

Profile-Mahathir

BY JAAFAR HUSSIN

Kuala Lumpur, Jan. ⁷⁶ (Bernama) -- He was once a controversial figure in UMNO, ^{and} was expelled from the party in June 1969.

He survived his political limbo and returned to UMNO's fold two-and-a-half years later with enhanced prestige and greater respect from friends and foes alike.

And what more his climb from obscurity to respectability and prominence has been achieved with dramatic ease; his return to the political limelight coincided with the growth of coalition politics in the country.

Within a short span of three years after his political "exile", ^{Dr. Mahathir Mohamad} ~~the one time controversial figure~~ made an imprint on the country's political scene with his swift rise from an ordinary UMNO member to the top rung of the party's hierarchy.

He is now one of UMNO's three elected vice-presidents besides being the minister of education. -- Bernama More.

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This achievement is by no means a small feat for a former party outcast for despite his earlier setback, Dr. Mahathir outshone a number of UMNO's stalwarts in the running for the senior post.

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 contested again in the 1969 General Elections but lost the seat to Haji Yusoff Rawa of the PMIP and was later expelled from UMNO on disciplinary grounds.

As a man who takes failure as a challenge, he did not sit back but worked labouriously and patiently to regain the lost ground.

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His efforts and patience paid off when he was re-admitted into UMNO in 1972 and re-elected a member of the party's Supreme Council.

In 1973, he was made a Senator and appointed chairman of Food Industries Malaysia (FIMA) Sdn. Berhad.

Following the 1974 General Elections in which he was returned unopposed to the Kubang Pasu Parliamentary seat, Dr. Mahathir was appointed Minister of Education in the first Barisan National's Cabinet headed by the late Tun Abdul Razak.

Education has always been a "tricky" portfolio, having to deal with problems of teachers and students apart from implementing the education policy.

"I will try to do a good job -- for all Malaysians," he said after assuming office.

Since then, he has never looked back.

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-- Bernama More.

His determination to carry out the national education policy to the letter has won the admiration of not only the educationalists and intellectuals but also of the masses.

Dr. Mahathir has been known for his firmness but he has always implemented the policy fairly and tactfully.

He believes firmly in a single language creating a single nationality and identity. He feels that Malaysians shall continue to be divided so long as they are without a national language.

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A development which has no less significance to the growth of the country's institutions of higher learning that took place during his term of office was the introduction and enforcement of the universities and **University Colleges Act**.

The Act, among others, sought to ban students from holding office in trade unions, political parties and student organisations from affiliating, or from doing anything that expressed support or sympathy or opposition to any political party or trade union.

— Bernama More.

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The act, which initially met strong opposition from certain student and political organisations, came for full praise and support from the populace.

As Education Minister, Dr. Mahathir has, to a certain extent, successfully settled recent student disturbances on the University of Malaya and MARA Institute of Technology campuses and a host of other problems relating to student-government relationship.

Since taking over the education portfolio, he has brought about certain changes and more visible improvements to the education system as a whole.

Footnote:

Dr. Mahathir is the author of the book "Malay Dilemma" which has been banned. -- BERNAMA.