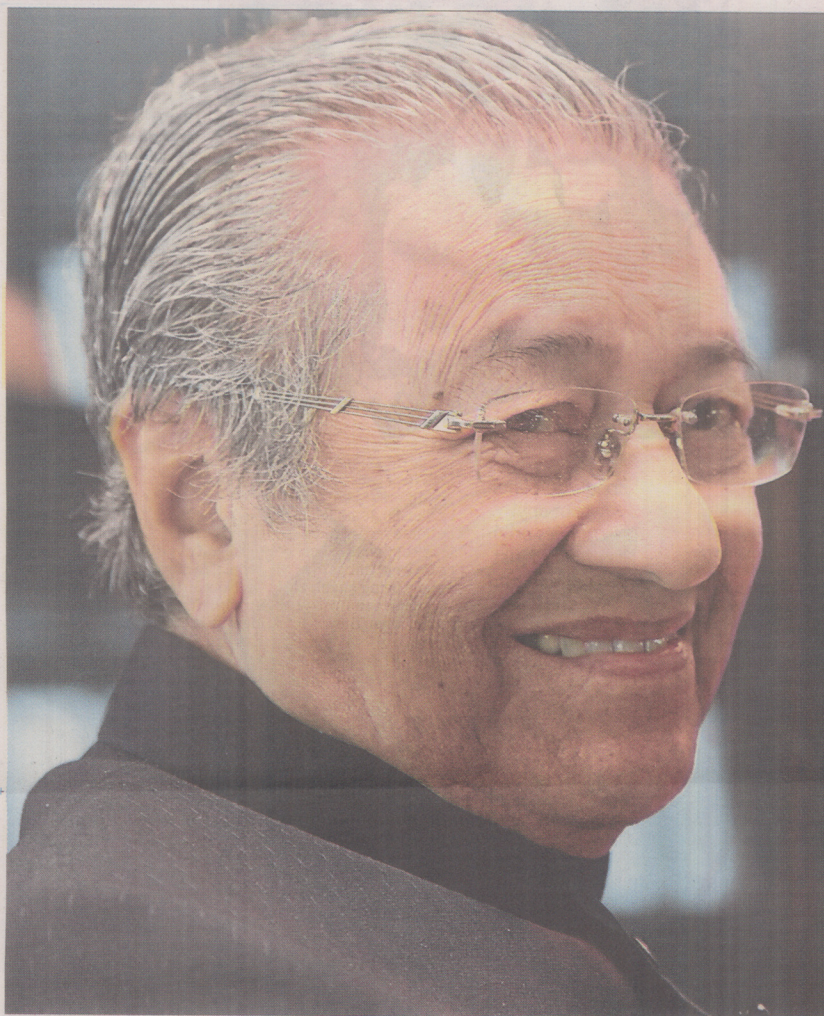


Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	15/4/2013

PRIME NEWS

NST-15/4/2013



'I just did things I thought others would do'

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE: The following is the second part of a New Straits Times interview with former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. He shares his thoughts with Rashid Yusof, Azmi Anshar and Rozanna Latiff on subjects ranging from the current prime minister and the Internet to the Penang Bridge and the Petronas Twin Towers

Question: Perhaps, much to the disappointment of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, you actually stepped down a few years later. There are, however, some politicians who seem to have trouble making way for others. Your comments, please.

Answer: I believe in leadership by example. Everything I wanted people to do, I did it first. I wanted people to ride horses, so I rode horses. I wanted people to fly, so I learned to become a pilot. Anything I wanted people to do, I did it first. Otherwise, people would say — why don't you do it? It's easy to tell others what to do.

My restriction, for example, on my family members' involvement in politics and business, I thought that would be copied.

And then, when I decided to resign, there were members of the cabinet who said, "If you resign, I will resign". Even (Pas spiritual adviser Datuk) Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat said that if I stepped down, he would step down.

Question: We've seen a lot of unrest in developing countries —

the tribal feuds in Africa, the fights between those of similar stock but different religions in the Balkans, the troubles in the Middle East — but Malaysia remains peaceful despite the mix of different races and religions.

Answer: Well, Malays are not a violent people. Throughout history, you don't read much about assassinations, except for one sultan. All the rest survived until they died because there is no history of revolution, no uprisings against the sultan. It's a very loyal, "Melayu takkan menderhaka", kind of thing.

It's the same when we have to deal with foreigners. We do not want to fight with them. We want to accommodate them, and we accommodate most people. For example, it would be excusable if a non-Malay did something that a Malay person would consider rude. We are very accommodating. And because of that, we give in a lot. And instead of confronting, we prefer to retreat.

That is why in Malaysia, there is no racial violence as such. Although one has to remember that the communist uprising and their attempt to overthrow the government was in

UPCLOSE & PERSONAL

with Tun Dr Mahathir

a way a kind of racial confrontation.

Question: This ability to accommodate — do you see it as a strength, a weakness, or simply a trait?

Answer: Whatever it is, it has kept the country peaceful.

Question: While there has been no history of violence, some elements in Malaysian politics have tried to replicate uprisings such as the Arab Spring. Do you think violent street protests would gain traction in Malaysia?

Answer: The Bersih demonstrations, for example, were participated largely by Malays. Apparently, (Malays) are quite easily influenced. They joined (the demonstrations) but the violence is actually very

minimal. In other countries, they would have burned down buildings. But apart from destroying one police car, I think they are very nice people.

You see, more Malays and more Malaysians now study abroad and they see what's happening abroad. And they think that these are great systems. When they come back, they tend to accept the values in other countries — demonstrations, liberalism, freedom and so on. They want to be seen as keeping up with the trends.

When they come back and they find that our levels of freedom are not what they see in foreign countries, the young people feel that there is a need for them to show that they are as liberal as the Westerners. You find them participating in demonstrations and being critical of what would be regarded as old values.

That is why you see some change among the Malays. Not the whole lot, but quite many now, young people especially, (who are) questioning our lack of freedom. Even to the point where they're asking, if people of other religions can change

their religion, then why not Muslims?

Question: One factor for Barisan Nasional's losses in 2008 was said to be the rise of online media and blogs. Now, it's the rise of social media. News spreads faster and it makes it harder for political parties to control the message. At the same time, it's also the best way to reach young people. Your thoughts?

Answer: I've noticed that the government is taking this up very seriously, the use of social media. But social media is so unrestricted, that people with no good intentions make use of it. Or rather, they abuse it.

They spread lies and say things that are not true because they think that they will not get caught anyway. There are gradually more and more abuses, than the use of social media for spreading truth.

They said there was government censorship and that, through social media, they can overcome that censorship. But instead, they make use of this freedom to spread lies, to say nasty things about other people.

Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	15/4/2013

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2013

NEW STRAITS TIMES | PAGE 9

NST-15/4/2013

PRIME NEWS

Question: When you set up the Multimedia Super Corridor, you said that the Internet, as far as Malaysia is concerned, would not be censored.

Answer: I have my doubts now (laughs). I'm very concerned about moral values. The Internet really makes pornography available, even to a child. I thought that it would be difficult to access it, so I typed a keyword into the computer and my god, all this rubbish there... I think it's so easy. Just type s-e-x, and you get everything. I mean, in colour, as movies.

I think this is destroying the moral values of our people and I think the incidences of rape and molest of children are because of (online pornography). So, I think we should find or charge these people with criminal abuse of the media.

But of course, that has to be done in the respective countries, across borders. You do it in your own country when it happens here. Germany, it seems, has devised a way of cutting out pornography.

I think we should forget about my promise not to censor the Internet. At the time, I didn't realise how bad it was, but now, I realise that the media is a great influence, a very bad influence on the morals of young people.

Question: How do you define pornography?

Answer: I think there should be some kind of definition. I once suggested that if anything contains the word s-e-x, then that should automatically be prevented from appearing on the screen... but then, it would cut out Sussex, Middlesex, sex education... (laughs). So, it's very difficult.

The world should come to an understanding that some things should not be put on the Internet and that it would be a crime to do so, and so the countries concerned can take action against whoever puts those things on the Internet.

The United Nations, maybe... but each country must have its own laws. There are laws in this country, that you cannot distribute pornographic magazines. We even censor the pictures in *Time* magazine.

Question: Moral standards are different in every country, however. In the United States, pornography is considered a legitimate industry.

Answer: That is the problem with people who initially proposed freedom — that freedom is abused in the name of freedom. They do not know how to deal with it. It's like Islam; they use the word Islam to do things and say things that are not very Islamic, and they do it in the name of Islam. And we find ourselves unable to deal with it.

Question: In that light, where do you see the future of the print media? You yourself started out as a columnist for the *Straits Times* in 1947.

Answer: I believe that social media carries too much rubbish. People will soon lose their faith in it. They will avoid reading it, because the

amount of information coming from the social media is huge.

One of the problems of social media is how to sift through (the content) to get the right news. You do that using keywords.

But as the amount of content increases, the more bad information you have — it is bad, either because it is not truthful or it is bad in other senses.

You need to sift through it. You need to (adjust the settings on) Yahoo! or whatever (browser) so you can type in the keywords, without the rubbish appearing on the screen. Unfortunately, the rubbish is so mixed up with the good things that you'll find it's difficult to separate them.

If print media then presents things correctly, in the proper context, if it is fair and not over-liberal (then I think it has a chance). Some newspapers in England need to publish a picture of a girl on the front page in order to sell.

I think over time, people will come back to print media — if print media is careful in how it presents the news to the readers.

Question: What are your thoughts on Datuk Seri Najib Razak's first four years as PM?

Answer: Once (Najib) has had to face an election, he has been very active. He spends a lot of time campaigning and doing all kinds of things to win support from the people.

Najib is very hardworking. There may be things that people don't agree with him on, but you cannot deny that he works very hard to win the election.

Question: Do you see a bit of yourself in him?

Answer: Even I never worked that hard. But I must admit that the support (for BN) was very obvious (when I was PM). That's why I won five elections, each one with a two-thirds majority (in Parliament). I can feel people supporting me

— even in 1999, when the "black eye" incident affected my standing among the Malays. I dared to hold an election then because I knew the Chinese would support me, because of how they were saved from becoming bankrupt, because of the actions taken by the government, our management of currency control.

Question: You weren't troubled by the loss of Terengganu to the opposition?

Answer: No. We got our two-thirds majority. I know why Terengganu was lost, and it was not a reflection on my popularity. It was local (issues).

Question: Najib has embarked on transformation programmes. In a way, do you feel they are similar to the transformation that you brought to make things more efficient? For instance, you synchronised the time for East and West Malaysia, and made all government officers wear name tags

to identify themselves.

Answer: I must admit that when I became PM, I had lots of ideas about what to do in order to achieve something for the country. The first thing I thought of was the half an hour time difference (between East and West Malaysia).

Normally, time zones are divided by one hour... when you have half an hour, it makes things very difficult.

The other thing was clocking in. When I was a minister, there were these people going home before 3pm.

When I asked why they left so early, they said it was because they wanted to avoid traffic jams. But in fact, they caused the traffic jams to arrive earlier. So, I said it's better to record the time they work. Then there were things like people being unable to recognise a (ministry) officer when they needed to make a

complaint about them, so I made them wear name tags... I mean, these are very simple changes. You may call it radical but it's not radical at all. Military officers always wear their name tags, so why can't others?

Question: You must have been storing up all these ideas when you were serving as an MP and then as a cabinet minister?

Answer: I was an MP from

"I have always believed that if you want to do something, you must see that it is done. Just talking about it — to me, it's not worthwhile. I never made announcements about any changes or anything... I just went ahead and did it."

1964-1969, then 1974-2003. So, that's 29 years, plus five.

No, I just did things I thought other people would do. It was common sense, nothing unusual. But people just didn't do it. They'd say, "Yes, we should do this and that" but they never did it.

But I have always believed that if you want to do something, you must see that it is done. Just talking about it — to me, it's not worthwhile. I never made announcements about any changes or anything... I just went ahead and did it.

Question: What about Vision 2020?

Answer: Vision 2020 was to identify a target. If you don't know where you are going, you may assume you are going forwards but you may in fact be going backwards.

It's important to have a target, and, of course, you have to design a way to get there according to the time given to you. I think 2020 was the result of a discussion with a few people, including (the late Tan Sri Dr) Noordin Sopiee, and we came up with this idea that we should identify the target.

Again, it's a very simple idea. It's just so that you may know where you're going. Nothing very radical about that.

Question: Do you think Vision 2020 can be accomplished earlier than the target?

Answer: I don't know if it can happen earlier. There are some things that are not developing that well. Kuala Lumpur is doing well — all

→ Turn to Page 10



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad taking in the view on the first day at his new Putrajaya office on June 20, 1999.

Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	15/4/2013

PRIME NEWS

NST-15/4/2013

'We must be confident of ourselves'

→ From Page 9

the facilities you have here are what you can find in developed countries. But you must take into consideration the rural areas. They must be brought into the future.

Question: When you first became PM, you embarked on the Buy British Last policy, which greatly upset the UK, but led to the beginning of your relationship with the late Baroness Margaret Thatcher. What do you remember most about her?

Answer: She was willing to stick her neck out. When she wanted to do something, she would do it, even though it would make her extremely unpopular. So unpopular in fact, that some celebrated her death with champagne.

She was brave enough to do (what she did) because the UK was going down the drain. The unions were so powerful that they could frustrate every scheme put up by the government. They were demanding more pay, less work and holidays. Britain could not produce anything to compete with the rest of the world. So, as a result, she had to stop the unions.

Of course, they were very angry with her. But actually, they were dragging the UK down with their lack of discipline.

Before, they had not been competing with Japan or Korea, so it was fine. (Britons) could raise the price of things so that (they could pay their) people more money. But when they raised the price of things and you had to compete with the Japanese, then you'd just get knocked out of the market.

Question: Lots of people have pointed out the similarities between you and her. Did you see her as an inspiration?

Answer: I think our characters were about the same. I wasn't copying her in any way, I have always been like that. In school, I had always taken the initiative. My teachers didn't like me because sometimes I talked back (laughs).

Question: Some would suggest you also stuck your neck out for projects seen as unpopular. The Penang Bridge, for example.

Answer: It was common sense! You needed the bridge. Of course, there will be people, especially those in the opposition — they will oppose anything! They will oppose anything you suggest.

But now they want to build a tunnel. They have two bridges and now they want a tunnel.

Before, they wanted to *lelong* (auction off) Putrajaya, but now, they want to capture Putrajaya. They would do anything to go to Putrajaya, which they used to consider a waste of money, or what they called another mega project... it's not a mega project at all.



Lat's take on Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on June 19, 1999.

They even opposed this building (Petronas Twin Towers)... but now, it is called a Malaysian icon. Everyone comes to see it.

Question: The Twin Towers are now a major tourist attraction.

Answer: The tourists call it rubbernecking because they have to look up. They used to go to New York, and now they come here to rubberneck, to look up.

Question: You delivered an inspiring speech at the official opening of the Twin Towers in 1999, something about towering ambition?

Answer: No, I said if you are short, you stand on a soapbox so you can be seen. If you go to the Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park, the speaker is always standing on a stepladder and giving speeches, otherwise, people can't see them. The world couldn't see Malaysia before, so we had to build a soapbox to stand on. This (the Twin Towers) is our soapbox (laughs).

Question: One of your biggest contributions has been to plant a sense of self-esteem and greater confidence in the soul of Malaysians. Your thoughts?

Answer: This is a very important thing. You must have confidence in yourself. You must not have an inferiority complex.

The Malay psyche is such that when we are walking and there's someone approaching, you stop and do that (gestures with his hands) to let a person pass by.

Za'aba narrated the story of someone who used to do just that... in his village, when there was

someone passing, he stopped to let the person go by. But when he came to town, he stopped, but he found that there were too many people, hundreds of people going by! He couldn't move! (laughs) He was

too polite.

So, you must assert yourself a little bit. That's what I thought we should do... we should be more confident of ourselves, and not think of ourselves as inferior to other people.

Question: You took that confidence to the global stage. You're respected in Japan and China, and the Arab countries were disappointed you retired. They wanted you to keep leading the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. And till today, young women from all over the world still want to take their picture with you.

Answer: They hang around me too late... *masa dulu tak dak!*

Question: The NST has been producing content on the trend of "Living Agelessly", given that Malaysians are living longer and enjoying a robust, fulfilling retirement. You are the epitome of this. Are you suggesting that the ideal retirement is not to retire at all?

Answer: I think so (laughs). I've been advising people since I was practising medicine that when they retire, they should occupy themselves with something. It can be gardening, anything... just don't go back and sit around doing nothing. You'll die.

You'll see it very quickly... this is my observation. I've seen it so many times — people who seem very healthy, who retire, and in a short while after, they died. During the British era, they used to say that when someone retires, the British government gives them poison so that they would not last too long and draw too much pension (laughs). That's what they said.

But the fact is, if you are not active, you will wither away.

Question: You're nearly 88 now (in June). We'll take your word for it.

Answer: Well, I have the services of a doctor. I could have died. My heart gave out twice and I had very serious, acute pulmonary edema... water in my lungs. I had a doctor and people who quickly took me to the hospital.



The Petronas Twin Towers are Malaysia's soapbox, says Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad