

# Much sought-after for his thoughts

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The Prime Minister is using the international stage to speak his mind on what troubles the world, while seeking out new trade opportunities for Malaysia.

In Bangkok  
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SINCE he became Prime Minister again, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has continued to keep a punishing schedule domestically, while fulfilling numerous invitations to speak at international conferences abroad and attending summits that require Malaysia's presence.

His travels abroad have often been questioned with critics asking the government to justify the need for his frequent travels.

According to the latest figure, the government has spent a total of RM20.96mil in public funds to finance Dr Mahathir's 30 overseas official visits between June 2018 and September 2019.

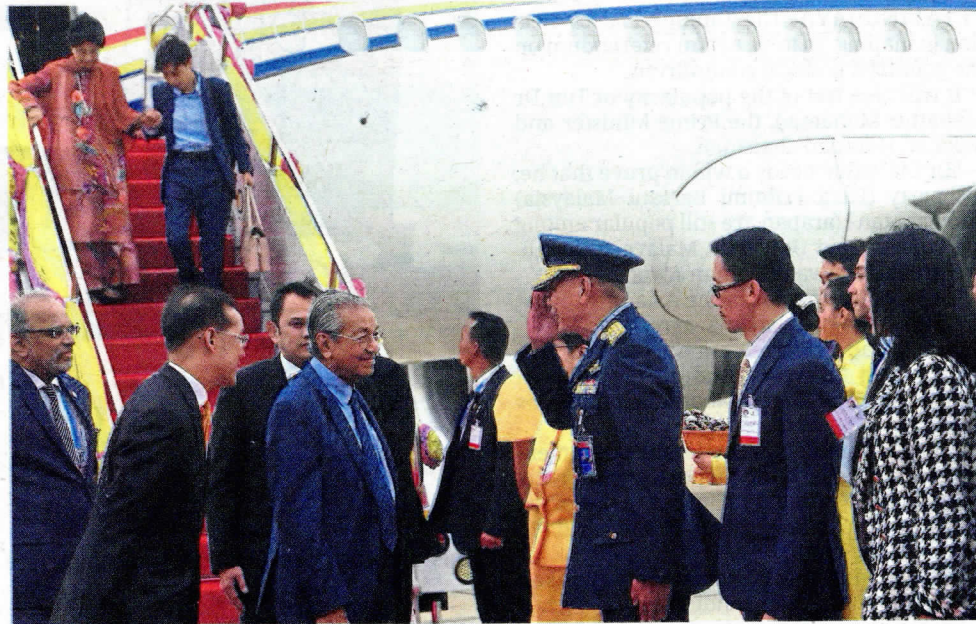
Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Liew Vui Keong told Parliament last month that this included expenditure for civil servants who participated in the official visits by the Prime Minister, adding that this had been approved by the Cabinet.

The 35th Asean Summit in Bangkok this weekend is the third country in a spate of 10 days that Dr Mahathir has visited. The Prime Minister was in Azerbaijan for the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) summit last week and before heading home, he was in Turkmenistan for an official visit.

He was supposed to leave for Santiago mid-November for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit but continuous public protests against the Chilean government forced a cancellation of the summit.

This trip would have been significant as Malaysia is hosting the Apec summit next year and taking over in leading the discussions towards charting a new vision for Apec post-2020.

In his speeches at these meetings and conferences, Dr Mahathir has consistently touched on trade. In his speech at the United



**Warm welcome:** Dr Mahathir and wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arriving at the Don Mueang International Airport for the Asean Summit. — Bernama

Nations in September, Dr Mahathir reiterated his distaste for proposals on rules and regulations made by the rich, insisting that poor countries were forced to accept them.

During the NAM summit in Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister spoke on the impact of trade wars on the world economies and called on the nations to build capacity by developing their own competitiveness.

NAM was a meeting that Dr Mahathir wanted to go to since the last one he attended was in 2003, which Malaysia had chaired. NAM, to Malaysia, is still an important grouping although many felt it was as good as "dead".

"We chaired NAM five chairmanships ago and our commitment towards NAM is still there. We felt that it was an opportunity for Dr Mahathir to share his views about the global situation now," said an official.

Officials from the Prime Minister's Office

said wherever he went, Dr Mahathir's speech was generally well received.

"He is saying what the leaders want to say but dare not. He is very clear in saying that we need to be united and be prepared for trade challenges.

"Some leaders in attendance probably realised that this was good perspective that Dr Mahathir had presented," said an official.

The NAM crowd would appreciate this kind of statement coming from an elderly statesman like Dr Mahathir but whether they can follow it is a different issue.

"These countries have their own internal problems and constraints. Some are aligned with other powers but when it comes to principles, it is something that people appreciate," said a government officer.

What many of us may not realise is that Dr Mahathir is very much sought-after by foreign governments for visits and to deliver

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speeches on current issues.

His office receives as many as 20 such invitations monthly and most have to be declined.

But when he is on a trip to attend a summit, bilateral meetings would be arranged at the request of other countries. This is when the Prime Minister would take the opportunity to touch on the economy and trade matters.

"He is always working towards enhancing relations and opening up opportunities. He wants to know details, what products Malaysia can offer and what we can buy. It is not just one-sided.

"It is only when the economy is doing well that there is growth and development and a country can advance further and prosper," said an official.

With the launch of Malaysia's Industry 4.0 policy, Dr Mahathir is now setting his sights on new technologies and without fail, has been checking out new technologies available in the countries he visited.

He is serious in driving Malaysia towards becoming the Industry 4.0 hub in the region in an effort to regain the Asian Tiger status.

The question is if his Cabinet members are able to catch up with his breakneck speed and understand his vision and deeds in carrying out his work.