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DUBAI, Sat. - A prominent Damascus University scholar has hailed Malaysia's former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad for demolishing European notions of superiority.

Describing Dr Mahathir as "an unusual politician," Dr Marwan Al Kabalan said, "One cannot but admire his willpower as a leader who set an example for the rest of the Muslim world."

"His skills can only be compared to that of Konrad Adenauer, Germany's first post-war Chancellor, who lifted his country up from the aches of absolute destruction and embarked on modernisation and industrialisation," said the academician in a weekend column written for Dubai's Gulf News daily.

The article, titled "Mahathir's model is the response to Western ideas," argues that by modernising Malaysia the former Prime Minister undermined "two of the most authoritative Western theories that have been trying for so long to explain the slow process of modernisation in the Muslim world: culture determinism and the capitalist development model."

Al Kabalan wrote that Western academia borrowed most of its assumptions against Muslims from the 19th century French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan's racist social theories that propagated European cultural superiority.

He wrote that the French philosopher believed the "Orient" suffered from an "iron circle in which the believer's head is enclosed, making him absolutely closed to science, and incapable of opening himself to anything new."

"In less than a quarter century of hard work, Dr Mahathir had proved most of these ideas wrong, relegating them to the dustbin of history.

"The Malaysian leader has proved beyond doubt that the Muslim mind is not closed by an iron circle and that it is open to science and new ideas and capable of producing state-of-the-art technology," Al Kabalan said.

Looking at Malaysia's modernisation, the Damascus academic said Dr Mahathir succeeded in transforming "a traditional collectivist society, with low levels of social mobility, simple specialisation and division of labour into a modern society, highly universalistic, with a high degree of social mobility."

"Alas, instead of supporting Malaysia and promoting its model, the west declared war on Dr Mahathir and tried to circumscribe his philosophy," Al Kabalan said.

Dr Mahathir visited Syria last month to deliver a paper on "the Malaysian Model in Investment and Economic Development" at the invitation of Damascus University. - Bernama