

## **Najib's task - to bring the country back to safer waters**

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COMMENT On Aug 7, 2013 I received an email announcement from the Malaysian publisher, GB Gerakbudaya, that the book, 'Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia' was available for purchase.

I immediately sent the communication to some friends with the comment that "I think this is a good book. I will buy one to read".

The reason why I have a special interest in the book is because my own book, 'Malaysia: Road Map for Achieving Vision 2020' was also published by Gerakbudaya earlier in 2012.

As my book covers both the Abdullah Badawi and Dr Mahathir Mohamad periods as prime ministers of our nation, I was intrigued to know whether my analysis of the poor quality of national leadership during the past 30 years was endorsed or repudiated by the 37 analysts, scholars and political figures who contributed to this new book.

NONESince that initial announcement, it is disappointing to hear that the book launch has been postponed due to the flood of media articles focusing on the interview that Pak Lah provided to the two book editors.

This interview, which appears as the first chapter of the book, is the first time that Pak Lah has gone on record to discuss his relationship with Mahathir.

He details how his predecessor attempted to interfere with his running of the country, and the negative impact it would have had on the country's development if he had followed Mahathir's insistence on implementation of his pet mega projects.

Much of the interview also focuses on the shortcomings and inability of Umno to reform, and of the damage done to the Malay agenda by Perkasa and Utusan Malaysia.

Excerpts from this interview have predictably stirred up a huge political ruckus. Umno's cyber-troopers and supporters have gone to town in condemning the book - many of them without even reading it!

Political ruckus

Part of the political ruckus has come about due to the completely groundless speculation that Pak Lah had a hand in the book - both hands or more - according to the Abdullah Badawi haters in the Umno/Malay blogging world.

We have seen how the game plan of Umno right wing and conservative forces is to impose 'ketuanan Melayu' on the country.

The announcement of the launch of the 'Awakening' book clearly provided them a good opportunity to lament the loss of the good old days of the authoritarian Mahathir era as well as to engage in bashing Pak Lah further.

najib hari raya open house 080813Hence, supporters of the triple M axis - the Mahathir-Muhyiddin-Mukhriz alliance - have gleefully seized on the book to promote their agenda. In this way, they intend to undermine Prime Minister Najib Razak's (right) position in the coming Umno elections and general assembly meeting, and check his efforts at reform.

Regardless of the conclusions arrived at by the contributors to the book, Malaysians have long felt the direct impact of the defective policies pursued by the two prime ministers.

As a result, no one today can escape from rising living costs, corruption, abuses in the market place, growing crime and insecurity, entrenched racism and religious bigotry in the civil service and other problems.

Many Malaysians have made up their minds about the place of Mahathir and Pak Lah in the country's political history.

They do not need a 620-page book to tell them about the achievements or shortcomings of the two previous administrations.

As for me, I can share with readers the conclusions that I arrived at in my book on the two prime ministers.

On Mahathir

This was written in response to Mahathir's rejection of the World Bank report on Malaysia's brain drain in April 2011.

Not surprisingly, the chief critic has been Mahathir who has derided the report as useless and politically motivated. As Mahathir has been the main architect of the

socio-economic policies that have been responsible for the brain drain, his reaction is predictable.

The country's leadership and citizenry should ignore his criticism as the ranting of a seriously flawed leader whose shelf life has expired and who has long lost his credibility to comment sensibly on any public policy subject - whether this relates to the New Economic Model or human capital development - and especially if it concerns governance issues of which the former prime minister has been fundamentally compromised and incorrigibly irresponsible.

On Badawi

As for Abdullah Badawi, although I did not write directly on his leadership qualities, this is what I had to say about the Islamic state concept which was endorsed and enlarged by Pak Lah to become Islam Hadhari.

Although it is true that Islam is the religion of the state, for the prime minister to call the country an Islamic state went a lot further than has ever been done before by any leader of the country.

In my opinion, it has lent greater significance and clout to conservative Muslim organisations and groups that want to take the country to a more Islamic oriented future in the country's road map - a direction which is not acceptable to the non-Muslim population and even to progressive Malay Muslims.

Other commentators have challenged the prime minister's pronouncement and argued that Malaysia is in fact a secular state, since the federal constitution is unambiguously a-religious.

The problem of religion in Malaysia can be linked directly to the Umno and PAS battle for the Islamic space and the hearts and minds - and votes - of Muslims.

Both parties have competed to out-Islamise the other.

Each has resorted to heightening religious rhetoric and endorsement of greater Islamic activity and acts of symbolism to demonstrate that they are more religious and worthy of Muslim votes.

In the process they have created a monumental road block in the country's drive towards a liberal, progressive and inclusive future.

Can Najib step back from the brink?

The disastrous results of the political machinations of our two former prime ministers are the unfortunate legacy we have to live with. Vision 2020 is in tatters and Islam Hadhari has taken over the country.

Many Malaysians now see the country as caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. Can Najib Abdul Razak, the present prime minister, bring the country back to safer waters or will he push the country beyond the brink?

Unfortunately nothing that Najib has done since the elections gives me confidence that he can resist the twin threats of Malay ultra-nationalism and Islamic religious fundamentalism to our country's future.

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