not mean absolute freedom. Issues that inflame religious, racial and cultural sentiments should not be sensationalised, while attempts to undermine national security and public order must be dealt with firmly.

We cannot compromise when dealing with the threats posed by extremism, terrorism and militancy. Therefore, the Government's firmness in dealing with these threats must be fully supported to ensure the security and peace of our nation.

The Malaysian people must hold to the principles of the Rukunegara: Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Sovereignty of the Laws, Good Behaviour and Morality.

The success that we have inherited cannot be continued if creativity and innovation do not become part of our culture. Firstworld infrastructure must go hand in hand with first-world mentality. Human resource development has to be enhanced to ensure that the growth of the Malaysian people balances physical, mental and spiritual aspects.

In a knowledge-based economy, people are the most important factor. Therefore, the Government will work towards providing quality education for each and every Malaysian to reach his or her full potential. We must also develop a value system that rejects crass materialism. We must reject a mindset that places the pursuit of material gain and narrow selfinterest above all else.

We must seek and identify new sources of economic growth. We must develop new approaches to enhance our competitiveness and strengthen our resilience to face global challenges. The distribution of economic opportunities must be equitable to benefit the broadest range of people.

We need to ensure that rural development continues to be a part of mainstream national economic development, and identify new sources of wealth for those in the rural sector.

Malaysians must be ready and courageous enough to face and deal with change. Our capabilities in the new and strategic areas of information and communications technology, biotechnology, science and modern agriculture are still nascent, and therefore we must enhance research and development in these areas.

The Bumiputera development agenda in producing a commercial and industrial community, as well as a science and technology community, must be fair and just, based on meritocracy within the community itself. This is necessary to enable Bumiputeras to receive due respect and recognition for their capabilities. Marginalising Bumiputeras who are truly capable and qualified, whatever the reason, will be damaging to the community in the long term.

The private sector is acknowledged as the engine for economic growth and should play a more important and active role in creating employment and economic opportunities. This requires the private sector to develop a more efficient delivery system.

The public sector must radically move beyond its role as mere regulators and law enforcers. It must become more effective, efficient and transparent facilitators, able to respond speedily to the needs and requirements of the private sector.

The public sector shoulders the responsibility of ensuring national policies are implemented effectively and transparently, reflecting a clean and incorruptible image. The public sector should be clean, efficient and trustworthy and embrace a work culture that is based on the concept of leadership by example.

People friendliness must be the order of the day in public service delivery, especially to the ordinary citizen - those without high standing or important positions or a famous name - and the people who are in most need of assistance. We need to prioritise the people.

Corruption is an odious crime. We must explore more effective methods to deal with it and in this regard, prevention is as important as punishment. Streamlining work processes, reduction of red tape, improvements in the delivery system, a conscious effort to raise the quality of work and more frequent and effective audits would reduce the opportunities for bribery.

Our resolve to have a civil service that is corruptionfree should not be weakened by unhealthy practices in the private sector or by parties that are outside the Government that contribute to this disease.

The governance of the nation would be strengthened if our laws were enforced transparently and without fear or favour. Crime prevention must be intensified. Vice that tears apart our moral values must be eradicated. We must fight those groups involved in the underworld and vice activities, and expose those who collaborate with them. The security of private property and the personal safety, particularly of women, children and visitors to our country, must be assured.

We have both a young nation and a young population. Malaysia must be able to cradle the hopes and aspirations of the younger generation. The ideas, aspirations and idealism of the youth must be harnessed into mainstream national development and draw from it innovation, invention and creativity.

The family institution is important and must be reinforced by educating our young with the right value system. We must advocate the concept of a happy family, to ensure the older members of our society are treated with deference, respect and continue to be cared for.

This approach is consistent with the teachings of Islam and with the tenets of our Asian culture.

We need to ensure that women, making up half of our population, are accorded equality and are not discriminated against in the formation of

policies, in the enforcement of these policies and in levels of participation. We need to recognise the importance of their role.

Globalisation and information and communications technology (ICT) have connected the world. We cannot live in isolation. Malaysia must be committed to being an oasis for foreign investments, international trade and a place where cultures meet. In the face of global realpolitik, the Government will continue to protect the sovereignty of the nation and will not compromise on our national interest.

We will remain steadfast and principled in pursuing global and universal justice. As the chair of both the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, we will work towards creating an equitable world economy and a global political order based on international law.

In shouldering these heavy responsibilities, I assure that I will continue the policies that have been laid out by the leaders who came before me. Vision 2020 will continue to inspire and drive this nation towards holistic development, to become a developed country. We must bring comprehensive human development in the areas of politics, ethics and morality, and socially. The national vision policy will continue to underpin our national economic policy.

The spirit of the new economic policy will not be neglected, given that it ensures our efforts to restructure society, will strengthen national unity and will eradicate poverty. The spirit of power sharing, which is the core of our system of governance and of nation building efforts, will continue to be strengthened.

The practice of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy will continue to be supported, and we must respect the separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. This is important to maintain the checks and balances needed to prevent abuses of power.

I have inherited the responsibility of governing a successful country. The responsibility is heavy and I cannot do it alone. Therefore, I seek the co-operation and support of all - legislators, administrators, the private sector, political parties, the media and from Malaysian citizens from all walks of life - to work with me to take Malaysia to greater heights, to achieve excellence, glory and distinction.

To you Allah, your humble servant turns for guidance and inspiration, strength and fortitude, patience and determination.