

A Tribute Issue



The weak and poor would normally extricate sympathy from society. But although weak and poor, Malays have succeeded in controlling politics in an independent Malaysia.

— Addressing the 35th Umno General Assembly, May 1984.

We here have to be careful that our strive to uphold the national language does not threaten our need of the languages of knowledge, progress and development ...

— At the National Confederation of Writers' Associations dinner, November 1984.

We need skills and know-how. We do not intend to be robots for foreign industry.

— Addressing the Japanese Economic Organisations in Tokyo, January 1983.

Lazy, unemployed youths who hang around amusement centres and shopping complexes are associates of Satan whose wastage of time and energy can threaten economic stability.

— In the souvenir programme of the 27th international Quran recital competition, May 1986.



GUARD OF HONOUR: Dr Mahathir and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder in Berlin in 2002

The international statesman

NST 31/10/2003 - 6, 9-10 PRECISE



With his extensive travels to both Western and developing countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as the country's No. 1 salesman, put Malaysia on the world map during his tenure as Prime Minister.

HARDEV KAUR writes.

THE MALAYSIAN FLAG HAS been hoisted from Antarctica at the bottom of the world to Everest at the top of the world. It has also sailed the seven seas while the national anthem has been played and sung in halls and theatres, including the famous Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Once known as a "rebel" and an "ultra", Dr Mahathir is now seen as representing, among others, the "Voice of the South", "Voice of New Asia", the "Voice of all levels of Society" and a "pragmatic" "world-class leader".

According to Tan Sri Musa Hitam, former Deputy Prime Minister and a rebel himself who resigned in 1986, Dr Mahathir has "emerged as the most illustrious leader ever...". The country, he adds, is "stable, modern and internationally well-respected".

Accolades come from many of his friends, adversaries, critics and world leaders abroad. A former British Minister, Peter Mandelson, is reported as saying that Dr Mahathir has transformed a primary commodity producer to "a very modern, progressive, well-managed and fast advancing nation".

Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady, said in an interview in 1993 that "Now Malaysia is a textbook example of how to build a prosperous nation".

The American Presidents — Reagan, Clinton and Bush Senior — have also heaped praise on the Prime Minister and

have been awed with the country's achievements under his leadership. Reagan paid tribute to Dr Mahathir and Malaysia for playing a vital role in maintaining peace and stability in the Southeast Asian region.

But there are also many critics who, like George Soros, have labelled him a "danger to his own country" and someone who does not understand finance. But Dr Mahathir's handling of the economy and the financial crisis has proven his critics wrong.

Thus, many of his critics give him credit for being consistent, honest, forthright and principled. They also admit that he was right in pursuing policies that they themselves had initially criticised, among them, the self-help during the financial crisis.

Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said in Davos that he admired Dr Mahathir for his strong statement on terrorism. This despite the fact that the Prime Minister has been highly critical of Israel and its role in the on-going violence in the Middle East and on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

From a country that was hardly known even outside the region, it has been firmly and clearly put on the world map by Dr Mahathir during his tenure as Prime Minister.

Not just that, but many seek his advice and now a record number of countries have established missions in Kuala Lumpur. The number of foreign missions in Kuala Lumpur has increased from 89 in 1981 to about 150 currently.

Dr Mahathir is also held in high esteem abroad. Some in the Islamic world are keen to study his thoughts while others, including those in the developed West, have

compiled his speeches and works into books for easy reference and study. A consummate nationalist, visionary, steadfast in his convictions and passionate about the nation, he travelled far and wide to promote the country and to learn from others. These were punishing trips that even those half his age were unable to keep pace with.

He made more than 250 trips, travelling from Antarctica



FRENCH CONNECTION: Dr Mahathir with French President Jacques Chirac in 1997

to Zimbabwe and to countries that many did not even know the names of. His meetings with world leaders, political and religious, from the developed and developing countries and those who have made a beeline to Kuala Lumpur are too numerous to enumerate. Suffice to say that there is hardly any world leader who has not shaken hands with Dr Mahathir in the last 22 years.

Among them are the Pope, American Presidents, Russian Presidents, British Prime Ministers, European Presidents, Russian, Chinese and Indian leaders. He has not forgotten leaders from developing and smaller nations. They too received and were accorded due recognition and warm hospitality. Malaysia offered them technical and developmental assistance. He travelled to war-torn Bosnia to meet Malaysian soldiers assigned to peace-

keeping duties; travelled to Siberia and to the frozen Tundra to see Russian naval and aircraft facilities as well as see for himself the achievements of Malaysian investors in the far flung regions of the world.

There were quietly made trips, over many years, to Japan to study the technology, work ethics and motor industry before announcing the move for a Malaysian national car project and the Look East, Malaysia Inc and privatisation policies.

He took to the world stage like a duck to water. He hosted many international conferences including the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Apec, NAM and OIC and has been keenly sought after as a speaker at conferences,

DR. M MEETS BUSH...



He made more than 250 trips, travelling from Antarctica

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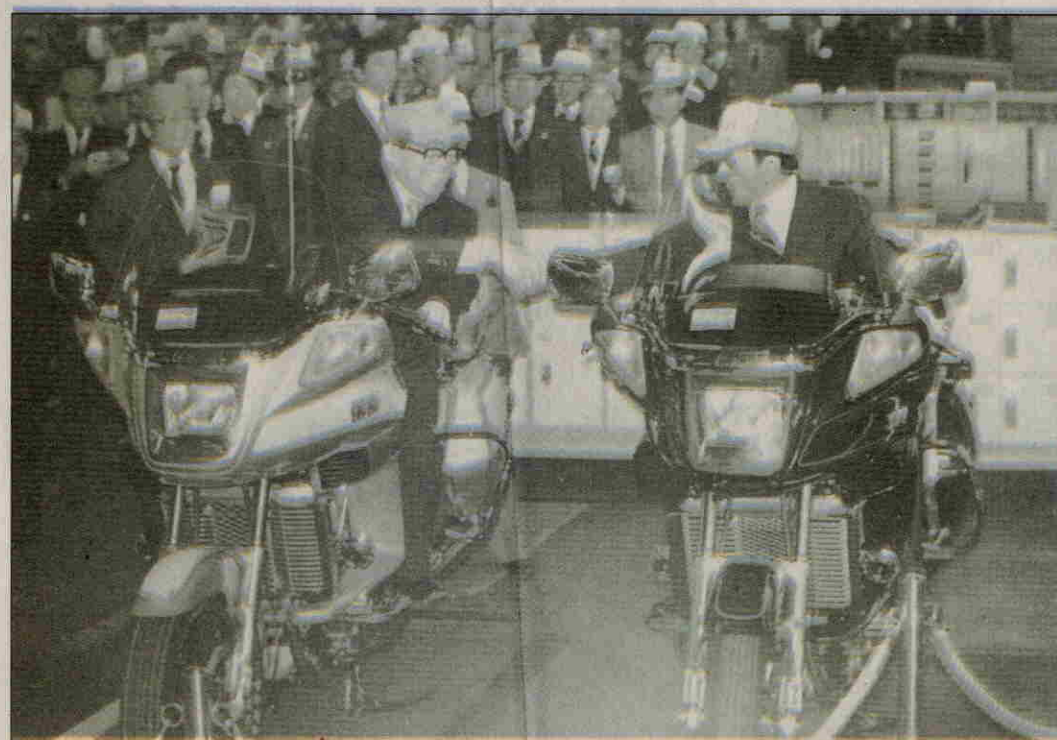
A Tribute Issue

Critical and outspoken

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The media, like the individual or groups of individuals, is an actor within a human community. In the modern world, however, such is the power of the media that it has often been called the Fourth Estate.

— Opening the World Press Convention, September 1985.



MEAN MACHINE: Dr Mahathir shaking hands with Yamaha president Hisao Koike during a visit to the plant in Japan in 1983. To mark the occasion, the PM was presented with 10 units of the powerful bike for use by the Royal Malaysian Police



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forums and at universities overseas. He made headlines both by being present and speaking out and also by not attending meetings and conferences. He brought attention to the lack of focus and the inequities of policies pursued by international and multinational organisations. Many were forced to undertake critical reviews of their functions following his comments. He declined to attend the CHOGM in Melbourne, Australia. His reason: it was not concerned with the plight of its poorer members. It was an organisation that was not sharing the "Common Wealth". This shocked many and in fact prompted the secretariat to take a critical look at its focus and operations. It subsequently instituted changes, according greater attention to the needs of its small and poor nations. Following this change, Dr Mahathir hosted a landmark and best organised CHOGM in Kuala Lumpur in 1989.

At the Harare CHOGM, he was given the delivered a poetic reply to Queen Elizabeth II's speech. He said:

"When Malaysia was under British Rule we had British advisers whose advice must be obeyed.

"We had Malay Sultans who were designated the Rulers but may not rule.

"Our Parliaments are presided over by Mr Speakers who may not speak.

"And when we have a permanent civil war, we declare emergencies and go about our daily routine.

"So it is not strange that we have a Commonwealth where the wealth is not common.

"But then we are thinking of material wealth.

"The wealth that we have in common is less quantifiable but no less real.

"It is the interest, the concern, the care and the love that you, Your Majesty, lavish on us all indiscriminately.

"As Head of the Commonwealth you lend meaning to this motley group of nations as no paper constitution can.

"Knowing that you share our aspirations, motivate us to walk that extra mile to compromise, to achieve agreement and reach consensus.

"For all these we thank you".

He made headlines again by not attending the first Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) leaders meeting convened by US President Bill Clinton in Seattle. He was labelled a "recalcitrant" by the then Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating.

The following year in Jakarta there was

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HEAD-TURNING: Dr Mahathir on a visit to Khiva in Russia

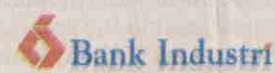
"Tiada kata seindah bahasa
Tiada gambar seindah lukisan"

Thank you, YAB Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad
— for making Malaysia what it is today.



Photo Courtesy of Asia Inc.

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A Tribute Issue

Umno must expose the hypocrites among the Malays ... (who are) like a thorn in flesh...

— Addressing the 35th Umno General Assembly, May 1984.

Justice delayed is justice denied and justice overly delayed is injustice perpetrated.

— Opening the 8th Malaysian Law Conference, November 1985.

A diversity of content may be interesting and entertaining but it is not the job of the media to be interesting or entertaining ... it is the task of the mass media to be an instrument of revelation rather than information per se.

— Opening the World Press Convention, September 1985.

The national car does not only speak of quality, but represents a dignified nation, a people who stand brave in adversity, a people who would rise up when they fall and overcome any obstacle and succeed.

— At the launch of the National Car Sale and opening the EON headquarters, September 1985.



WELCOME TO BRITAIN: British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher greets Dr Mahathir at 10, Downing Street in 1989

For a just and equitable world

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pandemonium, when the world's media sought out Dr Mahathir for his views on the grouping and Malaysia's call for flexibility in opening up markets among members. In the process, chairs and flower pots were toppled and the security gantries were not spared.

He spoke up without fear on a host of issues. This included taking international and multinational institutions to task, such as the Commonwealth, OIC, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and on the need to reform the United Nations. He spoke on the downside of globalisation and the adverse effects of free and open trade on poor developing economies whose institutions were not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the big and powerful.

He announced the Buy British Last Policy which made the former colonial master sit up and take notice of its former colony.

Years before the financial crisis hit in 1997-1998 he had warned of the dangers of currency speculation. He told an audience in Japan in 1995 that there has been "almost anarchy" since the adoption of a floating exchange in the money market.

The value of currencies seem to fluctuate "without any rhyme or reason". The fact that speculators have come in — and they are very big players — has resulted in some currencies suddenly depreciating and causing economic havoc in the countries."

He raised the injustices and difficulties caused by the rising and debilitating Third World debt, environment, human rights, terrorism, double standards and hypocrisy of the rich, AIDS, the rights of the poor, unfair trade practices, new colonialism and imperialism, and the challenges of globalisation and its adverse effects on the poor.

He has also not shied from taking his own people and the Muslims to task. He had said that "Muslims are equally to be blamed for their tarnished reputation, their poor image and their isolation". On another occasion, he stressed that it "is time for the Islamic world to take a hard look at itself and decide whether we want to move forward and how we can do so".

While speaking out for and on behalf of the developing countries, he stressed that for Malaysia "... there is no desire for us to lead the world". He reasoned: "You have to show an interest in others for others to show an interest in you. And when you have common problems, the fact that you know people, efforts will be made to help resolve these problems". Many are now seeking his assistance to resolve their problems.

During his visits to developing countries, he repeatedly stressed the importance of the transfer of technology and expertise. In post-war Vietnam, for example, he had pointed that a prosperous and stable economy makes for a stable and prosperous region and this, he added, holds true for Vietnam and the Southeast Asian region as well.

He, against all objections and reservations, championed the inclusion of Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam



NICE TO MEET YOU: Dr Mahathir calling on Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Teheran

into Asean. The former Asean Secretary General Rodolfo Selverino, in paying tribute, said Dr Mahathir was the "primary moving force" in bringing the three Southeast Asian countries into the grouping.

In showing interest in others and in an effort to resolve problems together, he enunciated the "Prosper Thy Neighbour policy" against the "Beggars Thy Neighbour" policy pursued by many.

He proposed the setting up of an East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), pointing out that the Americans had Nafta and the Europeans had the EU but the East Asian nations were a desperate group in facing the developed countries in the Uruguay Round. They needed to co-operate.

But as in many proposals and ideas, he was way ahead of others. Either they did not see the relevance of the idea or those who saw it, and in the case of the EAEC, opposed it. According to the then US Secretary of State James Baker 111 made sure that Washington "killed it".

Almost a decade later and the serious lack of co-operation and co-ordination of policies highlighted by the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 the relevance of an East Asian grouping sank in. The nations have now come together under the Asean plus Three umbrella, which essentially is the

EAEC with a different name.

And in Bali recently, Dr Mahathir noted that: "When we first suggested the East Asian Economic Caucus, we were forbidden to talk about it by other entities. We are talking about it now. We are making progress."

A fierce believer in co-operation, he argued in favour of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) when its relevance was questioned. At the meeting in Belgrade, soon after the end of the Cold War, Dr Mahathir defended it, adding: "...it is imperative that we stay together, present a united front and continue to strive for a more just and equitable world."

In his pursuit for a just and equitable world, he highlighted the need to preserve Antarctica as a universal heritage of man. He took the cause to the international body, the UN, and continues to champion the need for a global good and especially for the plight of the poor.

He championed the right of the developing countries and focused on the need for South-South co-operation. This led him to initiate the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) and the Southern African International Dialogue (SAID) which brings African and Asian leaders to seek solutions to their common problems and to learn from each other. Similar dialogues have also been held in the Caribbean and other regions have shown interest.

He encouraged and challenged Malaysians to reach greater heights. His keen interest in the progress and achievements of Malaysians and his personal touch and concern endeared him to many. While he has many admirers, he has his critics, too. In many cases, the critics give him due credit when they see that his views, ideas and actions prove to be beneficial and workable.

On his numerous travels, he makes a point to meet with Malaysians and

students, encouraging, chiding and sometimes scolding them for not trying harder. But he never fails to answer each and every question, some of which are raised over and over again.

Once when asked whether he ever tired of answering the same question repeatedly, his answer was: "It may be the same to you and me but to those asking the question, it is important as they may not have had the opportunity to raise the question before. Therefore they deserve an answer."

As the country's No. 1 salesman, his entourage included businessmen and entrepreneurs. This is a practice that has been emulated by others, including many in the developed world. In many ways he is very western — he says what is on his mind, directly, clearly and without mincing his words. He calls a spade a spade, which elicits both condemnation as well as praise from the West.

From a situation where foreigners did not even know where Malaysia was, the country today is known not only for its leader, who is outspoken, dares to be different and challenges orthodox thinking, but also for the economic progress it has made.

Malaysia now boasts a per capita income of RM14,098, an increase of more than 350 per cent from RM4,022 when he took over as Prime Minister in 1981.

But more than the physical, economic, social and political developments that Malaysians have been able to enjoy, the developments in Malaysia have also benefited other countries.

The US-based *Fortune* magazine, for example, commented that: "Every country should have Malaysia's problems; it has been growing too fast" while the BBC points out that Dr Mahathir has "seen the transformation of one of Asia's richest countries".

■ The writer is Assistant Group Editor at the NST.

