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Dr Mahathir the role model for healthy living

Felix Abisheganaden

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's portrait has been projected on giant screens in conference halls nationwide countless times. He has appeared in back-drops in conjunction with all types of national and international events dealing with almost every conceivable topic.

The possibilities of featuring him in an entirely new perspective would have been remote. But a breakthrough came a fortnight ago when Dr Mahathir's full-length coloured portrait appeared during a power-point presentation to motivate participants attending a healthy ageing seminar on whose lifestyle they should emulate if they wished to be healthy at the age of 100.

"Look at our PM," the speaker, a senior geriatrician said. "He is 76. Yet he has twice the energy, stamina and brainpower of people half his age."

Then, the 1,500 strong assembly was asked: "Who wants to live to be a healthy 100?" Without hesitation, almost every hand went up in enthusiastic response.

The upshot of the day's discussion was that nobody dies of old age. People die because of disease, so there is no reason why we cannot live to be happy ever after.

About three decades ago, Viennaborn physician, Hans (Hugo Bruno) Syle, who linked stress and anxiety to many disorders, had this to say about longevity: "A healthy and happy life is the result of making contributions, of having meaningful projects that are personally exciting and contribute to and bless the lives of others."

Syle's remarks may be used to describe Dr Mahathir's illustrious lifestyle. Besides having religiously followed a healthy tobacco-and-alcohol-free regimen, he has been involved in many meaningful and exciting projects that have blessed the lives of millions.

Seminar speakers stressed that a human life span of 120 years is not a hypothetical possibility but a reality. The fact that scientists have verified hundreds of such cases indicates that most, if not all of us, have the biological capability of living up to 120 years.

The point that they took great pains to explain, is this: Ageing is natural and inevitable. Death is natural and inevitable. What is neither natural nor inevitable is feebleness, sickness and pain at 50 or 60 and death at 75.

The fact is, death from "old age" per se is so rare as to be almost unheard of. Instead, people are dying from cancer, heart disease, diabetes or catastrophic accidents.

The good news is that we can drastically reduce our chances of contracting many of the more deadly diseases by changing the way we live.

"Free radicals" and "antioxidants" are described as the two most important substances discovered in the last half century.

Free radicals, we were told, have been linked to more than 60 diseases. And now there is evidence that antioxidants can protect against, stop, and in some instances, even reverse the damage done by free radicals.

The discoveries are as important to the health and well-being of people as were the discovery of penicillin and simple sterilisation techniques that would stop infection in operating rooms.

So, if you want to dance the polka at your great-grandson's wedding, start an immediate regimen to get all the antioxidants you need - both

through diet and food supplements.

The benefits of regular exercise were widely discussed, and it was made abundantly clear that exercise is a "preventive and healing medicine" both for the mind and body.

Studies have shown that moderate aerobic exercise does help individuals to avoid strokes, high blood pressure, muscle weakness, memory loss, osteoporosis, arthritis and diabetes.

Exercise also reduces anxiety and tension and boosts the body's immune system.

Well-known exercise evangelist, Jack Lalanne celebrated his 70th birthday by towing 70 boats containing 70 people for a mile across Long Beach Harbour in the United States, by holding the rope in his teeth while handcuffed and wearing leg shackles.

At 75, he still exercises two hours daily, works on books and videos and travels 15,000 miles a year conducting seminars.

British evangelist and founder of Methodism, John Wesley, travelled 250,000 miles on horseback averaging 20 miles a day for 40 years, preached 4,000 sermons, produced 400 books and spoke 10 languages.

At 83, he was annoyed that he could not write more than 15 hours a day without straining his eyes. And at 86, he was ashamed he could not preach more than twice a day. He complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5.30 in the morning.

Researchers studying the lives of 400 famous people found that 35 per cent of the group's achievements came when they were between 60 and 70; 23 per cent when they were between 70 and 80 and eight per cent when they were over 80.

When Dr Mahathir steps down as Prime Minister at the age of 77, he will surely, in three years, be among the top eight per cent to be involved in new and exciting undertakings. Certainly a worthy, exciting and fulfilling life worthy of emulation.

\* The writer, a former journalist, is corporate communications director with Prestige Communications. Contact: felix@i-prestige.com