

Dr M: Write about past for sake of future

New Straits Times - 28 November 2005

Write about the past for the sake of the country's future, said former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Urging the older generation of Malaysians to help preserve the country's history, he said those who lived through colonial times and independence should record their memories so that others could learn from the lessons and mistakes of history.

Speaking at the launch of the book *Negarawan Lima Zaman (A Statesman of Five Eras)* by former Federal Court judge Tan Sri Dr Abdul Aziz Zain, Dr Mahathir lamented that Malaysians did not have the writing habit, unlike the British, who meticulously recorded every detail of their rule over Malaya .

"Many of our leaders and founders of the country did not write their memoirs, so we have lost our history. The result is we have had to depend on history written for us by our colonisers, who write from their perspective." He said even common people who lived during colonial times should write their stories as there was much from that era to share with the modern generation.

"I remember the days when we actually had quarter-of-a-cent coins. With half a cent you could buy two cooking ingredients. But none of this is recorded and the generation today knows nothing about this." Dr Mahathir said the Malays should learn from the history of the sultans and how the British conquered them, as it would teach people today to work hard.

"The British did not have to use an army to conquer us. They merely talked to our sultans and promised them an easy life. The British paid them political pensions; the sultans did not have to work but still got paid, including their children and grandchildren.

"This attitude has seeped into Malay culture until Malays are willing to receive money for nothing. When we accept money for nothing, we lose power. You should give something back in the form of work, or you will become paralysed and your brain will shrink." Commenting on his own memoirs, Dr Mahathir said it was a "tough job" putting his memories together. "I forget which event came first and which came later." Abdul Aziz's book records his experiences throughout his career.

He was an attorney-general, a judge and, in 1971, the chairman of the Royal Commission on Teaching Services, which produced the Aziz Report, recommending radical changes.