

18/02/2003

`Past snub of Dr M cause of problems'

Balan Moses

SINGAPOREANS are putting Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad under the microscope - more than 50 years after the Prime Minister left the King Edward VII College of Medicine of the University of Malaya in Singapore as a young graduate.

The sudden interest in Dr Mahathir, evidenced in The Sunday Times coverage of the Prime Minister, is likely to have been precipitated by the ongoing friction between Malaysia and Singapore over, among other issues, the water problem.

Last Sunday saw the ST looking hard at Dr Mahathir in a move ostensibly aimed at explaining what makes the Prime Minister tick to its readers.

In a lengthy article that went well into Dr Mahathir's likes, dislikes and political orientation, Susan Long surmised that his antipathy towards Singapore had its genesis in a snub decades ago at the hands of a Singaporean.

In her commentary headlined "It started with a snub", Long went to great lengths to explain her premise that a supposed snub, apocryphal or otherwise, was to blame for the cold shoulder that Malaysia was allegedly giving Singapore.

The story, at least according to the ST, goes that Dr Mahathir had been taken to the service entrance of a house by a taxi driver and this had affected him for life.

The standfirst to the ST senior writer's piece read that "perhaps (Dr Mahathir's) years here at the King Edward VII College moulded views that have stayed with him the past half-century. He sees Singaporean Chinese as mercenary, insular, selfish, arrogant and `never having crossed the Causeway' ".

The ST piece, saying that Long delved into history to understand Dr Mahathir, went on to state that Dr Mahathir loomed large in the dispute between the two countries.

Meanwhile, ST reporter Zuraidah Ibrahim wrote a piece on Sunday that scoffed at Dr Mahathir's statement that Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had foiled a Malaysian plan to replace the Causeway with a bridge.

The ST, in a tongue-in-cheek standfirst, implied that Dr Mahathir's version of what had actually transpired in the issue was different from the Singapore version.

Sticking to the official argument based largely on official correspondence between leaders of both nations, the newspaper stated that Goh had actually agreed to the bridge.

Dr Mahathir had earlier last week stated that Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister and current Senior Minister, had told him that while he had no objections to the bridge, Goh was feeling nostalgic about the Causeway.

The article also noted that Malaysian newspapers had given extensive coverage to Dr Mahathir's statement.

"Beating mother tongue blues", read the headline of an article in the ST on how English is helping students learn Tamil.

According to the newspaper, the new textbooks have glossaries explaining hard words in English.

Shahida Ariff's piece stated that some students were now getting help in English for difficult words in Tamil textbooks.

"Students say it does help them understand what they read," Senior Minister of State (Education) Tharman Shanmugaratnam said yesterday.

In his keynote speech at an annual Tamil language seminar at the National Institute of Education, he said that using English in such a way was pragmatic.

On a lighter note, the newspaper published a story on a new breed of bomoh in Malaysia who mixed modern and traditional methods.

Writing about the Datuk Kelana Indra Sakti, Reme Ahmad stated that the bomoh lived in a big bungalow, "owns a stretch Mercedes Benz and has clients who include politicians and top businessmen".