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ELECTION 2008

MAVIS PUTHUCHEARY ON THE MALAYSIAN 'SOCIAL CONTRACT' | ZAID IBRAHIM ON A FIRST-WORLD PARLIAMENT | PARTI SOSIALIS MALAYSIA'S DANCE WITH THE DEVIL | FARISH NOOR ON ABDULLAH'S BIBLE | PATRICK TEOH ON CANDY | HISHAM RAIS' CERAMAH PERDANA | ABDULLAH AHMAD ON SUHARTO'S LEGACY | ELECTORAL MUSICAL CHAIRS | FORGOTTEN HISTORIES | AND MORE

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Ethnic conflict and reconciliation

Dear Mr Yossarian,

Thank you for your response to my article *The Importance of Being Malaysia (Off The Edge, December 2007)* last month (see *OTE*, February 2008). Let me first say that I share your sense of loss and the grief you still carry on account of the mistreatment your ancestors suffered. I do not deny this, nor the fact that huge numbers of Armenians perished in this tragedy at the end of the Ottoman Empire. I hope you will also acknowledge that no less a number of Turks and Muslims were massacred by Armenians in same conflict.

I am not a citizen of Turkey. I am a Canadian of Turkish Cypriot origin. My family and I were made refugees in 1963/64 when the Greek and Greek Cypriots militants waged war on the Turkish Cypriots to forcibly kick them out of the partnership republic. The Western diplomacy rewarded the Greeks for this first coup d'etat. The Turkish Cypriots were humiliated for ten years as the world looked the other way. In summer 1974, the Greeks were at it once again, staging another coup, this time to bring about Enosis, union of Cyprus with Greece. Fortunately, this time the Turkish army prevented Enosis, in effect facilitating the restoration of democracy in Greece, and the survival of the Cypriot Republic.

So, I have personal experience of being a displaced person. I know about war and conflict, having seen it in Malaysia during May 13, 1969 and again in Idi Amin's Uganda.

War, any war, is terrible; it kills and

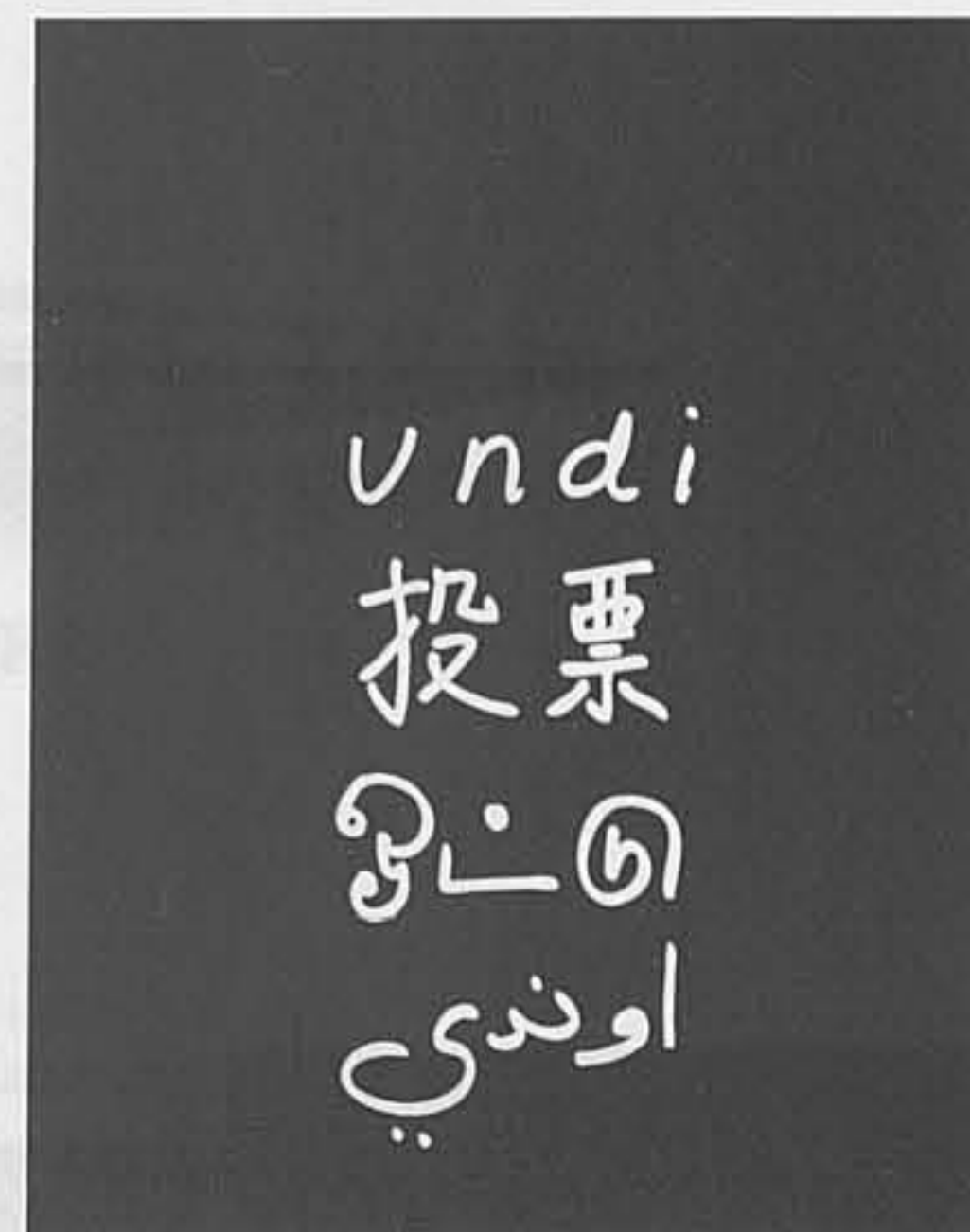
destroys. The end of the Ottoman Empire was extremely violent and all subjects suffered, not only the Armenians, but all other subjects, Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, etc.

The Armenians forget this historical context, they give the impression that only Armenians suffered.

Unfortunately, there are too many Armenian and pro-Armenian historians who perpetuate this one-sided, context-less history writing for the Diaspora Armenian market. This large market is full of forged documents (eg the notorious Andonian Telegrams) and fake quotes (eg the Hitler quote: 'Who still remembers the Armenian massacres?').

As I attempted to explain in my article, Armenians are not innocent victims. They committed treason against the Ottoman State by raising armies, joining forces with the invading Russians, several times massacring local Turkish and other Muslim populations, and in March 1915 they set up an independent Armenian state in the city of Van. The Ottoman military had every right of ordering relocation of Armenians out of the war zone. Regrettably, many innocent noncombatants perished during the long marches due to starvation, lack of medicine and transport. There were also reprisals and massacres back and forth. It was not as one-sided as you, and most Armenian nationalists, make it out.

Who did what to whom? How many exactly perished? What exactly was the role of the CUP regime, then in control of the Ottoman government? These are questions on which Ottoman historians are still hard at work.



COVER
 Design Rebecca Chew, Nik Edra

Abdullah's Bible

The father of modern Malay literature and a religious book

FOR A COUNTRY not exactly known for its reading habit, we seem to be grabbing a lot of books lately. Or, to put it more accurately, we seem to be detaining an awful lot of books.

For reasons best known to themselves, the benighted authorities in this land of ours have been vigilantly manning the outposts on the frontier lest we, while sleeping, are caught unawares by the legions of dog-eared tomes that are – at this very moment – surreptitiously on their way to this country to ‘pollute, corrupt and confuse’ our minds. The list of banned books grows ever longer; and the outrages continue unabated.

In the most recent fiasco, 32 Bibles were confiscated by customs officials from a Malaysian Christian on her way back from the Philippines, to be submitted for inspection by the Ministry of Internal Security. (The Deputy Minister of Internal Security has since clarified that it gave no order for the Bibles to be seized – ed.) Strange that Bibles are now seen by some as a potential ‘security threat’ that need to be confiscated upon entry into the sacred precinct that is Malaysia. But *Bibles? A security threat? To whom?*

All this talk of ‘dangerous’ texts and potentially dangerous Bibles reminds me of one particular edition of the Bible that caused quite a stir when it first appeared. In fact, so controversial was this particular edition that it almost never came out at all. I am talking about Abdullah's Bible; or rather, the translation of the Bible by none other than Munshi Abdullah Abdul Kadir, who is universally regarded as one of the forefathers of modern Malay literature.

If you remember what you were taught at school (and believe me, as an academic, I am all too familiar with the phenomenon of selective amnesia among students), you will also remember the name Munshi Abdullah. He was the Peranakan Muslim scholar and translator who served both the early British colonial administrators in Singapore and Malacca as well as the various Malay courts during the opening stages of the 19th century.

Abdullah wrote his *Hikayat Abdullah*, which stands until today as one of the most honest accounts of the state of the Malay

world at that crucial juncture in the history of this region. Abdullah was of course a key figure in the exchange of letters between British colonial administrators like Raffles, Farquhar, Minto, et al and the Malay nobles and kings. The *Hikayat* of Abdullah was unique for its pointedly frank observations about all that was wrong with the world he lived in then. Perhaps one of the most interesting and touching episodes in the *Hikayat* is where Abdullah describes his quarrel with his father, who was afraid that his son might be tempted off the right path by the ‘deviant teachings’ of the English missionaries he was working with.

The thorny issue that was being debated between Abdullah and his peers was his role as translator for a particular text that many of them were reluctant to touch: The New Testament.

Abdullah had been approached by some English missionaries and commissioned by them to translate the New Testament into vernacular Malay, which was to be used at Church, as well as for the modest missionary efforts among the colonial subjects of the Crown Colonies. As Malay was the lingua franca of everyone who lived in the straits then (including the Peranakan Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and even the British and Dutch), it was deemed appropriate to have the Bible translated into Malay as well.

Munshi Abdullah, who regarded himself primarily as a professional translator, was prepared to do the job that scared off all other contenders; until his father came into the picture, spewing steam and hot curses, and swearing that his son would never be converted by the heathen missionaries. In a poignant passage of the *Hikayat*, Abdullah describes how he appealed to his father's own sense of values, and in particular to his father's own love for knowledge and languages. His father was further persuaded by the appeals of the priests, Milner and Thomson, who promised that they would respect his father's wishes and refrain from offering any religious instruction to Abdullah. In the end, Abdullah notes how the appeals eventually won over his father's consent and he was allowed to continue his study of this foreign language called English. The result of Abdullah's



efforts came in the form of one of the first vernacular Malay translations of the New Testament, the *Kitab Injil al-Kudus daripada Tuhan Esa al-Masihi*.

Contrary to the fears and doubts of his friends, Munshi Abdullah was not secretly converted to Christianity as a result of translating the *Kitab Injil al-Kudus*. No magic Christian pills were plopped into his tea behind his back while he was working in the missionaries' quarters; nor were there any reported attempts to lure him to the Church by offers of money, promotions or package holidays. As he stated from the outset, he was professional through and through and he carried out his translation work in a scrupulous and objective manner, to the satisfaction of all.

Today, one can only wonder aloud about the fate of such a text, should it find itself before the customs officials or immigration desk at KLIA or the Golok crossing up north. If Bibles from the Philippines can be detained upon arrival, what then would be the fate of Abdullah's Bible, born and bred (or translated and bound) right here, in our dear ol' Malaysia? And how would he take to Munshi Abdullah, ‘father’ of modern vernacular Malay literature, pioneer of the vernacular autobiography and realist writing, who also happens to be one of the first translators of the Bible? Or have we, in denying the religious complexity and pluralism of Malaysia today, also closed the door to Malaysia's past where Muslims seemed less easily spooked by books of whichever tongue? ■

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Shards of the looking glass

The final deaths of Haji Muhammad Suharto (1921–2008)

A GREY-HAIRED MAN flat on his back is wheeled in, with tubes attached and anxious faces all around. It's a short distance between ambulance and hospital, but when this footage begins to be frequently replayed, in slow motion, to a soundtrack of plaintive violin (and on two occasions, the *Star Wars* theme) the man is made immortal and the journey eternal. It is already a death of sorts.

The image is replayed on all seven major TV channels and many regional channels (which in total, according to AC Nielsen, reach a full 91% of the population). Now, it seems, former President Suharto, fondly known as Pak Harto, is not just 'permanently ill' in the way that prevents him from coming to court yet allows him to attend a family wedding and greet visiting dignitaries; not just 'permanently ill' so that eventually government legal action against Suharto (to start recovery of an astounding UN-estimated total of US\$13-\$35 billion in assets) is officially cancelled by the Indonesian Attorney General (although civil action law suits can continue). This time, the leader of 32 years over 17,000 islands and now 220 million people really looks to be breathing his last – that is, to be 'permanently dead'.

IT IS AS if viewers need to be prepared – not just by the Suharto family members who are direct and indirect owners of four major TV channels. But after three decades of leadership, something is somehow owed to this 86-year-old, if only the attempt to more fully fathom what has come to pass. Any leader in power for that long has cast a looking glass for his country's citizens. So when the glass shatters, and each Indonesian holds up his or her fragment of mirror, how do they say their piece?

The TV camera crews set up camp outside Pertamina Hospital in south Jakarta. For the millions who cannot be at

the former President's bedside to see for themselves, the TV will provide a visual vocabulary with which to reflect. ('Boring,' say many journalists and viewers when the same old footage is repeated.)

The electronic media, now 'free' (to be owned by businessmen aligned directly to the powerful Golkar political party strengthened by Suharto) refer to him as Bapak Pembangunan. New montages appear of the smiling, soft-spoken patriarch with farmers in padi fields, marvelling at fresh catch with fishermen, as a five-star general looking as tame as a rabbit in simple salute to marching thousands. On-camera interviews with sellers of the country's favourites tofu and tempe, who earn less than RM10 a day, say that at least during those days, there was never a shortage of soybean. 'Only the elite benefit from democracy,' says one survey from the Habibie Centre, unless advantages are felt further down.

Suharto begins to improve, say the doctors who wear their white coats and discomfort before microphones.

Protestors start to gather outside the hospital. They ask about the people who were killed in military operations in Aceh and East Timor; other military killings; systematic repression of any protests through torture and abduction; mysterious mobs who started riots and rapes whenever protests had ended; failed big government projects that displaced hundreds of thousands of people. And what is the answer about the massacre of 500,000 to one million Indonesian communists in 1965 from the one general who rose to power during that time?

Suharto lapses into a coma and is mistakenly reported as dead.

Mystics from Surakarta (better known as Solo) say that because Suharto believed in certain Javanese ilmu, he cannot remove his power (wahyu): it will go when it needs to go, onto the next leader. But Suharto essentially denied such beliefs in his 1989 autobiography *Suharto: Pikiran, Ucapan dan Tindakan Saya* (*My Thoughts, Words and Deeds*). He preferred to align himself to the philosophy of Mangkunegara I, founder of one of the two royal families in Solo, and of whom Siti Hartina (Ibu Tien), Suharto's wife, was a descendant. His former personal aide, Soedjono Hoemardani, claims that Suharto 'terus-menusur meminta pertimbangan dhawuh

ini': Suharto regularly asked for messages from ancestors in the spirit world via his gurus, Romo Diyat and Romo Budi – such as before invading East Timor.

Meanwhile, the doctors report on Suharto's heart, lungs, kidneys and liver. It is as if the breaking down of parts helps the viewer to devour the man's image.

Politicians and pundits start to arrive on the sunny side of the street. Lee Kuan Yew flies in with 'yes, there was corruption... but there was real growth and progress' for the country and region. Former Australian premier, Paul Keating, writes that Suharto was never as corrupt as claimed by *Time* magazine reporters ('those ning nongs') and should be thanked for 'keeping Indonesia secular'. Readers are reminded that when Suharto took over from first President Sukarno, the economy was in ruins, with inflation at 200%, and yet a prosperous, united nation was established. But readers need little reminder that in 1998, when Suharto was forced to step down, the economy was in ruins again...

The current President Yudhyono asks the country to pray for Suharto and his family. Protestors pray too – so that the Cendana family (named after Suharto's main residence) will stand trial. Doctors report that Suharto can drink out of a straw and nod his head.

And then, the weather changes. At 14:10, on Jan 27, doctors announce that Suharto has died. Eldest daughter, Tutut, on behalf of her five siblings, tearfully asks the people to forgive her father's mistakes. Seven days of mourning are officially announced. One psychologist writes that Suharto's death is a chance for Indonesians to move on and not harbour old hates and hurts forever. Calls for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission begin again.

Though there is substance in each subjective view, no single shard of the looking glass can make for a full portrait. The historians may know better later, but that is small comfort now. Full-page condolence ads start to appear: 'Turut berdukacita yang sedalam-dalamnya atas wafatnya Bapak HM Suharto'... ■

Ann Lee is a writer who divides her time between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta

1 Mardjo Soebianto (second from left), head of a team of doctors monitoring former Indonesian President Suharto, speaks on Suharto's health condition during a news conference in Jakarta on Jan 7 2 Visitors and members of the media gather in front of Suharto's home after news of his death 3 A photograph taken of a local news programme on television shows Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, right, his wife, second right, and family visiting the body of Suharto on Jan 27



THE NON-CONFRONTATIONAL NEIGHBOUR

Remembering Suharto: He ended Indonesia's 'Konfrontasi' with Malaysia and gave us peace

WHATEVER WESTERNERS NOW say about Suharto, the former President of Indonesia who died on Jan 27, aged 86, Malaysians and Singaporeans have good reason to thank him. He ended the violent three-year-old Indonesian Confrontation (1963-1966) started by his predecessor, Sukarno, whom he ousted from power after two decades of absolute rule by the latter (Singapore was part of Malaysia when Sukarno launched Indonesian Konfrontasi with Malaysia). Suharto, too, was an absolute ruler for 32 years, slightly more than a decade longer than Sukarno.

I was saddened by his passing because he gave the three peoples – Indonesians, Singaporeans and Malaysians – a great sense of stability, comfort and cheer for decades. His good sense and judgment to stop Sukarno's Confrontation (thus also ending Sukarno's ambitions and illusions) were both pragmatic and remarkable. For 40 years after Suharto assumed power in 1965, Indonesia has been the foundation stone upon which Asean (the Association of South East Asian Nations) and regional stability was built.

Imagine what Southeast Asia would have been like if Indonesia had continued the Konfrontasi. One of these scenarios would have occurred: either Indonesia would have collapsed and disintegrated because its economy would not have been able to sustain an open-ended confrontation with us; or Malaysian history would have been hugely different. Indonesia, under PKI (Parti Komunis Indonesia), would have destabilised Malaysia and Singapore. Both nations would have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on the armed forces, with little to spare for development and social services, in order to maintain their independence and sovereignty.

Luckily for Malaysians and Singaporeans, Suharto had no hang-ups about Indonesia playing 'big brother' to Malaysia, and for that his neighbours loved him. For sure, he had good relations with Tun Razak (the two men liked each other); also, I gather, with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and, of course, with Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong.

The history of Konfrontasi may be boring to those born after the late Sixties, but it should be read, and its lessons learnt, because it could well happen again. God forbid. Of course, there are now many more barriers to its reoccurrence; the young in the three countries do not seem to know their history. But no

matter how much water has flowed under the bridge, we must work harder to enhance our neighbourly relations.

Malaysia, formed in 1963, did not get off to a promising start. From the beginning, it faced opposition from two neighbours: a violent one in Indonesia, because Sukarno claimed Malaysia was a neo-colonial scheme, purposely established to encircle Indonesia; the Philippines confined its opposition, in the main, to mere rhetoric by claiming that Sabah was part of its territory. We saw it merely as a display of solidarity with Jakarta. Still, it was a difficult and harrowing period of aggression, subversion and infiltration. Although the Soviet Union supported Indonesia, albeit in rather lukewarm fashion, and the People's Republic of China relatively more enthusiastically, we nevertheless triumphed because the United Nations and the Commonwealth (except Pakistan) supported us.

Indonesia failed to crush Malaysia ('ganyang Malaysia' was the rallying slogan of PKI and the Sukarno administration) despite Sino-Malay rivalry being at a dangerous level when Singapore was part of Malaysia. To consolidate his power and to avert potential racial strife, Tunku Abdul Rahman seized the opportunity of the worsening race relations to force Singapore to leave the federation on Aug 9, 1965. Indonesia blatantly tried to exploit the Singapore separation and the Sino-Malay polarisation without success. By then (after Suharto took the reins of power from Sukarno, a long-drawn affair), it was obvious Indonesia had lost its vigour in its confrontation with Malaysia. For a brief time, it maintained its posture, at least in declaratory form. Then, in 1966, Suharto presided over the Malaysian-Indonesian reconciliation.

I ACCOMPANIED TUN Razak, then Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and sometime Foreign Minister, when he flew to Jakarta on Aug 11, 1966 to sign the agreement that ended the confrontation and heralded the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two Nusantara or 'Rumpun Melayu' nations, as it was then trumpeted. Tun Razak introduced me to Suharto. I was his 28-year-old political secretary, three years into the job. I had also, on an earlier visit in 1962, met Sukarno, a charismatic leader of great presence who seemed to romanticise everything Indonesian. In any event, he was a good revolutionary.

During the Cold War, the West regarded Indonesia under Sukarno with considerable suspicion, as it did India, Egypt, Ghana, Yugoslavia and even Cambodia, because these nations

March 15, 1966: Lt General Suharto, who led the forces that crushed the communist-backed attempt at a coup d'état in Indonesia and assumed control of the country

■ CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

were at the forefront of the non-aligned movement. After Sukarno's fall, the West lionised Suharto and generously funded and assisted the Indonesian economy and its military. Then, Suharto, the great anti-communist leader, could do no wrong as he aligned himself with the West. After he lost power – he gave it up willingly, or rather, obediently – the West, its media in particular, mercilessly denounced him as if he had ruined his nation. The fact remains: whether they like it or not, Suharto gave Indonesia development, a measure of prosperity and stability, and provided the Asean region an enduring peace. All this was ignored. Instead, they highlighted his alleged excesses such as violation of human rights, corruption, nepotism, cronyism and his tough rule. Suharto had suddenly become a monster and his rule absolutely monstrous in their eyes.

I AM NOT his apologist. However, Suharto should be remembered for what he gave Indonesia – and for what he failed to do. On balance, I think, many Indonesians shed tears of joy when Sukarno and subsequently Suharto finally quit and left the political scene. Many Indonesians, I know, feel a tinge of longing for Sukarno's radical politics, which gave Indonesians

a great sense of identity and pride even if Indonesia was then a failed state; equally, many others yearn for Suharto's more predictable, stable and relatively prosperous Indonesia because under the current free-for-all democracy, the Indonesians do not seem to get what they desire. The democratically elected leaders have neither given Indonesia real progress nor the prominence it sometimes desperately seeks.

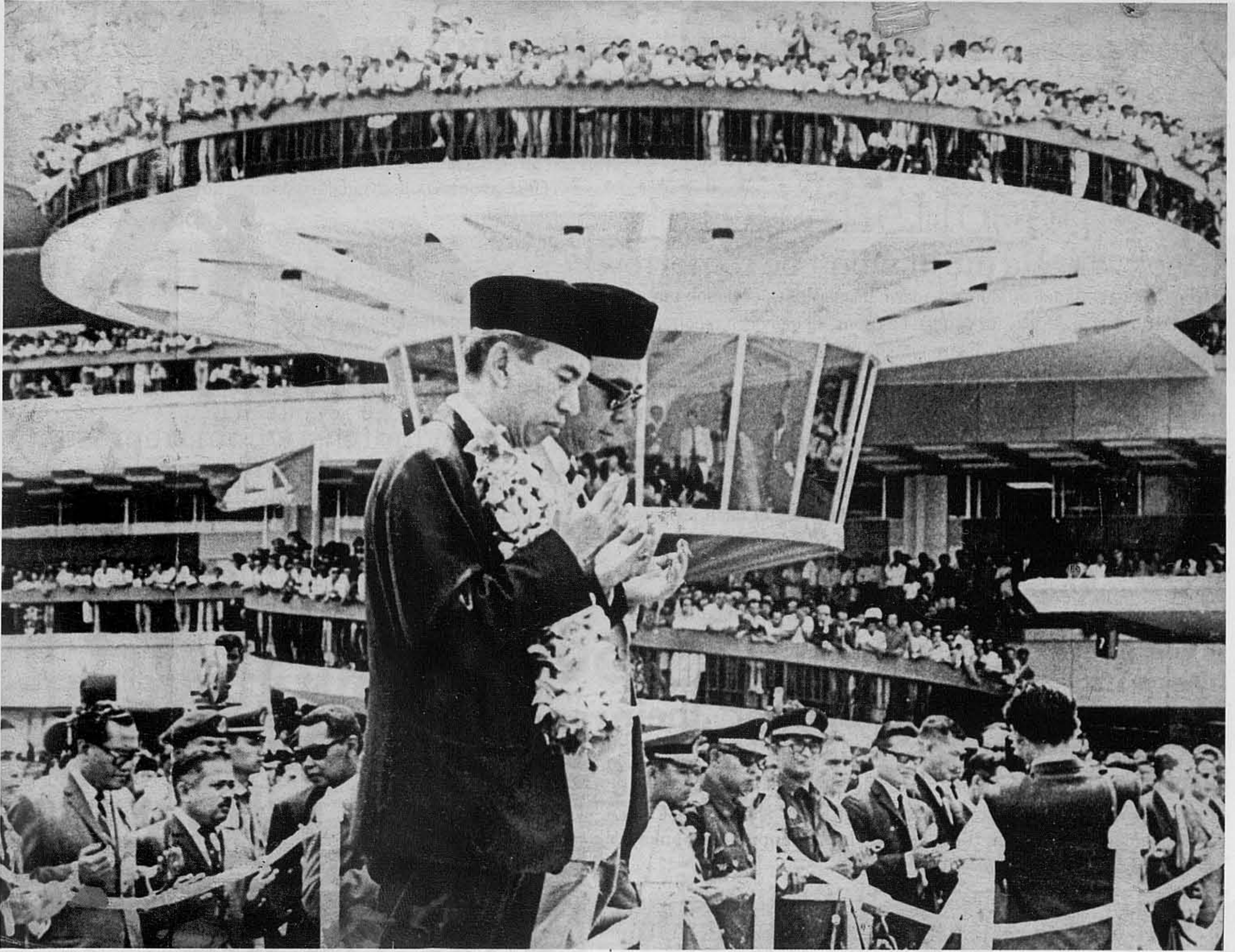
It seems very befitting that following Suharto's death, Indonesia declared seven days of national mourning and organised special prayers (tahlil) and memorial services. The Indonesian rakyat thronged the streets of Solo, leading to his makam or mausoleum to pay their last respects to the leaders who gave them a measure of comfort after their long deprivation. Suharto lifted millions of Indonesian rakyat out of poverty and expanded the base of the middle-class.

I was happy that Tun Dr Mahathir, Lee Kuan Yew, Xanana Gusmão (Prime Minister of Timor Leste) and Paul Keating (former Prime Minister of Australia) attended his funeral. Though Malaysia was represented by Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Seri Najib Razak (who was in school during the Confrontation), I wish Prime Minister Badawi had visited Suharto on his deathbed and attended the funeral himself. Malaysia has more reasons than the others to honour and remember Suharto – the man who ended Confrontation and nurtured regional unity which enabled us to concentrate resources and manpower on economic and social development, to restructure society and eradicate poverty.

There are a few great leaders in Asean – Lee Kuan Yew,

Aug 11, 1966: Tun Razak Hussein (left) and Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik sign the peace treaty in Jakarta marking the end of the Confrontation, while President Suharto looks on





Adam Malik, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, with Tun Razak Hussein, then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, at Subang International Airport in Kuala Lumpur after the latter had signed the treaty ending the Confrontation

Suharto, Tun Razak and Dr Mahathir come to mind – who built their nations. Only Lee remains in power, wisely, for he knows the ways of the world. (While on the subject of this great thinker and doer, I think I should stress this: we have no desire ‘to reduce Singapore to secondary status’; what we want is a genuine win-win situation in the spirit of live and let live. To each his own.)

Suharto, though out of power and out of sight for ten years until his demise, and in death, will not be easily forgotten because he and what he represented filled half of modern Indonesian history. I entirely agree with what Lee, Mahathir and Keating say about Suharto: that he was a great leader and a very good neighbour. But of the three tributes, only Keating’s was unqualified: ‘The descriptions of Mr Suharto as a brutal dictator living a corrupt high life at the expense of his people and running an expansionist military regime are untrue. Even his annexation of Timor was not expansionist. It had everything to do with national security and nothing to do with territory’ (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, Feb 2, 2008).

As Keating states, how many Australian leaders would have a million or so people grieve for them beside the roadway? Suharto’s funeral was a tribute to what his life (and contribution) truly meant. The only general I know whose coffin was accompanied by a million people was that of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt (who abolished the monarchy and nationalised the Suez Canal) when he died in office in 1970.

I would like to ask how many Malaysian leaders would

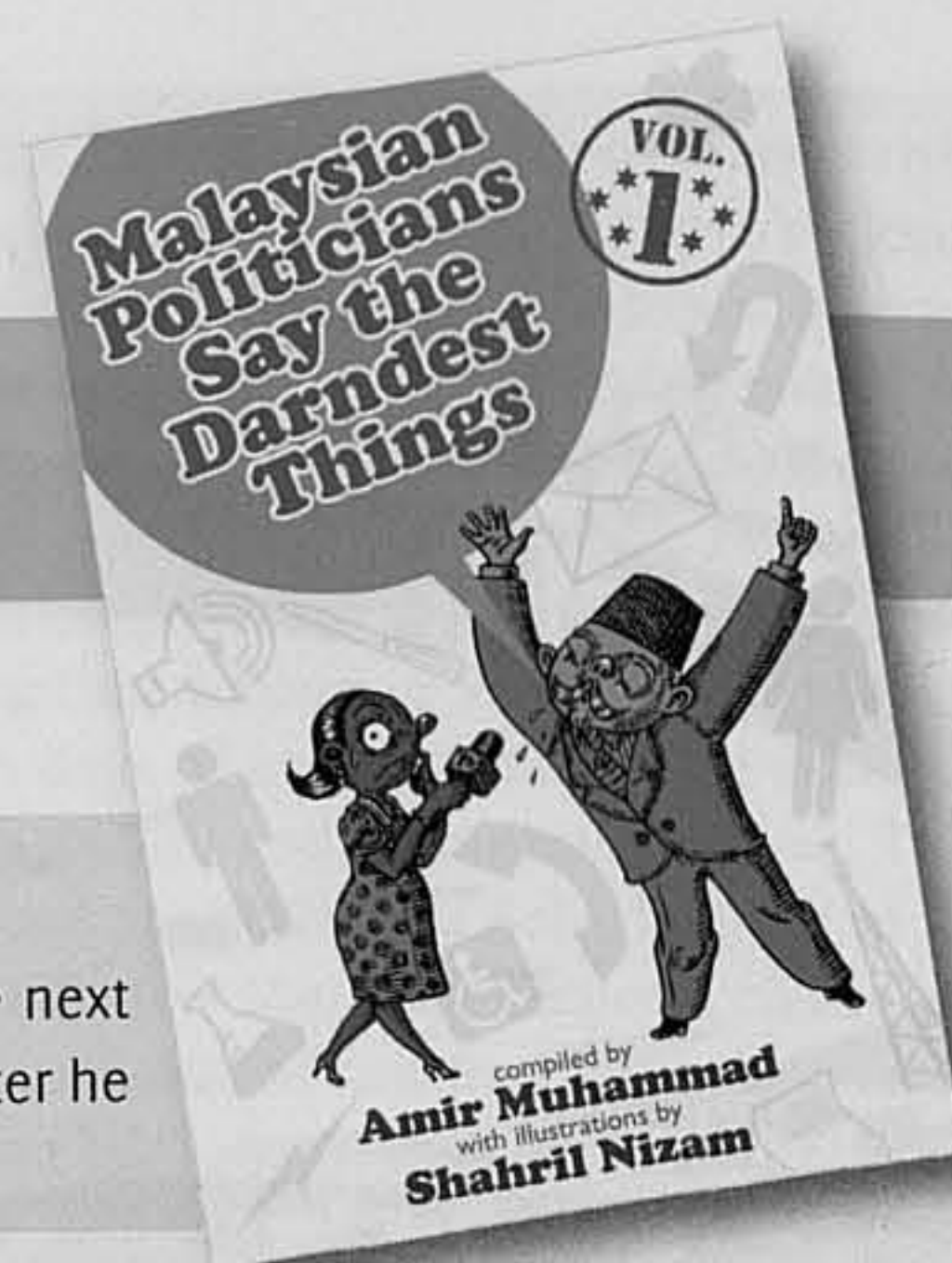
have 100,000 grieve for them along the jalan to the makam? I attended Tun Razak’s state funeral on Jan 16, 1976, the best attended on record until now and that mainly because he died in office. The founding father of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman’s send-off was by comparison poor. I was absolutely shocked and appalled because it seemed it had been organised half-heartedly. Had the Tunku died in office, and not twenty years afterwards, he would have had a grander farewell with pomp and ceremony.

Suharto and Tun Razak were buried with appropriate pomp and ceremony; Sukarno, quietly, though he was the co-founder of Indonesia (the other being Dr Mohamed Hatta). The people knew that in the case of Suharto and Tun Razak they were burying the builders of their nations. Suharto saved Indonesia from the communists and throughout his long rule he valued growth and stability above all else. Because he loved his children, his relatives and friends (perhaps a bit too much), as Indonesia grew, the picture did get a bit blurred.

Suharto did only what he thought was good for Indonesia and his family. More than anything else, I think, what he has left is a mixed legacy. Indonesians, I am sure, in time will value his positive qualities more than the excesses of his ‘New Order’ regime. RIP. ■

MALAYSIAN POLITICIANS SAY THE DARNDEST THINGS
COMPILED BY AMIR MUHAMMAD

Some of the following will be used in Vol 2 of *Malaysian Politicians Say the Darndest Things*, which will be released later in the year. Vol 1 is **already** in bookshops.



'Esok tak ada (no, it won't be tomorrow).'

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, dismissing speculation that Parliament would be dissolved the next day, Feb 13, to make way for General Elections. 13 had been reported as his favourite number. The day after he said this, he dissolved Parliament, proving speculation correct. (Malaysiakini.com, Feb 12, 2008)

'I was being subtle when I called them orang utans and not animals, which is rather crude.'

Kelantan Chief Minister Nik Aziz Nik Mat. He had been reported as saying that PAS in Kelantan was not up against a political party (Umno) but against 'orang utan which do not know the law and religion'. (*The Sun*, Feb 20, 2008)

'We are sure the monkeys are from Penang because their behaviour is different from that of their [mainland] jungle cousins.'

Kedah State Secretary Ahmad Basri Mohamed Aki, on the recent spate of destructive monkey activity in the state. The Penang Chief Minister then denied that the island had been dumping its monkeys in Kedah. (*Malaysian Business*, Aug 1, 1993)

'You will be punished by God if you do not vote for Ustaz Baharudin.'

PAS Deputy President Abdul Hadi Awang campaigning for his party's candidate at a ceramah in Kampung Titian Baru in the run-up to the Bukit Payong by-election. (April 1992)

'If the PBDS becomes the government we will all die! There won't be any more elections, either.'

Sarawak BN state assemblyman Jawan Empaling, on the opposition Parti Bersatu Dayak Sarawak. (November 1990)

'If doctors and surgeons start reattaching their hands, the whole purpose is defeated.'

Abdul Hadi Awang, on the proposed hudud enactments in Kelantan which would involve the amputation of limbs. The president of the Malaysian Medical Association had earlier said that modern medicine can do wonders to those who have been punished. (May 1992)

'Since the implementation of a similar law in Saudi Arabia, people can carry millions without worrying about being robbed.'

Nik Aziz Nik Mat, defending the controversial hudud proposal. (January 1994)

'The poor Indians, whom I represent, do not have to worry because they've never been getting places in medical colleges in the first place.'

MIC President S Samy Vellu on the Indian government's decision to disallow foreign students to study medicine in that country. (April 1990)

'We now have responsible branch leaders who were gangsters themselves before.'

MIC chief S Samy Vellu explaining his directive to MIC Youth to recruit youths involved in crime. (September 1992)

'I will appoint people to smell your mouths if you have had liquor.'

S Samy Vellu in an order to party candidates to refrain from splurging on alcohol at campaign dinners. (December 1994)

'I receive an average of 750 to 800 calls a day, and half of them are abusive.'

Energy Telecommunications and Posts Minister S Samy Vellu, explaining why he would test Telekom's new call-screening product at his home before introducing it to the public. (June 1994)

'They told the ACA that I have a house in Australia. But they are wrong in that I actually have two houses there.'

S Samy Vellu, helpfully correcting rumours surrounding his personal wealth. (July 1992)