

09/10/2003

Maiden voyage

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TUNKU Soraya Dakhiah Tunku Abdullah and Joan Foo Mahony believe in doing things in style.

"Tunku Abdullah, Tunku Soraya and I thought it would be a great idea to do a tribute to someone we all care deeply for," says Mahony. "We wanted to celebrate our Prime Minister's 22 years in office with a really classy book.

"I've been in publishing for two years," says the chairperson and CEO of JF Publishing. "Before that, I was a lawyer. And this is the first book of this kind that I've ever embarked on.

"As a publisher, I wanted to do something beautiful."

"For both of us, this is the first of its kind," says Tunku Soraya, executive director of Melewar Apex. "I took the plunge into publishing with Joan, on this project. I used to work in television. This project brought us together - and it's quite a project! Embarking on publishing on such a massive scale ... "

Getting the book's 22 voices together, says Tunku Soraya, was not the work of any one person.

"My father's contacts, Joan's, mine, our editor Michael Bociurkiw's - whatever we could pull in, we used. Parents, relatives, friends. Whoever we needed to tie down and force onto the telephone, we did!

"There were many ways we secured world leaders and senior statesmen," she says; "largely through embassies, sometimes through personal contacts. They'd write, fax, e-mail. Through ambassadors, through a middle party or to us directly.

"Some salutations had to be translated through the embassy concerned - Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's from Portuguese, Vaclav Havel's from Czech."

"They were all on their personal notepaper, though, signed," says Mahony. "Havel signed his with a heart, and Fidel Ramos, too!"

"The book is a gift from my father to the PM," says Tunku Soraya. She and Mahony decline to specify how much it cost to produce, because, says Mahony, "you can't win; if it's inexpensive, people will call us cheapskates. If it isn't, they'll say, 'What? So much???'

"We don't count costs, though, or cut corners. We would've done it whatever the cost. We wanted to do a good book.

"That's us. Professionally."

Mahathir: 22 Years, 22 Voices is, says Mahony, "a joint venture between our two companies; and we've not had a single disagreement! It's extremely strange - really quite nauseating!"

And how did this perfect partnership begin?

"We live in the same building, and probably met in the lift," says Tunku Soraya. "We also sail together - and, of course, work together."

On the subject of work, she says: "We're currently doing an art book, a sailing book - we're doing many books!"

And about this book in particular?

"We wanted this book to be special, and we haven't economised anywhere.

"Because of the nature of the book; and because of the nature of the man."