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Onn, man who led the Malays in darkest hour

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IT was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who encouraged Johor-born Mohamed Abid to put in writing his recollections of historical moments involving the nation's founding fathers, in particular, Datuk Onn Jaafar.

Dr Mahathir had been witness to Mohamed's narration of anecdotes of his childhood and life with Datuk Onn - a nationalist, Umno's first president and Johor's most illustrious son.

These were Mohamed's personal reminiscences and intimate observations that held so much significance and which can neither be found nor captured in history books.

They were therefore, priceless and had to be written so that history will not be lost. Mohamed took Dr Mahathir's advice and "Reflections Of Pre-Independence Malaya" was written.

The Prime Minister will launch the book at the Putrajaya Marriott tomorrow .

In his foreword, Dr Mahathir paid tribute to Onn, saying that he was a central figure in Umno's glorious struggle and the first Malay to be accepted by all Malays of the peninsula.

"This is the greatest achievement of Datuk Onn, apart of course, from his success in preventing the British from expropriating the land of the Malays as they did the land of the Palestinians.

"Allah knows what wars, what violent struggles, `terrorism' the Malays would have to perpetrate in order to regain their land. Datuk Onn helped save this country from the fate of Palestine."

Dr Mahathir said the book was important reading for those wanting to know the man who in the darkest hour of the Malays and the country, emerged to unite and galvanise them to fight one of "those thoughtless schemes of the European colonialists which could result in endless tragic wars and sufferings".

The book, he added, was written from the personal experiences of someone who was intimately involved with Onn and through whom, the Malays and Malaysians could learn who truly was this great man.

Mohamed indeed knew his grand uncle Onn intimately especially since he was like a father to him and in whose home Mohamed grew up.

He was, Dr Mahathir said, "a direct witness to much that was going on in Datuk Onn's life" as he was part of the household until he left for Kuala Lumpur to further his studies in August 1961.

Even then, he said he travelled frequently to Johor Baru to be with Onn who was not well until his death in January 1962.

The book, with a photograph of Onn and his wife, Datin Halimah Hussein on the cover, is written in a narrative style and contains photographs of immense historical significance.

Mohamed has also included 18 speeches of Onn from 1946 to 1951.

The book is about people Mohamed knew and fittingly, the nine chapters depict personalities and events involving them.

From the first chapter on Onn, his family and friends, Mohamed goes to the second on Halimah who is his grandmother. (Mohamed's grandfather, Muhammad, was Datuk Onn's younger brother. When he died, Datuk Onn married the widowed Halimah.)

Mohamed reflects on moments and meetings with former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, Datuk Mohd Seth Mohd Said, Prof Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-

Attas, the country's first Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman, Governor-General Malcolm MacDonald, British High Commissioner Sir Gerald Templer and Datin Paduka Siti Saleha Mohamed Ali who is Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah's sister.

"Reflection of Pre-Independence Malaya" was conceived by someone who may not have held any senior position in Umno but who had the privilege of knowing intimately events during Umno's formative years.