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GREAT STATESMAN

# STILL A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

Many across the globe look up to Dr Mahathir because he is a bold and vocal leader

KUALA LUMPUR

**I**N just a year of his tenure as Malaysia's seventh prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been recognised as one of the world's most influential men.

In January, he was named Muslim Man of the Year by *The Muslim 500*, a ranking of the world's 500 most influential Muslims.

Last month, he was ranked among the 100 most influential individuals in the world for the year 2019 by international news magazine, *Time*.

And earlier this month, portal Fortune.com ranked Dr Mahathir 47th in its "World's 50 Greatest Leaders" list.

The three publications described Dr Mahathir, 93, as an extraordinary man for leading the coalition of (formerly) opposition parties, Pakatan Harapan,

to win the 14th General Election in May last year and for being re-elected as prime minister.

As the oldest prime minister in the world, many know Dr Mahathir as a bold and vocal leader, always standing firm in his decision, trustworthy and having a high level of discipline, especially in terms of punctuality.

With a modest and tranquil look, he is highly respected by many and regarded as a credible leader with a sharp mind who is not afraid of giving or receiving criticism.

In his speech at the 73rd United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York on Sept 29, Dr Mahathir made a bold call to reform the world body and suggested that a veto should not be by just one permanent member, but by at least two and backed by three non-permanent members of the UN Security Council.

He captured the world's attention when he condemned the Myanmar government for the massacre of Rohingya in Rakhine state, and Israel for breaking international laws and moral codes.

In November, Dr Mahathir was conferred the "Grand Cordon of the Order of the Paulownia Flowers" by then Emperor Akihito of Japan.

The conferment of Japan's highest award followed his contributions to strengthening the bilateral ties between Malaysia and Japan.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Modern Language and Communication lecturer Dr Syed Agil Alsagoff said Dr Mahathir was recognised as a credible leader as his thoughts and ideas had been appreciated and praised by world leaders.

The prime minister, who had held the chair of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), had formulated strategies for the unification of Arab nations to break away from the influence of the United States and Israel.

"His criticism of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the US' invasion of Iraq in 2003, had encouraged and motivated the Arab nations to support his leadership and recognise him as a respected world leader.

"Dr Mahathir's success in transforming Malaysia from a Third World country into a developing country also attracted West Asian countries to emulate his political leadership.

"In fact, East Asian countries have made him a model in their economic and political empowerment."

Syed Agil said Dr Mahathir was

regarded as a Muslim statesman who transformed Malaysia into a model for the Muslim world and would always be remembered as a Malaysian leader who had channelled various assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina to rebuild itself after the Balkan country was involved in a war in the 1990s.

According to Universiti Utara Malaysia lecturer in politics and international relations, Professor Dr Azizuddin Mohd Sani, Dr Mahathir had been consistent in championing world issues, including those involving the Palestinians and Rohingya, as well as developing or underdeveloped countries.

As a man who despises brutality, he said, Dr Mahathir had established the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal to "put on trial" leaders of the countries involved in the Iraq war in 2003, which had claimed the lives of 1.4 million civilians.

"He is also anti-ethnic cleansing.

"That is why when his bid to ratify the Rome Statute failed, he got so angry at those who caused the failure.

"Through his boldness in voicing out his opinions, we can see that Dr Mahathir wants Malaysia to continue being the Asian Tiger

who is not afraid of voicing out on global issues."

During his tenure as Malaysia's fourth prime minister from 1981 to 2003, Malaysia experienced excellent transformation, particularly in infrastructure and socioeconomic development, hence spurring the success of the country in becoming a regional economic power and in facing several global financial crises.

Syed Agil was of the opinion that the seriousness of Dr Mahathir's ideas and thoughts in terms of national and economic development, especially when liberating Malaysia from the 1997-1998 economic crisis by pegging the ringgit to the US dollar, had prompted other countries to seek his advice.

Azizuddin believed that Dr Mahathir was re-elected to lead the government as the people wanted Malaysia to become a prosperous country.

"His vast experience is badly needed.

"Malaysians respect him as a great statesman.

"Besides romanticism, Malaysians who have seen the economic prosperity he brought to Malaysia in the 1990s also believe he can do it again." **Berna-**