



# The man behind the legend

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by Bissme S.

"WE did not put him on a pedestal, neither did we crucify him." That was how producer Lina Tan described the documentary she did on Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad which will premiere on the History channel on Sunday.

Produced by Red Communications Sdn Bhd, *Mahathir* tells the story of the 84-year-old former prime minister from his young days to his political milestones through interviews with the man himself, his family, his friends and even his political opponents, including DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang.

"Our biggest challenge was to present an honest depiction of Mahathir without any prejudice," said Tan, who is also Red Communications managing director.

Clarifying that they were not doing a public relations piece on him, Tan said the former prime minister was asked some tough and controversial questions.

"I asked him if there were any questions that we could not ask him on air," she recalled and was gratified when Mahathir told her that she and her team could ask him anything. "He understood journalistic integrity and didn't want to interfere."

Tan is no novice in this field, having won a number of awards for shows that she has produced, including the Asian TV Awards 2002 best infotainment programme for *3R (Respect, Relax Respond)* and the 2006 Seri Angkasa Award for best documentary for *Profile Seni* which also took a similar award at the 2006 Malaysian Film Festival.

On Mahathir, Tan said: "As a leader of the country, he had to make tough decisions every day. And it was hard to be at the top. He was the man who ran Malaysia for more than 20 years. He also made Malaysia a modern and progressive society that's recognised worldwide and he should be credited for it."

She added that Mahathir also made some controversial decisions and that they have also addressed these issues in the documentary.

## DISCOVER THE OTHER SIDE OF TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD IN A SPECIAL DOCUMENTARY ON HISTORY CHANNEL THIS SUNDAY

"From the show, you learn that Mahathir had the best interests of this country in his heart. I think we have been successful in being objective."

Leong Hon Yuen, the director and co-producer, agreed. "What I thought about him is not important," she said. "As a journalist, I have to be neutral. My job is to present his story and it is up to the viewers to make their own perceptions."

Michele Schofield, History's director of content (programming, acquisitions and production) added that they are not out to make any kind of political statement with this documentary.

"We are not trying to say whether Mahathir did a good job or a bad job as prime minister of this country," said

Schofield. "We are trying to see his life beyond politics. We want to know him as a man ... what influences he had when he was growing up. He's lived through World War II - what was that like?"

Leong added that they were given access to many of Mahathir's personal photographs that the public has never seen before.

*Mahathir* offers many poignant moments, especially when Mahathir talks about losing his mother and the death of his mentor, former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak.

One of Leong's favourite moments in the documentary was when Tun Dr Siti Hasmah recalled the time Mahathir suffered his first heart attack.

"She rushed him to hospital," said Leong. "He refused to sit in the wheelchair. He wanted to walk ... But she managed to convince him to use the wheelchair."

"The doctor then told her that she had to inform the Cabinet about the incident. It was only then that it struck her that she was not only bringing her husband to the hospital but also the prime minister of Malaysia."

Schofield, meanwhile, enjoyed hearing the views of two of the most important women in Mahathir's life - his wife and his daughter Marina. "We get to hear their views on sharing her husband and her dad with the country."

For Tan, she loved the story of how Mahathir courted his wife. "It was a sweet innocent love story," she said. "We got the story from him, his wife and his sister-in-law. I will not tell you more ... you have to watch the documentary."

The first part of *Mahathir* premieres on Sunday on History (Astro Channel 555) at 8pm with the second part airing the following Sunday at the same time.



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- Lina Tan



Mahathir and wife with their children and grandchildren.

## Mahathir in retrospect

PART 1 of *Mahathir* explores the man's early years, from World War II under the Japanese Occupation to his emerging political activism protesting the British colonial rule and his foray into political life.

We also get a glimpse of his medical schooldays, where he meets the woman of his dreams, and his days in private practice in a small rural town.

The film captures his early days as an elected representative, quickly earning a reputation as an exceptional debater and fierce advocate of Malay rights.

It also follows his fall from favour including losing his seat and his expulsion from his political party, and his eventual rise to become Malaysia's fourth prime minister.

Part 2 shows Mahathir striving to modernise Malaysia and to instil confidence and pride in the Malay



Mahathir ... then and now.

race. He is often seen lashing out at the western world and anyone who dares to challenge him.

The documentary goes on to show him turning Malaysia into one of the most successful economies in the

region and putting the country on the world map. But success has a price.

Mahathir has to face challenges and power struggles within his party as well as a series of crises and scandals that dogged his administration.