

Projek Bina Bangsa book series hopes to promote frank debates

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ASERIES of books discussing notable occasions in the country's history with the aim of fostering unity among Malaysians will soon hit the shelves.

In commemoration of the Rukun Negara's 50th anniversary, the Projek Bina Bangsa books will explore the foundations of the nation through past events, such as the Malayan Union, the formation of Malaysia and the introduction of the New Economic Policy, among others.

Author Eddin Khoo, son of late historian Professor Tan Sri Dr Khoo Kay Kim, who was one of the drafters of the Rukun Negara, said the 10-book series was about putting historical events into context.

"The books cover a range of topics, including the National Language Act, and also looks into other things, such as vernacular schools and how certain decisions were made (then) about the plurality in our education (system).

"The books will also talk about the Malay Reservation Enactment 1913, which was not just about land, but it was really (about) defining communities, (as in) who will be the Malays, who will be the Javanese and other (communities), as well as the immigrant communities (at the time).

"The book series will end with the edition on Wawasan 2020 (Vision 2020). I just got word that I've finally gotten an interview with (former prime minister Tun) Dr Mahathir Mohamad to reflect on his Wawasan 2020 and that interview will, of course, be in the book."

Khoo said this during the launch of the first book in the series, titled *Rukunegara: A Brief Introduction*.

The book series is an initiative by Kuala Lumpur-based cultural organisation Pusaka and Allianz Malaysia Bhd.

Khoo, who is Pusaka founder and director, said the books would give past lead-

ers "voices" through their contents and the manner they delivered their speeches when they held office.

"How many people know about (former prime minister) Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech on the day he resigned? Or the full content of the Rukun Negara, including the preamble or the speech by (former minister) Tun Ghazali Shafie?"

"I had woven in a lot of their quotes (into the books), so that they could enlighten us about the ideas, what the objectives were and what the quarrels were.

"Another thing I must say is how beautiful the language was — the eloquence that went behind these things that we seem to have totally lost in this very reductive culture."

Khoo said the first book of the series, which is on the Rukun Negara, would present the speeches of former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak on the national philosophy.

Khoo said he hoped presenting past leaders in such a way in the book would allow Malaysians to have more frank debates.

"I included some newspaper cuttings on Tun Razak's speech on the subject of a liberal and just society. This came after one of our government agencies recently described 'liberal' as an open and free belief system that is motivated by lust.

"There should be discussions on how we encapsulate the concept of liberal, which is there in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence and the Rukun Negara. Hopefully, this debate can be sparked."

Other titles in the book series include *The Malayan Union*, *The Making of the Malayan Constitution*, *The Formation of Malaysia*, *The National Language Act and National Cultural Congress*, *The Malacca Digest*, *The Treaty of Pangkor*, *The Malay Reservation Enactment 1913*, *The New Economic Policy* and *Wawasan 2020*.

The book series will be available online starting Sept 14 and in major bookstores at the end of the month.