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## DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

By HARDEV KAUR

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, once labelled a rebel, ultra, extremist and a Young Turk, was expelled from Umno in 1969 but made a comeback to lead the party as its president. At 62 years and a grandfather he admits to being forthright and frank but adds: "I will not admit to being extreme."

On Friday he faces the challenge to his post as party president — a challenge that has been described as the "most serious" to the Umno presidency in the history of the party.

But Dr Mahathir, a doctor, is not unaccustomed to challenges. As a young medical officer he drove miles to outlying villages to treat those who could not make it to the hospital and later to his clinic.

The fourth prime minister of Malaysia, unlike the previous three, is not a lawyer and is also the only one who was not educated in Britain but at the University of Malaya in Singapore.

While he portrays the image of "a man aloof" he is helpful and human — often giving free medical treatment to his patients. Che Det, as he is more affectionately called in his home state, used to give his poor patients bus fares to enable them to return home, in addition to the free medication.

For someone who started as a youth selling coffee and cakes at Pekan Rabu in Alor Star, a place he still visits when he goes back to his home state, he has proved

to be a convincing salesman for the country so much so that he was labelled the country's number one salesman.

An avid reader, he used to consume books in between selling coffee and cakes at his stall. He also likes to do things with his hands and recently went for a woodworking course in England. He has a workshop at home where he likes to "relax".

Youngest of nine children, Dr Mahathir entered politics in 1945 and joined Umno soon after. In 1964 he contested and won the parliamentary seat of Kota Setar Selatan. A year later he became a member of the Umno supreme council until 1969. He lost in the 1969 elections to Yusof Rawa who is now president of Pas and on July 12 he was expelled from Umno by Tunku Abdul Rahman.

On March 7 1972 he was readmitted to the party and three months later was elected to the supreme council, polling the highest number of votes. But he failed in his bid for one of the vice-president's post.

He was appointed a senator in 1972 and a year later was appointed chairman of Food Industries Malaysia (Fima). In the 1974 general elections he was returned unopposed to the parliamentary seat of Kubang Pasu and three years later succeeded in his bid to become one of the three vice-presidents of Umno.

Since his return to the party and government, he has served in various capacities, having held the education portfolio, trade and industry, defence and home affairs. At 11.02 am July 16 1981 he was sworn in as the country's fourth prime minister.

Since taking over the helm of the Government Dr Mahathir has instituted a number of changes. He stressed the need for punctuality and introduced clocking-in for the civil service, the use of name tags, synchronised the time zones so that people in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak followed the same time.

He pushed the move from an agricultural oriented economy to an industrial economy with the aim of making Malaysians able to stand tall among the citizens of the world. He urged them to aim high for the country. The country is the world's largest producer and exporter of natural rubber. Why not also the world's leader in tyres, he asks.



He has urged Malaysians to aim to be the world's largest manufacturing nation. People may laugh at this suggestion he said but if in the 1920s someone had said Malaysia should aim to be the world's largest producer of rubber and palm oil the same cynicism would have been expressed.

His basic philosophy is reflected in a prominently displayed sign at the Proton factory in Shah Alam: "Our future depends on our willingness to work hard not as slaves for the pay but because of our responsibility and love for freedom and integrity."

His leadership and style has given rise to a lot of controversy but there is no doubt his only concern is the future and survival of the country. He acknowledges that political rivalry will always be present. "Leaders come and go, the party will remain" he said, stressing the importance of maintaining Malay unity. Ironically that is the dilemma Dr Mahathir the author of "The Malay Dilemma" now faces.