

# OTHER THOTS

by A Kadir Jasin

## The Inimitable Dr M

**As the nation bids farewell to its longest-serving prime minister, accolades and tributes are pouring in, all too fair for a statesman who has done much for his people and country.**

**W**ITH A torrent of accolades being showered on him in his last remaining days as Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is bound to be embarrassed by some of them.

There is nothing much he can do to stop people from paying tribute to him. Needless to say, some may be overdoing it while others are not entirely selfless in their accolades as in the Malay saying *ada udang di sebalik batu*.

But when a Beirut-based Arab publisher, Hassan el-Zain, compared him to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim statesman, jurist, historian and scholar Abd-ar Rahman Abu Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun - in short Ibn Khaldun - we have to take notice.

el-Zain, who recently published a 10-volume encyclopedia comprising Dr Mahathir's speeches in Arabic and English, was quoted as saying that the Prime Minister's ideas on economics and his innovations were on par with those of Ibn Khaldun.

Those who follow Dr Mahathir's thoughts and actions and read Ibn Khaldun's *Al Muqadimmah* would find el-Zain's comparison interesting.

I am not sure if Dr Mahathir is a student of Ibn Khaldun, but he certainly reads voraciously, including Sydney Sheldon's popular novels.

Those who have read Dr Mahathir's books, in particular *The Malay Dilemma*, and listened to his speeches would not find it difficult to understand the parallel drawn by el-Zain.

*The Malay Dilemma* was about a people - the Malays - and their environment and history. Dr Mahathir attributed the failures (or the lack of success) of the Malays to their uninspiring environment and the historical experiences they had been subjected to.

If Dr Mahathir's world started with the Malays, the centre of Ibn Khaldun's world was man. In *The Muqadimmah*, which in Arabic means introduction, Ibn Khaldun spoke of man's dependence on the physical environment. Man's environment shaped his character, appearance and customs.

Ibn Khaldun traced man's socio-economic progress from the lowest unit of the tribe to the highest form, the *tamaddun* (urbanisation/civilisation).

He wrote about the importance of *assabiyah* (solidarity) in the formation of strong states and finally the *ummah*, which

was derived from an Arabic word which means to build and to develop.

Long before deflation became known as the scourge of modern economic management, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) had already warned of its negative effects by asserting that 'continued low prices are harmful to merchants'.

In assessing Dr Mahathir's contribution to the leadership of the country and his place in history, an understanding of Ibn Khaldun could prove to be useful. el-Zain's comparison of Dr Mahathir with Ibn Khaldun is not altogether baseless.

### THE MAN WHO MADE LIMA

**DR MAHATHIR'S** last Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) show came to a close on Oct 5.

Except for the heavy rain that washed out much of the aerial performances by the likes of the British Royal Air Force's *Red Arrows* and the choppy seas that curtailed maritime activities, LIMA 2003 was a fitting farewell to Dr Mahathir who is, in many ways, the father of LIMA and Langkawi.

Hopefully, the just concluded event was a

farewell that did not amount to a goodbye to Dr Mahathir. Knowing the man, it is unlikely that he would give LIMA and Langkawi up that easily.

It is heartening to note that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak acknowledged that Dr Mahathir could continue to contribute to the biennial show despite his retirement.

Since the inauguration of LIMA in 1991, Dr Mahathir has effectively been its host.

As Najib, the minister responsible for the event, put it, there is nowhere in the world that an air show has the head of government as host except LIMA.

It is pretty amazing for a man who became interested in aviation from seeing the wreckage of a crashed aeroplane to keep noticing even the tiniest development in the highly technical industry year after year.

One of the exhibits that attracted his attention this time around was a mini portable observatory. He also noted that there weren't enough 'space' elements in the show.

It would be tremendously useful if the government and industry could get together to create a permanent aerospace exhibit in Kuala Lumpur or its vicinity. It would be a fitting tribute to Dr Mahathir to have such a centre and it will be very useful in our efforts to develop the aerospace industry.

It would be a shame and certainly a waste of good resources if those beautifully designed booths and their highly educational displays were dismantled and discarded.

Certainly, the Malaysian exhibitors like Airod, SME, CTRM, Sapura and PSC, to mention a few, would benefit from the establishment of such a permanent exhibit. Visitors, especially school children and students, would benefit from it too.

Admittedly, our aerospace industry has come a long way since the inauguration of LIMA some 12 years ago. Even global players like Boeing, Airbus and BAE Systems openly admit Malaysia's growing role in the industry.

## A JOB WELL DONE

**AND** when the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) chief Jen Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad, who described himself as an aging general, took to the air in an aging Allouette

III helicopter on the opening day of LIMA, he was doing more than paying tribute to Dr Mahathir.

Never mind that he later told the Press that there was no better gesture that the RMAF could have made to show its gratitude to Dr Mahathir than for its commander to take to the skies once again.

By performing a series of 'dangerous' manoeuvres in the 40-year-old machine - among the oldest in the RMAF inventory - Abdullah proved that age, of his own and that of the aircraft, was not a major consideration. What is important is training and good maintenance of the equipment.

The fact that the Allouette is still flying and other older aircraft like the Northrop F5-E are being refurbished and restored to flying condition says a lot about RMAF's maintenance culture - another pet subject of the Prime Minister - and the changing approach to military assets.

The government, in particular the Defence Ministry, should be congratulated for taking the dual approach of purchasing new military assets and extending the life of old ones.

Yet, this would not have been possible a decade ago or would not have been considered a viable option when the economy was booming.

The combination of the expansion of the domestic aviation industry and the government's financial constraints has led to this new approach.

Today, the domestic aviation industry has developed to an extent that activities such as life extension, airframe and avionics upgrade, systems integration and airframe modification are commonplace. Malaysian engineers and technicians are so skilled that they are being contracted to maintain aircraft belonging to other air forces, including the United States Air Force.

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The Air Force, for instance, does not need to use the front-end fighters like the Boeing F18 Hornet and MIG29 for patrol and surveillance duties. This can be more economically performed by the F5E or even the

Skyhawk, which were decommissioned in 1999 and are now in storage at the Kuantan Air Force base.

For that matter, it is a challenge for the RMAF to see if it can refurbish and redeploy its former workhorse, the Caribou transport planes, provided their airframes are still serviceable. The Caribou was retired in 2000.

## WHITHER THE MAINTENANCE CULTURE?


**ALAS**, not everybody shares Dr Mahathir's call for the inculcation of a good maintenance culture or has even begun to understand its importance.

First-class aerospace products and technologies might have been exhibited at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Hall. First-class business and scientific brains might have gone into its planning and execution. But public toilets at the venue were as dirty as ever despite the cleaning crew being on standby. Clearly, they had been given a very low standard of cleanliness and hygiene to keep.

It would appear that with only days left, Dr Mahathir would retire as Prime Minister without achieving his dream of clean public toilets and a greener Malaysia.

The managing director of one of the country's largest conglomerates told this writer that he had taken a group of foreign business executives to Pulau Dayang Bunting, one of the scenic islands in the Langkawi archipelago, as a bonus for their participation at LIMA. He was shocked that God's world-class gift was being so poorly maintained. Well, as the Malay saying goes, *hanya mutu mengenal manikam* (only a wise man can appreciate what is priceless).

But beauty to the uninitiated is nothing more than a case of *tikus membaiki labu* (asking the mouse to repair the pumpkin).

But dirty public toilets and poor upkeep of scenic locations are not Langkawi's only problems. Some parts of the island are becoming increasingly prone to flooding due partly to indiscriminate land reclamation. 

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