

# COMMANDING HEIGHTS

Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad

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(b. 1925)

*Prime Minister of Malaysia since 1981, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad has overseen Malaysia's transformation into one of the wealthiest nations in Southeast Asia and has become a vocal critic of Western-style globalization.*

From "Mahathir bin Mohamad." Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2001.

Prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad was born in Alur Setar, capital of the Northwestern state of Kedah. He was educated in Alur Setar, and in 1947 entered the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. Active in politics since 1945, he was a member of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) from its creation in 1946. On graduation, Mahathir entered government medical service as a practitioner on Langkaw Island (Pulau Langkawi).

He was first elected to Parliament in 1965 but lost his seat in the 1969 elections. Following the 1969 elections, riots took place in Kuala Lumpur, leading to the discrediting of the leadership of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. Mahathir, by temperament forthright and frank, became one of Tunku's few publicly outspoken critics within the ranks of the UMNO. Mahathir's book *The Malay Dilemma* (1969) was soon banned inside Malaysia.

In 1973 Mahathir was appointed a senator but gave up the office to contest the 1974 general election, in which he was returned unopposed. He was appointed minister of education, and in 1975 was elected one of three vice presidents of the UMNO. In 1976 he became deputy prime minister, and in 1978 he moved from the ministry of education to the ministry of trade and industry, where he led several missions overseas to promote investment in Malaysia. In 1978 he was elected deputy president of UMNO and in 1981 was appointed president of UMNO, a post he has held ever since.

In 1981 Prime Minister Hussein Onn retired, and Mahathir became prime minister. Under his leadership, the ruling National Front coalition, led by the UMNO, won landslide victories in the 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995, and 1999 general elections. As prime minister, Mahathir has been active in international affairs, especially in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. He has also spoken strongly and

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controversially in favor of nonalignment; economic development; and the world's "Southern" (typically less developed and nonaligned) countries. Nations in the Nonaligned Movement tend to have no formal commitment to larger, more powerful nations and purport to judge issues on their merits rather than from positions determined by their foreign alliances.

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