

Interview with Dr. Mahathir: Prime Minister of Malaysia

THE MAKING OF A COUNTRY

Serge Berthier:

You often claim that Malaysia needs different politics from the Western ones. In what way do you consider Malaysia to be different from other countries, hence requiring different goals and different tools from others?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

The countries of Southeast Asia are largely different from the countries of Europe. In Europe, the countries are largely single ethnic nations. Of course, they have immigrants, but they remain marginal in the fabric of the nation. In Southeast Asia we have almost everywhere pluri-ethnic nations and we have to admit that the ethnic societies don't get assimilated. Even in Thailand, Chinese -Thais remain primarily Chinese. So we have to accept that we cannot assimilate. The difference between Malaysia and its neighbours in Southeast Asia is in its proportion. Whereas Thailand is largely Thai, with a Chinese minority, Singapore largely Chinese with small Malay and Indian minorities, Indonesia largely Indonesian, with a small minority of Chinese, we have a different composition. Indigenous people make up about 60% of the population and the 40% remaining are 30% Chinese and maybe 10% Indians (1).

Serge Berthier:

Is it the only difference?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

There is another one which was inherited from the past. The distribution of influence in the country is very peculiar. On the one hand, the Bumiputra (2) have political strength, because they are the majority, but they only have a small participation in the economy. On the other hand, the Chinese have economic strength and the Indians are somewhat in-between. This combination has proven to be an explosive mixture because the Malays are not only Malays, they are also poor. The Chinese are not only Chinese, but they are also rich. Of course, there are some poor Chinese and rich Malays, but they are in the minority. So the two groups are positioned diagonally opposite across the spectrum of the society.

Serge Berthier:

You did have riots in 1969 and nearly had new ones in 1998 in Penang (3). Is stability a constant worry?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

It is something you have to be permanently conscious of. In a pluri-ethnic society, if you have the social division amplifying the racial division, then you have trouble ahead.

Serge Berthier:

What do you consider as being achieved today that greatly reduces the risk of ethnic rioting?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Instead of going on endlessly fighting like Northern Ireland and other countries, we decided that we would try to correct the balance, in order to diffuse the potential for a strife. In single ethnic societies, the division between the rich and the poor was the breeding ground for the communist ideology. In a pluri-ethnic country, if you have the social division amplifying the racial division, then you have trouble ahead but you can't change the Chinese into Malays, nor can you change the Malays into Chinese. That is not possible. What we could change was the economic imbalance, which we set out to do by affirmative action.

Serge Berthier:

This affirmative action has now succeeded in a way. The Malays are not that poor anymore.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Yes, this affirmative action has now succeeded. Today the number of Malays at the top represents more or less the proportion of Malays in the country. However it means also that the number of Malays at the bottom accounts also approximately for the same proportion. If we have been able to reduce the tension created by the social differences and the ethnic differences, tensions are nevertheless still there. One of the things that we have achieved is to make sure that, where before the urban areas were 100% non-Malays, they are now made of a mixed population. In 1969, when the Malays came to the cities to burn houses and cars, they were certain that what they were burning belonged to a Chinese. Today, if they come to burn the city, they will burn things belonging to Malays. So, they don't do it anymore.

Serge Berthier:

Was this fact the result of a conscious decision or just a consequence of urbanization ?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

In a way, it was a conscious decision. Houses belong to Malays now. Before, in the urban area, it was exclusively Chinese.

Serge Berthier:

You have been in power for more than a decade. Yet you always give the feeling that time was, and still is a great constraint to achieve your goals. Why?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

The time constraint is indeed a very big factor. To restructure a society, you have to move fast. We gave ourselves twenty years to achieve progress. For example. the government set out (in 1970) that indigenous people must achieve 30% of the share capital of the commercial and industrial sectors and the Chinese, although they are smaller in numbers, 40%. The crux of that policy is that 20 years ago, the Chinese already owned 30% of the economy and to increase it one-third in twenty years time was a rather natural thing, but the Bumis, then, owned only 2% of the economy. In order to reach 30% within the same period, they had to increase their share by a 20 times factor, and the Malays are not the kind of people that can achieve to grow their share at such a sky-rocketing pace. So, you have to work very hard, to train them, to motivate them, to cajole them, to make things available to them, to punish them and so on.

Serge Berthier:

Is this why you got the reputation of bashing your own people from time to time?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Maybe. We did all kind of things and if I think something is wrong, I'll say it.

Serge Berthier:

Nevertheless, in the end the time, the challenge was too much. The Malays have not achieved the target, no matter what the government did about it.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

In twenty years, we did not achieve 30%. We only achieved 20% but it was already a tremendous effort. The Malays had to grow 1000% in twenty years to get there.

Serge Berthier:

The New Economic Policy that lays the rules for such stunning growth has been decried outside Malaysia as being a racist policy as it favored one group of the society, the Bumiputras. The classic way to reduce economic imbalance in the society is generally through fiscal policies and social transfer. Why was such a classic method discarded for a more radical and contentious approach?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

If you take away from the rich to give to the poor like the communists did or the socialists do, you cross a bridge between the ethnic fabric of the society and create even more friction. So we did not want what we called the Robin-Hood strategy where you rob the rich in order to help the poor because if you do that, there will be anyway a racial element into it. We had to work it out differently. We took a bigger share for the have-not's out of the economic growth engineered by our policies, in order to help them out. And this, we have been able to do.

Serge Berthier:

If the policy has been a success, why is the New Economic Policy still a corner-stone of the government policy?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

As I said, although the imbalance is greatly reduced, it is still there and we have to be very careful and get the balance right.

Serge Berthier:
Meaning?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We have to be sure that the Chinese economy within Malaysia, which is the largest, keeps growing but at a slower pace. It has served us well since it has eased tension to the level we experience now. In periods like this one, where the economy is slowing down, people remain quite solid and there is a sense of solidarity.

Serge Berthier:

Once you said, not so long ago, that threat to Malaysia does not come from outside but from inside. Did you mean that the re-engineering of the Malaysian society has its own in-built danger?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Of course. We have destabilized the society. The Malays were comfortable in their own environment. We have created a new one they are not familiar with. We can expect a kind of instability. Concussion, extreme reaction are there. The society has undergone extraordinary changes. Obviously, the mentalities have changed. The poor mentality is no longer there. There are different feelings, but the change brought new challenges also.

Serge Berthier:

Such as corruption?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We have problems of corruption where we had none in the past. That has to be corrected. But this is only one thing. There are many others. Some people are against such changes. Some say that we have lost some spiritual values. So all those things need to be dealt with. We have to learn and understand what is the effect on a society undergoing such transformation. What is the effect on the individual and the family? How do you correct the inevitable excess and so on?

Serge Berthier:

When you say that some people are against the changes, and criticized the loss of spiritual values, I have the word "Islam" coming to mind. Malaysia is an Islamic country. Yet you have not mentioned that fact as a characteristic of the country. Is there anything we can learn from Malaysia being an Islamic country?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Perhaps the example of a truly Islamic modus vivendi in inter-religious and inter-civilisational accord. In Malaysia, Muslims have been living and working with non-Muslims quite harmoniously. Admittedly there have been instances when they did not. But that is the point.

Serge Berthier:

You have been accused of making anti-Semitic statements. What is your answer to such criticism?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

If I oppose the policy of Mr. Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel, I am accused of being against the Jews. You can't criticize the government of Israel, no matter what. The Europeans invariably support it. But I disagree with the government that is in charge. I cannot condone its policies towards the Palestinians. It has nothing to do with the Jews. I have friends that are Jews and they can speak for me.

Serge Berthier:

Why is it, in your view, so hard for the Western world and the Islamic world to understand and respect each other?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Actually Europe's perception of Islam has not changed very much since the Middle Ages. Understanding of Islam is minimal. There is a need for both the Europeans and the Muslims to improve their perceptions of each other to improve their relationship. The Palestinian issue is really the straw that broke the camel's back. The Arabs fought together with the British to wrest Palestine from the Turks, but in the end the land they liberated together was partitioned and given to the Jews.

Serge Berthier:

Would you say that the Muslims are blameless for the distrust and dislike that is current?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

The Muslims are not blameless. The point is that the basis for the anti-European feelings of the Arabs in particular and the Muslims in general is political. But, quite naturally, religion is invoked.

Serge Berthier:

What then can be done to build up trust and respect?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We don't need a saint to bring about a better understanding about each other. All that we need is fair and accurate information about Islam and the Muslims on the one hand and about the true concern and generosity of the Europeans on the other. This is actually more important than an understanding of each other's religion.

Serge Berthier:

Is it done?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

No. For example, the activities of the French doctors who risk their lives to attend to the medical need of people in Muslim countries who have been displaced by wars have not received the right publicity among Muslims. Similarly the facts that most Muslims did not support the death sentence passed on Salman Rushdie has also not been publicized among Europeans either.

Serge Berthier:

One of the distrusts of the Europeans towards the Muslim world comes from the fact that Muslim states are not secular and that the laws that govern the society of such states are not secular but religious ones. How do you deal with this issue in Malaysia?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Secular laws and Islamic laws are not mutually exclusive. What are their purposes? For both to achieve justice, to be just. In that sense, they are not incompatible. You have to consider the substance, not the form. For example, if a Malay commits a crime and his accomplice is a Chinese, would it be just that he has his hand chopped-off while his accomplice is sentenced a jail-term? Would the society benefit from such justice? Certainly not. What is important is the spirit of the law, that

is to render justice. And the spirit of the secular laws and the religious laws are the same. In a modern society, forms clearly outmoded should be discarded.

Serge Berthier:

Do you have in mind a model of plural society that fits into what you would like to achieve in Malaysia?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

The model we have in mind of a plural society is the Swiss one. Switzerland has at least three major societies cohabiting together and a high degree of local autonomy. The country has three different languages, each group speaking at least two of the languages, which gives to all of them a common language to communicate. Of course Malaysia is far from that stage. For one, we do not have a common language. Of course, the indigenous language, the Bahasa, is the language of the majority, and so it has to be the common language, and we have the English language but it is not a common language either (4).

Serge Berthier:

The Malaysian economy has been hit hard by the financial crisis. What is the impact on the Malaysian society in general and the Malay society as you see it today?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

These are people that did not understand money at all before. The political leadership has disrupted the society to bring it to a different level. Twenty years ago, the Malays did not know what capital was. They were farmers. Money was a convenience in their pocket, to go to the shop to buy something they needed. That was money. But now the Malays have to understand what money is and what it entails, all the more so because we have a financial crisis to deal with. Money can be invested. It can allow productive investments. We have to explain what we have been trying to do. We are trying to reach out at all levels of the society, from the executives, the middle-rank workers, hawkers, the shop-keepers, the poor, and so on, across the spectrum of the society. The government has to explain to them what happened. Things have changed. Nevertheless you need to keep some high-values, otherwise you will destroy yourselves. One of the problems is that in the process of a growing economy, the cake grows and everyone can enjoy a bit of the benefits. When it shrinks, as is the case now, those people who thought they were rich become poor again. And they panic. What to do about it? They have to understand that to have money is not an end in itself.

Serge Berthier:

Do you feel in control?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We have lost control of certain things. For example we have lost control of the value of our currency. We have suddenly realized we can be made poor, just like that. It is very distressing because you realize that you do not have the power to correct, to change what is happening and affecting your people. The power lies elsewhere. Here we are being told that we must behave ourselves. If you behave yourself then you can recover. But what you find is that even those who behave do not recover well. So we think maybe it is not the intention, you should not accuse people of broad conspiracy or plotting something, but if you don't do that, why are those things happening to us? What we have been trying to do is to address social problems. We have not changed. But then, all of a sudden, things happened beyond our control. Our worry when dealing with the West, is that the West is at a stage where it is more interested in the means than it is in the result.

Serge Berthier:

You don't believe in the recipe of the Western economies?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We are not at the same stage. I think the problem with the European perception of Asia is that, if you are looking at Asia through your own glasses, you have achieved that level where things like starvation, lack of medicine do not really bother you because there is a huge safety net. If you are unemployed, you get unemployment benefits. You are not going to starve. So what matters to you is whether you are free to say certain things. But we are at a different level of society where starvation is a real thing. Well, you may say it does not matter as long as you are free. However when people are made poor, such as in Indonesia, where before they had an income, they had food, they had medicine, today they have nothing. Again you may say, it does not matter, because they are free to do business, but what business is there for them to do? In an open society you are free and you can decide, but what is at stake? What is more important? The fact that people may have leaders they don't like? That is not as important to them as filling their stomach. But this is something the West has a hard time to appreciate. Westerners don't understand why is it that some people don't care for freedom, for democracy, for the environment, etc. But those are concerns of rich people, not of people who wonder when will be their next meal. Unemployment benefits are a drain on any economy but it does not matter in the West. It is part of human rights, it is affordable. But in Asia, in Malaysia, if you are unemployed, you are without resources. You have no government subsidies because the

government is too poor. So there is a total lack of appreciation of the problem that has been caused. You say your trade must be open. You must not restrict trade. You should not restrict anybody who wants to make money. It is very important. If a hedge funds try to make a billion dollars, it would be wrong to stop them doing so. But the fact that by doing that, they may cause ten to twenty million people to be unemployed, that is irrelevant! The answer to my remarks is the easy one: people are unemployed because we do not know how to run our country. And how come such people don't have a safety net? Rich people do not understand that we, in Asia, have no means to do so.

Serge Berthier:

Why in your view is the West so self-confident in its own economic policies?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

What we learn from the past is that, when an idea or a perception has taken root and becomes an article of faith, it is very difficult to change. It does not matter that the idea is wrong or manifestly harmful. Dislodging it will always be opposed and countered by people who have accepted the idea and who distrust change. Today we are seeing faith in new economic and political theories which may not be challenged despite the obvious harm that they do to many societies.

Serge Berthier:

What is in your view the harmful side of the new faith then?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

The means being more important than the results.

Serge Berthier:

You mention political theories as well as economic ones. What political theories do you allude to?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Faith in democracy. If you are democratic, but because of democracy, you have anarchy in your country, you are told "that's fine because you have democracy". But then, what can you achieve? I heard once someone commenting upon a government he considered vicious on its dealing with some others, but it was a democratic country, and so, the fact that the government was oppressing other people did not matter because the government is democratic and was elected by its people. So we have to wonder what all this means and, in the end, stay faithful to what matters to us.

Serge Berthier:

What does matter to you then?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

What matters are our values in the end. If you dream to achieve something good and you try to discover that you do not achieve it, then you should be prepared to look at the means you need to achieve it. That is the difference between the end and the means. But people seem to have lost the ability to judge that.

Serge Berthier:

Why do you mention democracy as a problem?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

In many Asian countries and on many issues, there is an inability to govern. In the West there are generally two parties, and the government changes between the two big parties. But when democracy was put in place in many other non-western countries, it was said that political systems had to be multi-party ones. The countries ended up with forty or so different parties, none of them being national in character, all being provincial. So no one can achieve the majority. As a result, politicians have to have a coalition. A coalition is never strong. One party leaves and the government is out. So what we are seeing now is that the process of democratic election is on, but there is no government to speak of. Or there is a government that is too weak to move, that would not be reelected if it does the wrong thing, and even when it does the right thing, it may not be reelected. Governments have to do unpleasant things. They have to formulate laws which somehow restrict one or another. You can't please everyone.

Serge Berthier:

India seems to be the country you describe, but is it the case of Malaysia?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

If I lose one hundred votes I can be out. You don't need to lose all of them. What you have to understand is that if you lose half of your majority, you become powerless because you are in balance. If you lose then one vote, you are finished. So this is what is influencing the thinking of the democratic principle in Asia. Countries want to be democratic, but they have this problem of having thirty or forty different parties, election now and then, and in none of the elections can you achieve a majority. You cannot set out a government, and even if you succeed in setting out a government, you cannot take the

necessary action to develop your country. Your country remains backward, no water, no sewage systems, despite being highly educated, because the elite cannot move.

Serge Berthier:

But this is not the case of MalaysiaÉ

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Fortunately, for us, the ground work to avoid such pitfall was set up by the first Prime Minister (5). Since then, we have had less difficulty. Malaysia is slightly different in the sense that we have a coalition before an election, not after. So in a way we behave as one party, but the problem is that you have to give a little to one, a little to another and so on, till you reach a consensus. It means you have to work out how many candidates for this one, how many candidates for that one, you must support that party although it is not your party in such and such place but it is part of the coalition.

Serge Berthier:

Is it to cope with the ethnic imbalance as well as the religious one that you have to constantly tune-up such a system?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Yes.

Serge Berthier:

You mentioned earlier on that money was not an end in itself. What values do you attach to money?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Another thing I find about the misconception of the West is the idea that if you are wealthy, then it does not matter how you became wealthy. Actually there is no denial that there is a strong feeling of national pride underpinning every economic policy. When Asian countries open their economy, they allow all the large companies from the West to come in to start factories, run things, build highways, employ people and so on. People will become well-off in the process. This will increase the wealth of the country but in fact there is no pride in it. In an open society, you do not think in terms of border. You ease out the nationalistic factor. But we have our own pride. We want to be able to say "these are our banks, these are our companies". Take Korea. You can now buy-out Hyundai. 80% will belong to a Western company and 20% to the Koreans. The name will stay Korean, but to the Koreans, they would have lost a national symbol. And then it is

important for them. It has a price. They would rather be poor and have this national symbol, rather than be rich and have nothing. Of course such feelings cannot be perceived in the West, because it is precisely the Western companies that are dominating the economies. But imagine living in a given Western country where Japanese and Korean own all the companies, including the banks, and you work for them. What do you think you would feel about it? They are not ours. People tend to forget that we are all different, different races, different cultures and so on. Wealth is one thing, but it is not everything. We want to be our own as much as the Westerners want to be their own.

Serge Berthier:

But what you evoke is the classic protectionist argument!

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

We have been told "why do you want to close your borders? If you open up, you will benefit". But if such intrusion were the other way round, the West would not accept it. We do admit that the West have the most efficient automobile plants, the most efficient banking system. It is therefore obvious that it will get all the benefits of such courses of action. This is the conundrum about open market, open economy. When we mention national pride, it is just brushed aside as an antiquated notion. But is it really?

Serge Berthier:

Paul Krugman, the economist, says that globalization carried with it, in an exaggerated form, the features people dislike about market: impersonal forces that are out of national control and the fact that what sounds like common-sense turns out not to work very well. For a Prime Minister, what does globalization mean?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Facing very powerful forces. You appoint the wrong man, then you have a run on the currency and you make the people very poor. In the case of Malaysia, in 1987, we lost about 200 billion dollars in the slump. This was just the stock market loss and currency loss, not the real economy loss. Such figures are frightening. You are afraid to say what is right. It is like living in a dictatorship. You know that the dictator is doing the wrong thing, but that if you speak openly about it, you will be punished.

Serge Berthier:

Do you discuss such feelings with other heads of government?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

I have talked to a lot of people. Most agree with me. Some will just say that it is better not to say it. I made speeches after which the share prices went down. Once I made a statement that was reported in one of the agencies, and the shares went up. What is the real meaning of such facts? You get scared because, if you look at it carefully, it does not really make any sense.

Serge Berthier:

The Western press is an acerbic critic of your remarks. In what mood does that leave you?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

You have to be brave to face the situation. That is what a government is supposed to do. For example, when Rockefeller had a monopoly on oil, the US Government acted against it. Then when Milken and Boesky devised a financing scheme with the junk-bond market that proved in the end to be dangerous, it again put a stop to this kind of trade.

Serge Berthier:

But is such action possible today when the forces you are dealing with are mostly anonymous?

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad:

Of course, today, there is this pervasive feeling that the people moving money around are offshore and out-of-reach. They are nowhere and everywhere. But it does not mean such trade can't be disciplined. It needs to, and I believe that there is growing realization that it is necessary. Sadly a lot of poor people have been made poorer in the process.

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Notes:

1 - The figures from the government are: Bumiputra (Malays and other indigenous groups) 57,6%, Chinese 25,6%, Indians 10%, non-citizens 6,3%. Total population: 21,7 million.

2 - Bumiputra: sons of the soil; a term employed by the Malaysian government to refer to Malays and all other indigenous groups in the country, such as the Ibans, the Dayaks, the Orang Asli, etc. In both Borneo states there are numerous indigenous people. some of whom number only a few hundred, some two or three thousands.

3 - On 13 May 1969, three days after the election, Chinese and Indian supporters of the Gerakan and DAP parties took to the street of Kuala-Lumpur to celebrate the fact that the Alliance (UMNO) dominated by the Malays had seen its majority dropped from 58,4% of the popular vote to 48,5% only and from 85 seats to 66 seats in the chamber (Dewan Rayat) with 37 seats going to the opposition. A counter-rally that evening by UMNO supporters. mostly Malays, quickly deteriorated into uncontrolled violence. Only after four days of bloody fighting was order finally restored to the city, but for two months after the 13 May riots incidents of communal violence persisted.

On 28 March 1998, Georgetown, the capital of Penang state, was engulfed in communal riots between Muslims, mostly Malays, and Hindus, mostly Indians because a new Hindu shrine was being built (illegally) close to a mosque. 185 persons were detained and 4 were injured. Over the next few days, sporadic incidents continued statewide. Although quickly quelled, the incidents showed that religion and race can be an issue if communal problems are overlooked.

4 - The language issue has divided Malaysia ever since the formation of the Alliance, in 1958, and the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak into a greater Malaysia. As the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) wanted the basis of citizenship to be the principle of jus soli, the UMNO bargained in exchange that the Malay language would be compulsory in all schools and a common "Malayan curriculum" devised for all schools of whatever language medium. However when Singapore, and then the two Borneo states joined the Federation of Malaysia (which was officially inaugurated on 16 September 1963), exceptions were made. In particular, Malaya granted to Sarawak and Sabah the right to use English as the official language for state government until the State Legislature decided otherwise, whereas Malay was recognized as the national language (Bahasa Kebangsaan). In September 1973, Sabah made Malay the sole official medium of communication. Sarawak decided in March 1974 to retain officially both Malay and English until 1980, when English would be dropped. In Peninsular Malaysia, a National Language Bill had been passed on 3 March 1967 which was a compromise solution within the Alliance. Although Malay was the national language, English could be used in an official capacity. Furthermore there was a guarantee, still in force, that teaching and learning other languages (in private schools) would be permitted. See the interview of Professor Zakaria in this issue.

5 - Under colonial rule the British had orchestrated a smoothly functioning political and economic entity in which each ethnic group was allotted a specific role. The most important political parties were understandably communal ones representing the interests of individual ethnic groups.. However as early as 1946, to oppose the formation of the Malaysian Union as proposed by the British, 41 associations had gathered in Kuala-Lumpur for a Pan-Malaya Congress where it was agreed to form the Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu, in English United Malays National Organization (UMNO). In May 1946, UMNO was inaugurated and Dato Onn Ja'afar, Chief Minister of Johor, chosen as its first president. Since then UMNO has dominated

the political life of Malaysia. The first trial of intercommunal party co-operation was in the local election of 1952, when the Selangor branch of UMNO joined with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), a party established in February 1949, partially in response to UMNO's founding. The Alliance, as this loose political organization came to be called, appeared the ideal means by which compromises could be reached. It was led by Tunku Abdul Rahman from 1951 to 1970. Tunku Abdul Rahman became the first Prime Minister of the country when on 31 August 1957 the independence of the Federation of Malaya was proclaimed. He brought into the Alliance the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in 1959.

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