

# The making of Mahathir

S 31/10/2003 - 3-4, 6 PRECISE

The road to the top was rocky and often slippery but almost right from the start, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad already had well-defined ideas and steadfast principles which have virtually remained unchanged through the years, writes AUDREY EDWARDS.

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was born on July 10, 1925, in Alor Star, Kedah, the youngest of nine children.

His father Mohamad Iskandar was an English schoolteacher who was known as a strict disciplinarian and his mother was Wan Tampawan.

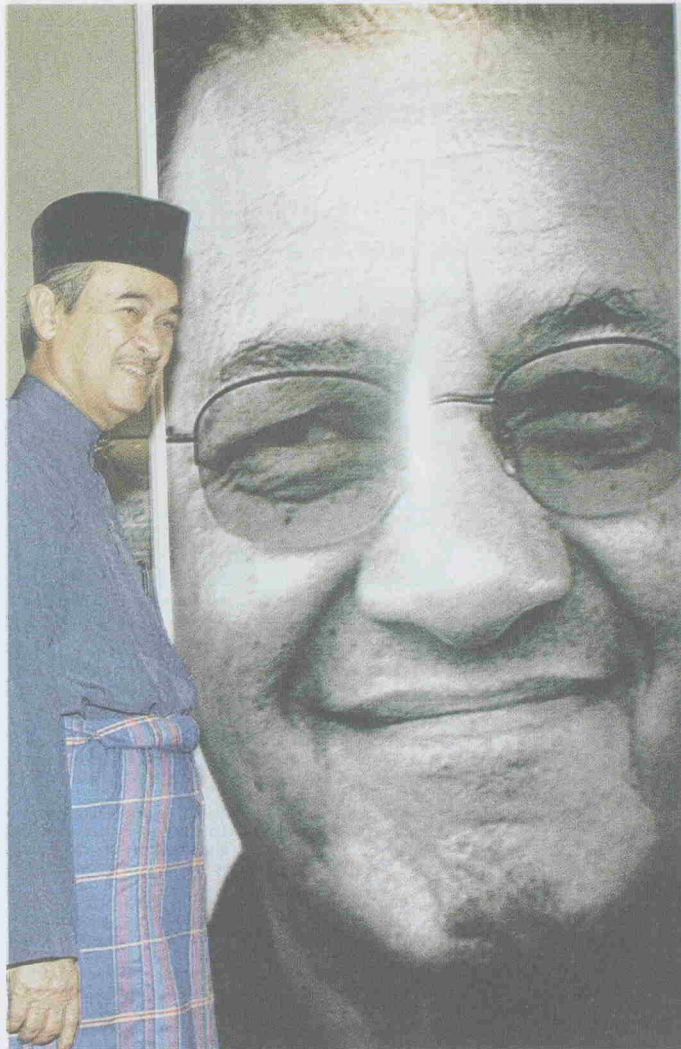
"As an adult with important decisions to make in life, he often sought his parents' views and consent as a gesture of love and respect," writes Aziz Zariza Ahmad in his book *Mahathir's Paradigm Shift: The Man Behind the Vision*.

Aziz also observed that the future Premier was "greatly influenced" by his father's resoluteness and determination.

His early education was at the Seberang Perak Malay School and later the Government English School (which became the Sultan Abdul Hamid College in Alor Star).

In school, he was the librarian of his class and constant winner of the English prize. A former teacher, Datuk J.F. Augustine, described him as an "above average" student.

"He was not very interested in sports. He was often with his books. His main hobby was reading and writing. In fact, he was so good in English that he was appointed the editor of the school magazine.



# Letter that led to expulsion

S 31/10/2003 - 3-4. 6 PRECISE

● FROM PAGE 3

The Japanese Occupation interrupted his studies but Dr Mahathir simply rose to the challenges of the time and ran his own business.

He sold *cendol* and set up a banana stall in Pekan Rabu. The bananas were sold fresh and fried and served at a coffee shop nearby.

J. Victor Morais, in his *Mahathir: A Profile of Courage*, quotes Dr Mahathir as saying: "I like business. Even in primary school I was making money. I bought balloons at two cents for three and sold them at two cents each. I organised a *tikam* (lucky draw) - using a soap box and cheap teacups for prizes."

After the Japanese Occupation, he continued his studies at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College and later went on to pursue medicine at the King Edward VII Medical College in Singapore in 1947.

Morais writes that Dr Mahathir's first love was law and he wanted to study it in England when he was awarded a state government scholarship. But the Government insisted on him pursuing medicine, as there were "enough lawyers".



The nation's third Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn greeting Dr Mahathir after naming him as his successor in 1981.



First Prime Minister and Umno President Tunku Abdul Rahman expelled Dr Mahathir who was persuaded to rejoin the party by Datuk Harun Idris (middle) and made a Cabinet Minister by second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak.

General Hospital and medical officer in the Alor Star, Perlis and Langkawi hospitals.

Assisted by Dr Siti Hasmah, Dr Mahathir opened his own medical clinic - the Maha Clinic - in 1957. It was the first Malay clinic in Alor Star.

Dr Mahathir soon became known as Doctor Umno and did not charge patients if they were too poor and would even give them their fare to go home.

"Mahathir never hesitated to make house calls, utilising whatever means of transport available, be it a car, a bicycle or hitching lifts from friends. His kindness and care resulted in Doctor Umno becoming more popular than his real name," writes Aziz.

Morais quoting Abdullah Pa' Chik, who had been with the Maha Klinik

since its establishment, described Dr Mahathir as a generous man. Dr Mahathir, he said, never handled money matters of the clinic. This was handled by his brother-in-law, the late Pak Hassan and later by Abdullah himself.

"This is one of Dr Mahathir's admirable qualities. If he has faith in a person, he will trust him with anything, even money," said Abdullah.

#### Life in politics

DR Mahathir's interest in politics began in his school days and this intensified through his involvement with the anti-Malayan Union movement, *Massa Melayu*.

He led a group of students and became active in anti-Malayan Union demonstrations. He joined Umno in 1945 when he was 20.

He declined a seat offered during the 1959 Kedah state elections and was never a state assemblyman. In 1964, Dr Mahathir won the Kota Star Selatan parliamentary seat.

Morais writes that he was fearless as a young politician and was noted for his "keen mind and diligence".

"Often he spoke without hesitation but there were times when he lost his temper. On those occasions, he threw caution to the wind," he writes.

He was an active backbencher until 1969 and spoke out against the Alliance's "gentility, caution and reluctance to take drastic action".

Dr Mahathir confronted what he saw as now Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's ambition for himself and Singapore in the newly formed Malaysia.

DR Mahathir recognises the Chinese community as a strong economic force in helping our national growth while simultaneously, he's given the Chinese business sector good opportunities to work together in partnership with the other races, particularly the Malays.

He also has been giving the Malaysian Chinese good opportunities to pursue tertiary education by encouraging more universities to be set up apart from the public institutions.

The Prime Minister is a very visionary, far-sighted and wise leader. Armed with these qualities, he has brought about great changes to the country, especially in the fostering of inter-racial ties in Malaysia. He has enabled the different races to accept each other and not to give room to extremism. He's managed to set a vision for all races to work towards to and have a sense of belonging.

One of his greatest achievements is that Malaysians now feel proud of being Malaysians. Dr Mahathir has become synonymous with Malaysia. This is how the world has come to perceive us.

- MCA President and Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting

The young doctor had differences of opinion with Tunku Abdul Rahman too.

"There was nothing personal, just a matter of differences of views. You don't oppose views because of the person, but because what he had or had not done. I gave my full support to the Tunku as party leader, although I disagreed with some of his politics," Morais quotes Dr Mahathir as saying.

But he was branded an "ultra" by his opponents and a nationalist by his supporters because his actions and views during this time concerned the rights of the Malays.

#### Turbulence and expulsion

The year 1969 until 1972, were bleak for Dr Mahathir.

His defeat by his PAS opponent Yusof Rawa in the General Elections by 989 votes paled in comparison to the subsequent incidents.

The defining moment was when he was expelled from Umno on Sept 26, 1969, after he wrote a letter to Tunku, in which he "harshly criticised the Tunku's personal and administrative weaknesses" besides bringing to attention a group in Umno who were frustrated over the plight of Malays, especially the rural folks.

A press statement released by the party's secretary-general Senu Abdul Rahman said: "Mahathir Mohamed ceases to be a member of the Umno Supreme Council with effect from today 12 July 1969."

The statement went on to say that "the decision was taken following

#### Medical school

DR Mahathir's university days took place when there were very few Malay students attending it. There were only seven Malay students in the university in 1947, including his future wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. He was 22.

The couple married on Aug 5, 1956 when he was 31.

It was at university that he showed leadership qualities in several fields and among others, became the Muslim Society president.

The only game that he would play was rugby and he continued to pursue his interest in writing.

An editor of the Sultan Abdul Hamid College magazine *Darulaman*, he contributed stories to *The Straits Times* under the pseudonym Che Det and was editor of a magazine published by the medical college.

Che Det concentrated on highlighting the plight of rural people.

Morais also quotes a university mate who remembered Dr Mahathir as being "aloof".

"He had a lot of dignity. He would join in the ragging but you could see he wasn't involved in crazy pranks. His intelligence made him a natural rallying point. When we got stumped with medical theories, we went to Mahathir. He read a lot and quickly, and he understood faster than any of us," the university mate said.

Dr Mahathir received his medical degree in 1953 and joined the government in 1954.

#### Doctor Umno

HE worked for some years as a medical apprentice in the Penang

ing the wide distribution to the public of Mahathir's letter to Tunku Abdul Rahman, President of Umno Malaysia.

"Letters containing important matters should first be discussed by Umno's Supreme Council, especially in view of the present situation in the country. The action taken by Mahathir is seen to be in breach of the party's etiquette and is capable of damaging party solidarity and the Government which the party supports," as published in *The Other Side of Mahathir* by Datuk Zainuddin Maidin.

The Government also proscribed his letter to Tunku and anyone found in possession of it without official permission was liable to a year's imprisonment or a fine of RM1,000 or both. Those found guilty of publishing, printing or distributing it was liable to imprisonment of three years, or a fine of RM2,000 or both.

Dr Mahathir, writes Zainuddin, felt isolated and "for the first time in his life he waited anxiously for the day of his arrest."

"His house had been ransacked by officers from the Inland Revenue, friends had remained aloof, and those who had previously beaten a path to his door were no longer to be seen. He was regarded as bad and dangerous to know," writes Zainuddin.

He quotes the Premier as saying: "I felt like an outcast. People were afraid to come to my house." It was at this time that he found who his true friends were and their visits to his house comforted him greatly.

"Whilst others were openly discussing the matter of my impending arrest, I shall never forget Tunku Abdullah (ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman). He was among those who waited for me at the railway station in Kuala Lumpur to see

# Return to Umno

S 31/10/2003 - 3-4, 6 PRECISE

if they would arrest me on my arrival from Alor Star." Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying.

Zainuddin writes that there was an order to arrest Dr Mahathir, but this was not approved by then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak.

Dr Mahathir was finally sacked from Umno on Sept 26, 1969.

In political exile, he returned to his medical practice in Pekan Melayu, Alor Star.

As a show of protest to Umno's leadership but not the party itself, he spoke at PAS-organised gatherings.

"During those three years and three months, Mahathir brought about a crisis in the thinking of those who were in politics in this country as well as among those who were interested in this country's politics," writes Subky Latif.

## Return to Umno

HIS return to the party was taken up by a group of prominent Umno figures including Umno Youth leader the late Datuk Harun Idris, who helped in the reconciliation between Dr Mahathir and Umno, besides pressuring it to let him return.

Zainuddin writes that Harun went to Dr Mahathir's house in Titi Gajah, Alor Star, in 1971 as part of an effort to bring him back to the fold.

"I shall never forget it. When the others were afraid to come near me, Harun came to my house," Dr Mahathir said while Harun merely said that he did it on behalf of Umno Youth as he felt that Dr



A relaxed and confident Dr Mahathir on nomination day for the 1982 general election, his first as leader of the ruling Barisan Nasional.

Mahathir was "an asset to the party."

He applied to rejoin Umno through the Rawang branch, which was headed by Tunku Abdullah.

"That application was deemed less than acceptable by members of Umno's Supreme Council because he did not state his willingness to abide by the party's discipline and also because he offered no apologies," writes Zainuddin.

Consequently, Harun and other members of the Umno Youth Committee saw him in Alor Star to persuade him to reapply. He turned them down, adding that he had sent a letter about the matter to the

Umno headquarters.

"If they want to reject me, then let them do so," he told them.

Zainuddin writes that Harun and some others brought him to a rest house in Jalan Day, Alor Star, where they asked him to sign another application and an apology letter.

"It can be said that we actually forced him to sign when he was reluctant to do so," Harun was quoted as saying.

The Umno disciplinary committee headed by then party deputy president Tun Dr Ismail accepted his application to rejoin Umno on March 7, 1972.

Now back in the party, Dr

plary pace. When he retires, we hope Dr Mahathir can continue to contribute his experience, knowledge, ideas and skills. If we know how to utilise Dr Mahathir after his tenure ends, then we will still have him to play his role in diplomacy, fighting for the Third World and in any field of national service.

— Former MCA president and Transport Minister, currently Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman chairman Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik

Mahathir got the most votes when he contested for a place in the party's Supreme Council but not a Cabinet position because of his defeat in the elections.

He was appointed Senator in 1973 and was appointed Education Minister after he won the Kubang Pasu seat in the 1974 general election.

## The minister

AZIZ writes that, "education was the first step in Mahathir's plan to change the people and the nation. As a leader, his ambition was to eliminate poverty and create justice for all, and to see to it that every individual was given an opportunity to improve his or her standard of living."

Throughout his tenure as Education Minister, Dr Mahathir introduced reforms such as increasing the opportunities for Malays to further their education at institutions of higher learning, changing the admission quotas and other criteria in the selecting students for such centres.

Facilities such as scholarships and teaching institutions such as the Mara Junior Science Colleges were also set up.

He also amended the Universities and University Colleges Act, which was opposed by academicians and those involved in education.

"As a strict disciplinarian, he did not hesitate to use necessary measures to silence the critics of the education policies. Today, all centres of higher learning are managed under the guidance of the Ministry of Education," writes Morais.

He contested and won a vice-president seat during the Umno General Assembly in 1975.

All this contributed to the success of his political future.

Following the demise of Tun Abdul Razak and the appointment of Tun Hussein Onn as Prime Minister and Umno president, Dr Mahathir was appointed Deputy Prime Minister by Hussein.

Automatically, he was made Umno's deputy president.

"Despite common consent over the appointment, one could not forget that Mahathir was known as an extremist and it inevitably aroused distrust among Malaysians of Chinese descent.

"Nevertheless, Mahathir has proved that the allegations hurled at him by his political opponents were groundless," writes Aziz.

Dr Mahathir remained Education Minister after his appointment. He was the Cabinet's investment committee chairman and also Trade and Industry Minister, where he had a non-stop campaign promoting trade between Malaysia and other countries.

He retained his post in the Cabinet and party when he won in the 1978 general election.

His time finally came when Tun Hussein Onn stepped down as Umno president and Prime Minister due to health reasons.

At 55, Dr Mahathir became Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister on July 16, 1981.



Seeking his first mandate from the electorate, Dr Mahathir sets out to win them over with his Barisan Nasional Manifesto.