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Dr M and the new dilemma

The second and final part of excerpts from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's instant best-seller - more than 10,000 copies sold since its launch - reveals his views and feelings on some key people and events.

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PETALING JAYA: When he was Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was exciting to interview. He almost always had an opinion on everything - which made great copy and headlines.

That still holds true with his autobiography, *A Doctor in the House*, as the following excerpts show.

> I am a Malay and proud of it. There are many reasons why I state this so strongly and boldly.

Stereotypes will always persist, even in the most progressive and educated societies. But a good leader does not let them go unchallenged. Every time when, as Prime Minister, I made a mistake or an unpopular decision, people were ready with their "dim-witted Malay" slurs. But when I made good decisions, it was always because I had Indian blood. I wanted to prove otherwise: that Malays were more than capable of thinking, progressing and leading. - *Chapter 3: I Am A Malay*

> Most Malays have come to think that the affirmative action instituted by the Government in the NEP is a recognition of their "superior" position as the indigenous people of this country. This is the new Malay dilemma. Do we take the bull by the horns and tell (the) Malays the truth, or do we refrain for fear of losing their political support?

Now, what we appear to have is a new culture of indigenous entitlement. Far from supporting professional Malay capabilities and competitiveness, it dampens the desire to strive. - *from Chapter 18: The Malay Dilemma*

> It is bizarre that many Malays seem to think that Malay reserve land is a recognition of their being "masters" of the country. This is disgraceful. The Native Americans of the US do live on reserves but no one regards it as a privilege. Indeed, it is an open acknowledgement on how they cannot compete with other Americans.

The Malay Reserve Laws should be nothing more than an interim measure, and at best, temporary crutches. - *Chapter 20: Into the Deep End*

> Lee (Kuan Yew) and I had a civil relationship, but it was never a friendship. In the period until Singapore left Malaysia in 1965, I had numerous brushes with him in the Dewan Rakyat. His demeanour usually seemed condescending and he appeared to want to deliver lectures to the House on what it and Government should do. I listened carefully at first, but I got tired of his style of delivery. He adopted the didactic tone of a know-all schoolmaster, telling us all what we should do and pointing out all the "mistakes" we were making. - *Chapter 14: The Bitter Thrill of Politics*

> Talking to Lee Kuan Yew was a one-sided affair. His style of conversation, like his manner of addressing the Malaysian Parliament when he was a member, was to lecture his listeners about what was right and what was wrong. But during our

discussion, I came to realise that he did not know all that much, especially on technological matters. I remember one occasion when he mentioned that he had just come across a new process of desalination. But it was not new at all and had been used generally for years.

Our relationship then was proper, professionally appropriate for political opponents, but never very friendly. Still, as Prime Minister, I worked hard at trying to resolve our various problems with Singapore but found them unresponsive. - *Chapter 32: Realigning Malaysia in the World*

> On the eve of my operation (a bypass following a heart attack in January 1989), a phone call came from Lee Kuan Yew. He was very concerned. He asked (Tun Siti) Hasmah to persuade me to postpone the operation because he had a medical team ready to fly to Kuala Lumpur, with the well-known cardiac surgeon Dr Victor Chang, a Singaporean living in Australia, to do the surgery. But Hasmah said I had already made up my mind (to have the bypass done by Malaysian doctors). She thanked him.

Apparently, Lee also contacted Tun Daim Zainuddin to ask him to intercede. Despite our many differences throughout the years, I appreciated Lee's concern. - *Chapter 43: Matters of the Heart*

> The Europeans made the bizarre decision not to provide arms to the Bosnians (during the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict in the 1990s) on the grounds that, should the Bosnians be able to defend themselves, more people would be killed. Apparently it was better if only Bosnians were killed. This, we thought, was morally wrong. So we decided to provide them with some light weapons.

That may have contravened United Nations orders but at this point, the Bosnians had no means to defend themselves. Other Muslim countries also provided aid, but to this day Bosnians still think that Malaysia was the country that helped them the most. - *Chapter 32: Realigning Malaysia in the World*

> Soon after I retired, I was to disagree with the way the (International Trade and Industry) Ministry was giving out APs (Approved Permits) to those I suspected were not conducting legitimate car businesses. This led to a falling out between me and the then Minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz.

In all fairness, she was very good at what she did and was promoted to the post precisely because of her ability to perform. But she was intolerant of criticism, and unlike most Malays, not afraid of being blunt. During Cabinet meetings, nobody dared to criticise her because they were wary of the heated arguments that would invariably follow. (Her retort was always to point out how much worse you yourself were. It was all very unpleasant.

For my part, I kept her in the Cabinet because she was an able negotiator and wasn't afraid of anybody. Because of this, she was able to obtain favourable terms for Malaysia in many trade agreements.



Life account: Dr Mahathir at the launch of his autobiography at Mid Valley Megamall in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

Not without reason did those on the international trade scene call her "Rapid Fire Rafidah". - *Chapter 23: From Education to International Trade and Industry*

> (As Education Minister) I was very much involved in getting Malay to be used as the main medium of instruction in schools. I believed that a common language can contribute to nation-building, a sense of identity and unity among people of all races. But when we switched to Malay, most Malays came to think very misguidedly that English was irrelevant. These days, most of our Malay-educated graduates cannot speak or write even a simple sentence in clear, correct English. - *Chapter 21: Up the Political Ladder*

> I have come in for a lot of condemnation by Malay language nationalists and there were many calling for Science and Mathematics to be taught in Malay again. The Government resisted, acceding to that political pressure for a time but on 8 July, 2009, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced the Cabinet decision to revert to teaching the subjects in Bahasa Malaysia in 2012. I believe this is a mistake.

Apart from the employability of the graduates, there is also the problem of bringing schoolchildren of

different races together. Ever since the English-language schools were converted to National Schools, most Chinese and Indian students ceased to mix with Malay students. Public universities draw students from all the communities, but on the campus they do not integrate. The Islamic Studies faculties have discouraged Malays from mixing with non-Malays in the hostels, suggesting that contact or even close proximity with non-Muslims is polluting.

Malaysians cannot live within their racial compartments. In a multi-racial society, it is important that they become familiar with one another while still young. If the schools cannot do this, then our universities should. If they don't, then it will never happen. - *Chapter 58: Education*

> Lawyers and the foreign Press regarded the removal of (the five Supreme Court) judges as proof that I had undermined the independence of the Judiciary. However, the removals were done in the manner prescribed by the Constitution.

Because I view certain actions by certain lawyers (particularly those involved in politics) with some animosity, people often assume that what I have done in public life that touched on legal issues has been motivated to get back at the legal community. The trouble with this

view is that it simply happens to be wrong.

I have criticised doctors, even though I am one. My criticism of the Malays is well-known. It does not mean I hate them. I always believe that when something is done which is wrong, someone needs to tell the person concerned. - *Chapter 42: The Judiciary*

> Anwar is an undeniably charismatic man and he knows how to get people to support him. All that I had done for Anwar in the past has been brushed aside. I was seen as having victimised him and throwing him in jail, as if there were no trial. Whenever my name is mentioned in a book or article, I am described as the Prime Minister who threw his deputy into jail. The fact that he was properly charged and tried in court is never mentioned.

am a forgiving person by nature, and I rehabilitated the careers of many people who tried to undermine me politically. I even named one of them as my successor after Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister.

But I find it difficult to forgive Anwar for demonising me in the eyes of the whole world. Anwar should have been the Prime Minister of Malaysia today. But if he is not, it is because of his own actions. He left me no choice but to remove him and I did what I thought was best for the country. I may have made many mistakes, but removing Anwar was not one of them. - *Chapter 53: Anwar's Challenge*

> Putrajaya is a beautiful, functional city. When I visited the Versailles Palace outside Paris I heard the guide proudly extol its beauty. But when the Sun King Louis XIV built it, the people of Paris had no bread to eat. When we built Putrajaya, Malaysians had full stomachs. It was not built at the cost of neglecting their needs. It expressed the people's own pride, not their leader's vanity. - *Chapter 51: Putrajaya*

> Throughout my tenure, I tried hard to establish certain standards. Firstly, I did not encourage the adulation and excessive glorification that is often given to leaders. I was determined that there would be no personality cult. I gave instructions that my official picture should not be displayed in government buildings, although this was widely ignored. To date, nothing has been named after me, except an orchid. - *Chapter 59: Resignation*

> Hoping to lead by example, I practised the values we promoted and resisted any attempts to corrupt me. It involved controlling greed. As Prime Minister I was already receiving an adequate salary but the Government also provided me with comfortable accommodation, paid my electricity and water bills, gave me cars and aircraft for my trips and allowances for my travels.

I had everything and I did not need anything more. But of course my detractors still considered me corrupt. However, my conscience is clear. - *Chapter 28: Bersih, Cekap, Amanah*