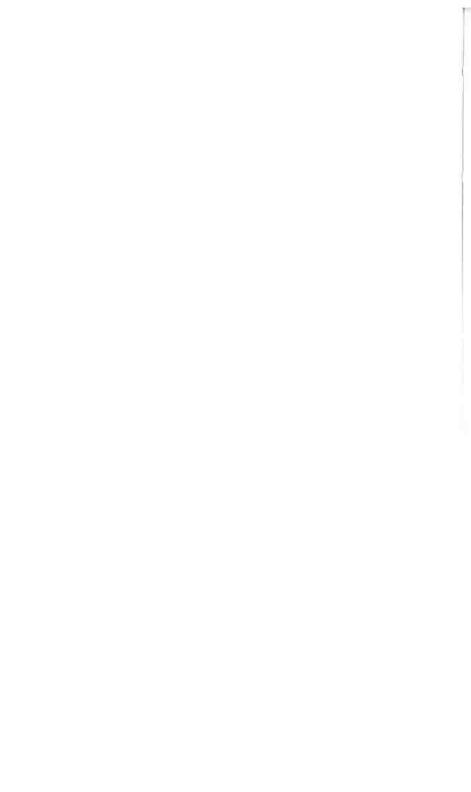


MAHATHIR
Wake-Up Call



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ANZAGAIN SDN BHD

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“If bones have turned to coral,
if eyes have turned to pearls,
if we have already seen a sea change,
we must now prepare ourselves for an ocean change.
Those who are strong enough and empowered
enough to sail on this vast new ocean
will reach shores never before dreamt of.
Those who are weak and infirm,
who cannot safely sail on this tumultuous ocean,
will simply be left behind if they are lucky.
They will be dragged under if they are not.”



Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad

Author's Notes

To My Great Malaysian Hero, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir:

There is something mysterious and magical about you. Every day, images of great and grand happening roll across the screen of your marvelous mind. You have dreams... you have always had dreams, as far back in your life as your memory will take you.

You dream of who you would like to "BE."

You dream of what you would like to "HAVE."

You dream of things you would like to "DO."

You dream of places you would like to "GO."

To Readers:

This book is dedicated to everyone who wants more out of life, even in the face of personal criticism, adversity and financial hardships.

I also dedicate this book to my family, my wife *Maimunah Abu Bakar*, my sons *Johan Harith*, *Haziq Aiman*, *Arief Amani* and a daughter *Yazmin Sofia* most of all. They teach me that I am wealthy beyond measure because I have them in my life.

In the great musical South Pacific, Mary Martin sang, *"...If you don't have a dream, if I don't have a dream, how are we going to make a dream come true?"*

"I'll do what I can do" - Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir.

Regards,

Hasan Hamzah.

Overview

I remember Dr. Mahathir once said at a function some time in mid 90's, "*many people think my favourite song is 'My Way', but I don't know if I really like the song because the lyric begins with "And now, the end is near..."*" The prime minister drew laughter from the audience. However, I felt there was more than just humour in his remark. He was putting across a strong underlying meaning. He was, to my interpretation, conveying a message that 'I am not done yet, there is still a lot of things for me to do before I call it a day'.

But how long? That seems to be a favourite question for the man who has been steering the premiership wheel since 1981. And that does not include his stint as cabinet minister and deputy prime minister. My goodness! This doctor has a really long shelf life. Perhaps, a miracle of medical advancement.

Finally, the doctor shocked the nation on 22nd June, 2002. It was a typical Mahathir way of announcing the unexpected. The choice of venue, event and crowd made it more dramatic. It could not have been more significant had it not been the final day of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) assembly at the Putra

World Trade Centre. What seemed like the ending of his long winding up speech, was actually the announcement of ending his political career. Television viewers across the country witnessed the whole event which was telecast live.

He was unable to finish his speech when stunned UMNO supreme council members rushed to persuade him to withdraw his announcement. It was a shock to everyone but he was prepared for the spontaneous and heart-wrenching reactions from UMNO delegates and members of the public. Members of the delegates refused to move from their seats until a more favourable pronouncement has was made.

It was amazing to see how humans reacted or pretended to react in such a manner when a lot of people (or may be not UMNO members) wanted him to make way for a new leader.

After much persuasion from senior UMNO members and family, Dr Mahathir eventually agreed to retract his decision. Deputy President of UMNO and Deputy Prime Minister, Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, made the announcement but Dr Mahathir was nowhere to be seen.

The very next day he left for holidays abroad. It seemed that the trip was planned way ahead of the incident. Perhaps it was the Prime Minister's plan to let his deputy handled the situation and a test for Abdullah before he resumes the leadership of the party and country. Whatever Dr Mahathir had in mind at that time, was his prerogative. One thing's for sure, he surprised almost everyone including his wife.

Dr. Mahathir's long political crusade might not go down well with some people. Some criticised him of doing

things only to his own likings. Some think he is greedy for excessive power and that his political gluttony never ends. That he has a voracious appetite for authoritarianism. To what extent those accusations affected Dr. Mahathir, are difficult to measure. But one obvious trait of the Prime Minister is his ability to put aside other matters and concentrate on doing his work. He would compartmentalise his tasks and solve problems piece by piece without allowing one to get in the way of the other. To him 'I do it my way whether you like it or not'. And most of the time he got his way and proved his detractors wrong.

While skimming through various speeches and writings of Dr. Mahathir, I noticed the man's strong doctrine expressed through his ideas and opinions. His sense of beliefs marinated with deep-rooted ingredients of knowledge and confidence were apparent even in his early writings published by The Straits Times in the 40's and 50's. One example is this article entitled 'Malays and Higher Education':

"It is to be found in the inherent nature of the kampung Malays; a nature which treats English education as secondary and unimportant. This cannot be truly said of town-bred Malays. These people, to a certain extent at least, have awakened to their responsibilities for the future of their children and have made every effort to provide them with the necessary education. But the same is not true of the kampung people and they comprise by far the majority of the Malay population. To them English education is as new-fangled as it was to their fathers and father's fathers before them. Coupled with this is their wish to have their children at their side carrying on their profession as tillers of the

soil. It never occurs to them that their own children, with proper education and training, could become engineers and doctors just like their town-bred cousins. With their apathy towards English education and lack of faith in their own children's abilities, they never would send their children to English schools even if they could afford to, as quite a high percentage of them undoubtedly could. Those Malay lads who won scholarships were reluctantly permitted by their parents to study."

The article was written in 1948 when he was only a medical student at University Malaya. Yet, Mahathir's thoughts then, reflected the thinking of a man who was to become a politician and subsequently a prime minister. I believe in his younger days Mahathir already had the strong urge to see his ideas implemented and demanded change within his community, among his fellow Malays and within the government:

"A comprehensive educational programme specially for Malays should be launched immediately and the Government should co-operate with responsible Malay political parties in a drive for more students. More scholarships should be created out of Government funds and contributions from the Malay public. The kampung folk must be made to realise that the salvation of their children and hence their race lies in education. Unless these steps are taken immediately, then the fears of many Malays about the advantages of the University of Malaya will prove justified."

Even in his youth, Dr. Mahathir had shown his writing prowess, the ability to think and analyse social and economic issues. Dr. Mahathir then had already empha-

sised the needs for higher education especially among the Malays. Mahathir's approach in his writings or remarks do not differ much as a student, politician and now a prime minister. Although Mahathir was known as "an ultra-Malay" among the non-Malays for his struggle to uplift the standards of the Malay community, the assumption slowly disappeared as he proves to be critical of his own race in order to change the Malay lot for the better.

Nevertheless, Mahathir's style of constructive criticism is not very well accepted by the Malays. The Malays are not used to being criticised straight to their faces in particular by another Malay fellow. But Mahathir thinks otherwise. For him, if the Malays can accept him as their leader, then they should be able to adopt his style and his ways of doing things.

Nonetheless, Mahathir may not be doing what the conservative Malays deem suitable and befitting to the culture and lifestyles of the Malay community. As a politician and Prime Minister, he feels it is his responsibilities to change the livelihood and attitude of his people. But are the people really prepared for such changes?

"It is not that they (the Malays) don't have the ability. It is just that they do not try, thinking that the Government is always there to look after them."

(NST, March 7, 2002)

We may be living in the technological age but as far as the Malays are concerned, culture and tradition are of the utmost importance, regardless of the strata of society or modernisation. The Malays cannot accept total bluntness even if you are telling the truth. The truth hurts, thus it has to be told subtly or perhaps... to be ig-

nored while we pretend not to know and keep quiet. Fortunately, Dr. Mahathir is not one who would turn a deaf ear and a blind eye on that.

Looking back at history, after the downfall of the Melaka Sultanate, the Malays remained 'in a cocoon' until the independence of the Malay Archipelago. Yet, despite independence, the Malays still could not achieve excellence. What Dr. Mahathir has done for the Malays and Malaysians in general, was to bring them into the open to compete with the rest of the world:

"Still a matter of concern is the seeming inability of the Malays and the *Bumiputera* to benefit from the opportunities created for them. They tend to abuse the opportunities and to be too dependent. They like to seek the easy way out. And plans and policies for their development are likely to fail because they have the wrong set of values, the wrong ethics and culture."

I must admit that Dr. Mahathir has done some wonders in shaking up the Malays from their deep slumber although he admitted of having failed to change the mindset of the Malay lot.

Dr. Mahathir's journey in championing the Malays and the rights of his country is like an exploration. After all, the premier doctor has a strong liking for the turbulent ocean. He sailed the unfamiliar and the unorthodox route only to prove his ideas and beliefs. Like the great Muslim explorer, Ibn Batutta, who circumnavigated half of the globe and presented mankind with other greatness in explorations, Dr. Mahathir dared to undertake a tumultuous journey and sometimes stumbled along the way. Batutta's experience became a reference that was adopted by the western world. Christopher Columbus,

Marco Polo and Ibn Batutta takes us back to the fascinating journey of 29 years in the 1300's across Africa and Asia.

Mahathir may not be as great explorer as Ibn Batutta or Columbus but his style of leadership could be likened to that of an explorer. He penetrates the untrodden path, reveals the unlikely revelations and ventures into uncertainties.

"If bones have turned to coral, if eyes have turned to pearls, if we have already seen a sea change, we must now prepare ourselves for an ocean change. Those who are strong enough and empowered enough to sail on this vast new ocean will reach shores never before dreamt of. Those who are weak and infirm, who cannot safely sail on this tumultuous ocean, will simply be left behind if they are lucky. They will be dragged under if they are not."

(Second World Knowledge Conference, 8 March 2000)

Explorers such as Ibn Batutta and Columbus began their journeys without much knowledge of what laid ahead of them. In fact, we could say their journeys began with a sea of uncertainties. However, those uncertainties brought enormous discoveries, which later resulted in the acquisitions of vast fortunes, and developed strong link with the rest of the world.

With brilliance and creativity, Dr. Mahathir transformed Malaysia into a respected developing country. Surely not without the envy of some other nations. In fact, even the world superpowers feel threatened by his overpowering ambitions.

Dr. Mahathir's personal and political style could provide an interesting study to political science enthusiasts

or anyone in general. What encompasses the overall Mahathir Mohamad? Is he a result of some special 'formula' — be it breeding, nurturing or grooming? Why does he do things the way he does? What prompted him to do so? The questions are endless.

When asked whether he feels exposed and lonely at the top? His answer:

"Well, if you have decisions that involve studying, you have to choose one. You feel responsible and you become more involved. There is no way of running away. You feel lonely at such times. I think I have many people who give me a lot of support. I can work with most people. I have that easy personal relationship and I'm not a difficult person to get along with. I can tolerate silly fools for hours if necessary."

The art and science of Dr. Mahathir's political manoeuvrability is unexpected and unassuming — even after two decades as the Prime Minister.

Like opening a pop-up box, it is full of surprises and if one is not prepared, the surprise may not be pleasant after all.

A shrewd man he is. But a cruel leader? Probably not. It all depends on how one perceives the man and his actions.

Sometimes admirers and enemies alike hate to think that he could actually mastermind a plan with so much vigour and secrecy and shock those who try to outdo or challenge him.

Dr. Mahathir's style could be aptly connected to Sun Tzu's strategy:

It is the business of the general to be calm and mysterious. He must be able to mystify.

(Sun Tzu II: 35-36)

Dr. Mahathir though able to deliver hard-hitting action and reaction, is often seen as a calm and unassuming person. He hardly raises his voice (at least not in public) and yet, effortlessly, he is able to drive the message across. Be it among the villagers, foreigners or even at international meetings such as the United Nations assembly or the World Economic Forum, he is often heard loud and clear through his sometimes almost inexpressive voice. In this case, I agree with Dr. Ong Hean Tatt's explanation regarding the Sun Tzu's strategy above:

"It means that strategy is not straightforward, but often involves a "beat around the bush" approach. The subtle beating around the bush approach has been dubbed as a feminine "soft approach". Some compare this soft approach to water which is soft and which flows around all obstacles and wear down the mightiest rocks."

(Dr. Ong Hean-Tatt, The Star, 10 February 2000)

Many were shocked, tongue-tied, astonished and amazed every time *'the man does it again.'* Apparently, even his aides and close confidants are not always aware of his 'unexpected decision'. His former political secretary, Datuk Mohd. Nor Azam once said: "One Saturday I went to see him about some ISA detainees, about when they might be released. He didn't tell me anything at all. This was in the afternoon. When I got home there was this news on TV about 16 detainees which have been released. I mean, the PM definitely knew about this when I was talking to him only a few hours ago but he did not say anything. You see, that is the man." Even his wife, Datin Seri Dr. Siti Hasmah, admits that she is among the last person to know about his administrative or political

decisions. For instance, she was among the last person to know about the 10th Malaysia's General Election.

Dr. Mahathir always "plans his work and works his plans". That is the secret to his success. To him it is not 'right or wrong', 'good or bad', 'win or lose', the order of the day is to get the job done. Dr. Mahathir has the mental and physical ability and capacity to plan ahead. During the Commonwealth Conference in 1989, the leaders and heads of most countries were eager to know the secrets of his success in harnessing the strength of Malaysian society towards a common vision and goal. Most countries with plural societies face serious demographic and geopolitical obstacles in overcoming good governance. Dr. Mahathir had even offered the high development systems Malaysia had nursed over the years for them to incorporate in their countries' administration.

A few small steps taken by others pose no threat to this forward thinking man for he is always several steps ahead of the rest. Just where does he get the energy, the ideas and time to plan and to execute? Doesn't he have enough of everything? When is he handing over the 'master key' to his successor?

Dr. Mahathir has been labelled a 'dictator', 'recalcitrant', 'authoritarian' and 'a leader usurping despotic power'. Yet, he holds strongly to his position and power-base as though he never wished to cross the finishing line. His enemies have been waiting to see his last days; 'The Finale of Mahathir's Leadership in Malaysia'. Somehow, the 'Mahathir show' gets into new episodes each year and it has even leapt into the new millennium!

No matter how we would like to see the show ends, there is always this question: What will Malaysia be without Mahathir's leadership — the 'post-Mahathir' era?

The task awaiting the next person to take charge of Malaysia is certainly challenging and enormous. Can the 'heir-to-the-throne' live up to the doctor's standard? Perhaps that explains why Mahathir has had four deputies to date and none of them (with the exception of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) has taken over the 'Chairmanship of Malaysia'.

However, the Prime Minister has been giving promising indications that Abdullah will be at the helm if he steps down as party president.

"If I were to step down, Datuk Abdullah will take over. I think UMNO will back him as my successor," he said.

(The Star, December of 24, 1999)

He even gave Abdullah a month trial period when he left for a working holiday in February 2002. The PM also reiterated his confidence in Abdullah:

"He has done well. He conducted Cabinet meetings, those of UMNO and everything else... never consulted me, he did not bother me... very happy, no phone calls."

With Mahathir's resignation decision, the path is clearer for Abdullah to reach the destination. And Mahathir has been giving more and more promising indications for Abdullah to carry on. In a press conference upon returning from his holidays in Europe, the Prime Minister said:

"The main criteria is that Pak Lah was chosen by UMNO as the deputy president and secondly I have worked with him for a very long time. Sometime ago I asked him if he was ready to take over and he stated

he was ready to take over. So the question (on his suitability) should not arise."

(The New Straits Times, July 4, 2002)

Will Abdullah cross the hurdle and emerge as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia?

In an interview with a weekly business newspaper, *The Edge*, Abdullah gave a rather 'dry and safe' answer to the question of succession.

[Do you see succession as an issue that may be politically destabilising?]

"No. We have had three successions in the past and all of them have taken place without any disruption. We are all working towards a common goal — that is to make sure Malaysia becomes a developed nation by 2020. The same policy framework will be used. We will continue to be a business-friendly government. We will maintain an environment that is attractive to investors. And we will continue to pursue equitable and sustainable growth."

(The Edge, April 15, 2002)

However, about 2 months later, Abdullah though still humble in approach, appeared more confident of his future number-one leadership.

"To me, I will always look upon him as a leader who guided me and advised me from time to time in the course of discharging my duties. I very much value his guidance and advice which will be of great help to me later."

Have Malaysians tuned their minds to accepting Abdullah as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia?

Abdullah will slowly but surely make his way to the hearts of Malaysians. Nevertheless, he will probably have a tough time trying to convince the foreigners, particularly foreign investors and media, of his ability to lead Malaysia. Before being appointed deputy prime minister, Abdullah served as foreign minister and his prior experience would surely enable him to tackle international issue with ease.

As for Dr. Mahathir, he will surely be missed by all — friends and foes. He has been so synonymous with Malaysia that without him there will be a possible void in the country. Oppositions and dissents will have a dull time not having to challenge his ideas and political arguments. Foreign media will have less sensationalised reports because one of their favourite subjects in Malaysia is no longer in power — what is there left to condemn, criticise and challenge?

This book serves as a 'vista' to Mahathir's leadership. Has the man changed after all these years or will he continue to be gallant and intrepid? His age may be catching up which is evident in his countenance, but his mind and thoughts seems to be as sharp as ever. John Barrymore said, "A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams." Dr. Mahathir still holds great dreams for the country. He is capable of doing wonders in his capacity as a politician and Prime Minister. Whether he has regrets for any of his actions or decisions, is hard to predict.

This book is written as simple and straightforward as possible in order not to complicate the understanding of a complex persona. As the author, I try to present 'neutral' views as much as I can. If Dr. Mahathir deserves praises and admiration, he should be given the accolades.

If he should be criticised, then it should be done constructively.

Together we will further dissect Mahathir's character, action and composition. At the end of it, let us see if we can understand him better or otherwise. If you are still perturbed by the lack of understanding of this exotic prime minister then worry not because you are on the right track — Mahathir does things his way which sometimes does not apply to other people's reasoning. That is his 'Sinatra Principle' – *My Way*.

"We have achieved whatever we have achieved according to the **Sinatra Principle**. We have all done it our own way."

(Mahathir Mohamad, World Economic Forum, 1999)

Read and feel the lyric of Sinatra's song carefully and see if you agree with me that those words aptly described Mahathir's political style and character.

"Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew. When I bit off more than I could chew.

But through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out. I faced it all and I stood tall;

And did it my way"

(Frank Sinatra's My Way)

Mind Block

“All humans have similar brains but what determines one to be better than the other is knowledge, and to attain knowledge we must not have a ‘mind block’, particularly to things which are new to us.”

Dr. Mahathir has always stressed the importance of acquiring knowledge and introducing new ideas. He believes that in order to progress, the country and government needs good ideas and capable people. He is a good example of someone who is never tired of learning and discovering new things. He supported the advancement of IT in Malaysia and he did not stopped there - the Prime Minister familiarised himself with IT and put some of his younger cabinet members to shame with his quick acquisition of the new knowledge. As an avid reader, the Premier constantly keeps abreast with new information. In a way, he keeps his mind and thoughts on the move all the time and perhaps that explains his sharp thinking and quick actions.

“There are many “Berlin Walls” within us. ‘Mind Block’ is the greatest hurdle in our approach towards competence in this new era of information technology.”

According to Mahathir, in the IT era, there is no barriers and no excuses for Malaysians to say they cannot compete with the Westerners given the widely accessible technology and infrastructure. *K-economy* should not just remain a mantra without necessary efforts to gain knowledge capital for further development in the country. *K-economy* should be the main agenda in today's development.

Dr. Mahathir's relentless pursuit for knowledge should be a good example for the society. However, as a prime minister, he still has to face the society lack of willingness to improve. The society's has to change their own fate and not merely wait for others to change their fate. Dr. Mahathir should know better as he had gone through the Japanese and British occupations, the Emergency period and now, the new challenges of the new millennium. His writing style and opinions even when he was a student has proven him wise and knowledgeable. In an interview with *Asia-Inc.* magazine, Dr. Mahathir was asked:

"We understand you learn to ride horses in your 50's..."

Dr. Mahathir: In my 60's.

"...and today an accomplished horseman? We understand you were in Antarctica to learn about the way the ecological system there works. What accounts for this passion for learning new things?"

Dr. Mahathir: I am curious, I like to know things. Even as a small boy, I remember there was a Chinese engineering shop near my house, and I used to stand at the window and look for hours at how they did things. It's of interest to me. Of course, I learned horse-riding at

the age of 60 because I couldn't afford to do it earlier. I had always wanted to ride a horse. So when I could afford it, I began to ride. It's the only exercise I get. I have no time for exercise. I work all day and most of the night. So weekends I ride. Riding is not like playing golf; it takes too much time playing golf. Riding is just one hour, two hours at the most. Once in a while I go to Argentina where I can ride, morning, evening, for days.

(Asia-Inc, May 2002)

He has said many times that the Malays and Muslims can achieve excellence. Muslims have proven that they were pioneers in many fields. Names such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Ibn Khaldun and al-Khwarezmi were famous in science. In fact, the Westerners translated many findings and researches by the Muslims into English and French. Muslims provided the knowledge torch when the West was still in the Dark Ages. The Renaissance occurred and flourished due to the Muslim world.

As for the Malays, they were glorious before foreign intervention. The Dutch, British and Portuguese crumbled the Malay Sultanate and ripped the Malays of their prosperity. Therefore, during the Industrial Revolution, the Malays and Muslims were left behind. Dr. Mahathir urged Malaysians, especially the Malays, to keep an open mind and get rid of the negative mindset. If they want to leap forward, they shouldn't think that they are weak and incapable of taking the lead:

“Two hundred years ago, we missed the industrial revolution because we were colonised and we had little knowledge. But today in the era of IT revolution we are somewhat on a level playing field and we can master information technology, even lead the way if there

is a will... a will to learn."

Dr. Mahathir also laments the people's attitude towards seeking knowledge and lack of passion in carrying out their duties. As much as he wants the Malays and Muslims and Malaysians in general to come out with new ideas, Dr. Mahathir also wishes they would emulate the Westerners for things that could bring improvement:

"People say, if a German is asked to write a book on mosquito, we will find volumes of thick books which contain everything about the insect; from its shape, rough or smooth, so in depth to the extent of its habit, its death, the way it breeds, its home and one thousand and one things about it. For us, two or three sentences are enough to describe this useless insect. What's the point of wasting time on an insect which only knows how to bite. Because of the kind of views we have that we do not relate mosquito with malaria which killed hundreds of thousands of people. Certainly even if we know that the mosquito bite is dangerous, we assume that all mosquito bring malaria and do not care to learn that only the aedes mosquito which has a certain shape and certain habits cause dengue. And because we do not know, we cannot save ourselves from this fatal disease. If not for other people of different culture undertaking research, we may just accept malaria in our country as natural and even worst, we may even blame God. That God equip us with the brain and then we fail to use it, does not cause us to feel guilty at all."

(1997 UMNO Assembly)

Dr. Mahathir's vision and passion for knowledge has made him different from other Malaysian politicians. The man never stops learning and encourage his people to learn from advanced countries in order to achieve

progress. To Dr. Mahathir, adopting other people's good culture does not make us less nationalistic. One ethnic group will not alter its ethnicity by adopting knowledge of a new culture for the sake of development. To Dr. Mahathir, the acceptance to change and the efforts to succeed should be embedded in the hearts of the people.

"The question is are we prepared to accept and practise the culture that can make us progressive. Are we going to become less Malay or less Iban or Kadazan or less Malaysian because we accept certain aspects in a foreign culture? I do not think we will become less Malay, less Iban, less Kadazan or less Malaysian just because we are more interested to learn something in depth, we are more knowledgeable, we are more disciplined and systematic in terms of methods and approach and more concerned with the knowledge we accumulate which can possibly be used not only by us but also by others and other generations. We do not become Europeans because we wear coat and tie, speak English, practise democracy and not feudalism."

(1997 UMNO Assembly)

Dr. Mahathir also emphasises the importance of mastering the English language if Malaysians were to compete in the global arena and achieve greater advancement. Although *Bahasa Melayu* (the national language) is the lingua franca in Malaysia, English is widely used particularly in business transactions and among the urban dwellers. However, of late the standard of English has deteriorated especially among the rural folks. The downfall of the standard of English is mainly due to the *Bahasa Malaysia* medium used in schools and the shortage of qualified English teachers. At the same time, there

are people who fight for the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* in order to create a more nationalistic Malaysian society. According to the Prime Minister:

"You cannot be a true nationalist by only championing the language, we need to strive for total development. We should be fanatical about the total development of our race and not confine ourselves to the language alone, ... no doubt we have to develop our language but there are many other things we must master too."

Dr. Mahathir is not hesitant to switch to the English medium if the people support such a move. The suggestion received mixed response from the public and academicians. For a start, the Education Ministry is conducting a study to determine the possibility of teaching Mathematics and Science in English

Dr. Mahathir said that the government would introduce an innovative information communication technology method of teaching in schools whereby the lessons would be transmitted via a central processor. Under the system, teachers would only act as facilitators:

"The shortage of expertise in developing these lessons has delayed us but we will be there soon. Learning English, for example, would be made easier, even if the teachers are not well-versed in the language, as students will only have to see, listen and practise to master the language."

It is hoped that with more emphasis on the learning of English, Malaysians will be more competitive globally and strive for more valuable knowledge. If there is anything that hinders progress, it is the mind block. The Prime Minister has tried and is still trying to battle against

the mind block in order to create a better society.

“For example, we respect diligence. But we know we are not so diligent. If we do something, we do not go all out until we really succeed, until the outcome of our work achieves very high quality. We are easily satisfied with the result of our work. Not so good, less durable, not so lasting, not so beautiful and not so clean does not matter. As such the outcome of our work is not so good, not very lasting and is substandard in all aspects, that is of lesser quality. On the contrary, an advanced race is so diligent, so critical of the results of their work, so particular about quality and durability and so on.”

(1997 UMNO Assembly)

Although Dr. Mahathir is a man of wisdom, he humbly expressed his gratitude to the previous prime ministers for the early groundwork that has provided a base for Dr. Mahathir to continue steering Malaysia. Nonetheless, Dr. Mahathir has to face many obstacles in the fast changing borderless world as time changes:

“In your 20 years as the Prime Minister, and in your many years on the public stage, you have stood for strength of will and pragmatism. What were the formative influences that contributed to this?”

His answer:

I inherited all these things from previous prime ministers. From the first prime minister, I learned how to handle race relations. I inherited pragmatism from the second prime minister. He always talked about being pragmatic, about doing things that you can do, not doing things that you wish to do. I learnt from the previous prime ministers. But the difference is that I put things across much more strongly than others. Being

pragmatic is what Tun Abdul Razak is all about, that's what I learned from him. But I must admit that whereas they were more diplomatic, I am less diplomatic. If I feel something is right, and should be done, I will do it and I will say it. That is really the difference. We have had the same party governing this country since independence and the principles are the same. How do we work between the different races? All these ideas were put in place by my predecessors, so I owe them.

(Asia-Inc, May 2002)

Dr. Mahathir continues to show his people and the world what he can do and what others can do — all they need to do is to clear their minds of any elements that could obstruct progress.

A Velvet Hand Within The Iron Glove

Essentially a private person, almost a shy and reticent individual, yet the public perceives him as a blunt, no-nonsense go-getter. This is perhaps Dr. Mahathir's personal dilemma. Not only the man and his image poles apart, but friends and colleagues also seemingly cannot agree on who the real Mahathir is.

An aide sees him as bustling with change yet, paradoxically he remains a traditionalist at heart. The man has a depth of perception which must surely qualify him to deal with the complexities of Malaysians. In his own quiet way (perhaps not so quiet anymore), Mahathir has laid the groundwork for a modern independent Malaysia to take its rightful place among the nations of the world. Firstly, he has the difficult task of pointing the people in the right direction, convincing them of the need to change their attitudes to help the country become more developed.

Opinions about the man differ enormously, even over the most commonplace matter. Some of those who know him believe, quite firmly too, that the Prime Minister has no sense of humour. He has according to his friends, a dry wit. When asked once what kind of exer-

cise he engaged in, he replied succinctly, 'breathing'.

Another friend has a more personal explanation, "It's very difficult to read the PM's mind. He looks and sounds exactly the same whether he is bored, indifferent, excited or pleased. And he has never been known to complement anybody. So it's very frustrating not knowing whether or not he likes your idea. Although I've never seen him lose his temper either, he can be very sarcastic. That is part of his make-up. So people don't know what he wants or how he feels and so, I guess, they feel uncomfortable."

Has he changed over the years? Many people think so. They read his once controversial *Malay Dilemma* and they concluded that this is not the same man who is now a Prime Minister. However, Mahathir does not think so, to him, "I'm the same person."

Malaysia's first Finance Minister, Tun H.S. Lee once described Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister, as a classic case of the iron hand within the velvet glove. Mahathir, apparently, is exactly the opposite. "He puts on a tough act," said a friend, "and so people get intimidated by that. They find it difficult to get close to him. Maybe he feels that he should put this on to hide that velvet hand." A political scientist compared Mahathir to Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Tunku Abdul Rahman and concluded startlingly, "I would actually say he's weak. The other two would have crushed their enemies absolutely. Mahathir lets them remain. And the Prime Minister seems to be aware of this... his so-called "weakness".

Dr. Mahathir rarely gives his initiatives a lofty philosophical framework. He does not resort to a little poetry or flowery language though for the past several years he

has been known for reciting poetry filled with emotion. The two famous poems which can be referred to as the 'PM's poems' are *Perjuangan Belum Selesai* (The Struggle Is Not Over) and *Melayu Mudah Lupa* (Malays Simply Forget). Dr. Mahathir is simple in speech but full of ideas and visions. He has the qualities needed for leadership — a sense of majesty, dignity and a tolerance for imperfection.

Master of Relativity

In the complexity that makes the man 'Mahathir' — reticence but blunt, traditional but bold — one quality which stands out is his consummate political skill. Dr. Mahathir has the courage to do what he must with little thought about personal consequences or obstacles — the courage without which, greatness in leadership is not possible. This courage is tempered with the fear that while he should push society to its limits, he must not overstrain its fabric. For only the most courageous and seasoned politician acknowledges that society's margin for change is small. If he exceeds the margin, he gets bogged down; if he falls below it, he becomes inconsequential. He has to be a *Master of Relativity*. Dr. Mahathir probably adopts Einstein's theory of relativity or invented his own secret formula to stay ahead of his time and age.

The complexity and the risk of being a political leader should draw us to a remark of a celebrated literary figure, Shakespeare:

"Uneasy the head that wears the crown."

For those who are not literary inclined, perhaps Einstein could convince you of the intricate fabric of poli-

tics. When asked once why mankind, on the one hand, has been able to unlock the secrets of the atom but, on the other hand, has been unable to devise the political means necessary to keep the atom from destroying civilisation, Einstein's straightforwardly said:

"This is simple, politics is more difficult than physics."

Mahathir lives through the difficult and turbulent life of a politician as though they are part of him and perhaps those are the elements that keep him going from strength to strength.

His recent visit to Antarctica was a classic example of bravery that not many leaders of his stature would do. Making a journey to such a faraway place as the South Pole requires one to simply surrender his or her fate to the mercy of nature. As far as security was concerned, Mahathir did not seem to fear the unlikely possibilities that could happen in the Russian icebreaker or while landed in the ice-covered region. If pictures really tell a thousand words, Mahathir appeared jovial and had a whale of a time in Antarctica. In fact, he endured the journey while others succumbed to seasickness and other discomforts.

In a way, I would say Mahathir is a true Muslim who surrenders his will to the Almighty in any circumstances. As a leader, he has to lead. According to him, if he follows others then he is a follower not a leader. A valid argument!

Nonetheless, his strong resistance to challenges has somehow created dislikes and even hatred within the inner and outer ring of his political circle. Many will agree that it is impossible for the ordinary "you and I" to challenge his courage.

Who was Mahathir's biggest influence politically? His answer: "None. But I had a great admiration for Winston Churchill over the way he conducted the war. Among Malaysian politicians I suppose it would be Tun Razak."

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has shown his calibre since he was in secondary school. During the British occupations, Mahathir led a group of friends in organising and participating in anti-Malayan Union activities.

Kesatuan Melayu Kedah (Kedah Malay Union) was part of UMNO in 1946 and Mahathir joined UMNO as one of its earliest member. From there his political ability and interest expanded. However, the desire to acquire higher education saw Mahathir working towards getting a place in university. He was interested in studying law but could not get the scholarship for it. Fate dictated that Mahathir be given scholarship to study medicine. And that made him different from the other three Malaysian Prime Ministers who were all law graduates. His interest in the legal studies explained Mahathir's style of presenting opinions, countering arguments and tackling issues.

"After registering the *Kesatuan Melayu Kedah* and the *Kesatuan Pemuda Melayu Kedah*, he joined a reformist organisation, *Saberkas*, and attended as an observer the congress of Malay organisations from which stemmed the existence of UMNO."

(Mahathir of Malaysia: Statesman and Leader, Robin Adshead)

Mahathir received his tertiary education at the King Edward VII College of Medicine (University Malaya) in Singapore. Besides occupying his time with academic pursuit, Mahathir still found time to write. His articles

appeared in *The Sunday Times* under the pseudonym C.H.E. Det. As a student, the extra pocket money he received from the newspaper company allowed him to spend his earnings on leisure and travelling. He could even afford to buy a motorcycle and later advanced to a second-hand car.

Some excerpts from his early writing, published in *The Straits Times* from late 1940's to early 1970's will serve as a mirror to Mahathir's past and present. We will be able to judge whether Mahathir, the ordinary man, has similar views and thinking as Mahathir, the Prime Minister:

"Slowly and with much trepidation, customs and tradition were jettisoned. But it was not until the post-years that the great extent of social reforms to be carried out was fully appreciated. For the first time in the placid history of the Malays, they were threatened with total extinction and when they decided to take the bull by the horns they found unexpected inspiration in their womenfolk."

(20 July 1947)

"A new Malayan democracy which has the blessings of liberal-minded Malays, Chinese and Indians is well on the way, and it will be surprising if feudalism can hold its own against this new force."

(9 October 1949)

"There is a tendency for a lot of people to gloss over or just ignore problems. If by doing this the problems are solved, well and good. But there is every indication that the problems do not cease to grow just because they are ignored. If we have any claim to level-headedness and political sophistication, it is better if

our problems are well-stated and squarely faced..."

(23 March 1968)

College life also brought some changes to Mahathir. One of them was getting to know the opposite sex. The shy young man befriended a Malay girl, Siti Hasmah Mohd. Ali, who later became his close companion. After graduation, their relationship was consummated in matrimony.

His wife described Mahathir as "a very shy and unobtrusive person, not good at socialising, especially with girls. He was rather inactive in sports or social recreation except when he played rugby for the college. He places studies first before other activities and excelled in it. Because of this he was very concerned about his fellow Malay students not doing well in their studies." (Robin Adshead)

Mahathir and Hasmah began their early-married life in Alor Setar where he worked in Alor Setar General Hospital. In June 1957, their first child, Marina, was born in a government quarters near the hospital. Since then more responsibilities came his way – as a doctor, husband and father.

That same year Mahathir made a crucial move to leave the government service and set up a private clinic. It made history as the first clinic opened by a Malay doctor. The departure from government service was a turning point for Mahathir to be more actively involved in politics. In fact, Mahathir was known as "Dr. UMNO" among the local community.

The bold step taken by the young doctor could actually be seen as a strategic move not only to be closer to the people and help improve their health but also to

build a foundation in his political career. As a doctor, Mahathir diligently served the community and would always fulfill their needs.

After building a strong relation with his future supporters, in 1964 Mahathir decided to contest as the prospective Member of Parliament for Kota Setar. His hard work paid off. The people elected Mahathir and a formal career as a politician began.

Mahathir continued to ascend the political rank by being appointed the Deputy Prime Minister in March 1976. The resignation of Datuk Hussien Onn in 1981 saw the political virtuoso as the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia.

As a prime minister, Dr. Mahathir has to deal with strong economic thunderstorm and political hurricane. According to some people, Mahathir cannot understand that it was him who sowed the seeds for change within UMNO. Says an UMNO veteran, "Our politics used to be very veiled, obtuse, the typical *wayang kulit* (shadow play) stuff. Mahathir started this blunt, abrasive approach. In a way, he has helped to alter our political culture." However not everybody shares that view.

By all accounts, Dr. Mahathir is something of an enigma. His blunt, no-nonsense style clashes oddly with a political culture that is essentially consensual. More than anything else, according to his friends, he is a shy, reticent individual. And in an occupation where public relation is, to say the least, important, the man (much to the despair of many of his aides) simply does not bother. In the process, he is said to have alienated many people, including some elements in the civil service.

Explains an aide, "He came in bustling with ideas for change. Other prime ministers used to let the civil serv-

ice have their way. That was safer; there could be no controversies. Not him. He shook them up. What do you expect?"

Though luck has a lot to do with how a prime minister rates, in this context, Mahathir could be said to be unlucky. He took over the administration when the country was sliding into, what was then described, its worst peacetime recession since 1932. That was between 1984 and 1987. Another economic typhoon struck in 1997. The latest economic crisis beat its predecessor in the mid 80s. It was the worst ever.

To add salt to injury, the global recession worsened by the 'so-called' clash of civilisation between the West and the Muslims worldwide, caused by the September 11th 2001 terrorist attack in New York which flattened the World Trade Centre and damaged the Pentagon. The clash of civilisation among Muslims and war against terrorism led by the United States of America seems to be an opportunity for Mahathir to play a greater role globally.

"The key is economics," says an academician, "and when the cake starts to shrink, people will take out their frustrations somewhere. And the buck stops here."

Love him or hate him, Dr. Mahathir continues to woo investors and visitors to Malaysia. Those who want to succeed should emulate his perseverance and diligence.

The Doctor's Way

Would it be different if he were to practise law? As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mahathir Mohamad originally wanted to be a lawyer but in the turn of event, he was 'honoured' with medical study and that has made all the difference.

Dr. Mahathir's attitude in dealing with problems stemmed from the medical training he received at Malaysia's oldest tertiary institute, University Malaya. A doctor in all likelihood must put aside fears in treating an illness. If it gets too chronic and requires a surgery to get to the root of the problem, then he would have to do it — even if it were a perilous conduct. And that needs courage and courage indeed he has, perhaps in abundance.

When faced with political problems, he remembered his medical training, the experienced he gained in dealing with people of all communities and the lessons he learnt. Of these he says:

"the first lesson is the methodical way that doctors approach medical problems. Observance, history taking, physical examination, special examinations, narrowing the diagnosis and deciding on the most likely di-

agnosis and the treatment required. These are useful in any problems in life, and they serve me well in attending top political problems”(Adshead).

Dr. Mahathir's problem-solving approach is to first determine the root of the problem. He would give a different treatment for different diseases — the more severe the disease, the more serious the treatment and vice versa. He also made sure that different “species” are treated differently.

“The sense of compassion and the deep understanding that a doctor develops towards patients are useful in politics. An ability to look at the other side of the picture, the patients' or the opponents' side enables understanding and appreciation. Counter measures can then be developed.”

Dr. Mahathir is not known to be philosophical but he always associates his ideas with scientific or medical knowledge.

“If the ailments of a society or nation are attended to in the same way as the illness of a patient, some good results must follow. The essential thing is to develop diagnostic skills,” the doctor further explained. (*ibid*)

His medical experience was also translated into his writings. This amalgam of science and theories of social behaviour came through strongly in *Malay Dilemma*, in which he described the Malays as less capable than the Chinese because they were accustomed to an easy environment in which even the weak could survive. He represents one side of the Malay “dilemma”, which he described as between the Malays' “desire to assert their rights and arrogate to them what they consider to be

theirs and the overwhelming desire to be polite, courteous and thoughtful of the rights and demands of others." In this context, I would like to share Khoo Boo Teik's opinion on the issue:

"Mahathir was already no less practised than the next politician in the art of ethnic accusation and counter-accusation. In later years, he often protested: I have been misinterpreted and misunderstood, even at the time when I was a member of parliament, all I was talking about was that the malays should have a fair share in this country — no more than that. Was it just gimmicks and labels and 'no more than that'? If so, Mahathir's rhetoric was at odds with the benignity of his intentions. He relished the display of his native ability for polemics. Apart from anything else, it permitted him to serve notice that he would be quick and able to rise to any — Chinese — challenge."

(Khoo Boo Teik, Paradoxes of Mahathirism)

Dr. Mahathir sometimes gives bitter medicine, which is hard to swallow, and seems like an overdose to some. One of the most recent events is the implementation of selective exchange control in September 1998 and pegged the ringgit to US\$3.8. Foreign investors and the world organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and the World Bank verbosely condemned Malaysia's decision. The United States wagged its tail too and tried various avenues to founder the "unorthodox" control.

"Malaysia essentially ordered foreign speculators to take their money, leave the country and not let the door hit them and removing the ringgit from free market trading. Malaysia believes it can goose its economy

without worrying that speculators will sit in judgement. Foreign corporation will still be able to exchange ringgit profits for foreign currency.'

(Asiaweek, 18 September 1999)

Bitter though it may be, the medicine has certainly helped Malaysia revive its economy. In fact, IMF and even the mighty US turned against their words and began to recognise the once unacceptable measure taken by Malaysia. Even Mr. Ex-President Bill Clinton, in a foreign policy speech in San Francisco in February 1999, acknowledged the needs for financial reforms of the world currency and capital markets.

Another strong advantage of being a doctor in his earlier days as a doctor-politician, was the network of supporters gained in his hometown, Alor Setar. The young doctor's decision to leave the government and bravely strike his own way in the private practice was after all a wise investment. Working closely with the people and giving them a personal touch prepared Mahathir for a flourishing future as a politician. His far-sightedness was obviously apparent even in the early years of his involvement in politics.

Many would admit the advantages of using a private medical practice as the launching pad for a political career: the doctor's rapport with his 'patients-constituents', his social standing in the 'community-constituency', and the personal-professional-financial independence which comes from the thriving 'self-employment'. None would disparage the individual qualities, talent, and dedication which went into the making of each renowned case of 'medicine-to-politics' transition, including, as Mahathir described it, '*a certain degree restlessness...which would make total commitment to medicine quite unsatisfying.*'

Mahathir, the only doctor to have become a prime minister in Malaysia thus far, appeared to have benefited from those advantages... but it would be churlish to imagine that Mahathir viewed medicine only through the careerist lenses of an aspiring politician. 'Dr. UMNO', as he was popularly called, was a good doctor before and has proven that he is also a good politician.

It is also interesting to note Michael Leifer's opinion of Dr. Mahathir in his foreword for R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy 'Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir'. Leifer said that: "Dr. Mahathir is exceptional as a Malay leader in contrast to his three predecessors as prime minister. He is not only an authoritarian but also highly combative and confrontational and adept at open invective. Such behaviour is out of keeping with the Malay cultural style and indeed with the notion of "Asian values" which Dr. Mahathir has espoused. It may be that his medical training as well as his personality has been a factor in shaping a political style that brooks no opposition to his diagnoses and prescriptions. His sense of rectitude in telling Malaysians that they should swallow the equivalent of so many pills a day in their own interest conjures up the image of medical infallibility translated to politics." Leifer's notion of the Prime Minister and Khoo's observation that "he left medicine for politics only to practise politics as medicine" suggest the closely related characteristic of Mahathir as a doctor and politician.

Indeed the medical practice has given him tremendous know-how in dealing with politics and people. As a politician, he will continue to dissect the intricacy and complexity surrounding him and will strive for new remedy.

The Godfather's Move

Since he took office, Mahathir has sought to change the country through a series of new ideas, policies and slogans which have won the support of most Malaysians. Some of the policies and decisions meet with resistance and criticism from various quarters. However, they are in no way dampened the determination of the leadership to forge a Greater Malaysia. Thus, while there were severe tests over the years, the events must be seen as pieces being formed and reformed to lay the foundation for future nation, as seen by his leadership. In seeking to build a nation that is strong and respected, several major policies were launched. These included "Malaysia Incorporated", "Privatisation", "Leadership by Example", "Multimedia Super Corridor" and "Vision 2020".

"Under the "Malaysia Incorporated" concept, the country, according to Mahathir is a company where there is close cooperation between the government and the private sector to ensure the progress of the company. The fruits of this progress will be distributed to all the people in this country."

(NST, 24 March 1993)

Under this concept, the role of the government would be to help and complement the private sector, rather than be a stumbling block, and to facilitate rapid economic development. The model was obviously "Japan Incorporated". The "Privatisation" policy means the transfer of government services and enterprises to the private sector" (Dr. Mahathir, Memorandum to Heads of Departments", 28 June 1983). Accordingly, the government drew up a list its activities, which could be handed over. In this list "except for education, everything is under scrutiny" (Sunday Star, 27 February 1983). While these two policies may be seen as foundation for Malaysia's future, there were also cogent and practical reasons.

The economy was still feeling the effects of recession and this has put severe strain on the government's financial position. According to Dr. Mahathir, the estimated operating cost for the year (excluding development expenditure) were RM17 billion compared to estimated revenue of RM18.5 billion (The Star, 19 August 1983). Moreover, it was acknowledged that the civil service and the private sector had been in conflict and working at a tangent. Finally the role of government economic activities in the last decade had "squeezed out or left behind" the private sector (Sunday Star, 27 February 1983). Both these policies were aimed at checking and reducing government expenditure. These two policies also indicate a change in strategy to ensure the successful achievement of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The leadership, since it assumed office, had closed down or revamped some public corporations, which were a major instrument in the implementation of the NEP to achieve its 30 per cent target of *bumiputera* (indigenous) ownership. Their limited success in the past

had been accepted since they were creating a *bumiputera* entrepreneurial class. While the economy was doing well, inefficiencies and losses were more acceptable. However, repeated losses coupled with economic recession made them unacceptable. Furthermore, other strategies and the passing of time have led to a growing number of *bumiputera* companies and the control of other big companies by government sponsored corporations. These were important factors for the launching of the "Privatisation" policy. To have such policy earlier would have resulted in participation by foreign and non-*bumiputera* companies only, and this according to Dr. Mahathir "was to be prevented in the light of the NEP" (NST, 16 July 1983).

In that sense the "Privatisation" policy is not new since, under the NEP, successful government enterprises and companies will eventually be sold to *bumiputera* interests. The difference is the traditional public sector services such as ports, railways, and telecommunications are now offered to the private sector. The response to these policies was positive but cautious enthusiasm from the private sector with opposition from the workers who were likely to be affected. The private sector was concerned with the amount of capital required to take over the utilities and also suggested *inter alia*, an Anti-Monopolies Commission "to protect new competitors from more dominant firms, which previously enjoyed advantages as public enterprises" (New Sunday Times, 6 November 1983).

CUEPACS, representing civil service unions, warned that the two policies could produce "severe economic backlashes such as unemployment, factioning union power, high living costs, and social restlessness caused by

increased poverty and labour exploitation" (NST, 22 December 1983). The Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) criticised the "Privatisation" policy as "a step backward" and claimed that, in the case of Port Klang, "it was already efficient by international standards" (Star, 3 November 1983). The government has sought to assure its workers that under the privatisation program, they would be given the option either to continue with their existing scheme or to accept the private sector wage offer (Star, 20 December, 1983).

During the year, it was announced that the third television channel (TV3) would be privately operated (by an UMNO company). Several firms have taken over the supply of telephones and tele printers, which previously were the monopoly of Telekom, while other services, such as the Port Klang Authority, have already been finalised. The government has invited offers from the private sector for consideration. It was also announced that an inter-departmental committee in the Prime Minister's Department had been established to study the various aspects of privatisation and was "*in fa our of selecti e and progressi e pri atisation*" (NST, 11 October 1983). These policies were the subject of various seminars during the year. The number of times the government had to re-explained these policies led to a call by the private sector for a white paper "*to dispel any misconception and uncertainty*" (NST, 1 October 1983).

The problems indicate that to a large extent the details of both policies have yet to be examined and studied for their implications. These two policies were followed by the "Leadership by Example" campaign. Malaysians from all walks of life, particularly the civil servants were urged "to set a good example in all aspects

of life not only to support the clean, efficient and trustworthy concept, but also to ensure the nation's progress and respect by the whole world" (Dr. Mahathir, *New Sunday Times*, 20 March 1983). The campaign was launched with a rally of 10,000 civil servants in Kuala Lumpur and smaller rallies in other major towns. They were asked by Dr. Mahathir to set an example by working an extra fifteen minutes a day. It is not without significance that civil servants, which represent the major proportion of Malays in the modern sector, should be singled out for this campaign.

There have been a lot of allegations against the Prime Minister regarding gross mismanagement of the government and its agencies. But the system of government is structured in a manner that every person empowered with authority is to be held responsible for any misgivings in the administration. Political leaders formulate policies and make decisions on all matters pertaining to the development of the country and government servants are the implementers of such plans. As a seasoned politician and long-time Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir is not oblivious of some wrongdoings and weaknesses in the system and he uses his skill to overcome them.

Dr. Mahathir is fully aware of serious problems pertaining to corruption and mismanagement but he will only take action if there is material evidence and proof to justify the case. Just as in politics, if anyone goes against his government policies he just eliminates that person and not his followers. There is a general feeling, though not publicly expressed, that the civil service has been bypassed and blamed directly for some of the failures of the NEP, hence the need for it to prove itself in the new scheme of government policies. To ensure that

they understood these new policies. Dr. Mahathir circulated a memorandum re-explaining the above three policies as well as the "Look East" policy to Heads of all Departments. This move is rather unusual in that one assumes that civil servants are aware of it, if not a party to government policies.

Other campaigns were also launched during that year. Among these were a six-month, widely publicised campaign against drugs which is considered the number one enemy of the country, with close to half a million addicts by 1983. The Dangerous Drugs Act was amended to provide a mandatory death sentence to proven traffickers even if the amount of drugs involved was 15 grams. In the case of a person convicted for possession of 15 grams, the person would be presumed to be a trafficker.

A national Cleanliness Campaign was also launched with members of the leadership sweeping the streets and urging the nation to make cleanliness a way of life. There was also a month-long Productivity Campaign, which urged the establishment of Quality Control Circles to increase and improve the quality of services and products. The media, particularly television, was used to encourage Malaysians to cultivate the habit of reading, to be helpful to neighbours, to drive safely and to use the national language correctly. Private companies sponsored some of these, such as the drug and road safety campaigns.

His far sightedness has brought so many changes in the development of Malaysia. Using a perfect vision, he sees Malaysia as a developed nation in Year 2020.

The 1999 Elections

The much-awaited election at the end of the 20th century once again allowed Mahathir's ruling party to claim the controlling stake with two third majorities — amidst scepticism which was due to the country's political situation prior to the 10th General Elections. The results, however, showed some marked differences in Barisan Nasional (National Front) electoral performance particularly the fall of another state to PAS. If that is not enough, the Malay votes for Barisan Nasional somehow deteriorated and it was still very much attributed to Anwar's issue. To make matters worse, the 10th election also saw the departure of some experienced cabinet members.

Barisan Nasional and UMNO, in particular, will have to conduct a critical analysis to improve its influence and reputation among the Malays. The trend of rural Malay voters is enough to send a worrying signal to UMNO and its future in the coming election. PAS effectively set a strong footing in Malay dominated areas with its Islamic agenda. The fall of Terengganu to PAS is a good example of how the party has achieved its objective of capturing another territory. And PAS is not cryptic of its intention to entice the people of the two northern states, Perlis and Kedah.

However, by comparison, the 1990 results were much worse than 1999 outcomes. In fact it is said to be the worst for Dr. Mahathir in his tenure as Prime Minister. BN claimed the two-third majority by just seven seats out of 180 seats contested. The DAP won 20, Parti Bersatu Sabah 14, the defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46 eight and PAS, seven. The independent candidates managed four seats.

"UMNO enjoyed many electoral advantages: a mass membership of some 2m (nearly a fifth of the electorate); vast powers of patronage; a slavishly sycophantic press; the absence, in jail, of Mr Anwar; and, allege the opposition, dirty tricks such as the use of phantom voters. Yet, despite all this, UMNO lost votes to an Islamic opposition party. Dr. Mahathir, in his pragmatic way, has shrugged off the setback. But it shows one danger of his determination to quash dissent within UMNO: a growth in the politics of religion. One of his great achievements until recently, however, has been to defend secular politics, preserving relative harmony among the Malay (Muslim) majority and the Chinese, Indian and other minorities."

(The Economist, 4 December 1999)

A statistical analysis by University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) shows a drop of nearly nine percent of BN's popular votes compared to the previous polls. 'In the 1995 general election, Barisan Nasional gained 65.14% of the popular votes in contrast to the Opposition which managed 34.86%. And this year, BN recorded 56.51%, while the Opposition increased to 43.49%'. (The Star, 5 December 99)

However the National Front votes were attributed mainly to the support of non-Malays and that helped the 14-strong member coalition retain their power for another term.

"Despite PAS's inroads into the Malay heartland, the opposition coalition formed in the wake of Anwar's arrest failed to attain critical mass. "The swing of Chinese votes did not come our way," concedes coalition spokesman Rustam Sani. That gives the powerful non-Malay business community some leverage over the

government it voted for. But for Mahathir it must be a bitter pill: The Malays he has championed for so long have drifted away from him."

(*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 December 1999)

Perhaps the strong support for PAS, even among the young professional Muslims, could be attributed to the notion that Islam is the way of life and solutions to spiritual challenges in this modern world. Although, supporting an Islamic-based party will not necessarily ensure spiritual enhancement and better judgement in the after world, some quarters feel more comfortable with PAS' agenda. Huntington's observation in his book (*Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the New World Order*) about Islam could be related to the increased support for PAS.

"While Asians became increasingly assertive as a result of economic development, Muslims in massive numbers were simultaneously turning toward Islam as a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power, and hope, hope epitomised in the slogan *Islam is the solution*. The Islamic Resurgence in its extent and profundity is the latest phase in the adjustment of Islamic civilization to the West, an effort to find the "solution" not in Western ideologies but in Islam. It embodies acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western Culture, and recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world."

(*Samuel Huntington*, p.109)

Various statistical conclusions could be derived from the election but the main point is how the ruling party and the new cabinet line-up is going to deal with the changing favour of middle-class Malaysians who are

more politically-inclined now. A lot of questions have yet to be answered. And the burden will surely be on Dr. Mahathir as the Prime Minister who continues to steer the country in the 21st century. The 10th election results once again require his stewardship and expertise.

"With elections over, Malaysians are returning to an old distraction, trying to read the tea leaves on who Mahathir Mohamad finally will pick as his successor. But for the foreign business community, this is no idle game: Political question marks can mean policy uncertainties that affect investments...Confronted with that very question, the prime minister hedged his reply: Deputy Premier Abdullah Badawi is of course prime minister-in-waiting — "unless of course, something happens to him." He added: "I don't like to say it's 100% certain, because three of my 'annointed' successors have not become prime ministers... So why many may still fret over who will succeed Dr. Mahathir, the real concern seems to us whether that person can put to rest the whispers – and outright accusations – of cronyism that have dogged this premiership. Would anyone care to stand up and be counted?"

(Far Eastern Economic Review, Dec 9, 1999)

The Restoration

Malaysian cynicism with politicians, nurtured over a quarter of a century was arguably stronger about the present Prime Minister than any of his three predecessors. But long before the 12-month honeymoon period he asked for was over (at the early stage of his premiership), doubts were beginning to fade even among the most grudging of his detractors; because it was becoming clear that he was offering something which other

prime ministers did not even consider: national pride based on realism and purposefulness. While in the past racial unity in a multiracial society was at best an honest hope – and at worst empty sloganeering – Mahathir, the man condemned in the past as ultra-Malay nationalist, set out to bring the races together.

Taking the seat of a premier enabled Mahathir to draw up policy, which shocked even the core of the establishment. But the bigger surprise was his "Look East" policy, which in effect, told Malaysians to consider the Japanese model for national development and industrialisation. These shifts in policy, at first received with widespread scepticism, were later seen as a sweeping move to alter the focus of political life in the country.

However, there were analysts who believed the 'Look East' policy was only a thinly veiled plea to emulate Singapore which has prospered with corruption-free efficiency in government, but it is clear that Mahathir is seeking more than mere efficiency or productivity. Like his predecessors, he believes that only prosperity can save the country from racial polarization and political instability. However, it is also obvious that prosperity alone is not the solution. The bigger economic pie, far from reducing racial tensions, only served to exacerbate them. The need, as he explained when he launched his policy of not buying British if there was something else equally good in the market, was for a change in attitude.

When the Prime Minister spoke to the press on 'Look East' policy, it was clear he was thinking in terms of decades into the future, and in terms of a Malaysian society in which the races stop looking inwards with prejudice but rather outwards with pride. He also made it clear that dependency on the West was fraught with dangers and

that the time had come to consider self-reliance as an urgent need, and to forge links with the Third World more assiduously. The heart of the policy quite simply lay in the belief that despite all the protestations about a new world economic order, whenever the crunch came, the Third World was left to fend for itself regardless of the destructive impact of problems like the recessions which largely grew out of the West.

The Mahathir Restoration, as some called it (somewhat coyly tolerating the echoes of Japan's Meiji era), which began with civil servants clocking in like factory workers, was faced with resistance. But his pace had not slowed down. The need to change bureaucratic attitudes was signaled with the setting up of a task force to draft a code of ethics for civil servants. He also reassured the non-Malays by saying that business should not be dominated by any one race, and went on record that the Bumiputera share of corporate equity would not be increased from the 30% fixed earlier, nor would the non-Malay share of 40% be reduced.

The foreign sector would continue to enjoy a 30% share, because rapid industrialisation through foreign inputs of capital and technology was only possible in an atmosphere of confidence, or, in his own words; 'if Malaysia was to be seen as a predictable country'.

Political Stethoscope, Social Microscope, Global Telescope

At UMNO's Supreme Council meeting, Mahathir Mohamad sometimes chastens in a humorous way, members who are not punctual. Latecomers are told in a stern schoolmaster's voice that they will have to stand in the corner. Nobody obeys of course – it's all in good fun. During one session, however, the prime minister was himself tardy, and one member decided to give the doctor a taste of his own medicine: Mahathir was ordered to go stand in the corner. "Am I late?" the PM asked innocently. Then he politely told that an aide had evidently got the meeting time wrong. That glimpse tells much about Mahathir as a leader. He can be as good a loser as he is a winner, though clearly he isn't put to the test of losing too often. Even if he does lose, he is good at not showing the obvious.

Sharp and determined, he will not go down without a fight and, in fact, he seems to relish verbal joust, no matter how brief. "If you're tough and can face him," said the Supreme Council member who dared make sport of the late-arriving PM, "you'll earn his respect". Demanding punctuality of himself and others is a symptom of a total, disciplined character.

Dr. Mahathir's concern for time management has prompted him to standardise the time between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia after he took office. Prior to that, the Peninsular and East Malaysia had one hour time difference. The change also allows better communication and dealings between the two sides.

Dr. Mahathir is also known for his straight-talking style. "Even his sense of humour," says a senior UMNO official, "is blunt." Apparently, nowadays, Dr. Mahathir has mellowed considerably from the years when he was regarded as 'UMNO ultra'. One local businessman close to him noted: "If the PM has a weakness, it's that he is frank almost to a point of brutality. If he thinks you're talking rubbish he'll tell you so. When I have to brief him about a project, I can't sleep the night before, he is very penetrating and has uncanny mastery of technological subjects."

Indeed Mahathir is known to take detailed interest on the progress of development projects. He has been spotted after office hours, driving around and overseeing the development of projects such as KLIA, KLCC and Putrajaya and also other smaller projects of interest to him. And apparently, it is also a habit of the PM to note down any observations made during his rounds in the city or anywhere in the country and bring the matter up to the relevant parties. "The PM is applying the principle of business to government. Government decisions tend to be overcautious but his are bold. He's like an entrepreneur."

The personal attention given even to something others might find petty, has made him more efficient and set a good example. He even created a more friendly relationship between government servants and the public by

introducing the name-tag. Until today, Dr. Mahathir still wears his name-tag when he is on official duties.

Widely described as "a man in a hurry," Mahathir does run the danger of preceding a bit too quickly. "It's like running the hurdles," says one businessman. "He'll go so fast that though he'll win the race he'll knock over a few hurdles on the way." Observers say many senior government officials and sections of the public have not been able to grasp the thrust of the numerous policies he has introduced since he became Prime Minister.

In fact, Mahathir had to circulate a lengthy memorandum to all department heads re-explaining the meanings of his policies. Even his decision-making is rapid. Explained a onetime aide to Tun Hussien Onn during his premiership: "Hussien was very tough, very careful when making decisions. But with Mahathir, people aren't as quick as he is. So he has to backtrack, reassess, re-explain, which wasn't necessary with Hussien."

Another difference between Mahathir and Hussien, say insiders, is the greater access people from all walks of life have to the current premier. Even a gardener or a hawker from Mahathir's home state of Kedah, gets the chance to meet him. Insiders add that Mahathir consult a wide variety of people before making a major decision but ultimately he relies on himself – he is enormously self-confident – and a small group of trustworthy advisers-friends who have proven themselves to him. While Mahathir claimed no association with any clique, analysts say he does run the risk of being identified too closely with certain prominent individuals. Says an UMNO member: "Unfortunately, a few people close to him are exploiting the friendship by using his name in public. I just hope the PM's aware of this." Others feel

that unlike, say, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Mahathir does not consult the opposition enough. Parliamentary leader of the opposition, Lim Kit Siang and Mahathir virtually have never met to discuss key issues – well, not that the public or the media are aware of. Oppositionists say Mahathir displays little respect towards them in public and yet can be quite approachable in private.

A former MP and currently a social activist, Datuk Lee Lam Thye, recalled an experience when he presented a petition against imminent rent increases signed by 3,500 Kuala Lumpur low-cost housing tenants to the Prime Minister and according to Lee after the PM studied the memorandum, he agreed to review the situation. Soon after that, the Federal Territory Ministry postponed the planned hikes. "I got the impression," said Lee, "that the PM was sympathetic to the appeal and the plight of the poor."

Observers say, Mahathir's public disdain for the opposition may stem partly from his view that the current batch of opposition is too abrasive, unlike the so-called gentlemen-oppositionists in the past. Others say Mahathir places high premium on loyalty and he lives in a black and white political world, with anyone in the other camp regarded as enemy. "Politically," says a senior UMNO official, "he is a little naïve." Or perhaps Mahathir is impatient with political intrigue? A former aide said: "He is no schemer. He has political strategies but is not a political planner on the whole. He doesn't worry so much about his public image. If he thinks he's right about something he'll go ahead with it. He's above petty bickering. That's a part of his innocence."

Mahathir's work style seems to extend to his home. The PM will show his culinary skill occasionally. "He

throws everything in at the same time or in the wrong order," wife Dr. Siti Hasmah once told local reporters, "but in the end the dish comes out as tasty as ever." Verbal jousts are also not uncommon at home. Said Dr. Siti Hasmah: "The children have probing minds and argue with him about certain issues. Sometimes they play the devil's advocate, just to see what his answer would be, but he hates to let disagreements drag on." By all accounts, the Mahathir family makes up a happy household. The problem, if nothing else, is to find enough time to spend together.

The doctor is up early for morning prayer, has some light exercises, breakfast and clocks in at his office before eight o'clock. He often works close to twelve hours a day, sometimes more. One of his aides said, even on Sundays sometimes Dr. Mahathir would be in the office early. He once thought he was ahead of him by coming in at about 9.00 a.m. After all it's a Sunday and not a working day. But much to his surprise the 'workaholic boss' was already in, way ahead of him. The PM is "driving himself too hard." Aides described him as "a workaholic and a hard taskmaster." He has not slowed down even till today although he has lived more than seven decades of active life. He doesn't think his job is all that stressful either. "When I was a private practitioner I used to work longer hours and there was greater stress. There people's lives could be in my hands. Now, of course, they could be, too, but in an indirect way. Anyhow, now I don't act alone. There, is collective responsibility."

Dr. Mahathir is also described as a man with a mission. The consensus is Mahathir wants to develop Malaysia into a country which is respected by the international community as quick as possible. "I don't know

how much time I have," the PM told his aides. "I am a mere mortal, I may drop dead tomorrow. So I just cannot waste the time I have. I feel that I need to do things and to do them quickly. I have always been like this. I want to see results." One result he would dearly love to see is the respect for the Malays. Mahathir once told the audience at a poetry-reading session:

"It's my dream to eliminate and remove all the ridicule and abuse that have been thrown at us."

The PM added, emotionally:

"I do not want to see my race ever run down again."

Dr. Mahathir has a multi-faceted personality. He can be a different man to different people. Said a politician, "that people have definite views about him, shows that he has already made an impact." Still, declared one opposition member, "Mahathir is a difficult man to assess." A former government official said, "It's hard to place Mahathir in a nutshell." Noted a former ministerial aide: "There's a Malay saying — *baling batu sembunyi tangan* (literally means people who throw stones and then hide their hands or figuratively someone who is not willing to admit his actions). The only sure thing you can say about Mahathir is that it could never apply to him."

Mahathir's style of doing things and his thinking pattern is not impossible to emulate by politicians and administrators. They just need to have his energy, his determination and passion for doing things the way he does. With the right 'Mahathir attitude', his successor too will shine bright in the local scene and global arena.

A leading Australian journalist, Tim Colebatch, praised Dr. Mahathir for the transformations he made.

Colebatch described the Prime Minister as “a leader who brushes aside conventional thinking, plans for the long term, and makes those plans become reality”. He said further, “looking down over the forest of stylish skyscrapers and freeways that is Kuala Lumpur today, it is hard to believe that 30 years ago Malaysia was a Third World country where most people were poor farmers and exports were mostly rubber and tin”.

If Colebatch is genuine in his admiration for Dr. Mahathir then it is a progress from the days when former Aussie premier labelled his Malaysian counterpart as ‘recalcitrant’. The view may be of Colebatch personally but at least the article will help boost Dr. Mahathir’s image in Australia and globally.

The Premier must have listened carefully to the political heartbeat through his stethoscope. Using the microscope, he also must have looked thoroughly into the ‘germs and intricate substance’ of social fabric. And definitely, he has looked far and away with a good vision using the telescope. With all the right gadgets and innovative thoughts, he works his strategy to win the locals and capture the attention of foreigners.

Bitter Medicine

“Success doesn’t come easily. You’ve got to batter your head against the wall quite a number of times before the wall breaks ... or your head. I suppose you’ve got to do that. I don’t believe in giving up.”

The thick and lush Malaysian tropical rainforest seems impenetrable at times. If explored carefully and thoroughly, it is after all friendly and rich in exotic species. However, no soil could withstand insurmountable exploration by others. When you incur the wrath of nature, it is likely to react — sometimes shockingly. Human is no exception.

Dr. Mahathir’s remarks are sometimes hard to swallow. He is said to be arrogant and even tyrannical. Some claim that he makes decisions without consulting others. To others he holds absolute power in the government. The list goes on. It is an individual’s prerogative to express his or her view. Nonetheless, the astute statesman has proven that he is capable of making an ace move and plays his cards well.

His revelation of George Soros as the culprit partly responsible for attacking the currency, shocked many in

the country and abroad. As the currency nosedived and the economy went 'haywire', Soros the 'currency conspirator' became a household name amidst the suffering nation. Mahathir was adamant with his allegation although the turmoil was seen by some as transforming the faults to others. The last British Governor of Hong Kong, Christopher Patten, in his book *East and West* felt that way:

"Consternation at the sudden discovery in the autumn of 1997 that they should not have believed their own propaganda brought howls of rage from some Asian government leaders. Western speculators were targeted as the malign external agents of an imperialist conspiracy to halt Asia's rise in its tracks. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's populist Prime Minister, took the lead in laying the blame for the region's rendezvous with reality at the door of George Soros, or, perhaps, 'the Jews,' who can rarely have been more improbably scapegoated. As ever, markets found themselves the villains when "buy" turned into "sell," when "invest" turned into "withdraw." The French, true to a mercantilist tradition in which the mighty dollar has frequently been a favorite whipping post, rallied egregiously to Dr. Mahathir's side; others hoped that Mahathir's deputy, the respected Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, would rescue Malaysia from his folly, while the British remembered a little shamefacedly that it had not been all that long ago that their own late Prime Minister Harold Wilson had blamed sterling's problems on "the gnomes of Zurich." Trying to shift the blame for one's own mistakes onto others is a universal characteristic."

(East and West)

The economics stumbled, capital control imposed, his

deputy, Anwar, sacked – these were seen by many at that time as great challenges to Mahathir after almost two decades at the helm of power. Nevertheless his tenacity withstood the challenges and he bounced back much to the chagrin of his enemy.

The last General Elections in November 1999 proved that Mahathir, amidst the storm, was not an easy competition. Although the Elections results showed some deterioration in Malay votes (the people Mahathir has been championing), the overall achievement of UMNO and its allies in Barisan Nasional (BN) enabled them, once again, to rule the country. In the battle of power, BN emerged with more than two-thirds of the majority – which the PM, prior to the Elections, had confidently said the coalition would be able to retain. Thanks to the voters, Mahathir-led coalition regained control of the country. However, he has to be contented with the non-Malay's votes which helped place BN back on its track. The Malay votes apparently shifted to other 'camps'.

After more than two years passed, Dr. Mahathir is more confident of Barisan Nasional's chances in the next general elections. He told thousands of UMNO members at the party's 56th anniversary celebrations on May 11th, 2002 that the opposition would suffer a crushing defeat in the general elections:

"They should be afraid as the time (of reckoning) for them is not too far away"

His message to the opposition:

"The person and issue you have exploited is no longer an issue in this country."

But how long more can Mahathir stay on? No doubt

as a leader, he can be considered extraordinary although luck has not been in his favour particularly where economic is concerned. As Malaysian Premier, Mahathir has to endure two economic turmoils — in the 80's and 90's. In the mid-80's, when he was about to gain momentum after the constitutional crisis in 1983, Mahathir was slapped with a recession which created tension between the business community and ordinary Malaysians. Subsequently, Mahathir had to face a challenge by his own cabinet ministers led by Tengku Razaleigh and his former deputy Musa Hitam. Mahathir's image was tarnished. Even those formerly entrusted with responsibilities in his Cabinet turned their backs on him. Nevertheless, the economic and political turmoil did not silent the prime minister, he continued with the political and administrative struggle and emerged unscathed. The man vanquished, again.

The nation's recovery from the mid-80's recession placed Mahathir back on track. In the beginning of 90's, the economy was robust and that not only benefited the country and its people but also the prime minister. Like a tiger that has just recovered from injury; regaining a lot more energy than before, Mahathir became the prime minister who has saved his country from the economic turmoil. He was, once again, accepted with open arms by largely all Malaysians. Mahathir's outspoken and blunt views could be heard from every corner of the globe. He positioned himself as a world class leader.

However, a twist of fate put Mahathir in another difficult situation. In 1997, the currency turmoil that hit the country left the economy devastated. Mahathir's dream shattered 'overnight'. Although currency trading manipulation was the main cause of the crisis, Mahathir

could not escape the blame from the economic downturn. His supremacy was being questioned. All big projects came under fire. His own deputy saw the opportunity to challenge 'the boss'. But like an experienced physician who knows his patients well, Mahathir immediately ordered an 'open surgery'. Capital control was announced and the very next day Anwar Ibrahim became a history as far as Mahathir's administration is concerned.

Again Mahathir had to endure a formidable task, not only due to the economic crisis but also from the tension which erupted from Anwar's sacking. People on the streets demonstrated and clashed with the police force. Mahathir as Home Minister then was even more blamed for what was described as 'police brutality' towards the demonstrators. Probably the prime minister himself never expected such a large protest from his countrymen. The protest scene from the streets was not a familiar sight to Malaysians. And when it happened in reality, something must be really wrong.

"A series of shocking revelations has kept the outrage fresh: first police officers at Anwar's trial were described as using harsh interrogation techniques to change witnesses' testimony. Then government witnesses explained how they received hefty state contracts. Former police chief Rahim Noor, who resigned in January, confessed to striking Anwar, giving him the infamous black eye. The Police aren't alone in suffering damage to their image. Recent events have undermined popular confidence in Mahathir in a way that the recession had not. Some people are questioning the roles of the legal system and the media — which reported the charges against Anwar in graphic detail."

(Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 March 1999)

The international community began to notice the stark differences in what was to be a bustling city of Kuala Lumpur. Tourists from around the world flock the city for its various attractions and guaranteed stability. The situation somehow shifted, some even likened KL to Jakarta with the massive riots although only a few spots in the city were affected by the commotion. Kuala Lumpur was not in complete chaos, the country's system was not in total disarray but indeed it was a great task for the leadership to 'clear the murky water'.

The Prime Minister, as a doctor, monitored the situation closely. Despite protests, he proceeded with his duty as if nothing serious had happened. Mahathir continued to face the people and relentlessly explained at public gatherings the reasons for his 'unacceptable' act. Indeed, the various incidents that had occurred for the past two years required a leader with tremendous courage and a high-level of resistance. Taking action is one thing but facing the consequences is another thing.

Mahathir has proven that he would not bow easily. Even if the amount of hatred has grown out of proportion, he remains seated amidst the controversy. He is like a pressure cooker. He is calm and composed and goes about doing his work as though nothing has happened. The man is able to compartmentalise his thoughts and not let one problem affect the other. Well, at least that's how it seems to be.

This again brings us back to how a doctor deals with ailment — by developing diagnostic skills and counter the problem with determination until it is cured.

“As a doctor, one is always tempted to look at problems as diseases, and the people affected by them as pa-

tients. Since taking up politics and the chores of running a Government, that temptation has seldom been resisted by me, and I must admit that the clinical approach to problems pays."

Mahathir's voice in the wilderness has greatly been heard – far and near. Whether it is a harmonious melody or total dissonance, it does not really matter as long as it is audible. And I believe, perhaps many believe, he will continue to speak for as long as he has the ability and chance to do so. The man will never give up easily. To him it is not glory that he is seeking. It does not matter whether he is recorded in celebrated history:

"I couldn't care less if people remember me or not. What does it matter if I have made history or not when I am dead. As minister of education I forbade schools being named after living people, including myself. It's totally irrelevant to perpetuate oneself in history. You can't determine what kind of judgement history is going to pass on you. Even alive I find that people are passing all kinds of judgements over which I have no control."

(Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 September 1983)

A Dose Too Much

“Many times have I been called the authoritarian leader, or even the dictator, despite the fact that I have had to fight hard to win every democratic election. When Western definitions of “democracy” and “human rights” were not followed to the letter, many an Asian leader, including myself, felt the pressure of modern Western orthodoxy. And although we tried to play by the rules of Western capitalism, the newly emerging Asian economies have suffered severely from the currency crisis that engulfed the region since July 1997.”

(Mahathir Mohamad, A New Deal for Asia)

If Dr. Mahathir was a snowman, he would have collapsed from the bullet-speed snowballs thrown by the ever energetic children. Children love to make or help make snowman but they, at the same time, love snowball fight (which sometimes is triggered by naughty adults). As a result the poor white man falls into pieces. The snowballs are like the criticism hurled at this famous premier with outspoken views.

The western media probably placed him on the top list of those who deserve ‘bad press’. The foreign media

seems to have a "love-hate" relationship with this prime minister from a small third world country. They love him so much that he is given a great deal of attention and he is even dubbed "the spokesman for Asia".

"I realise that I make enemies. I have no choice. Either I come here and sit comfortably and am nice to people and do nothing or else I try to do something even at the expense of becoming unpopular. I don't think I'll be permanent here. I don't think I'll be forever unpopular so it doesn't really matter and so long as I achieve something, being unpopular doesn't really matter. Even being thrown out of office doesn't really bother me."

I may be wrong but I am optimistic that they (foreign media & leaders) hate him for his guts and for not bowing to the West despite them having bigger and more powerful empires. Perhaps even the world super powers wished for a leader like Mahathir to give them a more powerful grip and certainly to avoid challenges from a small developing country like Malaysia. Imagine a country like the United States having Dr. Mahathir as their President. My goodness, I wouldn't want to even begin to think how much more powerful the 'superpower' would be. Even someone like Bush could preside over the White House, what more Mahathir.

"Asia cannot be remade in the image of the West. Asia, to begin with, is not the homogenous entity it is often made out to be on CNN or in Newsweek. Culture, languages, identities and ethnic origins vary much more than between America and Europe. Each Asian country must be allowed to develop at a different pace with different goals for the future. My own experience has,

if anything, taught me that each country in Asia has the right to develop its own mould, based on its own unique identity and history."

(ibid)

Perhaps, the West do realise that Mahathir's remarks and comments carry a considerable weight particularly among Asian leaders and now even his Muslim counterparts are looking up to Dr. Mahathir as one of their powerful speakers. That explains the fear and consistent effort to bring down the Mahathir agenda. It is funny to think that the West, which is highly advanced in many aspects compared to tiny Malaysia and its neighbours, still feel intimidated by the existence of a single man. How absurdly peculiar.

Mahathir once said that criticism would not bog him down. And he is prepared to face the critics.

"I've got to be prepared to endure all this. So let me try in whatever way I can to overcome it. If I can achieve a fraction of what I set out to do then it is satisfying. If I can't, I would have the satisfaction of having tried. Well, if you succeed, that's it."

(Malaysian Business, 1 April 1984)

The government, says Mahathir, is willing to accept constructive criticism that can contribute to efforts to develop the country. One recurring charge levelled at Mahathir is his increasing and growing intolerance towards criticism. Many find this ironical since he was the epitome of constructive criticism, especially in the 60's. People say now that he is in the government, he can't accept criticism. However, he brushed aside such "criticism" by saying that he has not changed.

"When I was outside, I criticised and expected the gov-

ernment to rebut and tell me off — but my criticism was constructive. It is a kind of manipulation and half-truths that are being thrown now. That does not affect me but it affects the ability to implement new things that are planned. That is what hurts. I will tolerate it to a certain extent, but I will not allow such things to get in the way of the development of this country. You must admit that I am more liberal than most prime ministers in the past with regard to criticism. For example when I took over, I told the press: "Criticise us." I regard it as a feedback system."

But sometimes it's more of absurdity and preposterous cacophonous voices just wanting to be heard rather than real criticism. As Dr. Mahathir said:

"During Tun Razak's time they accepted my criticism and acted on it because I came out with constructive ideas. I didn't say, 'You're wrong', and when asked for possible solutions, I did not reply, 'That's your business. All I can say is that you're wrong'. But these people just criticise for no reason. I tolerate this, but I have a right to reply. Why shouldn't I? People say it's unbecoming of me to do so. But if I don't these things will go on."

(Malaysian Business, 1 April, 1984)

Dr. Mahathir also claimed that there is more freedom of press ever since he took office. This is contrary to popular belief that the Mahathir's government has curtailed the rights of the media in Malaysia.

"...If you look around, there are more newspapers and magazines since I became Prime Minister. If that is not a sign of willingness to accept criticism, I don't know what is. Now we subject ourselves to questions and if we can't reply, people do not trust us. I told the Min-

isters to face the public — to go up on stage and answer these questions. That has not been done before. I have exposed myself by coming here — but there must be constructive criticism. You see all kinds of imagined things behind simple things and this hurts efforts to build the country. This I cannot tolerate.”

In one sense, Dr. Mahathir is like a lightning rod with magnetic attraction to criticism. He has been the vortex of rumour mongering. Mahathir cynically attributes such criticism, indeed all criticisms, to a basic trait in our society that adulates the underdog but is intolerant of any one in high position, especially the one at the top. He professed:

“When I was an underdog, by God, I was the most popular man. I could do no wrong. People would like to see you a hero but down and out. They wouldn’t like to see you go up. Once you go up, the process of pulling you down will begin. I recognise that.”

Nevertheless, Dr. Mahathir does not seem to elude criticisms. Perhaps criticisms has made him a better and stronger leader. This brings us to the other side of this man that is hardly known to many people. Personally, he is said to love the sea and remain calm and compose amidst the high waves. He could even concentrate on reading while several of his aides, some half his age, try to overcome seasickness. Such is the strength of his mind and body.

Dr. Mahathir has shown that the power of controlling oneself in whatever situation is the recipe to success. When he flexes his mind ‘muscle’, even the strongest wrestler like *The Rock* could perhaps fall flat on the floor. A person can be imprisoned and locked up but for

as long as he can control his mind, he is not defeated. The explanation by Dr. Ong Hean-Tatt based on Sun Tzu Principle appropriately described Mahathir's power of the mind:

"The beating around the bush approach often depends on the understanding of human behaviour. Understanding of human behaviour, more often than not, will provide the winning edge, not only in dealing with external "enemies," but also in establishing organisational excellence.... Down history, combatants, who started with seemingly superior material and physical weapons and resources, had crashed in defeats, through their inability to master handling of human resources. They had the means of killing physical bodies, but it is the killing of the mind which wins or loses the war."

(Dr. Ong Hean-Tatt, The Star, 10 February 2000)

Criticism, according to the man, will always be around, no matter what anyone does. Indeed it is a familiar situation for all leaders who attempt change. Robert Kennedy once said, "At any given time at least one quarter of the people will be against everything you do." It was a telling remark, born out of the frustration Kennedy harboured over the labels that were being pinned on him. In Mahathir's case, however, people alleged that he has changed, that he has grown increasingly tolerant of criticism.

In a foreword for Marina Mahathir's 'In Liberal Doses', the prime minister wrote:

"Society needs critics. Without them society can go very wrong, complacent with everything it does. Critics are absolutely necessary for those playing a leading role in society..."

Dr. Mahathir added that critics are like a mirror, which helps someone sees his or her flaws:

“We live in an imperfect society. We are all imperfect individuals. This is no excuse for us not to try to be perfect; to do what is right to avoid what is wrong. To know when we are right or wrong we need a mirror. The critics hold up the mirror so we may see ourselves, warts and all. But the critics too need to look at the mirror if we accept that none of us are perfect. Perhaps when they look at the mirror they would become slightly more tolerant of the faults and foibles of others.”

His critics certainly need an extra-large mirror to see beyond the criticisms.

Check Up

“Re-engineer by all means, shift the paradigms and entertain brilliant new ideas, but remember today’s much criticised ideas and policies were yesterday’s perfect ideas and solutions. By the same token, the new idea of today will be the subject of much criticism for their imperfections in the future.”

If there is one politician who is good at telling the people what they don’t want to hear, it is Dr. Mahathir. The *Malay Dilemma* is a good example of his style of telling the unpleasant but most of the time truthful facts.

“The Malay dilemma is whether they should stop trying to help themselves in order that they should be proud to be the poor citizen of a prosperous country or whether they should try to get some of the riches that this country boasts of, even if it blurs the economic picture of Malaysia a little.”

Mahathir is not the only leader who is frustrated with his own race. The late French President, Charles de Gaulle was frustrated with the French. Mao Zedong, too, was upset with the Chinese. It is perhaps the nature lot

of single-minded, visionary nationalists that their people do not live up to the goals set for them. Malaysian Premier, Dr. Mahathir has neither all the faults nor all the strengths of either de Gaulle or Mao. But there is a common thread: Mahathir wants to make his people a force to be reckoned with. To reach that goal, however, requires that the people themselves undergo radical changes in their outlook and attitude.

The people are with him in wanting to achieve the goal for most of them believe it is the correct path to take. But are they really prepared to undertake the journey? To say goodbye to friendly faces and accustomed ways? And to take the hard, uncertain road to fame and fortune? Many years after Mahathir shocked Malaysian-Malays as much as non-Malays with his blunt political testament, *The Malay Dilemma*, the nature of the dilemma might have changed, but his underlying analysis remains largely valid.

“They have become almost totally dependent on the Government. Sino-Malay joint ventures exist but many are still Ali Baba in nature. Bumiputera contractors depend exclusively on government contracts. Remove these and they will mostly collapse. Harrased by accusations of cronyism, the Government is tempted to abandon the NEP. But the future generation will have to make this decision.”

Then, the dilemma as summed up by Mahathir was this: “If no impediment at all is placed in the way of Chinese domination of the economic of Malaysia, the country would certainly be prosperous. The Malay Dilemma is whether they should stop trying to help themselves in order that they should proud to be the poor citizen of a

prosperous country or whether they should try to get at some of the riches that this country boasts of, even if it blurs the economic picture of Malaysia a little." He also described the dilemma as between the Malays "desire to assert their rights and arrogate to themselves what they consider to be theirs, and the overwhelming desire to be polite, courteous and thoughtful of the rights and demands of others." The dilemma now looks different to many Malays, partly because of the large scale government-led action to raise dramatically the status of Malays under the NEP.

The Malays have unequivocally started to resolve the 1970 dilemma by arrogating to them a large slice of the cake. But the dilemma now may be how far they are prepared to rid themselves of historical baggage and wrong attitudes in order to ensure that the modernisation of society become self-sustaining.

Mahathir is keenly aware that the pace of change for Malays must be sustained. Shape up! Discipline! Work hard! Follow new leads! Create a new Malay Man! Some of the rhetoric have been heard before, of course, even from former premier Tun Hussien Onn. However, Mahathir has a remarkable record for telling people — most particularly Malays — what they do not want to hear.

The *Malay Dilemma*, he accurately predicted, would cause "despondency among some and severe resentment among most others." If non-Malays found his book worryingly extreme in its nationalism, many Malays found it insulting, with its open discussion of some of the alleged negative characteristics of Malay society, and his attribution of them to hereditary as well as environmental factors. Malays which were lagging behind, must be given

(because of their rights in their own land) the opportunity to catch up with the more recent immigrant races. Mahathir would now almost certainly be more optimistic about the changes for achieving rapid change — at least in the hereditary factors.

Those out of power must be professional pessimists, while those in it must at least try to be optimistic. The Malays' achievement of the past decade must also have lifted some of Mahathir's own despondency about the time needed to correct the imbalance. While conservatives believed that Malays were equal but different, Mahathir the radical argued that Malays were unequal and must be forced to march to equality.

The weapon was the political power that Malays had had since independence. But Mahathir could see its dangers. "Merdeka brought power and wealth to the new Malay elite.... Politics was found to be the panacea. It provided the shortcut to everything... created for the Malays soft environment which removed all challenges to their survival and progress. Political power might ultimately prove their complete downfall. Take up this same thread of argument after years of the NEP and what does it say? It may be just an expansion of the elitists, of which Mahathir was so scornful. But Mahathir's rejection of the sentimental links with the British and the almost ritual admiration of things South Korean and Japanese is set to build on a great revival of Malay self-confidence after years of retreat before British imperialism and immigrant enterprise.

The Malay tide turned in 1974 with the defect of Britain's Malayan Union proposals — which would have given immigrants equal rights with Malays. Confidence was boosted by independence, then by the economic

progress under the NEP. But Mahathir clearly believes that the forging of the new Malay Man able to stand on his feet internationally in the scientific age has only just begun. Mahathir's antipathy to the British seems to be far more a consequence of his general philosophy than any particular personal prejudice.

British technology is becoming outdated; Britain's social system shows sign of decay; the British are associated with the past. The very close identification of the old elites with things has diminished national identity. Politically too, Britain bashing — especially over the university fees issue — is good electoral politics among all races. It does make some Chinese vaguely uneasy about who might be the next object of criticism. And in some quarters it raises concern that some of the better British legacies, such as sound administrative structure and separation of powers, might suffer with the bad. But generally it goes down well and present Mahathir as a strong leader taking on an old and arrogant power.

For all his bluntness towards others, all his emphasis on self-help and discipline, Mahathir remains remarkably thin-skinned in some ways. He sometimes gives the impression that he feels the NEP should be applied globally. Such attitudes have caused some to ask if he will cope well with the real adversity in Malaysian economy, or whether he will take to blaming national problems on the unfairness of the world. The problems, the dilemma also remains.

Ultimately, of course, the goals of the NEP are to achieve some modest degree of homogeneity, by pushing the Chinese to adopt Malay linguistic and cultural mores, while the Malays opt for urbanisation, technology and self-discipline. But what is debatable is how many of

those in either group who approve of the goals are also determined to follow the path. It is sometimes said in Malaysia that, in referring to South Korea, Mahathir is really saying "Singapore" and "the Chinese". To some extent, that is probably true. He admires Singapore discipline and ethnic Chinese drive. But he has also been critical of the attitudes of the Chinese businessmen. South Korean and Japanese industrial growth has been more heavily on social cohesion than on the small-business entrepreneurship at which the Chinese have excelled.

Mahathir thinks that what Malaysians need are larger scale, technology-oriented enterprises to expand the industrial base, rather than trading-oriented. In this case a combination of (Malay-controlled) government money with positive social attitudes (involving coordination, compromise and hierarchy — three very Japanese characteristics) would be at least as valuable as the Chinese attributes — the Malay MBA degree-holder versus the Chinese entrepreneur; the state bureaucracy-big industry nexus of Japan and South Korea versus the Overseas Chinese style small business trader-independent professional class.

This is only random, but it is possible that any waning of the Chinese entrepreneurial drive (as immigrants attitudes weaken while any NEP disadvantages depress Chinese morale and as the structure of the economy continues to move in favour of large state-related enterprises) may lead to Malay economic as well as political pre-eminence. That is a dilemma for the Chinese in the future. For the Malays, more immediately, the question is how to respond to Dr. Mahathir's prescription. Mahathir's zeal to root out inefficiency and corruption

have undoubtedly caught the imagination of Malays.

Even those who resent the intrusion into privacy which is conducted in a real anti-corruption investigation, find it hard to quarrel with the intent. And even most of those who find it hard to work up anti-British feelings and have no wish to be like South Koreans except, intellectually, that this is the direction in which Malaysia ought to look.

The same people who admire the aim can almost simultaneously be found to question values which emphasise on economic and technical achievement to the detriment of cultural and human values — the very courtesy and considerations for the rights of others that Mahathir saw as a weakness. There is no doubts too — among the liberal elite — about materialism.

Thus Mahathir faces a problem not only of establishing the ascendancy of a willing spirit over man's naturally weak flesh, but the intellectual commitment to his goals may not be complete. His directness, aloofness and single-mindedness are said by many to be not typically Malay — they certainly do not fit his own stereotype of the Malays. For some, it is a welcome style which will get things done. For others even among the sympathisers, it carries dangers of promoting reaction, so that either the power of his writ will gradually wane or there will be a reaction by the body politics against it. And rooting out graft from the political system could be beyond anyone's power. UMNO is a decentralised, grassroots organisation in a decentralised political environment. Its very democratic constitution makes it hard to control. Mahathir may want to follow some of Singaporean Lee Kuan Yew's footsteps. But the People's Action Party and UMNO are two very different organisms.

The third danger in the Mahathir scheme of things is the obvious outright reaction based on religious extremism, which could threaten not only communal harmony but also the attitudes needed for a modern industrial economy. Many believe that the Malay community has weathered the strains of very rapid urbanisation remarkably smoothly so far. Although there has been a surge of *dakwah* movements (Muslim missionary), as well as more extremist expressions of religious sentiment, the vogue for highly visible religious issues may have already peaked. To a large extent such movements were the natural response of people from rural communities who needed the identity and security, to a way of life which was not just different but strongly alien.

Some quarters point out that religious radicals have not opposed urbanisation and their movements have a high proportion of technically and professionally trained people. Still others are not so sure that religion and modernisation could not seriously conflict if religious radicals ally themselves with conservatives political force anxious to shore up their access to privilege and patronage and perhaps too, one day, with elements of more politicised and powerful military. Religion is an issue which the ruling coalition must take into account. Even if the majority is more or perhaps less religiously-inclined than before, the number of activists has grown, and with it the need for government to occasionally yield to the demands of intolerance.

To be Malay, by definition (contrary to the situation in Indonesia), is to be Muslim. However, the two are not entirely synonymous. The Malay culture contains many pre-Islamic customs not in accord with the strictest Islamic interpretations. On this score, Malays should con-

tinue to prove pragmatic and adaptable to the demands of social and economic change while refraining from forcing Islamic precepts down the throats of non-Muslims.

But there are zealots who consider the modernised Malays as a threat to religious values. The threat was considered inevitable in a society which is both urbanised and permitting all kinds of outrageous freedom to the non-believers for whom gambling, pork, alcohol (and even prostitution) are acceptable. Insofar as religion is an old attitude, any appeal for new thinking may be considered by conservatives as endangering the old indiscriminately. In time, as the economy develops and the race-economy gap narrows, class will doubtless play a larger role — again perhaps to the detriment of religion — as a rallying point. Industrial workers of whatever race will necessarily begin to see a commonality of interests, which surpasses ethnic and religious background. In urban areas, races tend to separate naturally into their own communities, even among the middle-class where educational levels might be thought to form the basis for integrated communities. Among some Malays there is resentment against mal-distribution of the fruit of the NEP. Many rural Malays have barely benefited at all — at least in terms of cash income. But to many, it is a situation perhaps more readily exploited by Rights than Lefts. Anyway, the Malay Left for all its antipathy to capitalism and feudalism and its attacks on rich cliques, is still seen by most non-Malays as more Malay than Left.

Indeed, it is the basic strength of the Malays that across the political spectrum all believe that the Malays must be the "definitive people" (to use Mahathir's phrase) of Malaysia. And most would probably take the

hard line (to non-Malays) that: "If citizenship is cemented on races other than Malays, it is because the Malays, consent to this. That consent is traditional." Malay instinct for compromise and bargaining should mean that severe problems related to religious issues, among the Malays or vis-à-vis the non-Malays are avoided.

In the past, the strict interpretation of Islam was most evident in coastal towns where Malays have been opened to influx of Muslims from India and Arabia. Mahathir himself, like many Malay leaders, come from a mixed background. Such intermarriages, according to Mahathir "enriched Malay stock" and as a result of this outside influenced town-Malays, "found no difficulty in changing with the times." Disciplined, intellectual Islam was a force for progress. In these terms, however the problem perhaps now is that the up-to-date external influences are not readily available from Muslim societies. In terms of modern skills, urban attitudes and education, Malays are now at least as advanced as any large Muslim ruling community.

The Malays must lose some of their traditional characteristics of tolerance and compromise, and adopt more ruthless and business-minded approach. As Malays, they may be able to do this without risking any loss of identity. But can they do it as Muslim as well? Here the Malay dilemma meets the Chinese dilemma. The Chinese can lose much of their 'Chineseness', learn Malay and English, forget their own language, culture traditions, lion dance and even dilute some of their clan and family based business enterprise. In other words they can throw out their traditional and chauvinist baggage and still remain closer to the Malays as equal partners.

Looking at the situation of the Chinese in the days of

the Malacca Sultanate, Mahathir wrote: "*E en the Chinese adopted the language, dress and part of the customs of the Malays although they were considered to be unacceptable due to religious differences. Inter-marriage between Malays and Chinese was extremely rare.*" The Chinese are therefore confronted with the dilemma of whether to fight to retain as much as possible their own traditions on the assumption that there will always be separate races and that Malaysia's aims to have a harmony of different elements, within the context of Malay as the predominant culture, rather than integration. Or whether to lose part of their identity in the hope of eventual integration.

For the Malays, there remains the new dilemma: whether they should make more compromise with religion and tradition, both for the sake of national unity and thus speed their own absorption of the attitude, ideas and skills of an urbanised, self-reliant, socially and technically-advanced state. And whether, as they gain economic equality, they will be prepared to see non-Malays acquire a bigger share of the political power which ensures that they are the "definitive people".

Against Doctor's Order

In two decades of Mahathir's premiership, there have been four deputies. Three of them, Tan Sri Musa Hitam, Tun Ghaffar Baba and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, had seen the end of their era as deputy prime minister. And now Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi will carry on the torch in his, perhaps, final lap before ascending to the No. 1 spot. Mahathir was asked in an interview with Al-Jazeera TV in March 2002 if he is always suspicious of those around him, his previous deputies and his current deputy, Abdullah Badawi. Convincingly he said:

"I do not know why they have this view. (Tan Sri) Musa Hitam resigned. (Tun) Ghaffar Baba and (Tengku) Razaleigh (Hamzah) have nothing to do with all this. Razaleigh tried to contest against me during party elections but failed and left the Cabinet. Ghaffar was appointed after Musa Hitam. Anwar was appointed and resigned. I did not ask him to resign. He was my deputy but when I saw that he had committed immoral acts which cannot be accepted by society, I had no other choice but to get rid of him. Thereafter, he was hauled before the court and was punished. It was the court which decided, not me."

Mahathir's first partnership with Musa Hitam symbolised a new generation of leaders. Both were considered "Young Turks" in the party and even dared to challenge the Independence father, Tunku Abdul Rahman after the May 13th incident. Both were expelled from the party and twelve years later joined hands as caretaker of UMNO and the nation. Nevertheless, Musa's succession as UMNO's deputy president and subsequently Mahathir's deputy was not without challenges. Musa had to face a promising and charismatic young politician, Tengku Razaleigh, in a heated contest for the party's number two post. Musa claimed victory and the plausible reason for that was simply said to be Mahathir's preference for Musa as his deputy.

But after three years, Razaleigh again rose to the occasion and challenged Musa for deputy president's post. When the ballot boxes were opened, Musa had 744 votes, 22 more than in 1981, while Razaleigh had 501, sixteen less than three years ago. And the party president described Musa's win as:

"Clear-cut with no ambiguity. It was the most likely result and was expected by most people."

Mahathir also saw it as an endorsement of his policies. He told Asiaweek:

"That is one way to read it. But more important is the fact that I was never challenged. Whoever was elected as deputy leader would have had to work under me."

The 2M Administration

The Mahathir -Musa administration or better known as 2M's instituted a system of time-clock to counter tardy

civil servants, led a high-profile campaign against corrupt officials, released hundreds of political detainees and urged their countrymen to work harder. The key task for the new administration then was also to deal with global recession. Said the PM: "If the world economy was better we would be in a better position to deliver goods quickly. That is the single most important problem we face."

Thus the 2M's partnership continued until it came to a somewhat rocky path in 1986. Musa tendered his resignation from government and party post. Mahathir took out a letter before a six-hour long meeting that ended at 2 a.m. on March 1, 1986. A letter written by Musa three days before the July 1984 cabinet reshuffle. Musa had just been re-elected UMNO's deputy leader against a strong challenge from archrival Tengku Razaleigh, the then finance minister. In the letter, Musa warned Mahathir not to keep the defeated Razaleigh in the cabinet. If Mahathir did, Musa threatened he would resign effective July 1985. The councilors listened in stunned silence. Then, several of Mahathir supporters as well as some councillors regarded as Musa's supporters immediately demanded acceptance of resignation. Mahathir allowed himself a brief grin.

It was because of Musa's decision that the struggle between Mahathir and him — rumoured and denied repeatedly for nearly two years — had burst into the open. Musa delivered his quit notice with breathtaking abruptness. Boarding a flight for Saudi Arabia on the night of February 26, he left Mahathir an official notice of resignation and a seven-page letter, copied to supreme council members, explaining his reasons for resigning. Next morning, at least one newspaper carried a frontpage de-

nial from the premier that his deputy had quit; by then news of the resignation was spreading country-wide. UMNO sources said Mahathir was 'upset' and 'hurt' at the manner of Musa's resignation.

Mahathir and Musa made a dynamic pair when they took over the leadership from Premier Hussien Onn. They had been close personal friends since the late 1960s when Mahathir was a member of the supreme council and a backbencher in Parliament while Musa was executive secretary at UMNO headquarters. The friendship blossomed when they were sacked (Mahathir from the party, Musa from his post) by Tunku Abdul Rahman in the wake of the 1969 riots for breaching what was described as party discipline.

When Tun Razak took power in 1970, they were admitted to the fold and began their climb through the ranks. In 1981 when Mahathir was elected unopposed as UMNO President and automatically Premier, he backed Musa as his No. 2 over Razaleigh even though the finance minister had greater experience in cabinet and was also head of several state corporations. Musa came from behind to win a closely fought contest.

In the years that followed, despite rumours of falling out, the two had repeatedly pledged support for each other. The 2M's, it seemed, had decided that sink or swim, they would stick together. As most political analysts gathered, the falling out began soon after the UMNO triennial elections in 1984. After losing the 1981 battle Razaleigh had moved on as Finance Minister and treasurer of UMNO. In 1984 he challenged Musa again for the same post in a much bitter and more expensive campaign that drained both sides of their financial resources. With his big business connections, however,

Razaleigh had little trouble in raising funds. But Musa, according to political observers, was still burdened with the cost of funding his 1984 campaign — to which reference was made in the resignation letter.

Musa supporters said their mentor had reached an understanding with Mahathir that if Razaleigh contested again in 1984 and lost, he would be dropped from his cabinet post in UMNO. They claimed Mahathir kept only half of that promise — Razaleigh lost the party treasurer post but was kept in the Cabinet as Trade & Industry Minister — leaving the door open for a third contest between the two in 1987.

Musa thought that with a strong new mandate in UMNO he could dictate some terms and slowly consolidate his grip on the party and the government. To start with, he wanted a transfer to the Foreign Ministry and important portfolios for some of his close associates. Musa asked that his own Home Ministry portfolio be given to Abdullah Badawi whom he had identified as his potential deputy-to-be. Again, Mahathir met Musa half-way. He could take the Foreign Ministry but Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen would be brought into the Home Ministry; Musa's choice, Abdullah, would go to Education. Three days before the cabinet reshuffle in July 1984, Musa reportedly told Mahathir he didn't want a transfer after all. "He wanted the powerful Home Ministry himself or under someone who would follow his order," says a high-ranking UMNO source.

Musa wrote a letter threatening to resign after he learned that the Prime Minister was going to keep Razaleigh in the Cabinet. Days later, Musa's camp received another blow: Mahathir picked close friend and prominent Malay entrepreneur (Tun) Daim Zainuddin

as the new Finance Minister. He also announced he had chosen close associate and loyalist Sanusi Junid as party secretary-general. Musa already had suspicions about Sanusi. Of the people close to the Prime Minister, Musa believed Sanusi to be the only one who had ignored Mahathir's wishes and secretly backed Razaleigh in the party polls.

Political observers said the resignation climaxed months of bickering between the two men. At that time, a deputy minister sympathetic towards Musa said: "It came to a point where Musa thought there was no way he could work under Mahathir." Another supporter said, "The disagreement is over style rather than substance. Somehow or rather Musa thought he wasn't consulted enough. He felt left out of the decision-making process." Added a senior party member: "It was a clash of personalities. The two men were poles apart. They had problems seeing each other's point of view."

The Master Principal

In 1987, Dr. Mahathir was being tested. He had to deal with a rickety game. Any steps taken, if not cautious, could be detrimental. And the challenger is no ordinary man. He is Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah — the Kelantan prince. A member of the East Coast royal household, Razaleigh has extensive influence in the political scene with his charismatic appeal. As a representative from a state with PAS stronghold, Razaleigh indeed has the advantage over some other UMNO politicians of his calibre. A slight twist by Razaleigh from mainstream UMNO could cause a bleak future to the party in a territory known for its strong statesmanship. However, a

hard heart is difficult to harrow. Break-ups were inevitable. Camaraderie turned to adversary. Separation occurred.

Tengku Razaleigh's departure from UMNO resulted in the formation of Parti Semangat 46 (The Spirit of 46 – the year UMNO was formed). And that created an exodus of some UMNO members (including high-profile personalities) to the newly-established party. Nevertheless, in this context, one could not ignore the birth of Semangat 46 as a continuity of Umno's struggle among those who were frustrated. For the name itself suggests that this group of people could not detach their political struggle from that of UMNO.

If they totally detest the party then they wouldn't name the new party as such because that will remind them and others of UMNO. From a simple thing such as naming a party we could draw the assumption that the struggle and unity among the Malays is hard not to be associated with UMNO. And Dr. Mahathir's situation at that time could be likened to the military. When a general experiences defection of his lieutenants then the troop is in trouble. That could be the situation Dr. Mahathir went through during that turbulent time. And that was the test of a real hardcore leader.

Nevertheless he persevered. Though being challenged, as the president of UMNO, Dr. Mahathir maintained his post and scores of supporters in the party's general assembly, albeit a slight majority of 43 out of 1,479 votes cast. Looking back, the strains between the two began in 1975, when Mahathir was gunning for an UMNO vice-presidency. Razaleigh had been appointed a party veep the year before. "Mahathir accused me of not delivering enough votes to him," Razaleigh said. Still

he backed Mahathir for the deputy premiership the following year.

When Tun Hussien Onn retired in 1981, "the understanding was that Mahathir was going to be No.1, and I was going to be No.2." But Musa Hitam won the PM's tacit support instead, and Razaleigh decided to fight. He lost and tried again in 1984, challenging Musa for the deputy's post. "The PM was very very angry," Razaleigh said, "so I said the next time around I would fight him." And he did. At the party's General Assembly in April 1987, Razaleigh took on Mahathir for the presidency. He lost again, narrowly. As Mahathir put it, Razaleigh "does not have the patience for me and Ghaffar Baba to retire.... Since Tengku Razaleigh is younger than us, his chance will come."

Razaleigh's rebellious act within the party was of little avail. However, the experience in challenging the 'Master' perhaps taught him some valuable lessons in politics. Lessons that created a more flavoured and favoured political player. Even earlier on, Razaleigh proved his ability as a politician by becoming the youngest finance minister at the age of 44. He emerged as the most flourishing and charismatic political prince in the country. At the age of 28, Razaleigh was appointed to the UMNO Supreme Council. He was even described as the architect of the country's Bumiputera or indigenous people. Razaleigh helped mastermind UMNO's return to Kelantan in the 1987 State Elections, ending 20 years of rules by Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). Nevertheless, the respected Kelantan prince was unable to master a move in his home-state in the 10th General Elections whereby UMNO lost several cabinet ministers in the heated contest.

The reconciliation

All is not lost. Razaleigh may be adamant in forming a new party and formed an ally with PAS, but he was still very much an UMNO man when he decided to rejoin the party in 1996. Razaleigh managed to entice his Semangat 46 followers into UMNO.

The appointment of the Kelantan prince as Kelantan's UMNO Liaison Chief in June 1999, a post once held by Dr. Mahathir since 1987, proved yet another hefty involvement by Tengku Razaleigh in the country's political arena in general and the Kelantan political scene in particular. The emergence of Tengku Razaleigh in Kelantan's UMNO could also be seen as bridging the gap between the royals and politics, which has been said to turn sour over the years.

Razaleigh was thought to be heading towards national political hierarchy and even to the extent of replacing Mahathir. Thus when speculations were rife as to who would fill the vacant seat of Deputy Prime Minister, Razaleigh was not excluded. In fact, he was among the favourite candidate. The Prince is well-known in and outside the country. He became the youngest Finance Minister at the age of 44 and went through much turbulence, sometimes of his own doings, in his political career.

"He is a veteran political operator with a strong regional base and a national support network. He is a charismatic risk-taker who challenged and almost reached the top, tumbled off the mountain, and is now climbing upward again. Most importantly, he thinks, talks and acts like a leader capable of filling just about the biggest pair of shoes in Southeast Asia."

(Asiaweek, November 12, 1999)

And in the 10th General Elections, Razaleigh became the sole parliamentary representative for Barisan Nasional coalition in Kelantan. The people in his constituency once again voted for their prince and gave him the mandate to be their leader.

Razaleigh still holds the trophy in Kelantan on UMNO's banner but is that all he is capable of doing? Has the Prince's influence in his home ground been slowly diminished now that PAS is getting stronger?

Razaleigh was expected to do the heavy-duty task of capturing the state from PAS. And that proved too much to handle. The party was trounced by the PAS-led opposition, winning just one of the 14 parliamentary seats and two of 43 state seats.

However, after the Elections, political pundits still think that Razaleigh will be given a Cabinet post. But, Mahathir spoilt the prediction. In fact, not a single representative from the state is present in Mahathir's new cabinet line-up. "Whichever side of the political equation they belong to, it seems Kelantanese must learn to accept the consequences of their action. If they choose to reject Barisan, then they must also be prepared to be rejected by Barisan" (*Star*, 14 December 1999).

But Razaleigh is Razaleigh. If he could summon a threat against the party's president and Prime Minister before, what's stopping him to do it again. The engine is still running and it is likely to accelerate faster and enduringly.

Razaleigh's contribution to UMNO since his return from the opposition fold has been questioned by detractors. Some said his influence is diminishing with UMNO's losses in Kelantan. Datuk Rozali Isohak, Kelantan Barisan Nasional information chief, defended

his mentor. Tengku Razaleigh, he stated, could not be entirely blamed for Barisan's poor showing in Kelantan. He said UMNO leaders knew Kelantan was lost on external factors, like the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from UMNO and the government in 1998. (*Sunday Star*)

He added, Kelantan was lost even before Razaleigh was appointed state chief in June 1999 and that made his mission to win the hearts of the Kelantanese more difficult.

The Kelantanese rejection of Barisan Nasional despite the promises of development and changes to the state underlies their comforts in the present way of life. Perhaps the Barisan's agenda for change did not go down well with the majority Malay population in the state, which has the highest level of poverty in Peninsular Malaysia.

An economist, Dr. Aznam Yusof, said in his article in *The New Straits Times* (27 November 1999): "After more than 40 years of independence, Kelantan is still stuck at the bottom of the development league with the distinction of having the highest level of poverty in Peninsular Malaysia and the lowest level of average per capita income of any state in Malaysia.... Kelantan is almost like a stagnating island surrounded by prosperous states." It is difficult to deny Dr. Aznam's view. But if it is the choice of the Kelantanese, then it will be difficult to make them realise the importance of development and better economic status to the present and future generations of Kelantanese. It is their rightful choice to live the way they are comfortable with.

Anwar – Lost Hope

Dr. Mahathir pulled off his biggest political coup after nine months in office by making an ally of the country's most charismatic dissident before the 1982 General Election. He announced on 29 March 1982 that Anwar Ibrahim, one of the government's most active critics and president of the (then) 40,000-member Malaysia Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM), had resigned from the movement to join UMNO. By joining the main party in the ruling National Front, Anwar shattered the hopes of PAS, the theocentric opposition party of which he was perceived to be a clandestine supporter. PAS was expected to give the National Front a tough fight at the polls. In fact, there had been wide speculation that Anwar might come into the open and join PAS or even lead the party.

At a press conference where he was introduced to Mahathir, Anwar expressed confidence that he could initiate important changes and declared that he would not compromise his principles after joining UMNO. He said he was persuaded by the performance of Mahathir's administration that changes were being made by a government committed to disseminating the real value of Islam and to eradicate such evils as corruption, inefficiency and neglect of the poor. Anwar who had long declared that he would not go into politics, explained that he was aware of the contradiction arising out of his move. He was moving into politics because, it seemed, he was satisfied that changes initiated by the government were fundamental.

From then on, many of Anwar's remarks could be analysed and scrutinised to know his true self and his

principles on certain matters. As a vocal critic of the Internal Security Act (ISA), Anwar appeared embarrassed by the fact that the day he resigned from ABIM, the government arrested nine members of a fanatical religious sect and detained them under the act. Surprisingly, he was apologetic about the law and indicated that its implementation rather than the principle was questionable, thus making the extraordinary suggestion that the draconian law could be handled in a reasonable manner.

He also said that there should at least be a review — he did not insist on repeal — of the ISA. This significant retreat from his original hard-line position was then expected to lose him supports among a large number of liberal thinkers who saw him a few months before as the focus of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and liberal future leadership. The acceptance of Anwar into UMNO is seen by many observers as indicating the government's needs for a more credible platform for its position on religious matters. While many people in the past have labeled ABIM as fundamentalist, it is without doubt the most liberal of the Islamic movements in the country. Anwar was wooed not only by PAS and UMNO but could also communicate with the opposition Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP).

Anwar rose through the political rank to become Malaysia's second man. However, even a glittering jewel will not shine forever, especially if it is not well taken care of. Anwar stumbled halfway in his climb to the top post of the country. Anwar's sacking could be considered as the most outrageous action ever made by Dr. Mahathir. If bringing Anwar into UMNO in 1982 was shocking enough, sacking him from the government and party was even more shocking.

Although there were widespread talks of friction between the two, many believed it would be ironed out for Anwar was assumed to be the most likely heir apparent. However, people always forget that Dr. Mahathir is no ordinary man and he consistently proves to be different. Many of his decisions were revealed when we least expected them. And when one is ill prepared for an action, the momentum is indeed greater.

The events after Anwar's dismissal definitely opened up the eyes and minds of Malaysians, even those ignorant of politics before the sacking. Some, of course, got carried away in attempts to voice out their opinions. Despite the numerous contributions he made to the country, the sacking drama was singled out as a platform to condemn Dr. Mahathir. Nonetheless, the condemnations did not deter the seasoned politician from facing the people. With guts he embarked on a nationwide tour to explain why he had to do it. He dealt with the problem face-on. A trait other politicians should emulate.

"Officially, the PM is on 'a countrywide tour to explain matters to the people'. There is indeed plenty of explaining to do: the political fallout from former deputy PM Anwar Ibrahim's ouster has divided the country, especially the majority Malays. Mahathir needs to present his case to win back the doubters, including those within his party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)."

(Asiaweek, April 2, 1999)

The Prime Minister had, prior to the nationwide tour, a heart to heart meeting with UMNO grassroots leaders in Kuala Lumpur and gave a lengthy explanation as to the dismissal of his former deputy.

"In an attempt to boost the government's position against Anwar, Mahathir sought to clarify matters in a meeting with UMNO grassroots leaders on Sept. 8.... It was, by all accounts, a masterly performance. The PM was a picture of calm confidence, assertive yet magnanimous enough not to directly attack his former deputy. Instead, he painted himself as someone betrayed by a trusted protégé conniving to challenge him. The audience was moved enough to give Mahathir a standing ovation. Others, though, were less impressed.... The PM may have revealed the steps leading up to the dismissal, but he still had not offered any evidence of Anwar's alleged misdeeds."

(Asiaweek, Sept 18, 1998)

However some political observers were of the opinions that Anwar's tale did not pose such great impact as in the case of challenge by Tengku Razaleigh. In an interview with Asiaweek after his sacking, Anwar was asked if he was going to challenge Mahathir in 1999. And his reply was:

"No, no, Actually I agree with Mahathir on the need for a smooth transition. Any relationship at the top level in politics is difficult. It would have served no purpose to challenge him, especially at this juncture when the economy is turning bad. But I also wanted him to understand the undercurrents in the country. I indicated that we should either make adjustments now or let a smooth transition take place eventually. But I never threatened him. I wanted to let him determine the time frame for transition. He thought I was too much of a nuisance or obstacle."

As a sharp and seasoned politician, Dr. Mahathir is cautious of his position and the threat even by those he

nurtured to take over from him. This crab story could perhaps sum up his sentiment.

"I used to tell the story of crabs sold by a man on the Isle of Man. I was watching these crabs marching to the sea wall and there was a man selling crabs. Suddenly the crabs were all over the place and some were trying to climb the wall (next to the sea). I said to the man selling crabs: "If you're not careful, the crab would climb over the wall and back into the sea." And the man said, "No way. Before that crab can climb over the wall, another crab will pull him down." So I think, I'm the crab who is up and at the moment everybody is trying their best to pull me down. And believe me, the next man who climbs up and holds this position is going to have the same treatment."

Among Malaysian politicians, Anwar could be described as the 'darling' of the foreign media. Anwar effectively captured the foreign press with his very accomodating approach and extensive public relations network. Surely the shocking sacking of Anwar Ibrahim irked the foreign press and they embarked on a wide coverage of the event. Anwar was given various interviews, some even live interviews over international electronic media. The foreign media gave Anwar a substantial avenue to tell his side of the story and to express dissatisfaction over the sacking.

"Still, Anwar's charisma, networking skills and popular support may be able to compensate for any lack of patronage from UMNO. His cause can draw support from his old youth group ABIM, as well as members of UMNO's Youth wing, many of them are discreetly loyal to Anwar."

(Asiaweek, Sep 18, 1998)

The post-sacking drama had seen Malaysians coming out in protest demonstration and chanting anti-government slogans particularly in Kuala Lumpur. Kampung Baru, in the heart of the city and infamous for the *May 13* tragedy, once again was used as a venue for congregation by political dissents. "*Reformasi*" (Reformation), became a familiar word not only among Malaysians but even the visiting US vice-president Al Gore. Al Gore who was here for the APEC meeting seemed to be dragged into the "*reformasi*" drama and ignored Malaysia's pledge to put aside any political issues during the summit.

Among the call by the "*reformasi*" protestors was for the resignation of the Prime Minister. Never before have Malaysians witnessed so much public hatred being thrown at Dr. Mahathir. However, the "*reformasi*" group which said the country is in need of reforms initially did not clearly spell out what sort of changes were required besides wanting Dr. Mahathir out of office.

"*Reformasi* must stand for something other than Mahathir's resignation. It must hold out credible alternatives, and not just in the form of political candidates. *Reformasi* has to be translated into workable specifics. Now is the time to define an agenda that will help rebuild not only tarnished institutions, but also national consensus."

(*Asiaweek*, 30 April 1999)

As "*reformasi*" activities progressed and enlarged, there were attacks towards the establishment and its other entities. The police force and judiciary were not spared, particularly as Anwar's trial continues and more evidents were revealed.

"Indeed the greater threat to Malaysia's social fabric may be the perception, now sharp among some Malaysians, that some national institutions are mere handmaidens of the executive branch, rather than independent bodies functioning without favor for the benefits of all citizens."

(*Asiaweek*, 30 April 1999)

If "*reformasi*" is not enough, Anwar supporters would be able to join a new political party led by Anwar's wife, Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. Named *Keadilan* or Justice Party, it is seen as an extension for Anwar's out-of-government agenda. However, the party top members dismissed such remarks. *Keadilan* is said to be a party to fight for injustice in the country and an alternative for those who choose not to be a member of other opposition party such as PAS and DAP.

In an interview with *Asiaweek* (16 April 1999), Dr. Wan Azizah said the party is beyond Anwar:

Azizah: It's a "Save Justice" party, [though] Anwar will be a de facto leader, the central point that will attract the masses."

Nevertheless, one question remains unanswered: Why is Anwar not a member of *Keadilan*? It is likely that deep inside Anwar's political struggle, he is still with UMNO and to join another party will obviously signal his departure from UMNO. But has Mahathir lost a charismatic deputy? Has Anwar been forgiven? Will he make a comeback? As for now, Anwar has to make himself comfortable behind bars and make use of the time to think of strategies for another political entrance.

Anwar's incarceration was and still is widely criticised by his supporters locally and abroad. The judiciary

came under fire. It was alleged to have acted under Executive influence and not within the justice of the court. Mahathir, of course, has answer to those allegations:

“If we put him under detention without trial, then we would be accused of taking action that is not compatible with modern practices. If you put him on trial, you say that the court is biased. Then the only other thing we can do is not to take action, on the basis of his being a very important person. Yet we want to uphold the idea of everyone being equal before the law. I think this can be understood.”

Abdullah Badawi – Promising Candidate

Mahathir's fourth and latest deputy, Abdullah Badawi has an affectionate name among the press and public. He is called 'Pak Lah' and he seems to be comfortable with it. Is Pak Lah the 'guy-next-door'? That's what he is seen to be. With that kind of image will he be able to lead the country and deal with the tough global wave? Abdullah had been entrusted to lead the Foreign Affairs Ministry and surely the eight years tenure (1991–1999) gave him enough experience to deal with international affairs.

After being appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah was given another big task — Home Affairs Minister. It's certainly not 'a-walk-in-the-park' kind of job. Some political enthusiasts say the Home Affairs portfolio is a training ground for Abdullah to toughen his act and to deal with risky and delicate matters such as the Internal Security Act and national security.

Dr. Mahathir gave Abdullah a 'probation' period to handle the Prime Minister's task when he left the coun-

try for about a month in February 2002. Mahathir seemed satisfied with Abdullah's performance.

Abdullah on the other hand, has been given more spotlights ever since he took charge of the country while Mahathir was away. In an interview with *The Edge*, Abdullah talked about economic issues, something he seldom does. Well, at least he made the effort.

"The blue chips represent the fundamentals. When the index rises because of the blue chips, it attracts the retail investors who start speculating on the second and third liners. That keeps pushing the all-share (Emas) index up. But investors have to ensure they do not rely solely on market rumours, otherwise they will get burned. They have to look at the fundamentals of the company in which they are investing as well."

(Abdullah Badawi, *The Edge*)

Abdullah too had to oversee the Finance Ministry which falls under Dr. Mahathir's portfolio. In the wake of Tajuddin Ramli's TRI tussle, Abdullah had his hands full in dealing with the issue. He told *The Edge*:

"It is a very demanding job. It demands a lot of your time, there are many files and papers to consider. Because public funds are involved, you feel added pressure to make the right and proper decisions. It's not that other jobs don't involve pressure, but this is different [because] you also have to be very very quick in making decisions. For instance in the TRI (Technology Resources Industries) issue. If we had waited for the issue to sort itself out, anything could have happened to the capital markets, to investor confidence.... So I had to speak to the regulators, and get to the bottom of it"

Anyone in Abdullah's position would feel the heat of critics and observers who use their best telescope to monitor his capabilities. But he should be given a chance at least to run his deputy premiership smoothly. He has proven his allegiance to UMNO although in 1987, he was in Razaleigh's stable of Team B. Abdullah retained his vice-president's post while Razaleigh and Musa were thrown out of the game. However, he was excluded from the Cabinet line-up. Razaleigh formed Semangat 46, Musa said adieu and Abdullah stayed on. Nevertheless, Abdullah was swept on to the shore while the others continued the tumultuous journey in the political ocean.

After about 4 years, 'Mr Nice Guy' proved that patience is the key to success. Again he managed to hold on to the position of UMNO vice-president in 1991. He was also appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, two years later, he lost the vice-presidency post but was given the 'golden share'; he was appointed Supreme Council member. The vice-presidency returned to him in 1996 and in 1998 when political calamity hit Anwar Ibrahim, the door opened wide for this veteran politician to move a step further. Speculation was rife that he was one of Mahathir's candidates for deputy prime minister post.

The pleasant Abdullah was given the mandate by Dr. Mahathir and from then on Abdullah sits on the delicate seat and has to balance his act on thin ice as the No. 2 man in Malaysia's leadership. The New Straits Times Group Editor-in-Chief, Abdullah Ahmad, who was a politician, believed Abdullah would be able to shoulder the weight given to him despite his 'Mr Nice' image. He told *The Edge*:

"The PM himself has said that Pak Lah's style will be different. I have no doubt the PM is committed to him and Pak Lah is the safest man to have as DPM. He is popular... give him time — he has his strengths and he will find his own niche. People underestimate him at their own peril."

Let us just wait and see how Abdullah Badawi manoeuvres his way through the maze. Whether he finds his way easily or has a tough time doing so, is too soon to predict. After all Dr. Mahathir is still around and he is full of surprises.

Economic Injection

The Malays especially in the rural areas are fond of subsidy. To them they deserve government subsidy and without it they will start having problems and create a lot of noise. To say that the Malays could not have achieved economic independence without government's assistance, would have irked the country's largest ethnic group. However, the formation of The National Economic Policy (NEP) after the 1969 race riots is sufficient to reflect the Malays reliability on the government to spur on their economic achievement. The Malays are by no means less enterprising than the Chinese. Having proven their economic and business skills during the powerful Melaka Sultanate, Malays can be at par with Chinese as far as business is concerned.

"There is little doubt that the Malays were exclusively involved in marketing, petty trading, importing and exporting and even manufacturing in the early Malay sultanates. There were skilled Malays craftsmen, artisans and skilled labourers. Except for a much smaller population and a more limited area, economic life went on very much the way it now goes on despite the fact that there were no Chinese." *(Malay Dilemma)*

Perhaps, complacency, a trait often used to describe the Malays, could be one of the factors which determine the lack of interest to improve their livelihood without the governments intervention.

Malays in the pre-NEP era were more comfortable as farmers and government servants. Their passion for farming could possibly be due to the Malays strong bonding with their soil, particularly if the piece of land is a family heirloom or better known as *tanah pusaka*. It is difficult to part with *tanah pusaka* even if otherwise they can have better returns. Thus most rural Malays would hold strongly to their ancestral legacy — harvesting the soil. As a result, the Malays then were less prominent economically.

Besides interest in agriculture, the Malays were much involved in government's machinery, working as government servants. Jobs at government departments gave security unlike venturing into business. Apart from monthly salary, there were other benefits such as pensions and government's housing loan scheme.

Under Mahathir's leadership, many new Malay corporate players were born and nurtured. The NEP has certainly helped Malay entrepreneurs to develop their business acumen and prove their abilities in handling big conglomerate which they could only dream of before. Malaysia's huge companies were associated with, among others, Tan Sri Halim Saad, Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah and Tan Sri Tajuddin Ramli. Many of these rising corporate chiefs are said to be politically connected or the more favourite term 'cronies'.

Cronyism since mid 90's has also been a favourite ammunition for those opposing the government. The opposition party has been having fun using the crony is-

sue to undermine Mahathir's administration. Even the *kampung* folks were beginning to talk about *kroni* at the coffee shops. Little did they realise that most of them have been government's cronies indirectly by asking for subsidies and government-aided projects. They might not get millions of ringgit each but the financial aid was given because of their support for the government.

Once at an UMNO General Assembly, Mahathir presented a 'surprise gift' by revealing a list of companies and the shareholders. Of course that helped shut the mouth of some people who had been crying loudly about cronyism. That was another slick move by the PM to counter accusation thrown at him and the government. "Mahathir referred to the need for qualified people when he told UMNO members not to harbour ill feelings against Malays who had done well, especially those who had benefited from privatisation. Before they were awarded projects, they had already proven their ability to run big operations. No doubt, this claim was correct in some cases, but sometimes, although a firm might have had experience in handling big projects, it might not have been the same kind of projects." (R.S Milne & Diane K.Mauzy). Foreign foes particularly the media had a field day writing about the cronyism issue.

Among all the players, Halim Saad was the most frequently connected to UMNO's business venture. Halim was one of the directors appointed for Hatibudi Sendirian Berhad, incorporated in 1984. He then rose through the ranks and became the Executive Chairman of Renong. Renong has been actively involved in many projects in various fields of investment. However well-connected it may be, Renong could not escape the effects of the economic crisis. The 1997 economic turmoil

plunged the big conglomerate into debts. In November 1997, Renong received financial aid from its subsidiary, United Engineers (UEM), at the alarming amount of RM2.4 billion.

In an exclusive interview with *The Edge* after the formation of TIME dotCom with Halim as its managing director, he was asked if "it is preferable for Renong to recover with the market instead of with the government aid...". Halim defensively said: "We did not get government aid. The government helped us to develop a scheme. The PLUS bonds were pledged against its 'cash flow.'" He added that Renong is still recovering. According to Halim, Renong was on the road to recovery after the PLUS bonds were issued, "...it was easier for us. That gave us time to create value (within the group)." (*The Edge, Jan 24, 2000*)

That was history... at least for now Halim and Tajuddin are only names that once graced Malaysia's corporate who's who. Whether they will make a prominent comeback is too soon to tell. But with Mahathir still at the helm of the country, anything can happen.

Much has been discussed, locally and abroad, of Dr. Mahathir-support and UMNO back-up business empire in Malaysia. However, it is sad to see that some sectors have been overlooked in the race towards corporate achievements. Agricultural and food sector for example has been neglected. Only recently when Malaysia was hard hit by the financial crisis, many realised how much money could actually be saved if the country were to develop the agricultural sector.

"Prior to Independence, the Malaysian economy was based pre-dominantly on the primary sector and on

international trade which became more than a device for optimum allocation of resources (Lim, 1994). In 1957, the primary sector, consisting of agriculture and mining was a major contributor to GDP as well as employment — generating 45.7 per cent and 61.3 per cent of GDP and total employment, respectively. Agriculture, involving principally of rubber cultivation and, to a limited extent palm oil plantation, rice cultivation, fishery and forestry activities were the most important economic activities, then, accounting for 39.3 per cent and 58.3 per cent of the GDP and unemployment respectively. Mining (mainly tin mining) contributed 6.4 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively (Fong, 1989)."

(Okposin, A. Halim A. Hamid, Ong Hway Boon)

However, from 1960's to 1980's the country's economic activities moved heavily towards manufacturing. This is because the agriculture sector did not provide substantial growth impetus for the overall economy.

Exports of manufactured goods, in ringgit terms, continued to increase although at a slower annual rate of 12.5% to RM173.2 billion during the first eight months of 1999, against an increase of 40.7% during the corresponding period of 1998 to RM153.9 billion. However, valued in United States dollar terms (US\$), manufactured exports rose sharply by 17.6% (January-August 1998: -10.1%). The strong recovery in exports in US\$ terms is attributed to rising external demand for semiconductors as well as electronic equipment and parts arising from the continued growth of the US economy and the turnaround of the East Asian economies.

(Source: 1999/2000 Economic Report)

In the 1990's input in the agricultural sector declined — also due to the economic crisis beginning 1997.

"Moreover output in the agriculture sector declined by 4 per cent in 1998 as a result of lower production of all major commodities. Also, the sector was undermined by lower external demand that was aggravated by inclement weather, labour shortages, unfavorable prices, reduced cultivated areas and lower use. In contrast, output in the mining sector rose marginally by 0.8 per cent due entirely to the higher output of crude petroleum and gas as well as the turn around in tin production, in response to the favourable price in the commodity."

(*ibid*)

In 1997, Malaysia imported RM704 million worth of rice and RM800 million on temperate vegetables. The total food import for that year stood at a mammoth figure of RM10 billion. Malaysia is a net importer of food, both in natural as well as processed forms. And although the government has taken steps to increase domestic food production, the value of food imports has been rising steadily, from RM3.5 billion in 1985 to RM7.7 billion in 1995 and RM10 Billion in 1997. Malaysia currently produces 72 per cent of its rice needs, above the 65 per cent that the policy-makers set as the self sufficiency level. It makes up for the shortfall through imports.... In fact, Malaysia is seen by some as a high-cost producer of rice because of high labour costs and the subsidies which amount to more than half a billion ringgit a year (fertiliser subsidy of RM100 million and price subsidy of RM450 million). (*The Edge, February 22, 1999*)

Surely, the financial crisis beginning that year aggravated the amount spent on currency exchange because of a large demand on imported food.

Because rice is the traditional staple diet of Malaysians, a larger production of rice locally is required to cater for this demand which is expected to increase by 25 per cent by the year 2010. If the government feels it will not likely be able to meet the escalating demand in the years to come, perhaps the Agriculture Ministry can promote "Eat Less Rice" campaign. After all in this modern and IT age, one requires less energy because a lot of things are computerised and motorised. The habit of eating a large amount of rice everyday can only lead to obesity if the amount of carbohydrate taken is not converted into energy. The days of our forefathers were different. They consumed food with high amount of carbohydrate such as rice because of the energy needed to plough the land, harvest the agriculture produce and sometimes walk several kilometres to get to a destination. Those were the laborious days of old but now life is more luxurious, though not necessarily in monetary terms.

"The first Industrial Master Plan 1985-95 identified food processing as a priority area for industrial development. The Second Industrial Master Plan 1996-2005 focused on increasing competitiveness through strengthening industrial linkages, both forward and backward, enhancing value-added activities, and increasing the productivity of the manufacturing sector, especially in food products."

(The Edge, 22 February, 1999)

In the 1999/2000 Economic Report, however, incen-

tives are given to food production. In an effort to increase food supplies, the Government has provided additional incentives by extending the Reinvestment Allowance (since 1996 Budget) to include the production of essential food items. It also provides exemption of import duties on specific equipment and inputs that would be directly used in the production of food on commercial or group enterprise basis. Dana Pertanian has also been launched to provide financing for agriculture projects valued between RM50,000 to RM3 million. An additional allocation of RM100 million was made to Dana Pertanian over and earlier allocation of RM300 million.

(Source: 1999/2000 Economic Report, p.124)

Perhaps it is high time Malaysia modernise its food and agro-based industries to meet its population demands for such products and to help stabilise the industrial sector which is laden with "non-food" production. The agriculture experts in Malaysia should be more aggressive in finding new ways to develop the agriculture sector in the country. Don't tell me they are waiting for the prime minister to think of better ways to develop the agro industry.

"Its (agriculture) estimated contribution to GDP in 1998 is 11.8 per cent, way below the 35.4 per cent share of the manufacturing sector. Output growth for agriculture has also been on a downward trend — falling 1.1 per cent in 1995, 2.2 per cent in 1996, 1.7 per cent in 1997 and 5.9 per cent last year."

(The Edge, Feb 22, 1999)

Malaysians' demand for certain poultry products, especially chicken, and the import of chicken feed from

countries such as the United States, has caused fluctuation in the price of chicken. It is amazing to note that the price of chicken has drawn much attention besides the stock market. However, the country is said to have reached 100 per cent self-sufficiency level for poultry.

In early 1999, the outbreak of Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Nipus virus caused the shortage of pork and prices of chicken, fish and meat increased significantly. Sales of chicken in Peninsular Malaysia increased by almost 50% from 800,000 to 1.2 million birds per day.

(Source: 1999/2000 Economic Report)

Another measure to boost the productivity of agro-products is through the involvement of the corporate sector. The Prime Minister should advise big companies with access to a large amount of capital to become more involved in agriculture and food production. In comparison to small-scale farmers, these companies will be able to modernise their venture and help farmers in research and development (R&D). Two companies which have shown initiative in developing the sector are Sime Darby and Nestle. Agriculture is not a new venture for Sime Darby, as it has been involved in palm oil activities for a long time now it is venturing into vegetables farm.

“One big private sector which recently announced that it is making inroads into the food sector in direct response to the government’s call to increase food production is the Sime Darby group. Its subsidiary, Sime Aerogreen Technology Sdn Bhd, will grow vegetables aeroponically at its RM13 million farm in Seremban. The technology, which involves suspending vegetable roots in air, allows temperate vegetables to be grown

here all year round and became commercially viable only recently with the research support of Singapore's Nanyang University."

(The Edge)

Nestle, on the other hand, has always been an international food-giant, thus its farming activity help boost the income of farmers.

It (Nestle) currently has a 12hectar experimental coffee farm in Kedah to provide technical assistance and direct market opportunities for smallholders. In 1996, it embarked on a contract-growing project for chillies in Kelantan for Maggi Chilli Sauce.

The Third National Agriculture Policy will hopefully develop the industry and help Malaysia increases its food sufficiency.

Foreign Investment

"Indeed in Dr. Mahathir's vision there would appear to be good foreigners and bad ones. The good seek to profit from helping Malaysians, the bad by impoverishing people. While it was Dr. Mahathir who articulated these sentiments, they are generally shared by his countrymen. The result is an understanding among Malaysians – opposition-party supporters included – that friendly foreigners who build factories and bring in expertise should be encouraged."

(Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 December 1999)

In terms of economic gains abroad, Mahathir sees opportunity even in third world countries, some hardly known. Seeing the possibility of developing business relationship with these countries, Mahathir would bring

along an entourage of Malaysian businessmen in his visits to these countries. The business community participation in the prime minister's visits secured business deals, with Malaysia capitalising on selected field of expertise. In comparison to some other developing countries, Malaysia is able to boost its technological know-how and business success.

Mahathir welcomes foreign investment that benefit the country and its people in the long run but not those with tendency to make sudden profits and disappear. In a speech at the World Economic Forum (October 1999) he said:

"My country is not against foreign equity investors. But we value the direct foreign investor who helps us build our productive capacities much more than the foreign equity investor who in his search for quick investment returns fly hither and thither to so-called quality. But we do value the foreign equity investor who is in for the longer haul, who shows interest in the business he invests in and not just the Stock Market Index."

Today we can see international multi national companies re-locating their ventures to Malaysia and many American and European companies are also positioning themselves in Malaysia for global market businesses. Nevertheless, Mahathir realises the consequences of the influx of foreign investment. For him, besides business opportunity, the interest of the people should be protected.

"By all means, bombard us with advice. Bombard us with facts. But please allow us to act as we think appropriate for our circumstances and for the achievement of our goals. Please allow us to decide on our

national and societal priorities. And please allow us to devise the most legitimate and productive ways by which these goals can be achieved. Please do not define cronyism as anything done for our people and our country. Nor should liberalism be translated into neglecting the interest of our people and our country in favour of foreigners."

(World Economic Forum, 18 October 1999)

However, the prime minister detests with passion the manipulation of free market which has robbed other countries of their prosperity.

"Malaysia believes the free market has been abused by the currency traders and the short-term capitalists. They have been profiteering. And Malaysia does not see any reason why we should adhere faithfully to the free market when the profiteers are not subscribing to the original intention of the free market. We subscribed to the free market because of the results it promised. Now we see that not only are the promises not being achieved but whatever little had been achieved had been systematically destroyed by the same free market system. What we did to frustrate the profiteers, the rogue traders, the stock market manipulators is something that everyone would have resorted to if not for the fear of being labelled heretic and burnt at the International Stakes. If, as we reasoned it, the cause of the economic turmoil was the deliberate devaluation of our currency and depression of our share market, then we just have to stop it any way we can. As a doctor I have been taught to eliminate the cause in order to cure the patient. By preventing Malaysian currency in whatever form from falling into the hands of currency traders, deliberate manipulation of our exchange rate become impossible. Thus Gov-

ernment regained the right to determine the exchange rate.”

Though loudly protecting the right of the country, Mahathir can still be considered as an advocate of foreign relations with his well-known foreign policies. ‘The Look East Policy’ for example switched the country’s focus, or more so the Prime Minister’s focus, to Japan although the Look East policy also included South Korea. But somehow Japan is more frequently linked to the policy:

“Once the government had decide to give some guidance to the people as to what they should copy, it was not difficult to choose an appropriate role model. The rags-to-riches story of Japan, and to some extent South Korea, was well known. After conducting a meticulous preparatory study on the matter, we officially embarked on our Look East Policy in late 1981, aiming to learn and emulate useful elements from, mainly, the Japanese business culture.”

(A New Deal for Asia)

Japan was selected for its many traits, particularly in business and work culture, that could serve as a role model to Malaysians. Japanese discipline, diligence, good work ethics, among others, captured the interest of Mahathir. He wishes for the people of Malaysia to emulate the positive attitudes of Japanese.

The Malaysia Incorporated concept was also conceptualised based on the Japanese model whereby the business sector works closely with the government.

Mahathir’s Look East Policy after being introduced in the early 1980s was still scrutinised by foreign media. *Time* magazine in its June 15 1998 issue wrote an article,

"Role Model from Hell – By imitating Japan, Malaysia may be headed for economic disaster". This time around the policy was associated to Asian financial crisis which claimed many victims in the region."

"Had the policy been confined to copying the best of Japan — the work ethic, the focus on technology, the emphasis on education — Malaysia would be one of the pillar economies standing firm above the rubble of Asian financial crisis. Unfortunately, Malaysia went too far. It imitated not only the frugal, hardworking Japan of the 1960s and 70s, but also Japan of the bubble era. Malaysian banks lent too much too quickly, the property market overheated, a lot questionable investments were made, and the stock market became speculative.'

(Time, June 15 1998)

How much the policy has transformed Malaysia, particularly in work habit, is difficult to gauge. Malaysians could be as dedicated and disciplined as the Japanese. However, owing to the Malaysians' different approach and style towards their lifestyle and work, it is difficult to change the habits that have long since been embedded. Nonetheless, in terms of Japanese investment, it has certainly increased tremendously. Large Japanese corporations, such as the electronic giant Matsushita, poured their capital into Malaysia. This has provided many job opportunities and technology transfer to the citizens although some quarters argued otherwise.

"Like the Japanese, we must be hard working, innovative and should have this culture of willing to venture into new fields."

(NST, 30 March 2002)

According to a Japanese diplomat, Dr. Mahathir has visited the Land of the Sun Rising so often that even the Japanese are familiar with him and admire his ability. Dr. Mahathir was even given a newspaper column to share his thoughts with the Japanese. The Japanese also steal the Premier's heart by showing high values and integrity.

"When we looked West we did not want to pick up everything, but obviously some of the things we did not want were also picked up in the process... but of late we have noticed that bad habits are on the ascent in the case of the West. They have now very little regard for religion, their moral values, and therefore we think we should insulate ourselves against such things and we need to balance it. Now in the case of Japan, it is true they are not very religious, but their cultural values are akin to the kind of morals and ethics that we have in this country or would like to acquire in this country. They may not be praying all the time, but the philosophy they have... their philosophy in trade, for example, profit is not everything. The welfare of their employees is important. They do not have this great class difference that you find in the West (where) in a factory the executive will never sit down in the same canteen."

(Asiaweek, 23 September, 1983)

The Look East Policy has given much benefits to Malaysia. Japanese investment came pouring in 1986 when investment laws were liberalised allowing foreigners to own up to 100 percent of certain manufacturing ventures. The Malaysian government approved more than US\$3.7 billion worth of investment from the Japanese between 1987 and 1991.

Perhaps, Mahathir was also sending a signal to the

West that he could change from the usual exit and drive forward to a new promising destination. Again the man is full of wisdom when explaining his actions:

"Well, let us say in the past we looked to the West to get new knowledge, to learn about technology, about the methods of production, even systems. They are all Western systems. This was what we looked at because at that time the West was very successful... so successful they conquered the whole world. Naturally one wants to copy the successful example. Now the situation has changed somewhat, whether people like it or not, we see a competition between the Japanese method and the Western method. And in the contest, we see the Japanese have made headway while the West has not only not made headway, but appears to be regressing."

(Asiaweek, 3 September, 1983)

Unhealthy Threat

"...no race or religion should be condemned or discriminated simply because people of the same race or same religion have been involved in terrorist activities."

Most of us are aware of the 7-11 store. In Malaysia, particularly in the city centre, the convenience store has offer a lot of convenience for the insomniacs and party revellers to buy late night snacks and six-packs or for the early risers to get the daily newspapers. 7-11 has become a global store whereas 9-11 has become a global nightmare. Yes, 9-11 as a result of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 has been some kind of a new branding campaign for terrorism. If it is the launch of an advertising campaign, then the advertiser has certainly done a marvellous job and has created an advertising forte to be remembered for a long time by the majority of the world's population. How much is the cost of the campaign? A bomb!

On a more serious note, let us view the WTC event as an eye-opener. It was such a heartless act to commit

mass murder on the innocents by flying the aircrafts right onto the building just as it is heartless and heedless to launch missile attacks and hit thousands of homes and innocent children. While we condemn such daring but inhumane act of terrorism to on Big Apple's prominent landmark and the Pentagon, we didn't shout anti-terrorist slogan earlier at the massacre of innocent people in Bosnia-Herzegovina or the war in Iraq. Some people and nations have been actively fighting for the cause but we did not take heed of their struggle.

During the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) on Terrorism on April 1, 2002, Prime Minister Mahathir again made himself heard by pressing hard for the need to solve terror through global endeavour.

"But we have always been ambiguous regarding terrorism in other countries as not really terrorism but as the legitimate struggle of people against their oppressive governments or alien rule. As long as it happens to other people, we do not believe we should do anything. Certainly, we do not feel a need for universal effort to fight against terrorism. But we know now that no country is safe, no one is safe."

However Dr. Mahathir's suggestion that "armed attacks against civilians should be regarded as terrorism and the perpetrators of such acts, terrorists" was not well received by some delegates and certain members of the media. He responded:

"But apparently people find it difficult to accept that definition. I am not insisting that my definition must be accepted. I am just proposing something for the meeting to discuss."

Dr. Mahathir further explained that any attacks on

civilians should be considered as terrorism whether it is done by Israelis or Palestinians.

“The Palestinians may feel justified to act in such a way (suicide bombing) but that does not mean that it is not an act of terror.”

“We must identify the cause of the bitterness and anger and we must remove these causes. I don't think people want to blast themselves to death simply because they enjoy doing so. These are the acts of the desperate, acts of people who see no way to redress their grievances, to alleviate their sufferings. We cannot just dismiss them as senseless perverts who enjoy terrorising people. If we want to stop new acts of terrorism we will have to attend to the causes of the bitterness and anger and try to eliminate them.”

The 9-11 incident made famous the al-Qaeda movement led by Osama bin Laden. Consequently Osama became an internationally known figure and to some people he is a hero. The long-bearded man with turban suddenly adorned posters and even T-shirts with Osama's face were selling like hot cakes, thanks to the enterprising opportunists. Whether he is guilty of the attack or busy counting the royalty from the merchandise sales, is anyone's guess. Whether he is still alive and plotting new strategies or resting in peace is a jigsaw puzzle, which has yet to be completed. All we have is a missing link.

Malaysia, unfortunately was not allowed to remain calm and peaceful (though Malaysians are still happily enjoying the peace in Mahathir-administered country) by the West. It was accused of harbouring terrorist networks and providing a 'launch pad' for terrorist attacks.

Again, the Western media had a field day writing and riding on the accusation. *Time* magazine apologised to the PM for its report and courteously invited Dr. Mahathir to write an article for the magazine which will be 'prominently highlighted'.

Speaking at a press conference at the end of his four-day visit to Russia in March 2002, Dr. Mahathir considered the offer by *Time* attractive and said, "I may consider." Dr. Mahathir should accept the gesture and let the world listen to his wise words through an international publication and help boost sale of the magazine.

On the other hand, US Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Robert S. Mueller during a visit to Malaysia in early March said that Malaysia was not the launch pad for terrorist attacks. In fact, according to Mueller Malaysia has been co-operative with the US in exchanging information on terrorism before and after September 11.

"He (Mueller) says what we have done (co-operating with the US on terrorism), we have done even before Sept 11, which means that we are doing these things on our own."

At the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Dr. Mahathir said that terrorism has been around even before the big 'hooha' of post-September 11. Nonetheless the *modus operandi* was different and the injury and damage was not as extensive as now.

"Terrorism, we all know, has always been with us. It is not a new phenomenon. What is new is that newer and more diabolical ways have been used in order to kill and injure people and to achieve more spectacular damage."

"It is a crime against the world no matter who or what or which country has been or being targeted."

And again the premier urged the United Nations to take charge and solve the issue in a bigger world stage.

"It is difficult for the world to unite against terrorists when there is ambiguity and double standard. We have to have only one standard."

However, there are always two sides of the same coin. For every action there is a reaction, according to Newton's theory. Again in a very frank and straight forward way, Mahathir asked the Muslims not to be irrational and have a wrong misconception of *jihad* or holy war. He added that those who indulge in what they think as *jihad* could be misguided, thus achieve nothing from their acts. It was just anger and bitterness that stimulate them into committing the violence.

Dr. Mahathir should know well enough to talk about the way Muslims resort to aggression because his country has dealt with extremist Muslims. The *al-maunnah* led by a former army personnel with members ranging from civil servants to professionals was the crux of the incident in Sauk, in the state of Perak. The group armed with weapons stolen from an army camp can be described as the biggest threat by the Malaysian Muslim extremist group after the *al-arqam* in the 80's. However, the *al-arqam* was nothing compared to *al-maunnah*. It must be noted that the *al-arqam* was smarter and remained in existence for a long time before the group was disbanded. At least the *al-arqam* members did not rob military weapons, instead they were enterprising and built a self-reliant community.

Another group *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia* or KMM is another Islamic-linked extremist group. It even has the Kelantan state minister's son as its member. In an interview with *Al-Jazeera* network, the PM was asked if it was true the US asked Malaysia "to rid the country of PAS", he said :

"The US did not ask us to do such a thing. I feel PAS too does not support the actions of some of its young members, including Nik Aziz's son. The action is committed by a number of the party's young members, that's the information we received. Therefore, there is no reason why we should rid the country of the party. We are a democratic government; they have a right to form a party and express their views. That is why we leave it to the people to choose the government."

In his diplomatic way of defending the right of PAS to exist as UMNO's opposition, Dr. Mahathir somehow turned the issue to PAS, "...I think PAS made up the story purposely to cultivate hatred among the *rakyat* (people) towards the government.

In the same interview, the issue of *ulama* (clergy) was brought up. Dr. Mahathir dismissed talks of anti-*ulama*.

"...I do not make enemies of all *ulama*. Nevertheless there are some *ulama* who have views that can adversely affect the development of the *ummah* (nation). For example there are those whose views are that we should only pursue religious knowledge and secular knowledge is not necessary as it has nothing to do with religion."

He added that some *ulama* are not genuine and their religious knowledge is shallow.

“These *ulama* are not the authority. They are the political *ulama*. They have joined the opposition parties and those who do not represent their interests have been accused of being not knowledgeable.”

The resurgence of extremism and ‘bogus’ Muslim *jihad* fighters within and without Malaysia has certainly posed a challenge to Dr. Mahathir. The advancement of information technology and globalisation which he has been promoting, has been a stimulant for the extremists and terrorists to achieve their agenda easier and faster. The world has become ‘borderless’ and so do violence and terrorism.

Global Job

“What we want to see is a proper interpretation of globalisation, and globalisation that is regulated. There is no reason why there should be anarchy with globalisation that is not regulated at all.”

Dr. Mahathir realises the importance of globalisation. He opens Malaysia's door as large as possible to foreign participation around the world. However, globalisation has its setbacks, especially where trade is concerned. M.S.Dobbs-Higginson in *'Asia Pacific: A View on its role in the New world Order'* said that foreign participation in terms of trade and economic could determine the dominance of one country onto another. Dobbs-Higginson's view helps to further enhanced Mahathir's fear on the adverse effects of globalisation: 'The struggle for power is now focused on the arena of trade and economics, rather than on military strength. It is significant that two of the most powerful players in this new game, Germany and Japan, are the two nations demilitarised after the last world war. The battle is one between attempts to dominate markets, now that the ideological barriers are down almost everywhere, and those

at ensuring that free trade can flourish.... The disputes likely to arise from this increasingly complex equation will all have their roots in a fundamental paradox: people and companies, want to be able to buy goods from the global market at the lowest price — yet people want to protect their own jobs, and companies their own markets. These two opposing sides of any economic equation inevitably lead to friction, and will probably lead to the next form of cold war — namely, trade wars on a global scale replacing the previous balance of military tension between the Pentagon and the Kremlin.’

Another area of concern is the advancement of information technology which Mahathir has been giving much attention and interest. The Informations and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities are somehow being used by some people for the wrong reasons. But it is rather late to turn back. Malaysia has to face the fact that globalisation cannot be avoided. Nevertheless, it can still be controlled. In his book “A New Deal for Asia” Dr. Mahathir wrote:

“Contrary to the way I am often portrayed, I do believe in globalisation and the liberalisation of trade, and in dismantling national laws and rules which hamper trade and cross-border capital flows. But surely the liberalisation and deregulation of national economies should not result in exposure to an anarchic world. If globalisation and open markets are to contribute to true growth and enrichment of people, there must be certain regulations and mechanisms or laws for everyone to observe.”

Former Malaysia’s Special Envoy to the United Nations (now Group Editor-in-Chief of The New Straits

Times), Abdullah Ahmad, wrote in the *Business Times* on 17 March 1999 on "Global Economic Liberalisation", echoing the Prime Minister endless attempts to express Malaysia's view on the matter:

"The people of the newly emerging economies had welcomed the end of the Cold War. However, they discovered soon enough that they had lost valuable political leverage — an alternative. All nations — particularly the smaller countries — are now at the mercy of a unipolar world. The US practically rules the universe and it does so with supreme and spectacular confidence. Today, capitalism and Washington find little need to compete for approval and acceptance. As a result, the worst aspects of the capitalist system have surfaced and we are suffering and being victimised.... Let there be a level playing field where the competitors are of equal strength — if it is at all possible. In any event, there must be morality in government and politics as well as fairness in commerce, trading and other aspects of the economy. Do not let the financial and currency crisis of 1997 become the trade crisis of the new century.... This is what I feel the picture of the future, the new century and the new millenium is going to be like. If I am right, then the result will be an erosion of hard-won independence. Neo-colonialism will have emerged in the new century — a mere half a century after the birth of freedom."

The prime minister has repeatedly urged the global authorities and communities to support the controls of globalisation and liberalisation. The Asian economic crisis for example, happened because of the free global market trading.

"Since the currency crisis began in mid-1997, I have frequently appealed for international action to stop the destructive currency trade and to discourage short-term investment in the stock market.... My views were regarded as ridiculous in a world moving rapidly towards ever greater globalisation, deregulation and liberalisation...."

Dr. Mahathir is cautious of other elements that will come together with the borderless world. Foreign and Western elements have to be sifted to ensure the Malaysian and Asian values do not weaken. "*Sudden changes in the way of doing anything are disruptive,*" reminded the premier, adding that we should always be circumspect when adopting new ways of doing things.

Nevertheless the borderless world which allows encroachment of one's territory through sometimes invisible computer system, has been the brunt of the problem. "Viruses" are no longer the traditional menace that bring diseases but in the information technology age viruses can be programmed and spread via the computers. It is too late to shift to the reverse gear and live in a more "private" life where there is some respect for privacy and territory. One logical alternative is to control and regulate, although the success rate is hard to predict.

"...The ethnic Europeans have really given up ideas about global empire. Globalisation is only to be expected as the world has shrunk. The ease of communication has made us all neighbours. We should now break down all the barriers between us, i.e. the barriers to capital flows. The barriers to technology must remain and certainly also the barriers to the migration of people. We cannot have massive migrations of people from poor countries to rich countries even though

the world is borderless. That is another thing altogether. That is not what is meant by liberalisation, globalisation and deregulation. Capital, yes. Technology and people, no."

(A New Deal for Asia)

The Prime Minister believes that Asian values can be accepted the integrated by the Western and global communities. Nevertheless Asians should not blindly accept Western substance even if the presence of Western influence is apparent in the society.

"Powerful societies are universalistic; weak societies are particularistic. The mounting self-confidence of East Asia has given rise to an emerging Asian universalism comparable to that which has been characteristic of the West. "Asian values are universal values. European values are European values," declaimed Prime Minister Mahathir to the heads of European governments in 1996. Along with this also comes an Asian "Occidentalism" potraying the West in much the same uniform and negative way which Western Orientalism allegedly once potrayed the East."

(Samuel P. Huntington)

On a working visit to France in January 2000, the prime minister met President Jacques Chirac. Dr. Mahathir was happy that France shared the anxieties and fears of developing countries about the consequences of globalisation. The prime minister said so much pressure had been created by developed countries for the world to globalise that it had come to a stage where one was regarded a heretic for disagreeing:

"There is a need for an open mind and to listen to other

people's views. Our anxieties and fears are very real. And it is not about being recalcitrant."

He regretted that the developed nations were pushing the idea of globalisation with all their might without any respect for countries which were living in fear of the consequences:

"In France, we see a lot more common views on the issue of globalisation than in other developed countries."

He said the problem was globalisation is only limited to freedom for capital to cross borders and to buy anything that money could buy, at the same time stifling competition among smaller companies.

"It would seem that globalisation is leading towards oligopoly where only larger companies from developed nations dominate various areas of the economy."

(NST, January 30, 2000)

Dr. Mahathir in supporting new technologies and foreign participation in Malaysia is also worried of decadence and depleting value systems particularly among the younger generations. The internet, for example, has been widely used by Malaysians to spread malicious rumours about the prime minister and the establishment. In spite of his far-sightedness, Mahathir probably failed to look carefully on the use of the internet to the government's detriment.

M.S. Dobbs-Higginson was of the opinion that value system would diminish in the borderless free trade world.

"Until recently, conflict between different value systems – whether religious, ethnic or political — has

helped to maintain the world in some form of balance. However, today and over the next, say, thirty years, with the demise of the superpower ideological confrontation, with the apparent weakening of religious beliefs (excluding extremist fundamentalist Islam and Hinduism), and with capitalism, particularly in its more extreme free market economy form, becoming the driving force in the industrialised and newly industrialised world, such a defined value system is no longer available. What will provide this new trade-focused, capitalistic world with a sense of moral purpose and a new form of democratic governing process?"

Foreign Policy – Success & Failure

The Mahathir era has witnessed the introduction of a substantial number of foreign policies- politically and economically. Though not all policies are successful, at least Malaysia is seen as an active third world country. At the same time many developing nations, for example those from the African continent, Central and Northern Europe, have become closer to Malaysia after numerous visits by the Prime Minister to enhance bilateral ties and establish or increase trade . In turn, leaders of other countries have also made their way to Malaysia to seek opportunities in various field.

In a recent visit to Russia in March, Dr. Mahathir played the right tune that even the national anthem, *NegaraKu*, was heard at the Bolshoi Theatre. According to news report, 'the chemistry' between the Malaysia's premier and President Vladimir Putin was clearly evident. Dr. Mahathir believed Russia could return to its past glory and Putin could restore the greatness of the

once great power. Dr. Mahathir was full of praises for the new President and the changes in the 'new' country:

"Moscow certainly did not look as bright and full of shops as it does now. What we are seeing today is the result of the changes from 1986 to 2002. There have been tremendous changes both in the attitude of the people in their understanding of the free market and the prospect of democracy."

Stronger relationships with other third world members create a greater support for Malaysia particularly in the United Nations. As prime minister, Mahathir uses the UN platform to voice his opinions to a global audience. Mahathir's strong criticism of several UN policies and actions, has resulted in some achievements in the UN.

Among the notable achievements is that Malaysia was elected to the Security Council as the Asian non-permanent representative in 1988 and secured the seat again for another year (1999-2000). Another 'pat on the back' for Malaysia was when a Malaysian, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, became the President of UN General Assembly.

Razali is now the special Envoy of the UN for Myanmar and negotiated the release of Myanmar's democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, from the country's military junta.

"While strongly objecting to the composition of the UN Security Council and the veto power of the permanent members, Malaysia has been very supportive of UN in general. Mahathir, in his address to the 50th session of the UN General Assembly, concluded that it is still the only truly multinational organisation where the 'voices of small nations can be heard'."

(Milne & Mauzy)

At the regional level, Mahathir was instrumental in introducing the East Asian Economic Group (EAEG) which was later, upon Indonesia's suggestion, changed to East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC).

EAEC was introduced as an alternative to Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and to be in the league with New Zealand and Australian Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU). EAEC provides an avenue for Asian countries to pool their voices and strengthen economic development in the international arena. However, the real success of EAEC, within and beyond Asian, is left to be seen.

Nevertheless, priority accorded to the economic dimensions of foreign policy was stressed in Malaysia's dealings with ASEAN as far back as 1985. That year at a meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and ASEAN Economic Ministers (both of which were held in Kuala Lumpur) member states were urged by Dr. Mahathir to accelerate economic co-operation and exploit the massive market opportunities on their doorsteps.

However, in April 2002, Dr. Mahathir told a group of foreign journalists covering the Special Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers that the "Asean Plus Three" [Asean + 3 (Japan, South Korea, China)] would eventually advance into EAEC.

"As to China forming a free trade association with Asean, that is something that we have to discuss."

During his visit to Germany in March 2002, Dr. Mahathir said East Asia and the three trading partners - Japan, South Korea and China - would approach the is-

sue of free trade zone very cautiously. In his wry humour, Dr. Mahathir said ASEAN would monitor Europe's performance before dipping their fingers:

"If you fall flat on your faces, then there won't be any free trade zone for us."

At The World Economic Forum in October 1999, the Prime Minister did not deny that Asia has learnt from Europe and the United States in its quest to invent and re-invent itself. However, Mahathir believed that Asia has its own unique way and various formula of achieving the "Asian miracle".

"We have achieved whatever we have achieved according to the 'Sinatra Principle'. We have all done it our own way. This was because, despite bouts of insanity, infatuation and detours into the blind alley of ideological dogmatism, we place the very highest emphasis in the final analysis on pragmatism — on doing what works. Not on doing what is fashionable. Not on doing what the text-books say we must do. Not on sheepishly following the very clever and with-it advice of others who so obviously have all the answers. Not on holding through thick and thin to the holy scriptures and stipulations. But on simply finding what works and on doing what works with dogmatic determination. If our success over the last generation has been achieved because of our devotion to doing what works — often contrary to the popular advice and admonition of those who so obviously know better and despite the threat of divine retribution — I believe that our success in the future will continue to be dependent on our devotion to pragmatism, to doing what works for us — for our own unique economies and for our own unique societies."

Nevertheless, Malaysia sought to strengthen its trade links with both China and Europe. Controls on business contracts with China were liberalised and joint ventures were predicted to expand (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 July 1985). As early as 1985 the Prime Minister has already embarked on a trade promotion tour to Austria, Finland, Norway and Denmark, while the Foreign Minister visited Czechoslovakia, West Germany, Portugal and Belgium. Displaying his concern for the economic dimensions of foreign policy, Dr. Mahathir personally attended the International Monetary Conference.

The trade-based foreign policy was seen as turning Malaysia into a major centre. An emphasis on counter trade continued, with countries such as Pakistan and China, for example, agreeing not to buy Malaysian commodities via Singapore. Another element of economic relations became clearer when new foreign-investment rules appeared to liberalise some rigidities that had kept foreign equity holdings in new investment project pegged at 30%.

Meanwhile, Mahathir's global aspirations projected Malaysian foreign-policy concerns into hitherto unknown areas. His initiative to internationalise the Antarctic (replacing the 1959 Antarctic Treaty) and his willingness to give aid to (and visit) faraway countries are but two instances of Malaysia venturing into areas where little or no direct interest was earlier thought existing. Some saw Kuala Lumpur's development aid to Western Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Maldives and African countries fall into this category. All this activity kept Foreign Ministry officials busy during the years, complicating, though sometimes complementing.

High visibility and mobility continued to be Malay-

sian foreign policy trademarks as Prime Minister Mahathir consolidated his reputation as the Kuala Lumpur's most travelled politician. During frequent trips abroad (taking him to Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asian countries) the Malaysian leader strove to become recognised as the spokesman for global and third world interests. In fact he is also regarded as 'The Salesman' for Malaysia by promoting the country in its various capacities.

Dr. Mahathir addressed an imposing array of topics, from political liberty in the Third World and Western "ethical degradation and moral decadence" to social responsibility and media. He offered views about the nature of world politics — "*sentiments, friendship and past associations have very little to do with the relationship between nations,*" he told the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, his ideas about Soviet intentions in the Far East.

After Malaysia was hit by the economic and currency turmoil in 1997, Dr. Mahathir took every opportunity to lament the unscrupulous traders for their activities, which impoverished others particularly Asian countries. The international monetary and economic bodies were not spared from Mahathir's criticisms. But he usually gives recommendations and solutions on how to tackle the economic problem which initially (such as currency control) are not taken seriously by big organisations or developing countries.

"When Argentina pegged the peso to the dollar, nobody said anything. But when we pegged the ringgit, all kinds of dire predictions were made of the collapse of our economy. But as you can see, Argentina today, is facing difficulties whereas in the case of Malaysia, people are rushing to lend us money. Our recent bond

issue was oversubscribed by three and a half times and some of those who subscribed it are the same people who had earlier condemned our move."

"The same people who had earlier condemned our move" could have been George Soros and California Pension Fund or Calpers. Soros, Dr. Mahathir's antagonist in the fight against free market, is now keen to invest in Malaysian sovereign bonds. Calpers, which withdrew from Malaysia with an allegation of corporate governance deficiency and lack of transparency in labour practices and capital market openness, made a sharp turn and expressed interest in the bonds. Looks like 'the menace to his own country with a recipe for disaster' (Soros's reference to Dr. Mahathir & his policies in the wake of 1997 currency crisis) is having the last laugh while thinking of more ideas to upgrade his country.

Australian journalist, Tim Colebatch, wrote in *The Age* newspaper of Mahathir's '21 years leadership in 45-year old Malaysia' and commended the premier's work and struggle to bring changes:

"And those who criticise him on other issues agree that he has raised the competence of government in Malaysia, and done so by example."

In retrospect, Mahathir's foreign policy initiatives, too, were wide — ranging, from an attempt in September 1985 to solve Iran-Iraq conflict via Malaysia's membership of a special mediation committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to high-profile lobbying for international action against drug trafficking, including a call for setting up a special UN agency to combat the problem. He also became involved in foreign

policies on the regional level, reversing Malaysia's earlier acceptance of an ASEAN plan to involve five of the grouping's dialogue partners in an Asean-Pacific Cooperation (APC) exercise, directly questioning the continuing utility of ASEAN's dialogue partnership and criticising the lack of economic substance in ASEAN.

Malaysia also attached itself to the concept of ASEAN as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality — the so-called ZOPFAN concept. Central to Malaysian objectives in the region was the search for solution to the Cambodia problem. Despite initial Thai and Indonesia misgivings, this received ASEAN endorsement — and Hanoi's disdain. Malaysia's attitude towards Vietnamese intentions hardened, with the priority of supporting Thailand's territorial integrity becoming paramount in Kuala Lumpur's reactions to incursion into Thai territory by Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

Malaysia also played host to a week-long Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) from 18–24 October, 1989. The event marked a 180-degree turn in Malaysia's position towards the Commonwealth compared to 1986–87 when the Prime Minister had seriously considered pulling out. Two separate foreign policy studies had recommended against it then and Malaysia did not leave. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth remains one of Malaysia's lesser international affiliations. ASEAN still holds top priority, followed by the OIC, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the UN.

Malaysia's relation with Britain had seen some gloomy days during Mahathir's tenure. The relationship hit rock-bottom in mid-1980's when Britain raised tuition fees for foreign students. Relationship slowly thawed in

the next few years that followed when Malaysia signed a memorandum of understanding to purchase RM4.5 billion worth of defence equipment in September 1988, effectively ending the unofficial "British Last" policy. On 17 October, the eve of CHOGM, Malaysia and Britain signed an agreement to help each other investigate drug cases, convict traffickers and seize their assets.

Environment also shared the centre-stage with Apartheid as among the Commonwealth's prime concerns. Malaysia, which had previously been somewhat reticent on environmental issues, pushed for the Langkawi Declaration. The declaration called on the developed countries to shoulder equal responsibility for environmental safeguards, allowing developing countries to achieve sustainable development.

Malaysia-United States Relations

Dr. Mahathir was hardly given a warm and friendly treatment by the United States prior to his meeting with President George W. Bush in May (2002) at the Oval Office in the White House. But Dr. Mahathir's perseverance has proven fruitful — he finally made a formal visit to America and held various talks and discussions with US authority including the Congress.

The visit to the US marked a strong diplomatic achievement for Malaysia. Dr. Mahathir said, "What is clear is that there is a change in attitude." On the other hand, Bush, seemed friendlier than his successor and showed willingness to renew relation between the two countries which somehow soured during Clinton's administration:

“I’ve been looking forward to this visit to publicly thank the prime minister for his strong support in the war against terror.” The two countries also signed a Declaration on Co-operation to Combat International Terrorism which, according to Bush, “codifies our determination to strengthen counter-terrorism efforts even further”.

The Prime Minister in an interview on CNN’s Q&A programme during his visit said that Malaysia’s perception of the US has changed in the same way the US has changed its perception of Malaysia:

“Of course when the US began to show some understanding of what is happening in Malaysia, naturally we change our perception of the US as well.”

He added:

“We were critical because the US was very critical of us.”

Dr. Mahathir was telling the world that what comes around, goes around — if the US supports Malaysia then Malaysia too would support the US. Dr. Mahathir is in a way playing a psychological game alongside Bush’s administration. Mahathir knows that it is difficult to beat a powerful nation like the US. Therefore, since he could not beat them, he joined them.

It was not easy for Dr. Mahathir to have a one to one meeting with the American President. They met briefly during the APEC meeting in Shanghai. However, the 9-11 incident was a turning point in Malaysia-US bilateral ties and Dr. Mahathir became a hero for Malaysia and the Muslim countries in fighting terrorism. Suddenly, the influential US granted the visit and gladly welcomed Dr.

Mahathir and his entourage. Mahathir is smart to show similarities between Malaysia and US to create a more friendly atmosphere the two countries:

"The United States and Malaysia have many things in common, much more than most people realise. We share a common history, language, many of our values, goals and even challenges. It is appropriate, therefore, that our two flags should be so much alike that, many mistake one for the other."

To begin with, we both achieved independence from the same colonial power, from whom we inherited the same language, common law system, and principles of representative government. What you may not know is that America's success in freeing itself from British rule led directly to the colonisation of what is now Malaysia, by the very same colonialists."

(US-Asean Business Council dinner, Washington DC, May 2002)

Dr. Mahathir, again, brilliantly positioned himself and gained recognition in a foreign land. Despite his so-called 'recalcitrant' attitude, Mahathir proved that patience and determination is a good ingredient in his recipe to success

Closer to home, Malaysia's relations with Singapore continued on an even keel in the 80's with Singapore investments pouring into Malaysia's southern boom-state Johor. The single sour note amidst such cordiality cropped up over Singapore's announcement in August 1989 that it was willing to provide facilities for US ships and aircraft. In order to relieve the pressure on Philippines as the only host of US forces in ASEAN at Clark air base and Subic Bay naval base, Malaysia had not been

informed and immediately, though not stridently, protested. Nervousness was complicated by initial confusion as to whether the Singapore offer actually entailed the setting up of full-scale bases or just bunkering facilities for ships and servicing of planes.

Having received assurance first from Singapore and then from visiting US Vice-President Dan Quayle, that the US had no desire to open a new base in the region, Malaysia officially calmed down. It had in the interim, however, pointed out that the establishment of a base was against the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), of which Singapore is a member, and of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), espoused by Malaysia.

Malaysia continues its bitter-sweet ties with Singapore over the years. Several issues arise among them are the water agreement, Tanjong Pagar Immigrations, Customs and Quarantine (ICQ) and the CLOB issue and recently the land reclamation project. Although Malaysia repeatedly said CLOB is not a government to government issue, it has somehow been played up to appear as a governmental issue. And recently the water issue cropped up again. Despite Malaysia's disagreement with Singapore, both countries realise the need for each other and this involved not only the government but the people. Malaysians and Singaporeans have developed a close relationship and the governments of both countries will have to ensure any frictions between the governments will not be detrimental to the relationship of its people.

Dr. Mahathir is perhaps the only leader from this region who dares to voice displeasures with the Superpowers. He has the guts to 'blast' the world leaders for their

selfishness in several important issues. He spoke bluntly at the United Nations General Assembly, Commonwealth meetings and other world forums. And if that is not enough, Dr. Mahathir will personally talk 'face-to-face' with leaders of other countries explaining 'the firm stand of Malaysia' on various issues. He became a spokesman for developing countries. The price for — 'being blunt' has paid off. His straightforwardness caught the attention of the world.

The Wake-up Call

“I couldn’t care less if people remember me or not. What does it matter if I have made history or not when I am dead. As minister of education I forbade schools being named after living people, including myself. It’s totally irrelevant to perpetuate oneself in history. You can’t determine what kind of judgement history is going to pass on you. Even alive I find that people are passing all kinds of judgements over which I have no control.”

As much as some of us would like to imagine Malay Asia under a new leadership, totally free from ‘Mahathirism’, the country will be devoid of its attraction in global centre stage once Mahathir steps down. Unlike Mahathir, his successor can’t just croon a lullaby. He has to sing the soprano. But as for Mahathir, he can just sing any melody and still be heard. Perhaps his music is made of special composition not known to us.

However, Mahathir’s appointed successor, Abdullah Badawi, should have the experience and skills to deal with locals and foreigners. After all, he is a seasoned politician and former foreign minister. Although he has yet

to be as outspoken as his 'boss', ever since the announcement of him being the next premier, Abdullah has begun to speak more confidently and in a more stentorian voice. It's unfair to compare him to Dr Mahathir. The friendly *Pak Lah* has his own way of managing his profession and playing the political game.

Dr. Mahathir as a Prime Minister undoubtedly has achieved many goals for Malaysia in its post Independence era. Malaysia has emerged as a respected third world country and Mahathir its outspoken Prime Minister. Mahathir dares to speak his mind and doesn't seem to care about being unconventional and unpopular in his country and abroad. His voice continues to be heard and it echoes for a long time.

The Mahathir era has seen some historic political and economic transformations in the country. Mahathir, unlike his predecessors, is known for making unanticipated decisions and shocking actions. Mahathir often receives wide range criticisms. Fortunately, he seems undeterred and unaffected by the verbosity surrounding him.

In an interview 24 hours before being sworn in as Prime Minister in 1981, Mahathir said he would give forthright opinions, thus creating a different tone of voice from Malaysia.

"...Perhaps Malaysia might sound a little bit more brash, because I'm not a very nice personality. I like to speak my mind and I may offend people in the process. But apart from differences in style and abrasiveness, perhaps, there will be very little change.... Well, when I said the Europeans had become lazy, people got annoyed. I don't know why. I was just stating the truth. Most people wouldn't say it; they would agree with me, but they wouldn't say it.

But I will say it." The Prime Minister said he would even offend his own people in trying to express his views: "In a way, I've always been offending them. I have offended the Chinese, as you know, and I have offended the Malays. Because just as I tell the Chinese that they must accept the effect of multiracialism and that kind of thing, I have often told the Malays that if they want their share, they have to work for it, that there's no way they can get it for nothing."

Despite Mahathir's outspoken views and his perseverance in achieving what he deems right for his country regardless of rejections, the man has proven that he is still very much needed, at least by his countrymen. In the wee hours of 30th November 1999, Malaysians and even foreigners witnessed the fourth Prime Minister once again emerged victorious after the National Front firmly set its foot on what was seen as a fragile political ground for over a year before the elections. Mahathir, though appeared worried before the official announcement, managed to put on a relieved expression on a weary looking face. UMNO won only 72 seats compared to 88 in 1995 and the total seats for the National Front stood at 148. In 1995 the Coalition grabbed 162 seats altogether. 'Such losses for UMNO may seem small; but they do not happen often in Malaysia. Dr. Mahathir's detractors are hoping that his poor showing among Malays will weaken his standing in the ruling party.' But not so. Mahathir's vitality and determination is not easy to melt even under constant heat. The man could still smile and rule the country for the fifth term.

"Certainly he has a case to put to those who, like this newspaper, have criticised his policies while praising the reformist urges of some of his neighbours. Malay-

sia was always the odd one out of the four worst-hit Asian economies. Unlike Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, it did not have to turn to the IMF for a bail-out. And whereas leaders in the other countries have stressed the need for reform, and sought the approval of western financiers, Dr. Mahathir has railed against hedge funds and currency dealers — indeed westerners as a class, not to mention the entire international financial system. But Malaysia is also different in another respect — it has weathered the crisis without a change in government. Politically, the treatment of his former deputy and now opposition figurehead, Anwar Ibrahim, may have outraged some, but it seems not to have alienated too many voters.⁹

(The Economist, 4 December 1999)

Mahathir's voice has been heard many times in many places. But is he successful in getting the attention of other powerful nations? Mahathir is undeniably a strong leader from Asia. However, whether his views of his country, the region and the world really go through the ears of the powerful seven in G7, remains hazy. M.S.Dobb-Higginson suggested that ASEAN members expand their network beyond the grouping:

"To overcome the natural fear which small countries in the region have of the larger ones, it makes sense for a new regional community to evolve out of ASEAN, perhaps taking its momentum from Mahathir's initiative. ASEAN's combined clout is now substantially increased; combined GNP of the ASEAN countries has risen from US\$20 billion in 1965 to US\$310 billion in 1992. The major players in the area already need ASEAN to a certain extent, and will do so even more if a more protectionist world develops. Mahathir him-

self might provide the necessary leadership, especially if he can shake off the narrow-minded touchiness shown several years ago in regard to Malaysia's relations with Australia. Mahathir, though, is handicapped by the fact that Malaysia is a Muslim country, where incipient signs of Islamic fundamentalism are evidenced. Given the effects of extreme Islamic fundamentalism elsewhere, it is natural that this phenomenon in Malaysia gives the rest of the world cause for concern. The most probable and credible 'Jean Monnet' (the founder of the EEC) of the region is Lee Kuan Yew, a leader of regional and international status. Singapore, in fact, would be an excellent headquarters for such a new community forum, being politically stable, unattached to any powerful country, and personifying, more than perhaps any other country of the region, a commitment to free trade and order. However, just as leadership in the new world order cannot be provided by one single country, leadership towards an Asia Pacific community forum probably cannot be provided by one man alone...."

The search for extraterrestrial life continues to baffle exobiologists, astrobiologists or bioastronomist and yet the scientific search continues. The same analogy can be used to describe the search for Mahathir Mohamad. It is not of great significance how much we know about who he exactly is, but the uniqueness of the man makes him stand out from the rest of the political leaders. He intrigues us. He compels us, perhaps unknowingly, to read his minds and his moves. Will another 'strong' man like Mahathir appears in Malaysia's political scene is hard to tell.

In the meantime, let him continues making 'wake-up

calls' to those far and near. If not all, at least some of Mahathir's 'calls' will be answered. Mahathir Mohamad is arguably the most analysed Prime Minister ever, the most relentlessly examined, the most controversial.

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