

**May 13 was not a planned coup**  
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**Bede Hong**

Politician Dr Syed Husin Ali has given a different perspective to Dr Kua Kia Soong's new book, *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969*.

He disagreed on the root cause of the Kuala Lumpur race riots, which Dr Kua attributed to a conspiracy by the "ascendant Malay state capitalist class" to overthrow the government.

"I beg to differ slightly with Kua on the nature and root of the May 13 incident. Kua seems to regard it as planned coup d'etat by state capitalists, presumably led by Razak to overthrow the feudal or aristocratic rule," said Syed Husin, who is the deputy president of Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

The former Universiti Malaya sociology and anthropology professor said it was most likely a combination of events which Umno leaders took advantage to specifically oust Tunku Abdul Rahman from the premiership.

"There was certainly a stroke or blow against Tunku which ultimately resulted in his removal from power. It was successful, but certainly not a sudden move.

"To me it appeared that what Razak (former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak) and others did was to take advantage of the ethnic violence which took place, in order to carry out the coup against Tunku, whom they were already dissatisfied with.

"But I have little doubt that the people who precipitated the ethnic violence were Umno leaders who felt threatened they would lose power. But they could get mass Malay support because they managed to spin that if they lose power, it would mean that the Malays as a whole would lose power," said the former president of Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia.

He was speaking to audiences in a packed hall at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall yesterday at a forum on the 1969 race riots. Also present was Dr Kua, researcher K Nagarajan and playwright Beth Yap.

### **Removal of an unpopular leader**

Syed Husin said the capitalist class that Dr Kua referred to did not exist.

"As Kua himself admitted [in his book] 'at the end of the 1960s, Malay capital was negligible'. In other words, the Malay capitalist class was perhaps not even in its infancy. The many state capitalist institutions that were formed mainly in the 60s did not succeed well, in fact some failed," he said.

"I contend that they did not manage to create a crystallised state capitalist, what else a private capitalist class. So, was there really a Malay state capitalist class, which was planning to oust the federalistic or aristocratic leader? Or was this a manifestation an intra-class to wrest power?" he asked.

Syed Husin also disagreed with the suggestion that Tunku Abdul Rahman was perceived as

more aristocratic and more 'feudal', therefore triggering Umno leaders to conspire against him.

"Tunku and Razak have their roots strong in the traditional upper-class structure; although granted that Tunku displayed more feudal characteristic than Razak.

"There have been suggestions that many had also begun to dislike him because he was an Anglophile. But, on the other hand, in terms of policies and political orientations his former lieutenants were perhaps only a few degrees less Anglophile."

He said what was clear "was that there was no overthrow of government."

"In fact, the old government continued. Instead, it was essentially the removal of a leader who is no longer popular, because he was perceived to be too close and often conceding to Chinese capitalists," he said.

### **An open inquiry**

Earlier, Kua said he didn't think his book "is the definitive book."

"We appeal to victims, their friends and families, servicemen, eyewitnesses, to come forward. We are asking for an open inquiry if not a royal commission," he said.

Kua is also a former DAP MP. He was also detained under the Internal Security Act during the 1987 Ops Lallang.

In his book, a result of a three-month research at the Public Records Office in London to study records and declassified documents - Kua suggested that the May 13 riots were by no means a spontaneous outburst of racial violence, as it has been portrayed to the Malaysian public.

"The (official) history of May 13 is full of nonsense, it doesn't reveal anything. It pins the blame on the opposition party which was not true, they were not the responsible party," Kua told malaysiakini in a recent interview.

"My book shows the responsible party were those ascendent state capitalist class (in Umno), elements within that gave rise and implemented this plan. There was a plan based on the people who assembled at the (Selangor) menteri besar's house.

"There are correspondences and intelligence reports which showed that. Official history has to reveal that truth and not to pin the blame on everybody around who are not to be blamed," the educationist and social activist stressed.

Kua maintained the May 13 incident was a coup d'etat against the Tunku by the then emergent Malay state capitalists - backed by the police and army - to seize control of the reign of power from the old aristocrats to implement the new Malay agenda.

Official figures said the May 13 riots claimed 196 lives, 180 were wounded by firearms and 259 by other weapons, 9,143 persons were arrested out of whom 5,561 were charged in court, 6,000 persons rendered homeless, at least 211 vehicles and 753 buildings were destroyed or damaged.

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