



NATION'S PRIDE: Dr Mahathir checking on the progress of work on Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang in 1996

Charting new frontiers

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A country's progress is defined by its leadership, and in Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's tenure as Head of Government, seminal changes have been seen in many spheres, writes **ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD**.



THE 22-YEAR ADMINISTRATION of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister of Malaysia is marked by numerous achievements, many against seemingly insurmountable odds.

His success in leading the country also comes amid a backdrop of various landmark events. Some of the events were successes, others challenges.

They qualify in significance owing to Dr Mahathir's able handling of the problems and his vision in implementing the right policies and measures for the country to continually develop.

From an economic standpoint, Dr Mahathir stamped his mark on the country's development soon after taking office as Prime Minister on July 16, 1981.

In early 1982, he introduced a policy to spur the country's economic growth through the introduction of tried-and-tested work ethics from an unlikely source — Japan.

The Look East policy, as it was called, broke the hold on Western values and ethics which many had subscribed to, and after over 20 years of its adoption, the policy has been a resounding success.

Early examples of the adoption of the Look East policy in specific development and private sector projects can be seen in the Dayabumi complex in Kuala Lumpur and in the Penang bridge.

To date, more than 13,000 Malaysian students, trainees and workers have been sent to Japan to learn about Japanese work ethics, and Malaysia today enjoys a relationship with Japan uncommon to many nations.

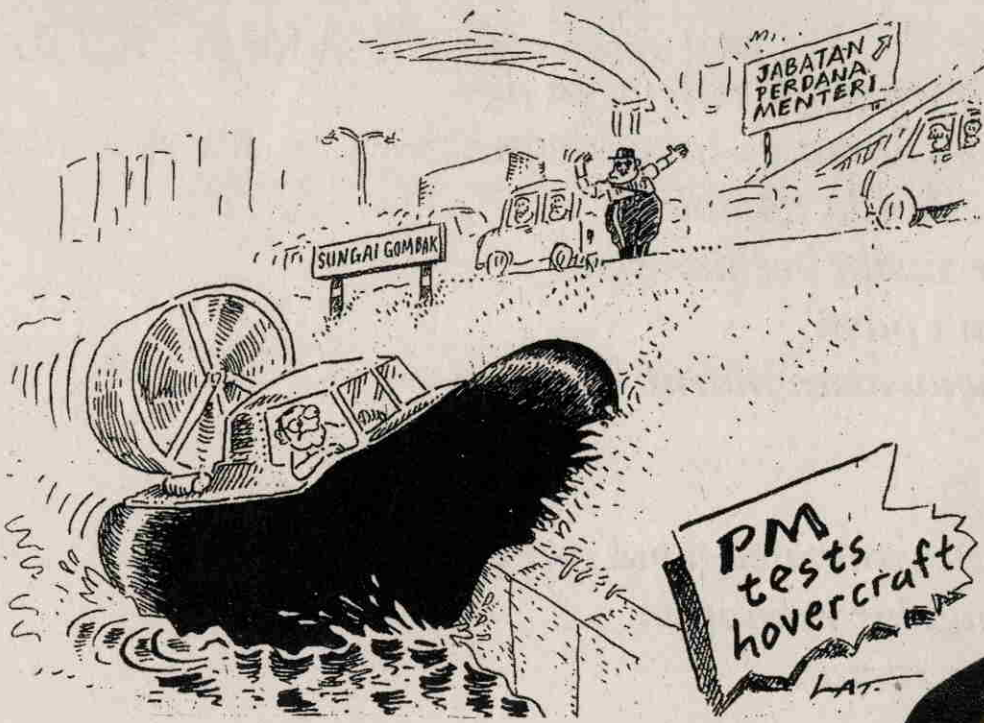
Among the earliest foundations for developing a modern Malaysia which Dr Mahathir lay in place after he came to office were measures to improve the efficiency of the civil service.

The 1980s saw the introduction of specific programmes and measures. They included the use of name-tags for all public sector personnel. Introduced in 1982, the move imposed a measure of accountability upon the civil servants.

It also allowed the public to know who they were dealing with and enabled them to lodge complaints against specific individuals for unsatisfactory service.

Dr Mahathir himself wore a name-tag, emblazoned with the word "Mahathir", and has been wearing it at work without fail throughout his tenure.

Another measure which Dr Mahathir introduced to the civil service in 1982 was the clock-in punch card system. Enforced since Jan 2 of that year, the directive is aimed at ensuring that all Government



in 1977.

Another landmark event which shows this concern was the development of Bank Islam Malaysia Berhad, which was launched on July 1, 1983. Dr Mahathir, after launching the bank, became its first customer, opening a RM500 account.

Serving as an alternative to Western banking, Dr Mahathir said the bank was also set up to prove that the assimilation of Islamic values into the country's economy would not bring calamity.

The establishment of Bank Islam turned out to be significant because two decades later, many Western-system banks have discovered the benefits of Islamic banking, and have introduced such services which have today become commonplace.

Dr Mahathir also advanced the Malaysia incorporated concept in 1983, where the Government and the private sector cooperate for economic growth.

In addition, he also announced a privatisation policy aimed at increasing

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employees put in the mandatory eight hours in a working day.

A day earlier, on the stroke of midnight, the whole country was introduced to another major change by Dr Mahathir. All clocks in the peninsula were advanced by 30 minutes to standardise Peninsular time with that of Sabah and Sarawak.

Dr Mahathir also embarked on an anti-corruption campaign, whose catchphrase — "Bersih, Cekap, Amanah" (Clean, Efficient Trustworthy) — has gone on to become the common phrase which even today is popularly used to describe the aims which the civil service is expected to live up to.

The year 1982 also saw Dr Mahathir being instrumental in the establishment of a specific body to encourage Bumiputera savings.

Permodalan Nasional Berhad was set up to serve as a vital institution that manages Bumiputera shares in trust funds.

Dr Mahathir's passion for promoting the development of Muslims in the country and throughout the world meanwhile led him to propose the International Islamic University of

Malaysia, which was officially established on May 10, 1983.

The university was founded upon the ideas of Malaysia's world-renowned scholar, Prof Dr Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, which were presented in Mecca during the First World Conference on Muslim Education



OUT OF THIS WORLD: Dr Mahathir showing the first-day cover issued by Pos Malaysia in conjunction with the launch of Measat-1 satellite in 1996

When we state that Malaysia is an Islamic country we have the right to do so. If Malaysia is not an Islamic country because of not implementing the 'hudud', then in this world there is no Islamic country as all those countries too cannot implement 'hudud'.

— On hudud, September 2001.

I have been through that — terrible, shameful — I could not stand being colonised, that is one thing that I (overcome by emotion) ... it is terrible... I can't even describe it.

— Overcome by emotion when talking about colonisation in an interview with the NST two days after marking his 20th year in office as Prime Minister, July 2001.