

Mahathir - architect of modern Malaysia's phenomenal growth

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by 'Amal' Anver,
Chairman - Amals Group

Politicians are aplenty; they are found everywhere, mostly voluble, rarely sensible. But Statesmen - they are a rare breed and could be counted on one's fingers.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamed is a Statesman, always putting country before self.

The distinguished Doctor Politico after two decades of memorable service to his beloved motherland graciously retired from politics as the Prime Minister of Malaysia on October 31, 2003. He has been the architect and strategist of modern Malaysia's phenomenal growth over the last decade of the 20th century. He is also initiator of Malaysia's vision 2020 and the multimedia super corridor.

Dr. Mahathir is the last of a remarkable crop of brilliant and exemplary leaders who led Far East and South East Asian countries to prosperity and self-respect.

Malaysia, a sparsely populated rural country with deep agrarian culture, helmed by traditional monarchs was peopled by millions of Chinese and Indian Immigrants after developments in the 20th century and the discover of tin.

Dr. Mahathir, a man of vision with a positive mission to make Malaysia, a prosperous, modern country, gradually built a sound industrial base while the country was concentrating on the export of tin, rubber and oil. Realising that improvement comes only from a prosperous and sound economy, Dr. Mahathir for a moment ignored ideology and transformed Malaysia from a producer of primary products to a producer of industrial products.

Mahathir used the new found wealth from the country's export of crude oil and palm oil to develop an infrastructure for high tech industries. His policies attracted many major players in the technology fields and all the big names from Intel to Motorola, Sony, Sharp and Siemens have some of their biggest plants in the world in Malaysia. More computer chips are made in Malaysia than in any other country and Malaysian sub-contractors for the big name companies have grown to be able to set up their own subsidiary plants in other countries.

Inspiring leadership

Under his inspiring leadership, the enthusiastic Malaysians developed an indigenous car, the Proton and attempted to build Malaysian Multinational Corporations. Sri Lanka has two Malaysian trans-nationals operating here. One handling the biggest cellular phone and the other soon to build its first highway.

During his 16-year rule he plummeted Malaysia into the 20th century and prepared it to face the 21st century with aplomb.

Malaysia is a multi-national country with the Chinese and Indians playing a very dominant economic role. Mahathir loved his people, the Malays, but he was not racist. The tension in the country because of the economic supervaluation of the immigrant community, he gently defused by giving special economic status to the Bhumiputra, the children of the soil. He persuaded the well-off Chinese businesses to forge partnerships with the local Malays and thereby share wealth. Whereas in other countries such unequal financial differences among the different ethnic



Dr. Mahathir Mohamed

groups, especially with the local group being comparatively financially poor, would cause violence and even terrorism. Mahathir very diplomatically resolved the urge for economic justice by the Malaysians and for profit by Chinese businessmen by making the two groups partners in progress and prosperity of Malaysia.

The invisible players in the modern financial world, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO dictate, dominate and also pontificate to heads of state, especially the Third World countries. Through these various types of loans they advance to the poor countries, they have a stake in the affairs of those countries, making them dependent on those International Lending Agencies.

The Most recent buzz world of these economic giants and their junior partners, the multi-national corporations, globalisation. All countries have accepted this economic prescription to hopefully cure these countries' economic ills. That is blind acceptance.

Mahathir, as Malaysia's Prime Minister never accepted anything without studying the pros and cons of a problem, especially if it was from the international lending agencies and the Western countries, who work as partners in exploiting the poor countries to enrich the developed countries.

Public pronouncements

Mahathir made many public pronouncements against the ulterior motives of the IMF, World Bank, the WTO and the Western countries. He was very candid. He spoke not only for Malaysia but for the poor countries as well.

Globalisation - Mahathir did not accept it as a remedy for the Third World's ills and a guide for prosperity among the poor of the world.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamed in his speeches had made an incisive critique of the main aspects of globalisation and provides explanations for the changing tide of opinion against the concept of globalisation.

Globalisation, deregulation and liberalisation in a borderless world, he maintains, must be handled with care as they are a means to an end - and not ends in themselves.

Globalisation must result in a better life for all. Though mobility of capital flows across borders in an efficient way of allocating resources globally and channelling them to developing countries, Mahathir said such mobility creates volatility and provides an opportunity for speculative attacks against currencies that threatens the economic stability of less developed countries.

Dr. Mahathir warned the world of the inequities and dangers of globalisation years before it was fashionable to criticise this concept. His lack of inhibition in speaking his mind - even when his opinion goes against conventional wisdom - is now well documented.

Dr. Mahathir in his many speeches and writings has not pulled any punches describing the events of the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the mechanics of currency speculation and the effects of the volatile inflows and outflows of foreign funds, as well as the measures Malaysia took to counter the crisis.

To highlight Dr. Mahathir Mohammed's initial evaluation of globalisation, deregulation and liberalisation in a borderless world, I am including some quotes from his speech on "Globalisation and the new realities", delivered at the 10th World Economic Development Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on June 27, 2001.

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Globalisation and the new realities

* There are so many people who want to do the thinking for us, and who get upset when lesser beings like us try to do our own thinking.

* It is not so easy to think straight when there are so many corporate giants bearing their teeth and so convincingly hiding their ambition at gobbling us all up.

* Why is that everywhere there is pressure to ensure "One, One Vote? Except in the IMF and the World Bank. In these important organisations, what has to be sacred is "One Dollar, On Vote."

* Why is that so much of the developed world, despite all their globalisation and liberalisation rhetoric, will not open their agricultural market? Why do they subsidise their farmers handsomely while they declare that subsidies distort the market and the economy and all food and fuel subsidies must be stopped or no promised loans will be distributed.

* Why don't the rich countries remove the barriers on these products - textiles, clothing and footwear - in which the poor countries are world beaters? Why is there instead tariff escalation on those products where the developing world is able to develop awesome global competitiveness?

* In 1960 the total income of the wealthiest 20% of humanity was 30 times greater than the total income of the poorest 20 per cent. Today after all the wonderful globalisation, it is more than 85 times greater. This figure grossly underestimates the concentration of wealth among the wealthiest. The United Nations (UN) estimates "the assets of the 200 richest people are more than the combined assets of 41 per cent of the world's people. Just imagine 200 people owning assets equal to the total wealth of 25 billion people of their fellow creatures.

* The globalisation theologians tell us all about the gains from trade. "Why do they not also tell us of the pains of trade?" Why don't they tell us about the trading by a few currency traders which earn them Billions at the expense of millions losing their jobs, their subsidised rice and at time their lives."

* I believe we must create a more compassionate and caring world, a world where the winner does not take all and the loser does not lose all.

(From a speech delivered at the 10th World Economic Development Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on June 27, 2001)