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Dr Mahathir Encyclopaedia debuts in UK

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OXFORD, Wed. - Days after its launch in Kuala Lumpur, the Encyclopaedia of Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad made its debut here yesterday at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

The 10-volume compilation of his speeches was launched by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim who described Dr Mahathir as a man who is "many things to many people".

"Reticent, yet expansive. Reserved, yet warm and spontaneous. A voracious reader."

And definitely not a vindictive leader as per the thesis of some quarters, said Rais who cited as an example his own Cabinet appointment in 1999, after his return to Umno.

"Although I have served under three prime ministers out of four in the last 29 years or so, the most memorable and exciting times have been under Dr Mahathir."

The launch was hosted by St Antony's College whose warden Sir Marrack Goulding is a trustee of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

Present was centre director Dr Firhan Nizaimi.

Dr Mahathir is no stranger to them as he had given an address here on "Islam: The Misunderstood Religion".

Rais said there may have been some policy pitfalls in Dr Mahathir's 22-year administration, but generally Malaysia has benefited from his leadership.

"He truly believes in the adage, 'what others can do we can do better'. He himself is a workaholic, he never fails to saunter into his office before 8am."

Rais recalled Dr Mahathir's decision to literally turn the clock back by half an hour in 1981 for greater uniformity and productivity in the country, the "Look East Policy" to learn the Japanese and Korean work ethic, and the "name-tagging" of all government servants and the clock-in system.

On his international role, Rais said developing countries look up to him as their spokesman.

"He has the ability for telling the truth."

He recounted the brickbats hurled at Dr Mahathir, from being labelled a "recalcitrant" to swipes from former US vice-president Al Gore.

Recalling the Frank Sinatra classic, My Way, a favourite tune of Dr Mahathir's, Rais said the Prime Minister's lyrics and rendition may not be liked by all, but it mattered little to him.

The encyclopaedia is priced at US\$350 (RM1,330) per set, either in English or Arabic, and US\$600 for a bilingual edition.

It is published by Egyptian company Dar Al Kitab Al Masri, a brainchild of its owner Hassan El-Zein.