

31/10/2003

The international statesman

Hardev Kaur

THE Malaysian flag has been hoisted from Antarctica at the bottom of the world t
Once known as a "rebel" and an "ultra", Dr Mahathir is now seen as representin
According to Tan Sri Musa Hitam, former Deputy Prime Minister and a rebel hims
Accolades come from many of his friends, adversaries, critics and world leader
Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady, said in an interview in 1993 that "Now Malay
The American Presidents - Reagan, Clinton and Bush Senior - have also heaped p
But there are also many critics who, like George Soros, have labelled him a "d
Thus, many of his critics give him credit for being consistent, honest, forthr
Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said in Davos that he admired Dr
From a country that was hardly known even outside the region, it has been firm
Not just that, but many seek his advice and now a record number of countries h
Dr Mahathir is also held in high esteem abroad. Some in the Islamic world are
A consummate nationalist, visionary, steadfast in his convictions and passiona
He made more than 250 trips, travelling from Antarctica to Zimbabwe and to cou
Among them are the Pope, American Presidents, Russian Presidents, British Prime
He travelled to war-torn Bosnia to meet Malaysian soldiers assigned to peace-k
There were quietly made trips, over many years, to Japan to study the technolo
He took to the world stage like a duck to water. He hosted many international
He made headlines both by being present and speaking out and also by not atten
He declined to attend the CHOGM in Melbourne, Australia. His reason: it was no
This shocked many and in fact prompted the secretariat to take a critical look
At the Harare CHOGM, he was given the honour to speak on behalf of leaders and
"When Malaysia was under British Rule we had British advisers whose advice mus
"We had Malay Sultans who were designated the Rulers but may not rule.
"Our Parliaments are presided over by Mr Speakers who may not speak.
"And when we have a permanent civil war, we declare emergencies and go about o
"So it is not strange that we have a Commonwealth where the wealth is not comm
"But then we are thinking of material wealth.
"The wealth that we have in common is less quantifiable but no less real.
"It is the interest, the concern, the care and the love that you, Your Majesty
"As Head of the Commonwealth you lend meaning to this motley group of nations
"Knowing that you share our aspirations, motivate us to walk that extra mile t
"For all these we thank you".
He made headlines again by not attending the first Asia Pacific Economic Co-op
The following year in Jakarta there was pandemonium, when the world's media so
He spoke up without fear on a host of issues. This included taking internation
He announced the Buy British Last Policy which made the former colonial master
Years before the financial crisis hit in 1997-1998 he had warned of the danger
He raised the injustices and difficulties caused by the rising and debilitatin
He has also not shied from taking his own people and the Muslims to task. He h
While speaking out for and on behalf of the developing countries, he stressed
During his visits to developing countries, he repeatedly stressed the import
He, against all objections and reservations, championed the inclusion of Myanm
In showing interest in others and in an effort to resolve problems together, h
He proposed the setting up of an East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), pointing ou
But as in many proposals and ideas, he was way ahead of others. Either they di
Almost a decade later and the serious lack of co-operation and co-ordination o
And in Bali recently, Dr Mahathir noted that: "When we first suggested the Eas
A fierce believer in co-operation, he argued in favour of the Non Aligned Move
In his pursuit for a just and equitable world, he highlighted the need to pres
He championed the right of the developing countries and focused on the need fo

He encouraged and challenged Malaysians to reach greater heights. His keen int
On his numerous travels, he makes a point to meet with Malaysians and students
Once when asked whether he ever tired of answering the same question repeatedl
As the country's No. 1 salesman, his entourage included businessmen and entrep
From a situation where foreigners did not even know where Malaysia was, the co
Malaysia now boasts a per capita income of RM14,098, an increase of more than
But more than the physical, economic, social and political developments that M
The US-based Fortune magazine, for example, commented that: "Every country sho
* The writer is Assistant Group Editor at the NST.