

**A short biography of a national leader**  
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**V for Vernon**

Sometime around the mid-1920s, in a rural region of a British colony, a child destined for political greatness was born. His early life was fairly uneventful, other than the hardship faced through colonisation and the subsequent ravages of World War II that engulfed the globe in the early 1940s.

However, the boy was hardworking and studious with a thirst for knowledge. During the first few years into the 1950s, this promising young man had successfully attained formal tertiary education and was a professional in his field of study. Shortly thereafter, while practicing his profession, he caught the eye of a fine young lady and eventually settled down.

Living in a British colony during the post-war period of mushrooming independent ex-colonies, this young man's political leanings were naturally weighted by notions of nationalism and rejection of foreign colonial governance.

Around the 1960s, his activities within his political party was temporarily halted when he was 'put out of circulation' due to subversive language against the leadership of the time. However, in 1974, he regained his political foothold by standing for, and winning, an election.

From then on, the sky was generally the limit for his political career. In the early 1980s, he went on to become the executive leader of his country, assuming the post of prime minister. Today, he is recognised as one of the longest serving national leaders in the region.

His leadership brought much social development to his country. Social indicators that improved greatly during his tenure included significant reductions in infant mortality and child malnutrition, as well as increases in immunisation rates.

Other noteworthy achievements during his tenure were the increase in adult literacy rates, coupled with high rates of enrollment in schools, relative to other post-colonial developing nations.

The leader was also noted for his firm commitment to education. Despite this, many of his critics lament that the country had one of the best education systems in the region before being ruined under his leadership. Additionally, the country also faced a severe problem in that the labour market was unable to absorb many of the graduates coming out of the education system.

His leadership of the country was also not without several political and human rights controversies. For example, not very long after taking over leadership of his political party, he had a rift with another senior leader of the party, resulting in a split within the party and the formation of two political parties.

In a separate incident during the 1980s, his administration was responsible for the armed and lethal response against political dissidents, resulting in a massacre of civilians. It should be noted, that this is merely one example that many cite when they refer to his

administration as a 'police state'.

As a final example, in what was believed to be a politically motivated persecution, one of the leader's political rivals was accused of sodomy in 1997, and was eventually prosecuted and jailed.

Other than these specific examples, this leader was widely known throughout his tenure for certain unfavorable characteristics.

Firstly, he had a deep-seated disdain for free media and press freedom. Journalists and media outlets that were critical of him generally faced an assortment of consequences. It is generally accepted that unless one can afford satellite TV, one is usually limited to information coming out through the state-controlled media.

Media outside his government's control, especially the western media, are constantly accused by him and his supporters of not 'objectively' reporting about his government and his country.

Secondly, this leader is often accused of being a racist. His political party and ideology thrives on persecuting the minorities; one method is through the imposition of unrealistic ethnic-based redistribution policies aimed at 'balancing' the perceived wrongs of colonialism.

However, this is often noted as being a cause in the stagnation of the economy, due to undeserving individuals being given appropriations and opportunities that are eventually not put to good and productive use.

Such policies are also noted for being associated with stunning levels of corruption and mismanagement. Furthermore, these policies have only fueled increasing rates of migration among the ethnic minorities.

Thirdly, this leader consistently deflects and distracts all weaknesses of his administration and leadership by blaming 'foreign elements', accusing them of being out to re-colonise his country.

He and his coterie of supporters also often accuse political rivals of being agents of these foreign (usually western) elements. Additionally, he targets Western 'economic meddling' as well as a specific ethnic group for constantly conspiring against the sovereignty of his country.

And last but not least, when facing the prospect of total loss of influence in the running of the nation, and the possibility of seeing his political rival take leadership of the nation, this leader resorts to creating tensions and instability through words and deeds.

Malaysians reading this short biography above may find some resonance and familiarity in the description of this leader. However, he is not who most would initially assume he is.

The person I have described above is Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Prime Minister (and now, President) of Zimbabwe. All you need to do is run an Internet search and you can corroborate all of the above.

It is imperative that we learn from the trials and tribulations of others, as dissimilar as they

may be to us, to ensure that any local version of a Mugabe in Malaysia does not weasel his way back into the seat of power; either through his selected proxy, or through some sort of Presidential Council of Elders that has been discussed amongst his supporters.

I am sure Malaysians do not want to go the way of Zimbabwe: from that of a bread-basket nation to what is presently a basket-case state.

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