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Umno founder's speeches to be published

By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The voice of Umno's founder Datuk Onn Jaafar will soon be heard by young Malaysians who have grown up knowing little or nothing about him.

Eighteen of Onn's speeches have been translated into English for the second edition of the book, Reflections of Pre-Independent Malaya, to be published later this month.

Some of his words are as relevant today as they were to pre-independent Malaya.

"What is the use of reaching for the moon if we cannot grasp it?" Onn said in a speech delivered to the Umno General Assembly in 1947.

"The only way is that we must have initiative to find the path, that we may extend our reach so that we may grasp the moon. Unity, co-operation and initiative, these are the secrets of success.

"Let us co-operate and work together in unison, in order to qualify ourselves as a large nation."

In another speech to the First Malay Congress in 1946, Onn said: "Let us unite like never before. Let us work together like never before. Show that we are truly the descendants of our forefathers, who stared danger in the face with hearts united."

The speeches, translated by Dr Syed Ali Tawfik al-Attas, and never-before-seen pictures of Onn and his eminent contemporaries form the bulk of the new material for the book's second edition. "As one of our founding fathers, it is only right that Datuk Onn is afforded the proper recognition," Syed Ali said.

Many credit Onn, who founded Umno in 1946, with preventing the British from seizing land in then Malaya during the colonial era.

In his foreword for the book, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad wrote: "Allah knows what wars, what violent struggles, what 'terrorism' the Malays would have to perpetrate to regain their land. Datuk Onn helped save this country from the fate of Palestine."

Written by Datuk Mohamed Abid, the first edition was launched and published by Pelanduk Publications last June, with a Bahasa Malaysia version released two months later.

The first edition in English barely touched 200 pages, but the weight of new material has increased the size of the book to 468 pages. "In fact, I think we will need more than a second edition," said Datuk Ng Tieh Chuan, managing director of Pelanduk Publications.

"This book will see many more editions because new facts and photos are surfacing. Things we never knew. As recommended by Dr Mahathir, we will keep revising the book as and when new data is acquired."

Mohamed was initially encouraged to write this book by Dr Mahathir and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after Mohamed shared stories about Onn with them at a private family function. He was part of Onn's extended family by virtue of being his grand-nephew, but his relationship with Onn was far more intimate. Being the same age as Onn's children, Onn was like a father to him and he was privy to many goings-on in the Onn household.

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