

Dr M has come full cycle
New Straits Times
13 April 2013
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LITERARY LEGACY: The fourth prime minister celebrates 66 years of writing and has moved from paper to cyberspace

WHEN I was the honorary resident president fellow of the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF) some years ago, it dawned on me that had it not been for Journalism Laureate Datuk A. Kadir Jasin, another facet of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad would have been lost.

Kadir, then group editor of the New Straits Times had discovered and published in 1995 Dr Mahathir's earliest writings in *The Early Years: 1947-1972*.

Over the years, Dr Mahathir's writings had not killed his text, if we go by the tradition of scholar and media theorist Walter J. Ong. But again, in the same tradition, Dr Mahathir's writings have resurrected the nation's consciousness.

Delivering a speech at the launch of a book by Utusan Malaysia columnist Datuk Zaini Hassan recently, in my subconscious mind, I was referring not so much to the contents of his book *Cuit: Dilema Melayu Moden*, but more on writing and its properties.

Zaini's book, a collection of his popular column every Wednesday for four years, was launched by Dr Mahathir.

My presentation also referred to the writings of Dr Mahathir. For a moment, I led the audience to be acquainted with Dr Mahathir as a writer. I reminded them that Dr Mahathir started writing in 1947.

More precisely, his first article was published in the *Straits Times/Sunday Times* in Singapore on July 20, 1947.

This makes July 20 this year as Dr Mahathir's 66th year of writing.

C.H.E. Det has come full cycle, emerging now as chedet.cc. On blogging, Dr Mahathir had said in his 2010 keynote address at Conference Blogger Asia and the Social Media that bloggers must rely on a code of ethics.

This is much needed because bloggers have the advantage of more freedom.

Dr Mahathir is ever conscious of the power of writing, and that of the writer. The writer cannot be obstructed or corrected. Their power lies in being writer, editor and publisher all at once.

Dr Mahathir's life of writing and the destiny of the nation would have been different had he taken up the offer by an editor of the *Straits Times* to be a journalist. The medical student replied that he was not interested (to be a journalist).

Dr Mahathir not only writes about Malay society, but politics, the nation, education, Islam, science and technology. In the subtext of his discourses lies the author as historian and social observer, as well as critic of the West.

Much earlier in the late 1940s, he had interacted with his environment through writing. Writing then was the vehicle for the expression of idealism for the future fourth prime minister of Malaysia.

The book *The Malay Dilemma* is a piece of writing that should be read by all Malaysians to understand contemporary Malaysia. In the 1960s, no one was bold enough to state the reality and truth on the state of affairs of the Malays, and ethnic relations in the newly independent Malaysia.

What was discussed in *The Malay Dilemma* had no place in the country. The book was first published in 1970 in Singapore by Donald Moore. In my teaching of the course *Malaysian Studies*, I required my students to read *The Malay Dilemma*.

The course, as well as *Ethnic Relations*, both offered in Malaysian universities should make *The Malay Dilemma* a compulsory text.

Another book, less well known, but nevertheless much significant is *Menghadapi Cabaran*, first published in Bahasa Melayu in 1976 by Pustaka Antara, and later translated into English as *The Challenge* and published by Pelanduk in 1986.

Dr Mahathir was conscious of the value of writing to society and civilisation.

In Cuit's foreword, he reminded that if history is to be a lesson, Malay awareness emerged when many of them have written the direction and destiny of the bangsa, agama dan tanah air.

Columnists and writers are the biggest contributors to the Malay consciousness. The continuity of the writing tradition will determine the future of the nation.

In the new media we see yet another transformation in writing. Dr Mahathir knows this. He is versatile. In the McLuhanist sense, he has migrated from paper to digital.

Dr Mahathir, the writer, has come full cycle.

In celebrating the life of writing of the fourth prime minister of Malaysia, PLF and the National Library is organising a seminar on Tun Dr Mahathir as a writer to be held on Wednesday at PLF in Putrajaya.

Dr Mahathir is expected to deliver the keynote address.

Some have argued that *The Malay Dilemma* is longer relevant in present-day Malaysia.

But then, the author recorded the historical moment, and analyses the new nation and its colonial heritage. The book is a writing of our narrative.

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Source: <http://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnist/dr-m-has-come-full-cycle-1.254292>