

When the ACA DG was persecuted for doing his job
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The year 1998 was a black mark in the annals of the country's history.

When then-deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was sacked from his lofty position as the second most powerful man in the government and subsequently faced trumped-up sodomy and corruption charges, there was hysteria among his supporters.

Their fears were not amiss as there was a massive witchhunt to 'purge' the government as well as the Umno ruling party of Anwar 'sympathisers'. Some who were caught in the crossfire were not just politicians, but also civil servants. NONE

One was former Anti-Corruption Agency director-general Shafee Yahaya (right), whom Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah had described as "true to (public trust) and rejected any form of corruption".

Shafee had an almost unblemished record of 33 years in the civil service. But it all almost ended in tatters on that fateful day when then-prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself 'scolded' him for raiding a senior government officer's office.

The episode would have gone mainly unnoticed had he not been called as a defence witness in Anwar's corruption trial back in 1998.

It was then that he testified in open court that he had raided then-Economic Planning Unit director-general Ali Abul Hassan's office earlier that year, and found wads of cash in his drawer.

NONE Life then took a 180 degree turn for both Shafee and his wife Khalsom Taib (right), who had to brave persecution and have various other accusations levelled at them, including a bizarre claim of breach of the Official Secrets Act.

"It was horrible. Shafee was taken to Bukit Aman for questioning until past midnight. And all the while there were policemen in my house. I had to put them in the spare bedroom and keep a close eye on them the whole time.

"Who knows what they could've planted around the house, and then accuse us of what not. They thought we were Anwar sympathisers!" said the plucky Khalsom in a recent interview with Malaysiakini.

Since then, both Shafee and Khalsom have been living a comfortable life as retirees, golfing and pottering around in the garden in their Taman Tun Dr Ismail house.

'Letter war'

That is until the 'letter war' in 2008 which reignited the incident they thought buried 10 years ago.

mahathir at bum 2009 bloggers conference talking about sex and old age 290509 01 In that year, former UN special rapporteur Param Cumaraswamy and Dr Mahathir (right) had traded acerbic but very public barbs at each other through the Letters to the Editor section in English daily The Sun as well as Malaysiakini.

That letter sent by Param blew the incident into the open and reminded the nation of the alleged 'interference' from Dr Mahathir's side when Shafee was just doing his job.

The former premier, still unfazed, in fact described Shafee: "raising his voice", "accusing him of trying to stop the investigation", "his words against mine", "an angry man", "opportunistic" and "revengeful".

Boiling with anger, it was then that Khalsom had decided to write a book, hoping to clear the air surrounding her husband of 43 years.

NONE"But then, I was a lot angrier. I felt that I needed to set the record straight for the children. I don't want that in years to come, when we're both gone, they suddenly have to deal with this situation again," she said.

And since then, she wrote a more "abridged" version titled 'The Shafee Yahaya Story: Estate Boy to ACA chief', launched in June by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

"The anger just crept back up after it lay dormant. This is because of all the injustice done to my husband," she said.

Since then, Khalsom had painstakingly compiled all the letters and newspaper clippings pertaining to the matter, but careful preservation of documents is not foreign to her, a History graduate from Universiti Malaya.

"But no one wanted to publish my book. Apparently, it was difficult to meet the requirements for my book," she said.

azmin ali pc in parliament 020709 02Despite the setbacks, Khalsom published the book on her own and printed only 1,000 copies in the initial run.

And it has picked up a lot of buzz, surprisingly, from PKR politicians.

Both young and old politicians from the Parti Keadilan Rakyat have been giving their "reviews" of the book through micro-blogging website Twitter and their own blogs or Facebook accounts.

In fact, during the course of the interview itself, a man came to the house bearing a cheque from PKR vice-president Azmin Ali (left) who had purchased 50 books.

"The response was encouraging. This is despite a lot of do-it-yourself marketing. We can't really expect to make money from this. But this is just our record of what really happened," she said.

Tales of 'interference'

From the day the book was launched, more are people are coming forward to Khalsom with their own story - either wives of government officers, or the senior officers themselves.

And all tell the same story - that they faced similar experiences of 'interference'.

"When the book came out, most of them were at first shocked that this could happen.

NONE"But many of our friends are slowly come out of their shells with their own traumatic experiences that they never dared to say before. Some also shared with us certain things that happened to them," she said.

Taking another step forward, she said that if she could convince some of her friends, she may even compile an anthology of such experiences.

"But so far, no one has dared to yet. We'll see how it goes," she said.

And with Khalsom being one of the rare people to brave repercussions from the powers-that-be to tell the story of her husband, it is only a matter of time before the rest come forward.

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