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Conversations with Tunku... an eye-opener

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OUR HISTORY: It's difficult to ignore the role of politics in the book, the Malaya that existed before Merdeka, the difficulty of uniting the three races and the story behind 'Ganyang Malaysia'

“T HOSE who do not know history are condemned to repeat it”. It's a quote that is so often used, it is almost cliché. It was one that I, too, heard on a beautiful Wednesday morning. It was uttered by His Royal Highness, the Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah.

This time around, the quote was mentioned with much depth.

We were at the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial, surrounded by relics of history. The people in attendance that day had years of experience and exposure and would have the breadth of knowledge of Malaysia today.

Some of them in the room, too, had created history. It was at the launch of Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad's book, *Conversations with Tunku Abdul Rahman* early last month. And I was more than honoured to be there to witness it all.

Being brought up in Malaysia would mean that everyone is conditioned to speeches. However, the ones that were given on that very day were insightful and useful, even as a reference. Abdullah, the author, is a man of many stories and experience.

Listening to his speech, read out by his wife, Puan Sri Fauzah Mohamad Darus, the opening remarks itself would catch your ears, “My Lords, Ladies..”. I realised I was lucky to hear this being used, a reminder of the olden days. As a lover of history, I was happy to have heard those words being uttered.

In his speech, Abdullah spoke of his experiences as a diplomat in the United Nations, and an occupant of the

Kamunting Detention Camp, the infamous prison that housed detainees under the now-defunct Internal Security Act.

I was given his book, and it was a book that occupied me for the many nights to come. Not because it was a difficult read, but it held so much of facts that were foreign and unfamiliar to me.

I would have heard of such situations, and such justifications for the many politically-linked incidents that has happened in, or to, our country.

In his book, Abdullah makes it an easy read, as it is organised according to the subjects. First one being Malaysia's relationship with Indonesia's first president Sukarno, and the story behind “Ganyang Malaysia” during the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation.

Next, was almost every Malaysian's favourite topic, Singapore and Malaysia. It nicely ties up with the second half of the book, “Malaysia and its Peoples”.

The book in itself, would let you into the personal mind of the Tunku. Growing up, I would hear of various sources and stories, even conspiracy theories behind Malaysian events.

However, as it is a well-known fact, the first point of reference was my Sejarah textbook, which had proven to be insufficient. But, seven years after I sat for my Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, I'm given a perspective of an account of history through this very book.

Through the chapter on Indonesia, I realised how important it is for you to

know of your leader. Not for his accomplishments, but for his personality and characteristic. For, the personality of Indonesia's president had an impact on its bilateral ties with Malaysia.

As for the relationship with Singapore, one thing that had struck me was vital: Prioritising policies to ensure the most important issue was tackled, and, indeed, living in 2016, it's difficult to imagine the threat of communism that had encouraged the separation of Singapore.

It is indeed difficult to ignore the role of politics in the book. It highlighted the Malaya that had existed before Merdeka, the segregation of races and the importance and difficulty, and the almost impossible nature of uniting the three different races that had been intended to be segregated by the British to consolidate their power.

Being a millennial, I personally felt like the Malaya, or Malaysia, discussed in the book was a different country altogether. Be it due to the minimal exposure through my days of SPM Sejarah, or even the immature mind in absorbing politics at a young age, but this book had opened my eyes and shown me what happened behind the scenes of the famous photo of my grandfather, the Tunku, with his palm in the air.

Indeed, through this book, Abdullah has allowed lessons to be learnt. One of the lessons would be the importance of friendship. The very lesson that engulfed the room that day as the sultan of Perak expressed his appreciation for the friendship be-

tween him and the esteemed Abdullah, as His Highness held his emotions in check when he spoke of Abdullah's strength and determination.

This book is indeed an eye-opener. The questions posed by Abdullah speaks of his deep interest. Today, many years later, the questions asked proves to be of a high significance, for it extracts the guiding beliefs and philosophies in decision-making. Personally, I found a deep connection, and as if I was speaking to my grandfather as I skimmed through the pages.

I had questions about my grandfather that were answered. I also understood him as a man who had respectable principles and philosophies, who shared the joy and success, for Malaysia was founded on cooperation and teamwork.

But, most importantly, I learnt the importance of humility, love for the country and the laws that govern it.

“I was elected not because I am a Tunku, I was elected because I am a representative of the people. A clear separation of powers, be it an abstract cause.” (Tunku Abdul Rahman).

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