

Razak's big, wide world

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FOREIGN POLICY: His world view called for proactive diplomacy, even a leadership role, in the international arena

AS noted in the preceding article, apart from his overriding concern for national and regional stability and security, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's world view had a profound impact on Malaysia's conduct in international relations and diplomacy. He was ever mindful of the unpredictability of contemporary global political, economic and security environments.

From the outset of his leadership, Razak recognised that Malaysia's extensive and entrenched linkages with the outside world ipso facto implied a correspondingly high degree of vulnerability of the country's national as well as international interests.

He envisioned that the foregoing realities inherently bore potential for serious, even grave repercussions to the country. In response, he stressed that the government and administration should formulate appropriate and timely measures to address the serious challenges that Malaysia was bound to encounter in the regional and international environments.

In terms of foreign policy direction, he was convinced that the country's interests would be best served through an active diplomacy of peace. He believed that only in an environment of stability and peace — where the country aspired to forge friendly relations with all states, regardless of their ideological preferences and other differences — could there be socio-economic development and progress.

His unflinching commitment to regional economic cooperation and active promotion of understanding and goodwill with the international community of nations underlined this overarching foreign policy thrust of promoting a diplomacy of peace.

Razak's world view called for a proactive diplomacy, even a leadership role, for Malaysia in the international arena. His positive stance envisaged a dynamic foreign policy coupled with a well-equipped diplomatic apparatus that was alert and responsive to contemporary international devel-



Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, then deputy prime minister, addressing the third meeting of a joint-working Asean committee in Kuala Lumpur on April 27, 1966. Seated from left are Philippine vice-consul Rodolfo L. Diaz, permanent secretary to the ministry of external affairs and interim chairman Datuk Ghazali Shafie and Thai ambassador Nai Prasong Bunchoem.

opments and trends.

This meant ensuring a bureaucracy that was trained in the sophistication of modern diplomatic skills as well as the wherewithal of conducting professional diplomacy and managing the country's foreign affairs, especially in respect to safeguarding and promoting its economic, trade and security interests.

Thus, upon his insistence, ongoing training policies and arrangements were extended to include the needs of key public agencies handling international affairs and matters pertaining to national and international security and stability.

Razak deemed it indispensable for public officers to be adequately

trained to enable the bureaucracy to maximise the country's national interests in the international arena. He was quick to recognise the bureaucracy's pressing training needs following the country's increasing participation and role in international conferences and forums to negotiate numerous understandings and agreements.

Indeed, as important agreements negotiated by the government with the international community kept steadily expanding, the negotiation capabilities of the public service as a whole were progressively stretched.

International negotiations were viewed in the broadest sense of the



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term. They covered a wide spectrum of international engagements, ranging from negotiating commodity arrangements and agreements, securing Yen Credits from Japan and other external development assistance from external sources, such as the World Bank for financing socio-economic development projects, to concluding trade agreements at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

The challenge of upgrading negotiation skills of public officials and the capacity of the bureaucracy as a whole to engage effectively with the external environment soon came under the close scrutiny of Razak.

Often, he used to lament at inter-departmental meetings and in his discussions with senior public officers, over cases of Malaysia's poor performances in a number of eco-

nomic and trade negotiations.

This led him to insist on professional training to improve negotiation capabilities in the bureaucracy. He stressed that public officials should be placed on a professional footing if the country were to secure the best possible terms and conditions in its international negotiations in various fields.

A potent factor for professionalism was Razak's belief that public agencies that actively engaged with the external environment should be adequately staffed with professionally-trained competent officers.

He emphasised that this requirement was all the more imperative given the increasingly sophisticated and fast-paced contemporary world that Malaysia was inextricably linked with and is dependent upon.

Ad hoc measures in conducting training modules in statecraft were deemed inadequate. Furthermore, these efforts were uncoordinated and unstructured.

Often, these were inconsistent in terms of substance as well as with regard to the training methodology and techniques that were employed.

In the meantime, pressures for specialised knowledge and work skills to meet the country's challenges and opportunities in international diplomacy mounted. It reached a point where a comprehensive and concerted approach towards professional training was deemed imperative.

A fresh strategy taking into consideration the manifest needs of the public service was formulated. It emphasised the development of positive attitudes, expert knowledge and work skills in international relations and strategic studies.

This eventually culminated in the setting up of the Centre of International Relations and Strategic Studies in Intan in 1978. It represents the physical embodiment of Razak's brainchild to enhance professionalism in Malaysia's conduct of its international relations and diplomacy.