

# Did Malaysians deserve Dr M's tyranny?

Sunday 6 March 2022, by [MOKHTAR Mariam](#) (Date first published: 4 February 2022).

**Marina, the daughter of Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister, issued an apology for attributing a contentious remark made by her father, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to the wrong politician.**

Writing for *The Sunday Star*, her column entitled "We need the leaders we truly deserve" also showed the ordinary rakyat how children of the political elite go around with their heads in the clouds.

Claiming that she was not revising history, she said that her [mistake](#) stemmed from "the weak memory of something that happened when I was barely out of my teens and still trying to make sense of the world".

Weak memory? Or selective memory? Or as her father once said, "[Melayu mudah lupa](#) (Malays often forget)?"

At around the same time that Mahathir wanted to "shoot to kill" the boat people, my peers and I were also barely out of our teens.

Unlike Marina, we didn't want to make sense of the world. We merely wanted to make sense of her father's policies. He robbed us of our future.

Mahathir's politics changed the country's political and socio-economic landscape. His policies corrupted the body, mind, and soul of every person they touched.

Marina wrote on Facebook, "I unreservedly apologise to anyone I have hurt or offended by this mistake."

More importantly, shouldn't she reach out to the family of the late [Ghazali Shafie](#), whose reputation she demolished with her ignorance?

The remark about shooting the boat people was also made on page 50 of '[The Apple and the Tree](#).' So, will she pulp the remaining stock of the book?

How did her publishers, her editorial staff, or her literary agent fail to check the veracity of the contents of her book? Perhaps whitewashing her [father's role](#) in Malaysian history could be construed as a work of fiction and therefore didn't need to be fact-checked.

She claimed in the book that she "'flushed red when she read what Ghazali had said".

So, where did she read what Ghazali had said? *Utusan Malaysia*, *NST*, *The Star* and other mainstream media which is beholden to Umno-Baru/BN?

And when did she read this? Was it in 1979 or more recently, when researching material for her book? If it was the latter, did she not source the [foreign news reports](#) too?

She claimed to have become crimson faced when Ghazali "...tried to soothe ruffled Western feathers by saying that he meant to 'shoo' them away..."

Would she care to show the same level of shame with Mahathir's affirmative action policies? Or is she unaware that Mahathir's divisive policies exist?

## **Inequality in education**

My school-friends were horrified when at one assembly, the headmistress of our mission school said that in the following year, [Malay would replace English](#) as the [medium of instruction](#). For those of us who had chosen a route in the science stream, learning scientific terms in Malay seemed a nightmare.

Worse was to follow. In the late 1970s, Malay schoolgirls abandoned the use of shorts and wore long trousers instead when playing netball, and the tudung became the standard uniform of Malay schoolgirls. So, were the girls at Tunku Kurshiah College, where Marina attended, cocooned from the massive changes in schools throughout the nation?

After completing our Form Five examinations, I remember the desperation and grief of some friends whose ambition to pursue higher education was halted.

They were of the wrong race. One said: "My father is a hawker. He has many mouths to feed, and I would have been the ticket to lift the family out of poverty. My weak Malay grade means I cannot enter the sixth form."

This particular friend had excellent grades in all her subjects except for Malay. She was forced to work and save for the fees at a private college.

Many non-Malays who excelled in the sciences and mathematics had to beg or borrow from extended family members in order to fund their overseas education. Many decided [not to return](#), thus causing Malaysia to lose great talent.

One friend said that her grades were unacceptable for the local college but she found out that an "*anak raja*" (child of royalty), and another Malay girl with lower grades, were sent overseas for A-levels and university.

The break-up of many families is another consequence of Mahathir's tinkering with the education system. Elderly parents refuse to make a new life in another country, and they resign themselves to a long-distance family relationship. Mahathir took away their children's futures, and he condemned many senior citizens to a lonely life.

Today, when we meet up for our reunion dinners, my non-Malay friends who managed to attend local universities would relate stories about discrimination, which they alleged was encouraged by the university's administration, and academic staff.

They endured racist taunts and were made to feel inferior when Malay students refused to share rooms in halls of residence. Those who became lecturers were later forced to find jobs overseas because their contracts were not extended or they were sidestepped for promotion.

Mahathir promised the Malays salvation but the price was that they had to surrender their soul and intellect to him.

## **Speaking of gaffes...**

In her original column, Marina said that "...at least in those days, these gaffes were few and far between".

Talking about gaffes, is she aware that anyone who said something which offended or upset Mahathir was immediately hauled-up for questioning and possible incarceration?

This is another consequence of [Mahathir's tyranny](#). We learn to keep quiet, despite knowing that something is wrong or unjust. However, the politically well connected will prosper.

Only the naïve will be seduced by the 'good cop/bad cop' psychological tactic used by children of the political elite.

We also know that name dropping has the same effect as saying "open sesame" when a treasure trove of government contracts, company directorships, share trading and land acquisitions become accessible.

Today, we reap what Mahathir [sowed](#) five decades ago. The only exit is by cutting the umbilical cord which successive PMs have refused to do.

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