



### About the Editor

Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad is an MCKK-, Cambridge- and Harvard-educated writer, public intellectual and politician. He was Special Envoy to the United Nations between 1996 and 2000 and Editor-in-Chief cum Executive Director of the New Straits Times Group of newspapers until November 2003. He writes a column for the popular independent daily *Sinar Harian* on Sunday. Abdullah enjoys travelling, daydreaming, sleeping and a nice plate of kippers. He and his wife divide their time between Kuala Lumpur, London and Kok Lanis in Kelantan.



## Dr Mahathir's **Selected Letters to WORLD LEADERS**

Many leaders write memoirs but few risk sharing their official correspondence with the public. This second volume of 73 letters records frank discussions on many issues of great public concern. Those from Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong stand out because they are sharp, business-like, meticulous and detailed. Letters from George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, General Pervez Musharraf, Saddam Hussein, Benazir Bhutto, Kofi Annan, F.W. de Klerk, John Major, King Abdullah II and others are direct and simple. Dr Mahathir's letter to Pope John Paul II is the essence of the man. Always thoughtful, he wrote a warm letter to Nelson Mandela when he was released from prison.

The result is a book of opinion. The correspondents' candour is to be enjoyed, particularly Dr Mahathir's exchanges with Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. Whether the views expressed are far-sighted or misinterpreted by those who share or reject them, they make for inspiring reading and are a great aid to achieve a better grasp of world events and diplomacy and the personalities who shaped them.

Dr Mahathir has long stood out as one of the most consequential prime ministers Malaysia has had. His letters here make an important contribution to the man's achievements and non-achievements. They represent a good start to understanding Malaysian foreign policy, and should spur further inquiry. This book is a celebration of unusual personalities who ruled their countries between 1990 and 2003. The first volume was winner of the *Popular-The Star Readers' Choice Award* in 2009.

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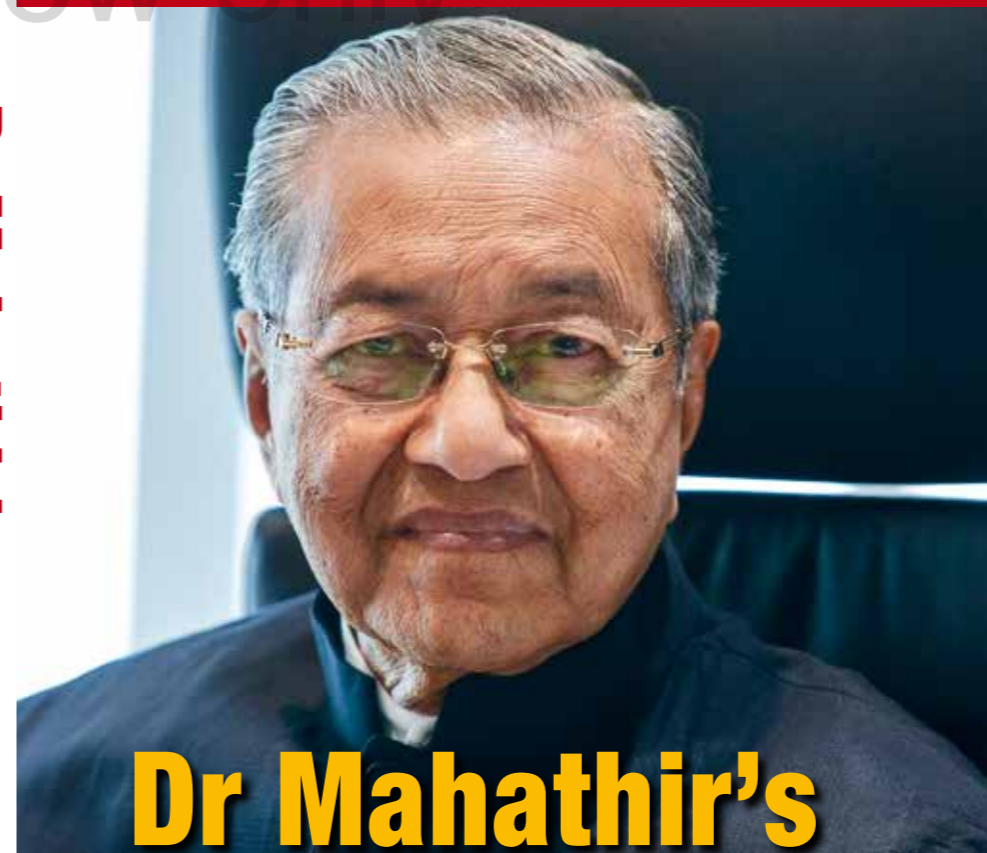


**VOL 2**  
Abdullah  
Ahmad

**Dr Mahathir's**  
**Selected Letters to**  
**WORLD LEADERS**

“A revealing ensemble of diplomatic letters worth reading.”

— Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah of Perak



## Dr Mahathir's **Selected Letters to** **WORLD LEADERS** Volume Two

Introduction and Selected Commentaries  
by Abdullah Ahmad

Marshall Cavendish  
Editions  


“These letters record significant exchanges at historic points of Malaysia's international relations. The undertone in some, especially pertaining to Malaysia-Singapore relations, is sharp. One wonders about letters yet to be published...”

— TAN SRI DR MUNIR MAJID  
The Star columnist and Senior Fellow  
of London School of Economics

“From Castro, de Klerk and Lee Kuan Yew to Blair and Saddam: a rare glimpse of high-level diplomacy lost to the scandal of socially mediated times—and of historic moments forever rumbling through our lives.”

— JASON TAN  
Founding editor, Off The Edge  
and The B-Side

# For Review only

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— Tan Sri Dr Munir Majid

*The Star columnist and Senior Fellow of  
London School of Economics*

“A must-read for would-be leaders, especially budding foreign ministers and those who rightly take an interest in foreign relations. A fitting sequel to the first volume. I congratulate the editor and writer.”

— Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam

*Chairman of ASLI, Centre of Public Policy Studies*

“From Castro, de Klerk and Lee Kuan Yew to Blair and Saddam: a rare glimpse of high-level diplomacy lost to the scandal of socially mediated times—and of historic moments forever rumbling through our lives.”

— Jason Tan

*Founding editor, Off The Edge and The B-Side*

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“The author deals with the complex subject of international politics in an impressively readable way. It is an essential reference for those interested in the subject and in the historic personalities of a defining era.”

— S. Radhakrishnan

*Senior lawyer and Chairman of  
Gandhi Memorial Trust of Malaysia*

“The book offers a rare and unique perspective on Malaysia’s foreign policy in the complex geopolitical arena. Another outstanding achievement by the editor Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad in making this available to all.”

— Jason Leong

*Political strategist*

“Dr Mahathir and Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s correspondence is definitely timeless—sharp and well-written.”

— Chan Kok Keong

*Perak Academy*



*Two workaholics in Malaysian politics: Abdullah Ahmad and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the 86th floor of the Petronas Twin Towers, February 2015. Picture taken by Rosli.*

For Review only

**Dr Mahathir's**  
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**Volume Two**

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*The only important thing in a book (a letter)  
is the meaning that it has for you.*  
— Somerset Maugham

# For Review only

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*The remarkable workaholic: Tun Dr Mahathir reading a new manuscript at his desk in his office on the 86th floor of the Petronas Twin Towers, February 2015. Picture taken by Rosli.*

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## Acknowledgements

I was delighted when Marshall Cavendish asked me to prepare a second volume of *Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders*. Obviously, it has been useful enough to need a second instalment. I would like to dedicate this volume to Malaysian diplomats who have represented our country and its values since Merdeka or independence.

To make it easier to read, I have followed the successful pattern of the first volume to which I included brief introductions and commentaries. They should help satisfy the curiosity that many readers have about the news and events they read about.

Compiling this volume has not been as straightforward as previously. An immense amount of time was required, even if not by design, to obtain the government's permission for the letters to be released. This, to Tun Dr Mahathir, speaks volumes, confirming perhaps that his influence is slipping further into the past.

However, I am grateful to Prime Minister Datuk Sri Najib Razak and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, for giving me and my special assistant, Wan Sepwan bin Wan Haji Abdul Rahman, access to the secret registry of Wisma Putra, the Malaysian Foreign Office, to sight Dr Mahathir's correspondence.

The first English volume of *Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders* was reprinted nine times, unrevised. It was a distinct success. Dr Mahathir and I became joint winners of the *Popular-The Star Readers' Choice Award* in 2009, for the non-fiction category.

# For Review only

## Prologue

This book could not have been published without the assistance of these persons: Datuk Badariah Arshad at Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's office, Tan Sri Jalaluddin Bahauddin, former media adviser to the prime minister, Datuk Wan Sihab Wan Ismail of the Prime Minister's Department, and Encik Ahmad Hussein and his staff at the Wisma Putra secret registry office. All have been unfailingly pleasant and helpful.

Christine Chong, an old hand in publishing and now, consultant to the publishers, Wan Sepwan, Jason Tan, a colleague, and my new editor, Irene Leow, were generous with their time and helpful whenever I needed them, and my brother-in-law, Emeritus Professor Alan Shahlan Brunken, for reading and offering suggestions for improvement. I also thank Nora Agbulos, my long-time Girl Friday, for her loyalty and help in general.

And finally, of course, to Fauzah, my long-suffering wife, whose suggestions, criticism, advice and love have sustained and energised me.

All that is not written is lost.



*Kuala Lumpur, 11 March 2015*

Soon I hope to be 90 years old. I am in my twelfth year of retirement and seven years have passed before the second volume of my selected letters to world leaders is published. It was a tortuous experience getting the government's permission to release the letters. I shall be honest: had it not been for Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad's persuasion, perseverance and determination, this second volume would not have appeared.

I am delighted the first volume has generated keen interest among the young, especially in diplomacy and international relations. The fact that Marshall Cavendish wanted Tan Sri Abdullah to prepare a second volume confirms that the first was well received to mandate a new collection. This is why this second volume is valuable.

My letters convey Malaysian views on geopolitics. My intention is to enhance public interest in both foreign policy and domestic politics, which are intertwined. Together, they are crucial to our survival, peace and prosperity.

As prime minister, I tried to enlarge Malaysia's international space and diplomacy. Our sovereignty and independence must remain secure so that Malaysians will have more than a decent place in the world pecking order. In the process of seeking a brighter future, we must not subordinate our interests to any power, big or small, and certainly not become their lackey. Malaysia, I think, must not sound pro-Western for no apparent reason than to win public applause and the personal affections of high profile leaders. It does seem to me



that we now have a poor grasp of geopolitical strategy and may, as a result, be caught up with mere tactics.

Being a realist even when differences were at their keenest, I worked with our neighbours in pursuit of mutual benefits. I did not succumb to political expediency; cater to every wish and whim of the majority race, or that of the economically strong community. Then and now, our landscape should ideally transcend race and religion, to a point, or we will continue to be a house divided.

In connection with this I must warn that populism in any guise is unsustainable, because a leader can only appeal to popular sentiment when it suits him—and denounce such appeals when it suits him. Pork barrel politics is defensible but bribery in any form—as a means of making certain that enough voters keep the ruling party in power—is not proper.

Even if I say so, I do not believe I had left the government and the nation in a lamentable state. To continue to survive and do well, Malaysians must be creative, hardworking and honest in their dealings. The prerequisite for greater success is to embrace the talents of all Malaysians while giving due regard to the vital ground rules of Malaysian politics as embodied in the Constitution. This foundation document, on which the country is built, protects and upholds the basic rights of all Malaysians. Though our nation is multi-racial we have managed to attain progress and remain stable because we share political power and, seemingly, increasingly in the economy.

All stakeholders—the young especially—must have a sense and feel that they are welcomed to participate in politics and to hold office in the government and the ruling coalition. The government

leaders must not intimidate them but instead moderate the young when they express themselves too strongly or appear unMalaysian.

Crucially, this must not only be done, but must be seen to be scrupulously done. Ours is not just a Malay-Islamic nation. We are an Islamic country with a Muslim majority. So we should set a good example by being understanding, empathetic and inclusive. In the rough and tumble of the coming fourteenth general election, it will require more than passion, enthusiasm and hard work for UMNO-BN to retain power, let alone to increase its majority. The leadership must be sensitive to the latest political temperatures of the diverse electorate. Failure to do so will result in the ruling party losing by default.

It is no less crucial for prime ministers and world leaders to recognise that electorates brought up on social media are becoming ever more demanding of accountability. Open-ended and interminable investigations are anathema to the new voting public. My own country provides a good case study: the investigation into Malaysia's controversial 1MDB fund must be done without fear or favour and those found responsible, no matter who, must be prosecuted without delay, the sooner the better, or the government will suffer further reputational loss. Investigating bodies must be empowered with the resources and the clearest mandate to perform their impartial duty, and their findings made public expeditiously.

We have little power to alter what happens beyond our shores, but it does not mean we should become anyone's poodle. We must sometimes speak up for one side, and at other times for the other, to maintain a balanced and equidistant relationship.

To sustain and continue being in power, the government and UMNO will require a coherent strategy of reassessment of the concept of balance of power within the Malay-Muslim community or *ummah* and the natives of Sarawak and Sabah in relation to the others.

Finally, I would like to thank Tan Sri Abdullah for his enthusiasm and patience in pursuing the powers that be on my behalf for the right to publish these letters, and also for writing their introduction and notes. I never doubted he would deliver what he started out to do because Tan Sri Abdullah, as I know him, is a result-orientated person.



*Dr Mahathir Mohamad*

*Kuala Lumpur, 11 March 2015*

I am a strong believer in the belief that all that is not written is lost. Malaysians are fortunate Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad likes writing. Malaysia's founding father, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, was a columnist for *The Star* after leaving office. None of the previous prime ministers was a writer. Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, the second prime minister, died prematurely in office, otherwise—I know for sure—he would have written his memoirs because that was the plan. Dr Mahathir, a prolific writer, advised me, sometimes with some vehemence, to write my memoirs.

The first volume of *Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders*, published in 2008, was a distinct success. The Malay edition surprisingly fared better than the Chinese translation. In the event, I look forward to working on the third volume.

This is a book about global and community leaders and their correspondence with Dr Mahathir in which they give their thoughts on politics, human rights, civil rights, terrorism, globalisation and, other topical subjects and, thank each other for something or other, full of thoughtful assessments, hopes and conclusions. It is a book of opinion! Malaysia became better known globally on Dr Mahathir's watch because none of his three predecessors had faced hard choices. Dr Mahathir possessed colossal self-belief that transformed Malaysia.

What you are about to read is only a fraction of the enormous quantity of material I have read and selected. The publishers,

however, chose only 73 letters, two more than in Volume I. The letters have been virtually left unaltered (except in several instances where it was an obvious grammatical or typographical error). Where I thought it necessary, letters are preceded by a head note giving the context of the correspondence. The choice of letters reflects the publisher's judgement, not mine. New personalities are included in this volume, the likes of Lee Kuan Yew and, his successor after 31 years in office, Goh Chok Tong, General Pervez Musharraf, his nemesis Benazir Bhutto, the historic Saddam Hussein, Li Peng, Pope John Paul II, King Abdullah II, Fidel Castro, Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela and several others.

I marvel at Dr Mahathir's infinite patience in not interfering and completely relying on me to deal with the bureaucratic inertia. The two volumes carry only 144 letters from the 300-plus that I originally chose. There is no doubt much of the correspondence with world leaders and personalities still remains untraced at the Prime Minister's office, Wisma Putra's archives and Arkib Negara.

For too long the government and bona fide historians have left our history well alone. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra wrote his version of events and vented his anger in *The Star*. Dr Mahathir followed suit with books, articles, letters and his blog. Tunku began a tradition of sorts for a former prime minister to write what interested him, even if it was nearly always self-serving. In any case, this is the best way one's story is told, remade or recast. Despite the danger of biased and impressionistic judgement, I urge Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and anyone with a story to tell to do so. As a people, in some ways, we have made a success of independence; many Malaysians have done better and have achieved more. They must

tell their stories for posterity.

The balance between reality and legend is difficult to strike. No book can hope to articulate a person's life and times truthfully, because it will hurt too many people; even cause disharmony and disorder. There is no way anyone of consequence can tell everything as it is. Letters are different.

As in Volume I, the letters have never been published. They throw new light on the 1987–2003 period of Malaysian diplomacy and international relations, especially between Malaysia and Singapore. Francis Bacon said, 'Books (and letters) will speak plain when counselors blanch'. Or, as Oscar Wilde would have said, were he alive, 'The letters are well written or badly written. That's all'.



Kuala Lumpur, 11 March 2015