

28/01/2004

Tribute to our unsung heroes (HL)

M.K. Megan

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysia must never forget those who laid down their lives to make the country the peaceful and prosperous haven it is now, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said thousands of unsung heroes among the country's security forces lost their lives and whole families were murdered in defending the country against its enemies.

Abdullah reminded Malaysians, especially the young, not to forget history.

He recalled the tumultuous period leading to the country's independence and how thousands of soldiers, policemen, special constables and Home Guards died to maintain the peace and sovereignty of the country. "Their sacrifices cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Incidents such as the Bukit Kepong Police Station massacre and the brutal killing of whole families of security forces... these are the unsung heroes."

Abdullah's comments come at a time when the police force is under scrutiny following the involvement of several of its personnel in high-profile crimes ranging from rape and robbery to murder.

Although the number of "black sheep" has been minuscule in relation to the 85,000-member police force, the nature of the crimes committed has led to criticisms of the force as a whole.

Abdullah was speaking at the launching of a book, Wira Tak Didandang (Unsung Heroes), by Deputy Minister of Information and former journalist Datuk Zainuddin Maidin.

The book traces the story of how the police, especially the Special Branch, fought the Communist Party of Malaya and engineered its surrender in 1989.

The communist insurgency from 1948 until their surrender saw the killing of thousands of people, the majority of them soldiers and policemen, particularly the Special Branch.

The launch was a poignantly emotional affair. Many in the audience shed tears as a slide show, interspersed with patriotic songs from the era, depicted the battles for an independent Malaysia.

Zainuddin paid tribute to three persons for the surrender of the CPM: former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor and former Deputy Director of the Special Branch Datuk Yaw Kong Yew. All three were present, together with many senior and retired officers, ministers, deputy ministers and government servants.

Abdullah said those who led the people of Malaya and later Malaysia had struggled and sacrificed to make the country prosperous, safe and peaceful.

"We have never forgotten them. But at the same time, do we know who stood behind these leaders? Who was in the frontline, sacrificing their lives to protect the country's sovereignty? Many gave their blood and lives for this country.

"They did it alone, they did it together, but they all sacrificed so much," he said.

"Let us never be lulled by the prosperity this country enjoys today. Without the sacrifices of those unsung heroes, today's generation may not be able to enjoy what we have."

"Only by recognising the real account of history can we build a noble national character. Only by recognising the pure ideals and sacrifices of

our heroes will we be able to strengthen our sovereignty," he said.

The book is Zainuddin's fifth and is published by Utusan Publications.