

Ugly reality of Mahathir
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From Bruce Leeming

Sir: Sholto Byrnes asks us to recognise the merits of the approach of Dr Mahathir Mohamad to government ('Mahathir knows best', 25 October). This is the Malaysian Muslim bigot who, inter alia and on Mr Byrnes's admission, had his political opponent, Anwar Ibrahim, jailed on 'trumped-up charges of sodomy'; who regularly voices virulent anti-Semitic pro-Islamic views; who blatantly lied for years over his government's complicity in the 1986 'Tin Crisis', a shabby international market manipulation which no doubt privately enriched a few of his colleagues but bankrupted many honest brokers and hardworking Chinese miners.

Dr Mahathir's sanctimonious pronouncements over the years to the West, especially those directed at Britain, which bequeathed him a good going concern in independent Malaysia, have been sickening. And it should never be forgotten that, had allies of the Malaysian people from many nations not fought and died to rid the country of Japanese and later Communist enemies, Dr Mahathir would never have enjoyed the right to speak in the terms he does. Indeed, he would never have been heard from at all.

As it is, John Simpson may be going a bit far in describing this tinpot little despot as 'a successful Asian Robert Mugabe', but let us not lose sight of the ugly realities of Mahathir's 22-year rule.

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From Roy Rubenstein Sir: Sholto Byrnes argues that Dr Mahathir Mohamad's anti-Jewish remarks should be seen in the context of his regular outbursts. And anyway, Byrnes assures us, the targets of his remarks are Israel and Zionist Jews. But Dr

Mohamad can't be lauded for bringing stability to his religiously tense land while being excused for targeting an outside religion to rally Muslim solidarity. Is this really the best we can expect from a veteran politician promoted by Byrnes as 'the very model of a moderate Muslim leader'?

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