

THE MAN WHO SAVED MALAYSIA

NST- 31/12/2006

Most Malaysians have only a vague memory of him. To many, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman was little more than a leader whose time was cut short much too soon.

But a soon-to-be-released biography of the man, who died as acting Prime Minister on Aug 2, 1973, reveals just how critically important he was to the country.

The book, *The Reluctant Politician: Tun Dr Ismail and His Time*, is the first authoritative biography of one of Malaysia's most respected founding fathers.

Written by Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) Fellow Dr Ooi Kee Beng, the long-awaited work is based on Dr Ismail's private papers and in-depth interviews with friends, colleagues and subordinates, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

A key source material is Dr Ismail's own unfinished autobiography — an unpublished manuscript that was among the papers placed under the care of his son, Tawfik.

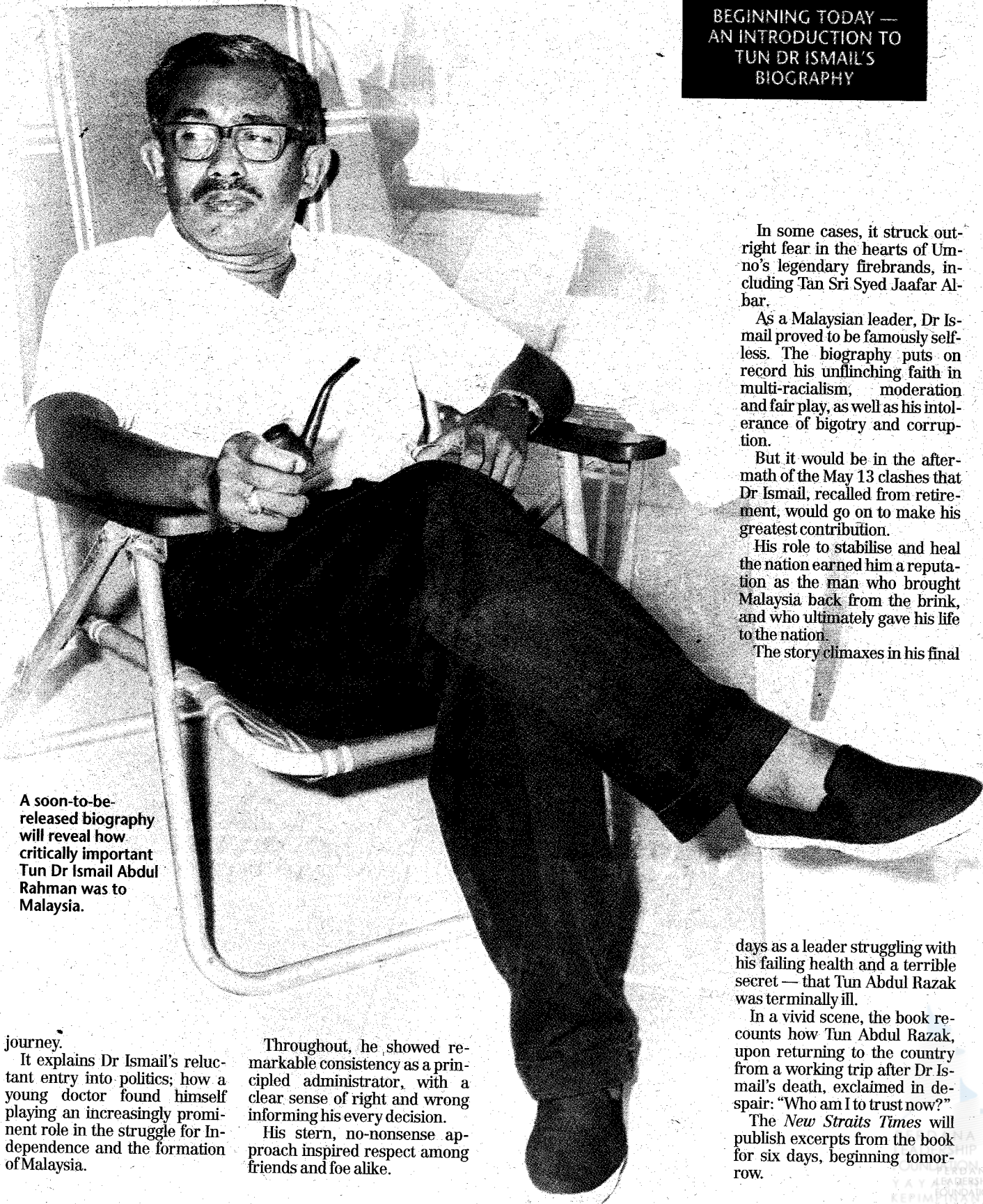
The book unearths some startling new insights. It details, for instance, Dr Ismail's failed plea to MCA president Tun Tan Siew Sin not to "pull out" the MCA from the Alliance Government in 1969.

The withdrawal was temporary, but Dr Ismail believed it played into the hands of racial extremists and led to the May 13 clashes.

Also in the book is Dr Ismail's recollection of a missed opportunity to dissolve the parties that made up the ruling Alliance and form a single multi-racial party. It was an idea he apparently discussed with Tan in the late 1950s.

Fiercely loyal to Tunku Abdul Rahman, Dr Ismail is also revealed as the Umno leader who wanted Dr Mahathir Mohamad expelled from Umno after Dr Mahathir's criticism of the Tunku.

Published by ISEAS, the biography charts Dr Ismail's thinking and his inspiring life



A soon-to-be-released biography will reveal how critically important Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman was to Malaysia.

journey.

It explains Dr Ismail's reluctant entry into politics; how a young doctor found himself playing an increasingly prominent role in the struggle for Independence and the formation of Malaysia.

Throughout, he showed remarkable consistency as a principled administrator, with a clear sense of right and wrong informing his every decision.

His stern, no-nonsense approach inspired respect among friends and foe alike.

In some cases, it struck outright fear in the hearts of Umno's legendary firebrands, including Tan Sri Syed Jaafar Al-Bar.

As a Malaysian leader, Dr Ismail proved to be famously selfless. The biography puts on record his unflinching faith in multi-racialism, moderation and fair play, as well as his intolerance of bigotry and corruption.

But it would be in the aftermath of the May 13 clashes that Dr Ismail, recalled from retirement, would go on to make his greatest contribution.

His role to stabilise and heal the nation earned him a reputation as the man who brought Malaysia back from the brink, and who ultimately gave his life to the nation.

The story climaxes in his final

days as a leader struggling with his failing health and a terrible secret — that Tun Abdul Razak was terminally ill.

In a vivid scene, the book recounts how Tun Abdul Razak, upon returning to the country from a working trip after Dr Ismail's death, exclaimed in despair: "Who am I to trust now?"

The *New Straits Times* will publish excerpts from the book for six days, beginning tomorrow.