

## Science in Malaysia: Challenge for the world's oldest prime minister

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The astonishing victory of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia's elections has been hailed as a conquest of democracy. It is certainly an extraordinary comeback of a 92 year old, Mahathir Mohamad, previously held the office of prime minister between 1981 and 2003. On May 10, 2018, sworn again as the world's oldest Prime Minister.

Mahathir, during his previous tenure of prime ministership, introduced the country's "Vision 2020" in year 1990,<sup>1</sup> took sweeping revolutionary steps in promoting science, education, research and innovations and established large number of universities and research institutes. He implemented English as the language of instruction for teaching science from junior school levels,<sup>2</sup> faculty were trained, textbooks were written in dual-languages English and Bahasa Malaysia, depoliticized the academic institutes, and inspired the Malaysian nation as a democratic, scientific and progressive society.

The multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial Malaysia, is a home of about 32 million people, 154 universities and degree awarding institutes<sup>3</sup> with an academic staff 35500 in public and private universities.<sup>4</sup> Malaysia enjoys position in global competitiveness, Malaysian universities achieved the privileged positions in the global science, research and inventions as expected in "Vision 2020". As per Academic Ranking of World Universities report<sup>5</sup> two Malaysian universities, University of Malaya and University of Science ranked in the top 500 global universities.<sup>5</sup>

The total number of science journals from Malaysia which are indexed in the Institute of Scientific Information, Web of Science are 136. Malaysia produced 189722 research articles in Institute of Scientific Information, Web of Science indexed global science journals. The country contributes pleasing number of scientific research papers appearing in the 200 leading science journals.<sup>6</sup> The science research

indicators are satisfactory, researchers and faculty from Malaysian universities seemed in reputable international journals. The research publications have appeared in worldwide noble science journals including Science, Nature, Nature Genetics, Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine and Journal of American Medical Association<sup>6</sup> with 224 h-index of the country.

As per World Intellectual Property Organization report, from 2007 to 2016, the average registered resident patents are 294 per annum.<sup>7</sup> Malaysia research has been focused in institutions of higher learning and industry-led. Behind these achievements in science education, research and innovations is the vision of Mahathir, who developed long-term strategies during his previous tenure of Prime Ministership.

Despite some concerns of his age, the Malaysian nation, once again laid its trust in Mahathir, 92 year old physician and politician, as a Prime Minister of Malaysia with great expectations to further enhance spending on higher education, research and development, promote science education, research and innovative culture in the country. The science community in Malaysia is expecting that Mahathir would proceed the science findings from fundamentals to commercialization as an apparatus for socio-economic development and transformation of the nation to join the paradigm shift towards a knowledge-based economy and bring the Malaysian science and education glory at higher status to enhance the image and economy of the nation. Whether this trust of the nation is well placed or would backfire by his increasing age and its associated physiological limitations. I strongly believe, Mahathir would conquest his physiological limitations of ageing with his visionary role and once again he would gain the trust of Malaysian nation.

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