



# Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times (Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific)

*Barry Wain*

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## **Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times (Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific)**

Barry Wain

The grandson of an Indian immigrant and the first Malay commoner to become prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad turned the Muslim-majority Southeast Asian country into one of the developing world's most successful economies. During his 22 years in power he adopted pragmatic economic policies alongside repressive political measures, and showed that Islam was compatible with representative government and modernization. Abrasive and outspoken, Mahathir emerged as a Third World champion and Islamic spokesman by condemning the West, not least for trying to impose liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics on developing nations. By raising living standards and winning international acclaim, he contributed to a sense of national identity, pride and confidence among ethnically diverse Malaysians. But in mixing business and politics, Mahathir encouraged cronyism and failed to prevent the spread of corruption. Authoritarian and impatient, he jailed opponents, sacked rivals and undermined institutions as he pursued his obsession with development. In retirement, he broke a promise to stay out of politics, falling out with his two successors while using all available means to protect his legacy.

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