

Criticisms of book on Pak Lah, media get whacked

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COMMENT 1. We hope that all of you are enjoying your Raya holiday and apologise for disturbing it to respond to errors in the media coverage of our edited collection, *Awakening: The Abdullah Years in Malaysia*.

2. The media response to this collection was not expected. Despite our efforts to stress to the media early-on that this was a serious reflective collection by scholars and practitioners, the focus has been on sensationalizing parts of the book, especially former premier Tun Abdullah Badawi's (below) interview.

budget 2007 010906 pak lah holding the budget bookThe media dynamic has taken on a life of its own, with nasty unjustified attacks on individuals, including some of the contributors and editors.

These are not in the spirit of the season, nor do they reflect the substance or the intention of the collection itself.

3. This was a project that began several years ago, and consistent with a project involving multiple contributors, the process is a long one.

This project was delayed. The sole responsibility of this delay lies with the editors, as we navigated multiple publishers, galleys and conflicting professional demands.

4. We were never asked to delay its release, before or after any elections. The galleys were not finalised until early July this year.

The book was to be released and launched after Raya, the earliest date after printing. No one asked us to delay the release of the book for any reason.

5. In coordination with our publisher, we decided to make sure the book was available in bookstores before the launch. We were worried about sales, in part due to the delay of the collection.

The first copies were released at a book fair in KL last week and arrangements were made to have the book in bookstores this week, for a launch initially scheduled for August 16th.

6. The media reports on the book come from the purchase of the book, and, sadly

in some cases, reports from other reports in many cases involving erroneous reporting. Others wrote the book without even seeing the book!

7. Media outlets have mistakenly labelled the book "Pak Lah's book". This is not correct. It is a collection of multiple views, many of them quite critical of the period of his tenure. Others are less so.

We have contributors from all sides of the political divide and academic observers. We worked to have a balanced collection and part of the balancing was to give space to Pak Lah himself to put himself on record on his tenure.

We reached out to a wide variety of individuals in bringing together over 30 authors. This is a serious collection aiming for a reflective discussion of the premiership of Malaysia's fourth prime minister.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 06Throughout, our effort was always toward promoting understanding. If one reads the book itself, one will find diversity and a range of views on multiple issues.

8. We are grateful to Tun Abdullah Badawi who was kind enough to grant us an extensive interview.

We consider this an honour and an important part of understanding the history of this period. That he agreed to be part of a collection that included views critical of him speaks to his character and openness.

9. We are also grateful to the other 33 contributors whose valuable insights helped to make the collection a strong foundation for future analyses of this important period in Malaysia's history.

10. Given the politicisation of the collection in media reports and in an effort not to promote further misunderstandings, the official launch in KL will be postponed. We hope to hold a panel discussion about the book, with multiple perspectives from different speakers, in Singapore and elsewhere after the official KL launch. The book has been released and should be available in bookstores.

11. We call on the media and blogging community to act responsibly, to read the book before making assessments and to avoid erroneous speculation.

12. Wishing you all the best during the Raya holiday.

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