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Ooi Kee Beng: Tun, your generation fascinates me. You are of the nation-building generation who dared to imagine that it would not only change the world, but configure it to fit local conditions. The impact of that generation has of course been enormous in all post-colonial countries, but that generation is passing. What advice would you give young Malaysians about the future, given what you see now of global economic dynamics and the political situation in Malaysia today?

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad: The first thing for people to learn is the history of the country, because if you don't have an understanding of the background of the country, you cannot make an assessment of events or of the improvements that have taken place. Many Malaysians today were born long after Independence. I would tell them that what we are seeing today is completely different from what we had under the British or even in the early days of Independence. So we must be able to make a comparison between the past and the present.

OKB: If there is one word to describe you, Tun, I would use the word "nationalist". You are very much, for want of a better word, a situationalist. Your analysis of events and different times shifts as things evolve; you seem very tuned into evolving dynamics. In that sense the methods you adopt would be understood best in a tactical mode. Would that be correct?

MM: I was trained as a doctor, and a doctor approaches a problem with a certain method. He has to know the background, the history of the patient, and do an additional examination to see what the problem is. For a sick person or for a community, it is the same thing. Once you adopt that approach, you recognise a problem much more clearly. And after recognising what the problem is, you can think about how to resolve it. Having been trained as a doctor, I approach most problems that way. I find it to be really very easy. It is methodical and it is very consistent and often quite accurate.

You may end up with three possibilities, for example, and then you will have to do a further analysis to determine which disease



it really is and what the cure should be. It is the same with a community – you have to determine what the problem is first.

OKB: But are there shortcomings to that kind of approach?

MM: Well, I suppose there are. There are of course people who can instinctively see what the problem is and come up with a solution. But instinct is not methodical. It may come or it may not come. You have no control over it. But the methodical process of examination by doctors is something that you do almost automatically, and you eliminate other possibilities to arrive at the right diagnosis.

OKB: One has to always consider multiple factors.

MM: Yes.

OKB: Since you have been in the limelight for an amazingly long time – in fact since after the Second World War, when you

started writing as **Che Det** – you are very overexposed by now, and one would expect people who are overexposed to

be very predictable. Yet you are not. You can be very unpredictable. I tend to think that when people are unpredictable, it is usually because they are being misunderstood. People have their own logic and in following that logic, they are really being consistent.

I would like to ask you a straightforward and personal question: "What motivates you deep down?" How do we see consistency and how do we make sense of your actions over the last 70 years? You do know that many think that you are often contradictory.

MM: Like you said earlier, I am a nationalist. That's what motivates me. I have been exposed to many things inside the country and outside the country. The desire to do things, to achieve and to be proud of what [I] can do... [that] is consistent. You just have to do something to improve any situation. The situation may be already good, but you have to think – what else can you do?

So in that sense, there is consistency all the time. When I was a young boy, I saw poverty, I saw people who were jobless and living very poor lives. I felt it was not right. You see that some people are rich, and some people are very poor, and some people do not even have regular meals. These are social problems and when you see problems like that, you want to do something. We are brought up that way, to be concerned about people who are less fortunate than we are. So if they are less fortunate, what do we do for them?

Throughout my career that has been my motivation, and even the approach has been very consistent. I don't come up suddenly with some fantastic thing. I think things over to myself. For example, when I wanted to resign [as Prime Minister in 2003], I did not tell anybody. I thought it was time for me to

The desire to do things, to achieve and to be proud of what [I] can do... [that] is consistent.