



About the Editor

Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad is an MCKK-, Cambridge- and Harvard-educated writer, public intellectual and politician. He was Special Envoy to the United Nations between 1996 and 2000 and Editor-in-Chief cum Executive Director of the New Straits Times Group of newspapers until November 2003. He writes a column for the popular independent daily *Sinar Harian* on Sunday. Abdullah enjoys travelling, daydreaming, sleeping and a nice plate of kippers. He and his wife divide their time between Kuala Lumpur, London and Kok Lanis in Kelantan.



Dr Mahathir's **Selected Letters to WORLD LEADERS**

Dr Mahathir Mohamad governed Malaysia from 1981 to 2003, during which he wrote and received many letters from world leaders. The 71 letters presented in this volume are unique as they argue the contrasting positions on terrorism, globalisation, economic and diplomatic relations, as well as wars and conflicts. The correspondence presents a less-than-ideal world for the reader to inhabit.

The correspondents—Dr Mahathir, Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac and Prince Charles, among others—were transparent, solid, informative, and sometimes robust. Dr Mahathir writes directly, in his own distinctive voice and style. The memories they and their words leave behind are always startling.

An excellent book to be enjoyed, on many different levels, by all who love politics, diplomacy and international relations. This book was winner of the *Popular-The Star Readers' Choice Award* in 2009.

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VOL 1

Abdullah Ahmad

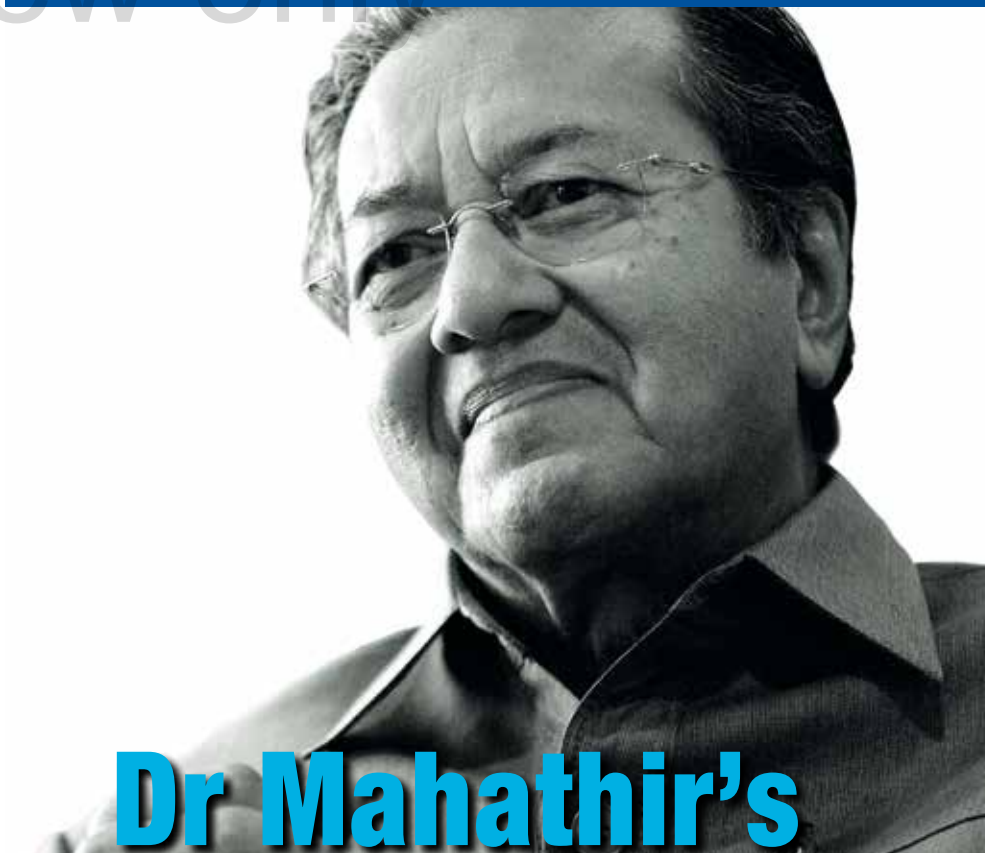
Dr Mahathir's

Selected Letters to WORLD LEADERS

Marshall Cavendish Editions

“A voice of modern Malaysia. The book and commentaries brim with insights ... an exhilarating glimpse of the words of some of the top world leaders whose actions sometimes altered history.”

— Raja Dr Nazrin Sultan Azlan Shah, Raja Muda of Perak



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Volume One

Introduction and Selected Commentaries
by Abdullah Ahmad

“This is a fine work of Malaysian diplomatic engagement. It is not easy to find anyone who can add to Tun Dr Mahathir's letters and Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad's commentaries. An excellent read for any student of Malaysian international relations.”

— S. RADHAKRISHNAN
Secretary of Malaysia Inner Temple Alumni Association

“This correspondence brings to life some painful moments when the forces of history intersect with well-known world players and change the course of events.

Irresistibly a good read.”

— TAN SRI RAMON NAVARATNAM
Chairman of ASLI, Centre of Public Policy Studies

For Review only

“A voice of modern Malaysia. The book and commentaries brim with insights ... an exhilarating glimpse of the words of some of the top world leaders whose actions sometimes altered history. A book to be celebrated.”

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— Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam
Chairman of ASLI, Centre of Public Policy Studies

“Tun Dr Mahathir’s direct style is to be savoured ... the correspondence and commentaries provide a readable introduction to diplomats, politicians and teachers as well as students. Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad introduces each chapter and some of the letters with explanations that set the situation perfectly ... an attractive volume with a straight-speaking preface by Dr Mahathir.”

— Professor Dato’ Dr Hood Mohd Salleh
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

“A compelling read. It should be translated into Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin. The letters and commentaries are unbelievably enlightening about the political complexities of international relations and Malaysia’s role in simple and clear language.”

— James Wong
Political analyst

For Review only

“The correspondence is a portrait of a period which haunts us. The book puts Tun Dr Mahathir in a new light ... an eye-opener. There is much pleasure to be derived from reading the letters and commentaries.”

— Halimah Mohd Said
Academician and writer

“Tun Dr Mahathir’s correspondence reveals him as he has never been seen by Malaysians before. The commentaries by celebrated editor, Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, put the letters in context. A must read.”

— Chan Kok Keong, *Perak Academy*

“This is a fine work of Malaysian diplomatic engagement. It is not easy to find anyone who can add to Tun Dr Mahathir’s letters and Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad’s commentaries. An excellent read for any student of Malaysian international relations.”

— S. Radhakrishnan
Secretary of Malaysia Inner Temple Alumni Association

“Tun Dr Mahathir’s reputation will be further enhanced—with good reason. His letters provide a condensed tour d’horizon of Malaysian diplomacy. Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad’s crisp introduction, critique and epilogue are thought-provoking or apposite depending on who you are. It will be well worth the time to read this book.”

— Tun Hanif Omar
Columnist, The Star



Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad when both were movers and shakers, circa 2001.

For Review only

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With words we govern men
—Disraeli

For Review only

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
PROLOGUE	13
INTRODUCTION	21
THE LETTERS	
• Terrorism: Winning Hearts and Minds	28
• Globalisation: Between Power and Powerlessness	82
• War and Conflict: ... Then Peace (As Always)	135
• Economic and Diplomatic Relations: Raw Power (Not Skill) is Real Diplomacy	214
EPILOGUE	239
INDEX	246


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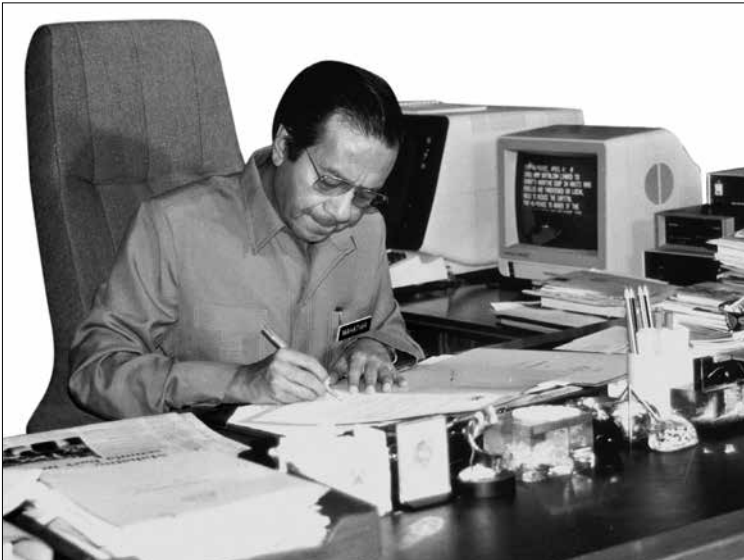
I have always been delighted at the response I have received for my books over the years—stretching from prime ministers, politicians and diplomats to Main Street. And so, salutations and thanks to all of you.



Kuala Lumpur, 4 July 2007

For Review only

Prologue



Dr Mahathir at his desk in the Prime Minister's Department, signing one of the letters published in this book. Picture taken circa 1990s.

In the twenty-two years I was Prime Minister, I wrote and received many letters from world leaders. Now that I am retired, I thought that maybe I should publish these letters as they might be of interest to some members of the public. They reflect the changes in Malaysia's foreign policy and our concern for the fates of many unfortunate people in many parts of Asia and Europe. As a Third World country, we should maintain a low profile, but the atrocities and the unfairness of the powerful has forced us to be openly critical of them and to try to influence their leaders. Although many of them replied my letters, my efforts did not achieve tangible results.

I had collected 200 of these letters which I considered worthy of publication. The Government appeared to hesitate giving permission but eventually allowed eighty-four of them to be published.

Thirteen letters were rejected by the publisher because they were not significant. The seventy-one approved letters record a tiny part of the history of Malaysian international relations and diplomacy. The letters range not too widely: terrorism, globalisation, war and conflict, and economic and diplomatic relations. President George W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, President Jacques Chirac, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and Prince Charles are amongst those who figure in the correspondence. These letters should be read in the context of the time in which they were written.

I wrote to these world leaders, all of whom I have met, because I knew they could, if they chose, determine the course of the events

which were unfolding and avoid catastrophic results. The daylight slaughter of Muslims in Srebrenica—the ethnic cleansing of tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslim men, women and children and that of Croats by Serbs were atrocities that were shown over television instantly and repeatedly all over the globe. The world was having a grandstand view of the horror of ethnic cleansing. But it took a very long time before leaders such as President Clinton, strongly backed by Canada and Germany, decided to act decisively. After the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) planes bombed Serbian positions, the perpetrators of this modern genocidal brutality had to stop. The Dayton Accord followed: it recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina's existence as an independent State but divided it into a Serbian enclave, Republica Srpska and the rest where Bosnian Muslims make up the biggest group. The agreement ended the well-documented ethnic cleansing of Croats and Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs within Bosnia-Herzegovina and from rump Yugoslavia. It was none too soon for by then a quarter of a million Bosnian Muslims had been killed and two million had fled the country. I must record my deep appreciation to Clinton for pushing NATO to be more aggressive despite opposition by Russia. If it was not for Clinton's personal resolve there might not have been any Bosnian Muslims and Croats left in that country today. The stubborn refusal of Bosnian Muslims to give up in the face of Serb aggression was exemplary—their bravery was remarkable. Unfortunately, the Serbs who had committed genocide were rewarded with veto rights in the Federal Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Dayton Accord.

Terrorism presents a serious obstacle to progress and peace. The least we could do is to try to limit it, if not end it. Crucial to the

success in the fight to contain terrorism is the understanding of the root causes of terror acts. If the causes are removed, or at least substantially diminished, then we can expect less terrorism.

Here I must define what constitutes terrorism in order to deal with this scourge. Any act which terrifies people with the fear and terror of sudden death or severe injury must be regarded as acts of terror. Bombing and shelling of innocent people must therefore be considered as acts of terror. The people responsible for this must be regarded as guilty as the suicide bombers. If we want suicide bombers to stop, we must also stop the organised killing of innocent people by regular forces. Being killed and maimed by regulars is no less terrifying for innocent victims than when perpetrated by irregulars.

Globalisation was conceived by the rich and quite obviously it was intended to benefit the rich most. The poor may experience some beneficial effect but the price to be paid by them would far outweigh the benefits.

The world is shrinking because of the ease of travel and the speed of wireless communication. No country can isolate itself from the rest. Globalisation is therefore inevitable. But can there be just one model of globalisation? Can it not be modified? Can there not be another model: one that benefits everyone more or less equitably?

I have always been much concerned about the horrors of modern war. War is about killing people as a means to achieve national objectives. But the efficacy of modern weapons is such that millions would be killed in war. Yet—as we see in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran—the stated objectives or even the hidden objectives have not been achieved. I believe that war is no longer an option even for the

strongest. Their killing capacity will not make victors of them. The combined might of Britain and the United States has availed them nothing. It has only aggravated matters in the countries concerned. Governments may surrender but the people will continue to fight for freedom from foreign occupation.

Malaysia has grown and prospered under the old Most Favoured Nation trading system. If the old system is to be thrown out, then Malaysia must ensure that the new system involving globalisation would be better for the country. I had therefore engaged many world leaders on this matter.

The correspondence may provide glimpses of the frustrations of a leader of a small country. I should not have bothered, but then no one seems willing to tell the powerful when they go wrong. At the risk of being ignored, or being told off, I wrote those letters so that the voice of the small man was not totally silenced. What people think of me was not too relevant.

It did not cross my mind that after I left, there would be such a change as to make pleasing the Prime Minister more important than anything else. News in the mainstream media is so censored and spun by spin doctors that the Prime Minister cannot possibly know the feelings and frustrations of the majority of the people. But fortunately for the Government, Malaysians abhor violence when expressing their anger. So things must become much worse before they would show their true feelings in any way. In the meantime, the sycophants will continue to enjoy their day. Poor Malaysia!

What do I think of my various correspondents? It was unfortunate Clinton did not come to Malaysia for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in September 1998. Had he come, I

am certain, he would not have made the ungracious remarks his Vice President, Al Gore, did during the dinner I hosted for Heads of Government. Al Gore obviously intended to offend me and to incite and encourage my opponents—"the brave people of Malaysia" as he described them—to overthrow my Government (thus breaking diplomatic niceties). After the remarks, he left the dining hall in haste. Whatever people might say of Clinton, he is diplomatic; he would not have embarrassed his host. He would not have made the diplomatic and political gaffe; there was a proper time and place to raise sensitive issues. The Al Gore blunder was a stark interference in the internal affairs of a friendly country which resulted in the cooling of bilateral relations. I was happy when Al Gore lost in the year 2000 elections, but the winner is far worse. In any event, the organised anti-government agitation was not a broad-based movement. It was merely the expression of frustration of an ambitious personality over losing his job.

I had a good working relationship with Margaret Thatcher. Malaysians should remember that she came to Kuala Lumpur three times. No other British Prime Minister, before or since, has done this. Tony Blair never came during his ten-year term at 10 Downing Street. Thatcher was a realist with regard to Malaysia, unlike her predecessors or successors.

Jacques Chirac was special. He and I got on very well together. His interest in Malaysia and the problems of the Arabs and Muslims was genuine. He understood the Arab/Muslim-Israeli issue. Once when I called on him at Élysée Palace just before the breaking of fast during Ramadhan, he prepared dates and other items for me to break my fast. His assistants announced the exact time for me to

do so. Chirac has much more credibility than Bush or Blair and has secured a place for himself in history.

Bush, on the other hand, is quite dense as events and developments in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East and sometimes even in his own country have revealed. He consistently refused to acknowledge the truth even when the evidence, as in the case of weapons of mass destruction, was overwhelming. When the whole world and even his staff said the Iraq venture had failed, he insisted that it had succeeded.

Former President Jimmy Carter described the Bush administration as “the worst in history”. The “Shock and Awe” invasion of Iraq revealed the smallness of his mind. When a country as powerful as the United States crushes the forces of a Third World country, there really is nothing to be proud of. Far from uniting the world against Saddam Hussein and democratising the Iraqis, Bush has succeeded in dividing the Americans, the Europeans, the United Nations, and above all, the Iraqis—plunging their country into civil war.

Blair apparently believed he could influence Bush into becoming less belligerent over Iraq, but ended up becoming Bush’s “poodle”—completely ineffective and only managing to achieve his coveted ten years as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom because he was thick-skinned enough to ignore public opinion in Britain and the world. I stepped down without being pushed, but Blair had to be literally booted out by his own party.

I have asked Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad to write the introduction as well as commentaries and explanations to accompany each of the four sections of this book. The nature of the letters which I wrote myself remains. The prologue establishes the authority and

credibility of the correspondence. Everyone but me is absolved from responsibility of *Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders*.

I hope this little book will be of some use to students, diplomats, politicians and researchers on Malaysian diplomacy and international relations, as well as on the thinking behind my policies and actions. You may not agree with everything that I did, but I did what I thought was right for the nation.

Whether I was a good or a bad Prime Minister is, of course, not for me to say. When I am dead and gone, the judgement would be more accurate. Since I will not be around then, it would be quite meaningless to me. My children and friends would be the ones to savour the truth or bear the pain of whatever I am condemned for.



TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

Kuala Lumpur, 4 July 2007

For Review only

Introduction

Dr Mahathir Mohamad has both verbal ability as well as writing skill. Though image has not become a factor in Malaysian politics, it is an advantage and Dr Mahathir also has this. He always appears younger than his age. While the politics of appearance is not vital in our elections, it enhances him. Speaking is easier than putting words to paper. Malaysians have never before had an opportunity to read their Prime Minister's confidential correspondence. Now, they can read Dr Mahathir's selected letters to world leaders.

His bank of letters is large. I read about 200 letters he wrote and received during his long premiership, which he wanted to publish. However, the Government, in its wisdom, only gave permission for eighty-four. The correspondence withheld is more noteworthy and interesting. I was not altogether surprised at some of the contents, the diversity of subjects and the clash of opinions. By his own admission, Dr Mahathir says his efforts did not achieve tangible results. Nevertheless, he did what he could. Many other world leaders feared offending the powerful and did nothing, though privately they agreed with Dr Mahathir. Fortunately, most of the events that aggravated him have now been largely forgotten or over with.

The seventy-one letters (we are not publishing thirteen because they are relatively unimportant) should clarify events and our stance. Dr Mahathir comes out well as the forceful voice of Malaysia. He has ably explained his position to his counterparts. The selection, to my mind, of the letters to be released was poor. It was imposed on him

by the Government of his successor.

This volume should be required reading for all students of Malaysian politics and diplomacy. The letters should leave a mark in our history and hold enduring interest for posterity. Therefore, they should be read by as many as possible, for as long as possible.

I have written the general background and commentary for each section, and in several cases each letter is preceded by a brief introduction which puts it in context. Dr Mahathir is noted for his consistency and breadth of principle. You would have noticed that Dr Mahathir was in full control of Malaysian domestic and foreign policy. There was a note of urgency, both for the victims for whom he was fighting and for Malaysia. Making speeches was important, but it was more important for Dr Mahathir to be always in contact with his foreign counterparts or peers. I am sure some of the letters I read must have been a bit of a nuisance to the recipients. Several never bothered to reply or merely sent acknowledgements that they had received them.

It is no secret that the Serbs' policy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the helplessness of the Palestinians, as well as other atrocities and events, had a deep effect on Dr Mahathir's approach to his political commitment at home and overseas alike. The plight of these oppressed people would be stated and restated ever more prominently in his speeches in later years and in his other letters. And again in his prologue for this book.

Dr Mahathir wrote his letters himself and also his speeches. Of this I am absolutely certain. Actually, there is no better way to articulate your own thought, policy or stance than to write letters and speeches yourself, even though this demands much time and

effort. This approach remains unchanged. He is currently writing his memoirs assisted by a team of essentially female researchers.

As you leaf through the letters in this volume, you may find that some of the letters are better written than others—or more precise, the tone varies (though mostly formal and business-like)—but you would know that these are the words of Dr Mahathir, who knows his own mind and has always known how to use words to convey his thoughts simply and clearly. Many politicians do not write their own letters and speeches. They find that a burden. Others do not have as much time as they would like (to write their letters themselves) because they must be busier than the Prime Minister! They depend entirely on ghost writers or speech writers. There is nothing wrong in hiring professional writers to do what one wants. But not Dr Mahathir; he would never regurgitate the words of a civil servant or anyone else.

Reading these letters gave me great pleasure (not of the lapdog devotion genre). More importantly, what they reveal is educational. This, I want to share with you. This justifies Dr Mahathir's decision to publish them. We read about some of the issues still in dispute and unresolved from all sides. It has been hard reading how Dr Mahathir agonised, as I think we have all agonised, over Srebrenica and Sarajevo and the hapless Palestinians.

Sometimes, just as interesting, are the replies. Prince Charles surprises me. As Dr Mahathir has said, whatever people might say of Clinton, he is diplomatic; I hasten to add that his charm might have helped sustain the good Malaysian-United States relations. Though Tony Blair is unpopular and considered a failure in his foreign policy, he never bothered to visit Malaysia, merely sending

his minions. Thatcher thought us important enough that she came thrice. Bush and Blair were not on the 2007 Time 100 list of the world's most influential people. At the core of the Time 100 is the idea that those listed—by virtue of their character, drive and dreams—change the world and make history. According to *Time* magazine's managing editor, the list is not a survey of the most powerful or the most popular, but the most influential whose examples, talents and discoveries transform the world we live in. I can imagine were we to have a similar list it would have been headed by the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir was at his greatest in domestic policy. He was the architect of the halcyon age that gave us nearly two decades of rapid development, high profile and improved infrastructure, as well as higher standards of living for Malaysians. I should think that for all the controversy and drama, most Malaysians have good memories of the peace, security and prosperity of the Mahathir years. The state of the *bumiputra*, he asserts, is not getting any better any time soon. The main cause of rising economic and social inequality is the lack of political will; a bigger factor than it was during either Dr Mahathir's or Tun Razak's leadership. In foreign affairs, he voiced out against genocide as well as poverty and disease, and spoke contemptuously of George W. Bush's intelligence. He described him as dense.

An active, hands-on Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir epitomised competence, vision and energy. He was one Malaysian Prime Minister who did not advertise himself as a great friend of Washington, London, Canberra and Singapore. He was not an international sycophant, you might say.

Dr Mahathir was not as good as his admirers believe, nor was he as bad as his critics assert. Like Tun Razak whom he admires, Dr Mahathir was a moderate and pragmatic politician. It was Tun Razak who invited him to rejoin the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and gave him his first cabinet experience. He nurtured Dr Mahathir and some of his ideas. What Dr Mahathir did may now be deemed politically incorrect, but the fact remains—history is history—that Dr Mahathir was considered by Tun Razak as a close political ally. To the *bumiputra*, the two rank higher than their predecessors.

Those who remember the early years of Malaysia shout at the dangers of a drift. The incumbent appears too eager to be accepted as a partner to all and sundry. Malaysians must stand up more vigorously for their national interests in an inherently cutthroat world.

Of course, I am not blind to Dr Mahathir's flaws and I disagree with some of the things he did, but every Malaysian must admit that the country is in many ways so much better than it was between 1976 and 1981—for which Dr Mahathir deserves credit. I have always supported Dr Mahathir, but as is also known, it does not mean nor imply blanket approval of his policies.

There should have been a happier old age: he got what he sought after and his political talent rewarded. But his retirement, except for the first year, is not without pain and disappointment. I do not even for a second believe he will ever forgive himself for mistakenly anointing Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Prime Minister. As his successor's power burgeons and the

Badawi clan's interests flourish, Dr Mahathir's sense of isolation also grows. For his successor, his interest far outweighs sentiment and gratitude. It is the spirit of the age.

It is obvious Dr Mahathir was a remarkable Prime Minister. It is unfashionable to recall or talk such truth. Leaders must choose to educate, not deceive. Let history be the judge of his efforts. Whatever the judgement, his place in Malaysian history is secure. His successor may well do worse or better. We shall see. For nearly four years, the Prime Minister has revealed many flaws but, like all fair people, I will reserve judgement on this ordinary man until I have seen more of him, his policies and their implementation and whether the policies will achieve the desired results.

In his prologue, Dr Mahathir—drawing on his experience and knowledge—offers an informed, plain-spoken appraisal of the Malaysian foreign policy and his evaluation of international relations cut the heart out of policy issues much debated today and perhaps in years to come.

Dr Mahathir's book sets a benchmark for Malaysian international relations and surely will come to be regarded as a classic work of Malaysian diplomatic history.



Kuala Lumpur, 4 July 2007

The Letters