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Newspaper	Today Online
Date	9/3/2011

# TODAY

MICA (P) 057/10/2010 • A PUBLICATION OF *MEDIACORP* • NEWS HOTLINE 6822 2268

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## Mahathir defends legacy in memoir

KUALA LUMPUR - Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad released his memoirs yesterday, defending decisions he made during a 22-year rule that critics say was marred by human rights abuses.

Dr Mahathir, who was one of Asia's longest-serving leaders when he retired in 2003, maintains in his book that his policies were in the country's best interests but said he regrets that "the epithet 'authoritarian' appears without fail in all my detractors' assessments of me".

"I had tried my best although I cannot be a judge of my own work," the 85-year-old Mahathir said. "It is up to the people of today and the future to pass judgment."

The 800-page book - titled *A Doctor In The House*, a reference to Dr Mahathir's former medical career - hit stores in a blaze of publicity. Bookstore chain MPH displayed posters declaring the autobiography is "set to be the best-selling book of 2011".

Dr Mahathir's frank, personal writing provides rare glimpses into every phase of his life. He recounts his childhood in a poor northern Malaysian neighbourhood

that "verged on being a slum", with "stinking earth drains and black scum floating on the water".

His father was a strict school teacher who emphasised on education, spurring him to study medicine. He became politically active in the '50s during the twilight of British colonial rule, eventually running for Parliament and winning in 1964.

He also admitted that he has Indian blood but maintained that he is still Malay "and proud of it", reported *The Malaysian Insider*. "I admit that some Indian, or more accurately South Asian, blood flows in my veins but from which part of the Indian subcontinent my ancestors came I do not know," he wrote in his book.

After nearly 30 years in and out of government, Dr Mahathir became Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister in 1981. He claims he was "a highly unlikely candidate" since his predecessors were London-trained lawyers with political pedigree.

Dr Mahathir devotes several chapters to his economic drive that transformed Malaysia from a rubber and tin mining economy into one of Asia's most industrialised countries.



Dr Mahathir Mohamad signing a copy of his newly-released memoir, AP

He also explains his choices during political crises in the '80s that led to the detention without trial of dozens of opposition activists, the closure of newspapers and other measures that curtailed the independence of the judiciary.

"It is hard to know at such times what is required and reasonable, what is disproportionate and excessive." Dr Mahathir wrote. "We had to act and we did." **AP, THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER**