

GIANTS of ASIA



DOCTOR M:  
OPERATION  
MALAYSIA

conversations with

MAHATHIR  
MOHAMAD

TOM PLATE

*Author of the bestselling*  
Conversations with Lee Kuan Yew

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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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Asked what they  
thought about  
**DR MAHATHIR  
MOHAMAD**  
and his legacy,  
here are what these  
world figures and  
experts had to say.



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“When the economy was growing rapidly, most Malaysians were willing to ignore the darker side of Mahathir’s one-man rule: the no-bid contracts awarded to cronies, the lack of transparency, the restrictions on political freedom, the decline in Malaysia’s educational system and quality of governance, and the squandering of public monies on failed projects from Proton to Perwaja to Putrajaya. But no more. Still, ‘Dr M’ is a fascinating figure—controversial, outspoken, and never boring. He ranks with Tunku Abdul Rahman as Malaysia’s most transformational leader. Long before Barack Obama, he was telling his people ‘yes, we can.’ (*Malaysia boleh.*) His legacy will be that of a bold, visionary, but ultimately flawed leader.”

*John R. Malott,  
U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia, 1995–98*

“Dr Mahathir Mohamad is an international figure who still exerts a great influence in many fields. His achievements are recognized not only at the Malaysian level. He has demonstrated how persistence, hard work and vision are omnipotent to guarantee success. His rare sense of patriotism and moderate religious beliefs have played a major role in his openness to other cultures and to his keen interest to develop the education process in Malaysia and to make it more accessible to the population. His political and development approach is considered by many politicians and leaders as a model reflecting his deep commitment to create a just and equal society.

Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a strong proponent of moderate Islam and has practically proved how Islam, when understood well and implemented correctly, can be a driving factor for development and progress. He is a man who believes that Islam can be integrated into all affairs of life and is compatible with the universal concepts of justice and human rights. This is reflected in his ability to evolve coexistence between different religions and ethnic groups in Malaysia and in his respect for others' beliefs.”

*His Excellency Dr Abu Baker Al-Qirbi,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of Yemen*

“He was an outstanding Prime Minister of Malaysia. During his premiership of over 20 years, he changed Malaysia from an agricultural, placid society into an industrial, dynamic society. He educated his people, sent many abroad on scholarships. They in turn transformed Malaysia.”

*Lee Kuan Yew,  
Prime Minister of Singapore, 1959–90*

“When Tun Dr Mahathir became Prime Minister of Malaysia in the early 1980s, I was a Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. The country and civil service in particular were initially impressed by his quiet charisma and his strong leadership and decisive qualities. He inspired us with many of his innovative policies like



the Look East Policy, Malaysia Incorporated, Buy British Last, and so on. Many of us were also moved by his nationalistic stance in international fora over economic, trade, investment, financial, diplomatic, security, and environmental policies. On the domestic front, great strides were taken to stimulate economic growth and strengthen the national infrastructure in the country. We were struck by the new modern highways, the new airport, the world-class Twin Towers, and the new national capital called Putrajaya. Many believed that Dr Mahathir really put Malaysia on the global map, and we were proud of it!

However, as he continued his long rule of 22 years, we slowly began to feel uneasy with the price we were paying for his authoritarian style of government. His overly critical and aggressive approach to the Western world, which provided us with export markets and foreign direct investment, lost us some international goodwill. In championing the legitimate concerns of South and Middle East countries, forcefully and sometimes even abrasively, he created considerable negative reactions against Malaysia that did not help. Internally the strong national institutions that we had inherited from the British at the time of Independence in 1957 began to weaken under Dr Mahathir's watch. The judiciary in particular, the civil service, the police and the education system, inter alia, gradually declined. Indeed the whole administrative system began to sag under the burden of growing corruption and money politics. Furthermore, his undue commitment to restructuring equity ownership for the *bumiputras* caused some