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The beat on Malaysia's past

reviewed by Manveet Kaur

A POLICEMAN'S STORY

By Datuk Mohd Pilus Yusoh

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WHEN Datuk Mohd Pilus Yusoh was 28 years old, he was asked by the Japanese to become a spy.

It was just after Hiroshima was bombed and the Japanese had surrendered. The troops were retreating from Malaya, and Mohd Pilus was asked to keep an eye on the British.

This is only one of the many exciting incidents that have been narrated in A Policeman's Story, by Mohd Pilus, the former Chief Police Officer of Perak.

Launched by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi early last month, the 255-page book tells about his experiences during the communist rebellion and threat, the Japanese Occupation, the end of British rule, the separation of Malaya and Singapore and the May 1969 riots.

Mohd Pilus, who turns 84 next week, was encouraged by his children to write this book.

"All the events that happened are still fresh in my mind, like they just happened yesterday. I was sharp and focused when writing the book."

It took him only three months to write it.

"I wrote this book so that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren could have a feel for what life was like during my time. There is also my love for the country and the Force, and my high regard for my comrades."

"Malaysia did not happen overnight." Sitting in the living room of his bungalow in Bukit Damansara, he explains: "The younger generation must realise that what we have today has been built upon the blood and tears of those who fought in the jungles during the Emergency."

In his book, Mohd Pilus presents his life story through the years he spent in the police force. The memoir begins with his humble childhood years and his early days in the force. He traces his rise through the hierarchy of police ranks with a detailed narration of the Malay wartime roles and experiences.

He also recalls his forced collaboration with the Japanese. Once he realised that he had no alternative, he began to co-operate. He used his influence with the Japanese to help people in trouble. He rages over the Japanese atrocities and massacres of the Chinese community, and the role of Chinese guerillas.

He describes colonial Malaya with disapproval but he has fond feelings for a number of British officers for their individual personal qualities.

"One must distinguish between the system and the individual," he stressed. "They taught me a sense of loyalty and fair play."

A Policeman's Story covers Malaysia's struggle and her rise to Merdeka (led by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj), the formulation of the plan for racial harmony (led by Tun Abdul Razak Hussein), and its building of the economic success it is today (led by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad).

Complementing all these recollections are newspaper clippings from 1952 and many snapshots, including old black-and-whites of his days in the force.

When asked if there was still pride in being in the force today, what

with the scandals and corruption jokes revolving around policemen, he replied: "Corruption existed, and it still exists, but it is now rampant ... there is nothing wrong with the force, it is the person."

He also reflects on the difficulties he endured during his service. Mohd Pilus recounts the incident when he was demoted from Corporal to Lance Corporal two days before he was to be promoted to Inspector.

In Chapter Three, he describes how some Malay boys threw sticks of unburnt charcoal at his friend Ong's house. Upon investigation, he classified the incident as "simple mischief". He was then reprimanded by the Officer Superintending Police Circle for not classifying it "attempted arson". He was found guilty of neglecting his official duty, a charge which he feels was unfair, and which led him to believe he was framed.

"The re-classification," he writes, "did not makes any sense, as it contradicted all the evidence and exhibits."

His advice to policemen today is to gain the confidence of the people and to always remember that the public is watching you. The police, he says, need to be professional and respect the rakyat.

All in all, Mohd Pilus' book is a self-portrait of a strong-willed leader and a personal, eye-witness account of a section of Malaysian history.

Its pages abound with celebrated people and events, and its teachings reach far beyond the police station.

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