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All about our PMs

By Nuraina A. Samad

THE Perdana Leadership Foundation in Putrajaya is a repository of information on our past Prime Ministers. Heading it is former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who wants it to research, document, disseminate and publicise their contributions. NURAINA A. SAMAD was there recently.

IF you were to lose your way in Putra Jaya, you might end up near a huge bungalow at the edge of a long and winding road.

Be curious and take a closer look at the elegantly-designed structure that is built on a twohectare piece of land by a lake.

You will find that you are right in front of the Perdana Leadership Foundation which houses the Perdana Library and Research Centre.

Not many people who have business in Putrajaya ever get lost here simply because the foundation is hardly their destination.

But those who do are the few visitors to the library and research centre.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is the honorary president of the foundation found this to be a common complaint.

"We will put up more signages soon," he said, reassuringly, to a group of journalists at his office on Monday.

Dr Mahathir is aware that many Malaysians do not know of the existence of the foundation, let alone its location.

But then this is to be expected because since its incorporation in January 2003, its operation has been low-keyed.

The foundation was established with the primary objective of documenting the intellectual legacies of Malaysia's past prime ministers.

Dr Mahathir said understanding the contributions of the country's past leaders would invariably provide an understanding of how Malaysia had achieved political, social and economic success - something other countries have been wanting to learn.

"I have been invited to many countries simply because people are interested in knowing how Malaysia, as the only developing country, successfully transformed itself from an agro-based to an industrial-based economy in a short time. And how the country has successfully managed race relations."

The idea to establish the foundation arose from a proposal to build a memorial for Dr Mahathir some time before he stepped down as Prime Minister.

"It was from my political secretary, Matthias Chang. They wanted to do something, like building a memorial. But I am not dead yet, so you cannot have a memorial for me," he said.

Instead of having a foundation to document his contributions and policies, Dr Mahathir suggested that one be established to research, document, disseminate and publicise those also of his predecessors - Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn.

"All that we achieved in Malaysia is the fruit of their contributions. That is the purpose. We keep all records, documents, audio visual recordings of all four prime ministers for posterity. For the future generations of Malaysians to research and study."

The foundation, Dr Mahathir said, was not the government's gift to him.

"I do not want to receive anything for myself. You know I don't like personality cults. Even when I was in government, I did not allow my

picture to be put up or any building to be named after me.

"This is not for me. It is for the four PMs and their contributions to the nation were considerable.

"Apart from saying thank you very much and all that, we need to be more academic. We want to know precisely their contributions, the history of our country, from way before independence."

Dr Mahathir said the foundation was sourcing materials for the library and research centre "from everywhere, locally and from abroad".

"And if we have to, we are prepared to buy."

Among the collections in the library and research centre are books, monographs, serials and articles, sound recordings and video footages, slides and photographs, slides and photographs, resolutions and reference sources.

It has online access (<http://library.perdana.org.my:800>), online loan/reservation, electronic delivery, document delivery and research and packaged information.

It is open from 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12.30pm Saturday.

Dr Mahathir has contributed a handsome collection of his own books, besides donating a number of personal gifts he received when he was Prime Minister.

Decorating the ground floor of the building are old artefacts and memorabilia. Visitors will pass a sweeping staircase as they make their way to the library which faces the lake.

"It is indeed a conducive place to do research," remarked Dr Mahathir who himself is "trying very hard" to work on his memoirs.

Asked how much of work on his memoirs is ready, he said with a meek laugh: "Maybe one per cent."

The foundation, in fact, is offering fellowships to PhD candidates to conduct specified research and studies.

He said this would be a mutually beneficial exercise for both researcher and the foundation.

Asked if the foundation is also preparing to compile documents on his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Mahathir said it was being done.

The foundation has already a schedule of events for this year. Three seminars will be held in its impressive its hall with a 150-seat capacity.

Dr Mahathir said the foundation was in need of funds in order to carry out all its plans.

He hopes generous Malaysians will donate to the foundation.

He pointed out that the construction of the building was funded by the initial donations from generous Malaysians.

"I am thankful that the completion of the building was expedited so that it was ready by the time I retired from the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the foundation needs about RM100 million from which earnings could be used to run the foundation.

"We don't want to ask from the government. I hope donors in Malaysia will be generous in contributing to the foundation."

The foundation has a 24-member board of trustees comprising prominent members of industry and academia who represent donor organisations. An executive committee headed by Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob manages the foundation.

Dr Mahathir is hopeful that in time the foundation will have a reputation of being an archive - an excellent repository of documents and records of the nation's former prime ministers, on which not only Malaysians but also foreigners will rely for authenticity.

The foundation is scheduled to be officially opened in May by Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

(END) Source : New Straits Times