

# Timely study of some major policies of Dr M

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Profile

BT 15 APR 1990

DATUK Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamed's policies of reform and restructuring will continue to be a point of debate and dissension among analysts and observers for a long time to come.

Certainly, no other Malaysian Prime Minister has generated the same degree of public discussion, disagreement and printed literature focusing on the various programmes and policies of the Government.

In "The Mahathir Era", subtitled "Contributions to National Economic Development", Dr V. Ganapathy and a number of others have focused on some major programmes and policies of the Mahathir administration and have attempted to outline and analyse the impact and implications of these programmes.

The major policies that are reviewed and analysed in the book include privatization, Islamisation and economic development under the Mahathir administration.

Prof Ozay Mehmet describes Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir as, "the most ambitious reform-minded leader" to hold the position of Prime Minister of Malaysia.

He begins his analysis by citing from The Malay Dilemma and quotes Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's conclusion that "the value sys-

of the Mahathir administration.

The replacement of the Syariah by a Civil Code and the substitution of the Latin script for the Arabic script for writing Turkish were measures that were carried out ruthlessly.

It must not also be forgotten that Kamal Ataturk abolished the caliphate — the religious counterpart of the sultanate — and expelled from Turkey all members of the Ottoman dynasty.

The Look East policy of the Mahathir administration is much narrower than the programme of westernisation and modernisation undertaken by Kamal Ataturk.

While the Look East policy can be considered to be more than a strategy of setting up sogo soshas and introducing Japanese-style enterprise unionism, it cannot be compared to Kamal Ataturk's programme of reform and the creation of the modern state of Turkey.

Prof Mehmet argues that "the basic difference between Ataturk and Mahathir centres on their dif-

***THE Mahathir Era by Dr V. Ganapathy, Prof. Ozay Mehmet, and others (Kuala Lumpur: International Investment Consultants, 1989). Price \$7.50, pages 97.***

ferential part of Malaysia's economic planning system. It therefore had a limited life span of 20 years. It was assumed that by this time it would have achieved its objectives."

The prognosis of the writer as regards the post-1990 economic policy is that, "whatever the form it is likely to take, the priorities of the NEP after 1990 will shift towards the achieving of the objectives of stimulating economic growth and wealth creation, so that the social restructuring goals can be achieved within the context of an expanding economy".

One of the effects of the recent economic recession is that it has forced the Government to review more critically its economic policies and programmes.

Analysis of the Government's policy of privatization, both in terms of its advantages and its drawbacks, is succinctly articulated by the writer and this contribution comes out as one of the better ones.

He goes on to say that, "opposition and criticism should be regarded as a constructive part in the on-going national dialogue. They have a valuable role to play in the life of a nation. No government is foolproof from making mistakes or wrong decisions in policies.

"They need to hear other voices. They should welcome the expression of alternatives. It is the wise leader who is able to cultivate the trust of his or her critics and opposition, so that they become his honest critics and opposition. If he can do that, he is very lucky indeed".

## Directions

One idea put forward by Mr Lubis that Malaysians should seriously consider is that Malaysia contains an "explosive cultural mix".

What he means by this is, "... that when the right political, social, economic and cultural climate can be developed, this cul-

In the writer's words, "the first is to list the economic reforms he has made to the nation — the reforms which had helped to restructure the economy by being less and less dependent on the fortunes of primary product exports and the institutional changes that were made to serve the people of this country.

"The second method of measuring Dr Mahathir's contribution to national economic development, though less tangible but no less real, is the psychological revolution which he has created and which in turn has inspired Malaysians to be more competitive and to think in global terms."

Dr Ganapathy accords top marks on both counts to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir. He argues that, "within a brief period, despite mistakes and accusations, it was his administration's commitment and discipline which helped the nation's successful adjustment to the difficult economic environment of the early 1980s".

Dr Ganapathy gives the accolade of "Renaissance Man" to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir.

tem of the Malays clearly ... hinders the progress of the competitive abilities of the Malays in a multi-racial society".

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir views Malay society as first and foremost feudal and that the masses are highly deferential to rulers and that they lack competitive spirit, prefer land ownership to doing business and their monetary system "is still primitive".

According to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, "budgeting, savings, banking, investments, credits, growth, transfers and all other refinements in the use of money is generally not appreciated".

Prof Mehmet's analysis sees the Mahathir reform programme as "modernisation" from within. He further puts forward a parallel between Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's reform programme and that of Kamal Ataturk, the nationalist leader who reformed Turkey after the victory of the National War of Independence that lasted from 1919 to 1922.

### Parallel

He puts forward the view that, "ideologically, therefore, it is plausible to describe Mahathir as an Ataturk-style reformer, in particular in terms of their common diagnosis: that the traditional cultural values acted as hindrance to development".

This ideological parallel is, however, very limited. Kamal Ataturk's programme of the re-creation of Turkey as a modern state in the western pattern was both massive and in many ways brutal, that almost totally changed the face of Turkey.

Ataturk's assault on all forms of the manifestations of Islam in civil and political life without brooking any opposition and his programme of westernisation cannot be compared at all and in any way to the Look East policy

ferential leadership response to Islam".

He further states that, "they both saw Islamic values as 'hindrance to progress', and both recognised the need for psychological transformation according to some imported set of secular values but Mahathir, especially after 1982, became increasingly reluctant to move along the secularist road of progress.

### Contribution

"On the one hand, he pushed ahead with Malaysia Inc and Privatization, but on the other hand he introduced an Islamic policy."

The contribution by Prof Mehmet is intriguing and holds interesting viewpoints, although one may not agree with all of it.

In the chapter entitled "The NEP and Privatization: Conflicts in Economic Policy", Mavis Puthuchery, concludes her analysis that "... unless the privatization policy is carried out in an atmosphere of openness and with greater participation by the people it is unlikely to achieve its objectives of promoting economic growth through efficient private entrepreneurship".

The analysis of Ms Puthuchery is in three parts. The first part deals with the origins of privatization and the second part deals with the multiple objectives of privatization. The third part deals with the problems and conflicts in priorities for government planners and decision-makers.

This is due to the fact that, "... fundamentally the two policies are in conflict — the discriminatory nature of the NEP (New Economic Policy) conflicts with the fundamental philosophy of free enterprise system".

As stated by the writer, the NEP was seen as, "... necessary in

### Developments

The chapter on Islamic Values for Development, is a short one and treats the subject in a rather superficial manner.

Mochtar Lubis, in his piece entitled "Malaysia, Promise and Hopes" brings a note of freshness and an outsider's view to Malaysian political developments as seen from the eyes of a veteran journalist and a spokesman for human rights. He expresses the feelings of warmth and friendship that exist between the peoples of Indonesia and Malaysia.

The thrust of Mr Lubis' analysis is on political leadership and the democratic ethos. He writes that "the most negative side of the Malay political leaders in all the Malay lands is their most intense dislike, almost bordering on hatred, of opposition and criticism".

tural mix might be able to explode into a new synthesis, a new powerful culture, open and forward looking and creative, combining the best parts of each culture, which will give the Malaysian society a powerful thrust into the future".

Maybe, Malaysians in general and our policy planners have discounted the potential the country has in favour of pursuing relentlessly the grey areas of cultural uniformity and consequently monotony and dullness.

Mr Lubis is both full of frankness and praise as regards the political leadership qualities of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir.

Dr V. Ganapathy writes an overview of the Mahathir era. In the first few paragraphs of this overview, he suggests two possible directions for the evaluation of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's leadership.

At certain points Dr Ganapathy speaks bluntly. For instance, he states: "In apportioning the 'accolade' for the rapid growth of the receivership business in Malaysia, it is difficult to exclude the banks! And the Government must be included as well!"

"Insolvency is an emotional subject. When one is down and out, one experiences only ruthlessness and insensitivity from everyone around. In fact, those who cannot repay their debts are often regarded as a shade better than thieves."

One can't but agree given the ruthlessness with which banks stack up insolvency.

The Mahathir Era, while it does not examine some of the issues in depth is a timely study, taking stock of some of the major policies that have made Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir a man of action and controversy. — *By Murugesu Pathmanathan*