

PROFILE-MAHATHIR

BY JAAFAR HUSSIN

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HIS NAME SPELLS LIKE CONTROVERSY, BUT THERE IS NO ARGUING THAT HIS IS A CLASSIC TALE OF THE PHOENIX RISING FROM THE ASHES. FEW POLITICIANS COULD HAVE SURVIVED THE SHOCK OF EXPULSION, BUT DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED RECOVERED FROM POLITICAL LIMBO TO RETURN TO THE POWER FOLD WITH ENHANCED PRESTIGE AND GREATER RESPECT FROM FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE. HIS CLIMB BACK FROM OBSCURITY TO RESPECTABILITY AND PROMINENCE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED WITH DRAMATIC EASE. THE SHORT SPAN OF THE LAST THREE YEARS WITNESSED HIS TRANSFORMATION FROM AN ORDINARY UMNO MEMBER TO THAT OF HEIR-APPARENT. --- BERNAMA MORE 1556/A1

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THE NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IS 50. BORN IN ALOR STAR ON DEC. 20, 1925, DR. MAHATHIR OR +DOKTOR UMNO+ AS HE IS POPULARLY KNOWN IN HIS BIRTHPLACE, RECEIVED HIS EARLY EDUCATION AT THE SEBERANG PERAK MALAY SCHOOL AND LATER AT THE SULTAN ABDUL HAMID COLLEGE. AFTER GRADUATING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, SINGAPORE WITH A MBBS DEGREE, HE SERVED AS A MEDICAL OFFICER IN KEDAH AND PERLIS BEFORE RESIGNING IN 1957 TO ENTER PRIVATE PRACTICE. IN 1964 HE STOOD FOR ELECTION AND BECAME MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR KOTA STAR SELATAN FROM 1964-1969. HE LOST THE SEAT TO HAJI YUSOFF RAWA OF THE PMIP IN 1969. HIS EXPULSION FROM UMNO FOLLOWED SOON AFTER. AS A MAN WHO TAKES FAILURE AS A CHALLENGE, HE DID NOT SIT BACK BUT WORKED LABOURIOUSLY AND PATIENTLY TO REGAIN LOST GROUND. --- BERNAMA MORE 1600/A1

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HIS EFFORTS AND PATIENCE PAID OFF WHEN HE WAS RE-ADMITTED INTO UMNO IN 1972 AND ONCE AGAIN WAS ELECTED A MEMBER OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL.

IN 1973, HE WAS MADE A SENATOR AND APPOINTED CHAIRMAN OF FOOD INDUSTRIES OF MALAYSIA (FIMA) SDN. BERHAD.

AFTER THE 1974 GENERAL ELECTION IN WHICH HE WAS RETURNED UNOPPOSED TO THE KUBANG PASU SEAT, DR. MAHATHIR WAS APPOINTED MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN THE FIRST BARISAN NATIONAL CABINET HEADED BY THE LATE TUN ABDUL RAZAK.

+I WILL TRY TO DO A GOOD JOB -- FOR ALL MALAYSIANS,+ HE SAID AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE. -- BERNAMA MORE 1603/A1

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HIS DETERMINATION TO CARRY OUT THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY TO THE LETTER HAS WON ADMIRATION NOT ONLY FROM EDUCATIONISTS AND INTELLECTUALS BUT ALSO THE MASSES.

DR. MAHATHIR IS KNOWN FOR HIS FIRMNNESS BUT HE HAS ALWAYS IMPLEMENTED THE POLICY FAIRLY AND TACTFULLY.

HE BELIEVES IN A SINGLE LANGUAGE CREATING A SINGLE NATIONALITY AND IDENTITY. HE FEELS THAT MALAYSIAN WOULD CONTINUE TO BE DIVIDED SO LONG AS THEY ARE WITHOUT A NATIONAL LANGUAGE.

A DEVELOPMENT WHICH HAS NO LESS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE GROWTH OF INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING THAT TOOK PLACE DURING HIS TERM OF OFFICE WAS THE INTRODUCTION AND ENFORCEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGES ACT.

THE ACT, AMONG OTHER THINGS, BANS STUDENTS FROM HOLDING OFFICE IN TRADE UNIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROHIBITS STUDENT ORGANISATIONS FROM AFFILIATING, OR FROM DOING ANYTHING THAT EXPRESSES SUPPORT OR SYMPATHY OR OPPOSITION TO ANY POLITICAL PARTY OR TRADE UNION. -- BERNAMA MORE 1606/A1

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ALTHOUGH THE ACT INITIALLY MET STRONG OPPOSITION FROM CERTAIN STUDENT AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS, IT CAME IN FOR FULL PRAISE AND SUPPORT FROM THE GENERAL POPULACE. 20

DR. MAHATHIR HAS QUITE SUCCESSFULLY SETTLED RECENT STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA AND THE MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND A HOST OF OTHER PROBLEMS RELATING TO STUDENT-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP.

SINCE TAKING OVER THE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO, HE HAS BROUGHT ABOUT CERTAIN CHANGES AND SOME VISIBLE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AS A WHOLE. -- BERNAMA 1608/A1