

**Author denies new Mahathir book a PR exercise**  
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The author of the latest book on former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad today insisted that his book is not a public relations exercise as some have suggested.

Tom Plate (left), author of 'Doctor M: Operation Malaysia; Conversations with Mahathir Mohamad' defended the book as an attempt to understand Mahathir's psyche rather than to judge his decisions.

"This is not a whitewash. Not a public relations exercise," said Plate during the book launch today.

"I wrote a book that I wanted to write. It's an appreciation, not a nomination; it's a critical appreciation.

"It is about understanding the thinking behind the decisions and not the decisions...(Whether the decisions Mahathir made were right) is for you to decide," he said.

Launched at the Perdana Leadership Foundation, Putrajaya today, the book has been slammed by some critics who felt that it was apologetic of the transgressions committed by Malaysia's longest serving prime minister.

For example author and former journalist Kee Thuan Chye in his book review for Malaysiakini even said that Plate was "fawning", and that the former prime minister was "airbrushed like a hero".

Opposition leaders, especially those who had denied ever meeting Mahathir prior to their arrests during Operation Lallang crackdown as the former premier has claimed in Plate's book, has also accused Mahathir of trying to rewrite history.

**'Who hasn't made mistakes?'**

As if responding to his critics, Plate today said, "In assessing a man's life you have to weigh it...is there anyone in the audience who hasn't made mistakes?

"Look at the economic development. The standing up for Malaysia. This was not somebody who'd be a pussycat," he said.

The American career journalist added that Mahathir, whom he also described as "more entertaining than a travelling circus", displayed incredible gumption with the "cool" Buy British Last campaign, less than a year into his premiership.

The book, Plate stressed, is a journalist's perspective and not a biography.

"I told Mahathir I wasn't out to get him but I was not out to make him a saint. I was trying to understand," he later told reporters.

In the book, Plate describes the elder statesman as a "soft authoritarian" and notes that Mahathir (right), who takes home a pension of USD 3,000 a month is "not greedy" and is

gratified by his achievements.

He also credits Mahathir's leadership for stability in Malaysia and for the lack of terrorist attacks on the country, which Plate says bucks the trend of other Muslim-majority countries.

Interestingly, Plate in the book also does not correct the former PM when in their conversations Mahathir mistakenly says that no Jewish people died in the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001, but instead expresses relief when his subject choses not to elaborate on the matter.

### **Dr M skips launch**

Plate's book is now tops on the Malaysian non-fiction best seller list, while special editions of the book which are autographed by Plate and Mahathir are selling for RM10,000 each.

Four have since been sold, and all proceeds of the sale of the special editions will be donated to four charities chosen by book launch sponsor Fraser n Neave (F&N) Holdings Berhad and Mahathir himself.

Speaking to reporters later, F&N chief executive officer Jordan Ng Jui Sia said that the book is a "good appreciation of the things that Mahathir stand for and the things he had said."

Mahathir himself was absent. It is understood that he chose not to attend, in order to leave the limelight on Plate.

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