

YOURSAY | Harun Idris and May 13: The truth can cut both ways

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Yoursay

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Vijay47: Ashaari Azman Shah, reading the valiant efforts you made to re-establish your grandfather's reputation, one can readily conclude that you have all the hallmarks of a true Umno leader.

Heck, you can also be a university professor! After all, former Selangor menteri besar Harun Idris had many non-Malay friends, he had a passionate interest in sports, he led the national football team to great heights, and he even arranged the Muhammad Ali-Joe Bugner fight in Kuala Lumpur in 1975.

So how can anyone hold his alleged involvement in the May 13, 1969 riots against him? How can anyone hold the Holocaust against Adolf Hitler's aide, Heinrich Himmler, who had been a boy scout in his youth - it was just one of those molehill things!

You credit your grandfather with the creation of PKNS (Selangor State Development Corporation). Very true. But let us not overlook the fact that PKNS, like most government-linked companies (GLCs), is a citadel of racism.

Equally true are two seemingly contradictory statements you made - that he was imprisoned for corruption and that he “was too farsighted”. Again, very true.

Had he lived in more current times, especially with a corrupt association, he would have been hailed as a shameless leader of the race by his fan club.

The Pulitzer Prize is assured for you, Ashaari, that when you asked former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad whether he, Malaysia’s second prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein, and your dear grand-dad had any role in the May 13 tragedy, he replied in the negative. Maybe you will even get the Nobel Prize for Literature.

PinkRabbit2966: Ashaari, I wish you success in your endeavour. I did some research at the National Archive United Kingdom in Kew, England and National Archive Australia, in Canberra. I read all the materials, including confidential matters and news cuttings related to May 13.

I went through diplomatic despatches, letters and interviews of politicians by

senior diplomats, especially from the UK and Australia. I could not find anything that can pinpoint Harun as the person responsible for the riots.

The Australian National Archive has some materials that it can only allow people to view on its premises. I was there in early 1990 but at that time the materials were still not available to the public. I do not know if the materials can share some insight into what happened then.

Sun: I have read the comments of my fellow readers. Many lived through the May 13 tragedy and may have even suffered losses, personal or otherwise, from it. But I cannot understand the venom they are spewing at the grandson who merely seeks the truth.

He mentions several times that if the facts show otherwise, he will accept it. Much of the controversy around Harun was shaped by the widespread belief, supported by the fact that the rioters set out from his residence, that he instigated it or at least played a key role in it. The fact remains that no impartial committee was set up to evaluate the incident.

Politicians who had blood on their hands wanted no independent investigation and perhaps it was difficult at that time to find impartial members to sit on such a committee.

Ashaari's quest to find the truth should be the quest of every Malaysian, regardless of his/her private perceptions on that matter. By the way, I too grew up believing Harun was the mastermind behind the riots, but maturity has taught me two things.

First, never attribute the sins of fathers (or grandfathers) to their sons (or grandsons). Doing so destroys yet another life.

Second, perceptions or beliefs, no matter how often they are circulated or recirculated, cannot constitute proof. History is full of innocent people condemned by perceptions.

Only an impartial investigation can establish the truth about Harun. That he escaped charges for involvement in the riot but was convicted for corruption instead speaks volumes of how politics, more than justice, delivered the verdict on him.

Kilimanjaro: Ashaari, I laud your effort to clear your grandpa's name. But asking Pejuang president Mahathir; that is laughable. When has anyone got a straight answer from him?

The truth is Harun fell out of favour with politicians who were envious of his

clout and fame. If you care to read Justice Azlan Shah's judgment, he referred to Harun Idris as one with "unparalleled cunningness".

His menteri besar position was hanging in the balance where Selangor BN had fared badly enough, the fact that his residence was the epicentre of the riots that followed, two innocent Chinese onlookers were mercilessly murdered, and his speeches were full of racism, etc.

Yes, it is a good idea to set up a royal commission of inquiry (RCI). Why do you think the then or successive governments didn't want to do that?

Like you, we are also yearning for the truth, but you must also know that it can cut both ways. The guessing game has made many rounds - that it may have implicated some Malay leaders as the prime instigators of the riots.

Malaysia's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, gave a glimpse of the then-internal Malay politics in Umno – how his deputy Abdul Razak went behind his back to approve the permit for the gathering to march despite warning him that it may lead to problems.

Our then leaders or those thereafter never had the wisdom or maturity to do a truth and reconciliation exercise to heal a wounded nation. After all, we never

produced a "Nelson Mandela" and that is the tragedy of this nation.

Ruslan Bahari: Those commenting that Harun was a racist say so without any personal dealings with the man.

Having grown up at the time he was menteri besar, and went to his house and participated in his activities, especially soccer, I can vouch for his racial equality.

No doubt, you would say that "you're a Malay, of course, you'd defend him"; that's your right, but Umno today is probably a more racist party than it ever was.

He was gentle. He fights for his rights as anyone would, and at a time when the "Rancangan Malaysia" ideas were still fresh and believable, he did carry a torch for the Malays. But it was never at the expense of another race.

I saw all manner of people from all races come to his Langgak Duta home and he met them assuredly as a leader. Harun would be ashamed at the level of racism practised here today.

I may have been a child then, but I knew what he meant when he told me "Malaysia nak maju, semua kena maju". My late dad was there as we spoke lightly

about the way forward for Malaysia.

Sure, the Malays were the chunk of the discussion, but he did not omit the Indians and the Chinese in that realm. May Allah forgive his weaknesses and reward his deeds with the highest of Jannah, InsyaAllah.

Betul Malu Bukan Maluapa: What nonsense is the late Harun's grandson talking, when his grandfather, who was the chairperson of Bank Rakyat, used the bank's assets to hold the boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Bugner in Kuala Lumpur.

For that crime, Harun was found guilty by the High Court. Justice was served under the no-nonsense late prime minister Hussein Onn's watch.

Pathfinder: By official figures, almost 200 people died in the May 13 riots. Unofficial numbers are much higher. Independent reports and observers estimate at 1,000 to 2,000 people died, the vast majority of them Chinese.

Many lost their fathers, mothers and children. They were murdered, and some were burned. You and Marina Mahathir can shake hands and try to whitewash terrible such legacies. Shame on you.

Ashaari: @Pathfinder, yes, it was a terrible tragedy, one which Malaysia has not moved on from.

I agree with Suaram's founder Kua Kia Soong that the documents should be declassified, and I agree with Iskandar Puteri MP Lim Kit Siang when I interviewed him that there should be an RCI to look into it.

If it was Harun, then so be it, but we should all look at it as Malaysians together. Sadly, all those lives were lost. Sadder still is that this event is still used as some kind of bogeyman.

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