

Musa: Nobody dared speak the truth on Memali
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COMMENT On March 27, 2014, 9pm, (PAS vice president) Husam Musa and I were on the panel at a discussion hosted by the Kelantan government with the theme: 'Politik Malaysia: Dahulu dan Sekarang' (Malaysian Politics: Before and Now).

Professor Agoes (Muhammad Agus Yusoff) from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia was the moderator.

The format of the discussion was similar to BBC's 'Hard Talk', where panelists are unscripted and not allowed to refer to any notes when answering questions from the moderator.

In the two hour-discussion, the moderator was combative, aggressive and provocative but I admit that he was also fair, independent and impartial.

At the end of the discussion, I was asked about the Memali incident. The question touched on three aspects:

- That when the Memali incident took place, Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in China and I was the acting prime minister;
- That I am fully responsible for the incident; and
- My feelings about the incident.

I responded to the question using these four aspects:

1. I corrected the moderator by saying that as a professor, he should speak based on research and facts.

2. When Memali happened on Nov 19, 1985, Mahathir was in Kuala Lumpur and I was not acting prime minister. The moderator then expressed shock and audibly said, "My God", which further surprised the audience.

3. As home minister, I had outlined a rough guideline as well as reminded and instructed the police on two things: abide by the law and avoid violence and bloodshed.

I had left it to the discretion of the police conducting the operations to decide on the best time and method to conduct the operation. I was not directly involved but I took responsibility and accountability over what had happened.

4. Sincerely and honestly, I admit that Memali was a black spot on my political career.

In the time permitted by the moderator, I had elaborated on the chronology of events. On the day of incident, the acting police chief (Amin Osman) and I had met with the prime minister in his office.

The acting police chief had given a briefing on what had happened during the police operations in Memali, resulting in the deaths of four police personnel and 14 civilians.

At the meeting, I urged Mahathir to delay his visit to China on three grounds:

1. The incident took place in Kedah, his home state;
2. It involved Malays and Muslims; and
3. By delaying his visit to China, Mahathir will show that he prioritises and cares about domestic affairs.

Mahathir made the decision to still leave for China.

I informed him that I planned to table the matter (the Memali incident) in Parliament. I also sought that all media, local and foreign, give me 24 hours so I can get complete information on the incident.

I tabled the Memali matter in the Dewan Rakyat the next day, Nov 20, 1985, and then met with the media.

The conclusion is this:

1. It was not my intention to create a new polemic over Memali. The issue was revived due to my response to a question by the moderator at the panel discussion.
2. The main issue in this matter is the facts - that is whether I was acting prime minister on the day of the incident as Mahathir was not in the country.

Based on research from sources that I can still access today, it is clear that Mahathir was in the country when the Memali incident took place and I was not the acting prime minister.

3. In a court proceeding in my successful lawsuit against a writer several years ago (when Mahathir was still prime minister) my counsel asked the same two questions.

That is, whether Mahathir was in the country when the Memali incident happened and if I was acting prime minister on that day.

My answer was consistent. Mahathir was in the country and I was not acting prime minister. But no media reported it.

I have long been maligned, reproached and insulted over Memali by various quarters, including PAS.

As I recall, and especially after I resigned as minister, no one, be it in the government or Umno, was prepared to speak the truth.

I even offered to be interviewed exclusively by the media on the Memali incident but no media outlet was prepared to do so.

I understand that, at that point, no one wanted to take the risk of speaking the truth as this could affect the position of a sitting prime minister.

I have been alone in my quest for justice, but I continued to pray and finally, there was this programme in Kelantan, which I now see as Allah's answers to my prayers.

There was then room for me to correct a historical error on an important event which I was a part of. I am thankful to Allah for giving me that chance to correct the error.

I understand that the latest developments have invited remarks and views, both positive and negative, as well as further slander and accusations against me.

I leave everything to Allah, who is all-knowing, and to Him I seek guidance and justice.

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