

Newspaper	PENANG MONTHLY
Date	JUNE 2016

profile

resign and give place to others. So without anybody pushing me out, I resigned.

OKB: I suppose the poor usually can't help themselves, and so those who have the opportunity have the responsibility to help them.

MM: That is true of course. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer – at least relatively speaking. The rich can get richer because they have the means. For example, in business, they have the capital and if they see an opportunity, they make use of that opportunity to enrich themselves. A poor man may see an opportunity, but he has no capital, so he will forever be poor because he does not have the means. So what we should do is not only give him the opportunity but also give him the means to make use of that opportunity.

OKB: You are practically a socialist, are you not?

MM: Socialism itself is not bad. But it is used sometimes to oppress people, and that is bad. A system is good only if you make use of it properly. During colonial times, the Europeans were the “masters”. You called them “Tuan”, and you think that they are superior and that they know a lot while you don't. And they can do what you cannot do. And in a way, you feel very inferior. You get an inferiority complex.

OKB: The whole of society, really...

MM: Yes. I asked myself, am I as inferior as they make it out to be? Well, I thought, they

are there because of their dominance over the people. They have practically colonised the country, and they are given [good] jobs, authority and power. That was what made them superior people. They could do what you could not do.

OKB: These experiences in your younger days must have affected you very deeply.

MM: Yes, very much. But I was fortunate. I was among the 20 or so boys who had the opportunity to go to an English school. There were hundreds of others who were equally good, but they did not get the opportunity to get a good education. It seemed to me quite unfair.

You had the opportunity, they didn't have the opportunity. So, the solution to that is to create the opportunity and to give them the means to make use of the opportunity for their own good.

OKB: Being one of the few privileged ones, you felt this to be your responsibility then?

MM: Yes.

OKB: One of the great innovations of your time was Vision 2020. If I ask you to reformulate Vision 2020 today, would there be things in there that would be different from before?

MM: We wanted to be a developed country, but a developed country in our own mold, not just a copy of some other developed country. So we started spelling out what we meant by “in our own mold”. What do you mean by being developed?

If we do not define it properly, people tend to take the simple definition, which is that if you have money then you are developed.

You have to define what you mean by development. And to me, it is not just about per capita income. It is about our capacity.

So you see the stress on per capita income. If you have a per capita income of [US\$]15,000 or 30,000, then you are developed.

But that is not true. I have always thought that thinking in averages is a very bad way of assessing anything. I tell people that they can drown in a river with an average depth of two feet. If one man is a millionaire and 999 men are poverty-stricken, then the average [wealth] is \$1000. You see, averages are not a very good measurement of achievements.

So you have to define what you mean by development. And to me, it is not just about per capita income. It is about our capacity. Do we have very well educated people? Do we do research and development? Do we produce things by ourselves? Are we industrialised? All these things must be there before you can consider yourself developed. At the moment, the stress is far too much on per capita income. Per capita is an average, and it is not a good measurement.

OKB: It's more about people's integrity and dignity, isn't it?

MM: Yeah! People must be able to hold their heads up, to stand tall like other people.

OKB: Something that would have happened along the way since the 1990s would be the development of “Melayu Baru” – the New Malay. It's a new world today and the Malays are in a different place – as a community and also in their relationship with other communities. Are we seeing something that you would have foreseen, that once the Malays reached a certain level of development a lot of conflict would also come into play?

MM: I spent a lot of time when I was Prime Minister to try and change the value system and the culture of the Malays because I believe it is the value system that determines

