

**A pathetic attempt by Mahathir
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"History consists of a series of accumulated imaginative inventions." (Voltaire)

COMMENT It would appear that Dr Mahathir Mohamad's memoirs have been published with two main objectives in mind:

* To try to clean up the blemishes on his record, for example, the unleashing of Operation Lalang in 1987 and his assault on the judiciary in 1988; and

* To try to stop at all costs the attempt by his nemesis, Anwar Ibrahim, to become the next prime minister.

His memoirs reveal that he is not one who respects the truth of historical accounts. Wasn't it Oscar Wilde who said, "Any fool can make history, but it takes a genius to write it"?

Suaram/K Das' 'The White Paper on the October Affair and the Why? Papers' (1989) and my own '445 Days under the ISA' (1989) have set straight the record on Operation Lalang. Mahathir's silly effort to pin the blame on the police and the former IGP's gauche efforts to ake credit for it belong to Malaysia's growing stock of political fairy tales.

Remember 'May Day for Justice'?

As for Mahathir's assault on the Malaysian judiciary in 1988 when the lord president was sacked and several Supreme Court judges suspended, he makes the vacuous claim that it was all because the king had been annoyed at Salleh's complaints about noisy building works near his house...

Only fools and buffoons would fall for such a caricature of history. The Malaysian judiciary has still not recovered from that rude assault by Mahathir in 1988, which affronted judicial circles all over the world as well.

Writing the Foreword to Salleh & Das' 'May Day for Justice' (1989), Justice Michael Kirby of the International Commission of Jurists said of the incident:

"Singled out for particular mention was the concern of the International Commission of Jurists about the campaign of attacks on the judiciary by the prime minister of Malaysia; the inducement made to the lord president to resign his office quietly; the apparently biased constitution of the tribunal set up to inquire into his removal; the inclusion in the tribunal, as its chairman, of a judge who succeeded to the lord president's office; the unprecedented action of that judge in securing the removal and suspension of Supreme Court judges who provided a stay to allow the constitutionality of the tribunal to be tested in the Malaysian Supreme Court, and the 'unpersuasive' report of the tribunal following which the lord president was removed."

The assault on the Malaysian judiciary in 1988 was one of Mahathir's crudest attempts to cling to power when he was challenged by Razaleigh Hamzah and showed that he does not respect, or does not understand, the meaning of 'the rule of law'.

And he cannot run away from that responsibility, nor can he erase that history. This dark episode in modern Malaysian history has been meticulously recorded by Salleh and Das in 'May Day for Justice', published in 1989 by Magnus Books.

Tunku Abdul Rahman wrote in the Preface to 'May Day for Justice':

"Episode after episode in the book shows the spiritual corruption, the cynicism, the moral turpitude, the viciousness and the horrible ruthlessness which attended the exercise of falsely accusing him, hastily putting him before a Tribunal of questionable character and quickly removing him from office.

"I do not know how any honourable government can stay in office after this book has been published. It constitutes a denunciation which cannot be answered without confessing to the most dishonourable conduct in public life."

All of this happened under Mahathir's watch and the system of justice in this country has still not fully recovered from the crude assault. If not for that, he would not be so smug about casting libellous claims about his political opponent's moral character.

Sure, he need not tremble in fear of defamation suits by Anwar in the present system, but in the event of a new just government in Putrajaya, and the rug is lifted from the dirt in his term in office, we will put right our history...

Coffee table amusement

It is a sign of the times that Mahathir's memoirs should be released at a time when the government is making history compulsory for all Malaysian students:

"History is now strictly organised, powerfully disciplined, but it possesses only a modest educational value and even less conscious social purpose." (JH Plumb).

In an age when information is so abundant and accessible, I have often said that history text books should not be prescribed for secondary school children. They should be encouraged to read widely in order to encourage critical thinking.

That being the case, Mahathir's memoirs can best be relegated to the function of coffee table amusement. As the visionary William Blake has put it:

"A truth that's told with bad intent,
Beats all the lies you can invent."

Mahathir would do well to live out the rest of his life free of self-deception, self-delusion and self-denial.