

**TITAH
DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
PADUKA SERI SULTAN PERAK DARUL RIDZUAN
SULTAN NAZRIN MUIZZUDDIN SHAH**

**MAJLIS PELANCARAN BUKU
'RAPID FIRE RAFIDAH – BEING MALAYSIAN FIRST'**

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'Rapid Fire Rafidah – Being Malaysian First' disiapkan penulisannya ketika Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz mencapai usia 79 tahun. Namun pada usia tersebut, beliau masih memiliki memori yang kuat, berupaya mengimbasi peristiwa-peristiwa yang ditempuhi. Buku ini dimulai dengan refleksi memori Rafidah yang begitu segar, menggambarkan ikan sepilai berenang-renang dalam kejernihan air yang mengalir pada anak sungai, kemunculan ikan sepat ronggeng, serta kemunculan kodok di tepian kolam yang dikelilingi rumput rampai, juga pohon-pohon rambutan dan jambu mawar; koleksi pengalaman Rafidah seawal usia tiga tahun, melalui perjalanan hidup dalam persekitaran masyarakat Melayu desa di Selama. Daya ingatannya yang kuat, membolehkan pembaca mengikuti pelbagai pengalaman yang pernah dilaluinya.

2. Buku ini membuka lembaran untuk pembaca berupaya mengenali salah silah keturunan Rafidah. Moyang beliau, Abdul Karim bin Raja Aman Shah, bersama rakan-rakan dari Rawa Sumatra telah berhijrah ke Tanah Melayu dan membuka Selama. Anak kelahiran Selama ini, kemudiannya berhijrah melalui alam-alam kehidupan dan persekolahan di Kajang, Kota Bharu, Johor Bahru dan Kuala Lumpur, sebelum mengikuti pengajian tinggi di Universiti Malaya Kuala Lumpur. Ketika berusia 10 tahun, datuknya membantah Rafidah memasuki Special Malay Class di Convent Bukit Nanas, kerana bimbang Sekolah Convent ialah *Sekolah Nasrani* atau sekolah Kristian.

3. Rafidah cekal hati memilih untuk mengikuti persekolahan berbahasa penghantar Inggeris, di sekolah yang dirujuk oleh datuknya sebagai *Sekolah Nasrani*. Rafidah menamatkan pengajian persekolahan menengah di Sekolah Convent Bukit Nanas tanpa menjadi seorang Kristian, malah pengajian moral yang diperolehnya daripada seorang *sister* semasa di sekolah tersebut, kekal terpahat menjadi asas membentuk watak dan keperibadian beliau.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Rafidah Aziz has been a trailblazer throughout her career. She has made an outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Perak, of Malaysia, and internationally, through her long service in the following positions:

- As the parliamentary representative for Kuala Kangsar, where she served for three decades. She transformed and enhanced the lives of residents, working tirelessly to boost the provision of local infrastructure and social services.
- As a Malaysian cabinet minister serving three successive prime ministers—Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Mahathir Mohamad, and Tun Abdullah Badawi—and stimulating trade and investment; and
- As our trade and investment representative, where she became known on the international stage as Malaysia's Iron Lady—steadfast, tenacious, and uncompromising in promoting both the national interest and that of other developing countries.

5. In late 1960s and early '70s, Rafidah studied and taught economics at the University of Malaya, under the highly distinguished Royal Professor, Ungku Aziz, where she focused closely on the rural poor. She also conducted research on the rubber sector, including small-holders, contributing to policy development from the start. Indeed, she is a highly skilled technocrat and not only a politician. Her leading-edge policies helped to restructure and transform the country's economy as we moved away from agriculture towards the greater value-added of the manufacturing and services sectors.

6. As Malaysia's Minister of International Trade and Industry for more than two decades, from 1987 to 2008, Rafidah drove the country's industrialization policy. She orchestrated and led numerous high-level global trade and investment missions. These greatly boosted the country's exports, and attracted massive foreign investment, especially from the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. During Rafidah's tenure from 1987 to 2007, Malaysia's annual gross exports rocketed from RM 45 billion to RM 604 billion, equivalent to a growth rate of 13 per cent per year. Over the same period, cumulative net foreign direct investment inflows amounted to a staggering RM 255 billion.

7. These foreign investments facilitated the transfer of new technologies, and accelerated the growth of the higher-value-added manufacturing sector. Malaysia became one of the world's largest exporters of semiconductors. Even during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, with its significant negative impacts, the measures Rafidah introduced to attract foreign investment and support local businesses, helped to ensure that Malaysia's economic and export recovery were swift, and ahead of neighbouring countries.

8. The country's private sector operating environment gradually become more competitive in regional and global markets, through Rafidah's leadership of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. She encouraged innovation based on market intelligence and research. She promoted small and medium-sized enterprises and major corporations alike, including by establishing MATRADE—the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation—to help raise the profile of Malaysian exporters in foreign markets. She vigorously implemented the “Malaysia Incorporated” policy, which brought together the public sector and the private business sectors, for their mutual benefit.

9. As globalization advanced, with expanding cross-border liberalization of goods and services, Rafidah punched above her weight at ministerial meetings on the international stage, again

promoting Malaysia's global outreach. She also became known for championing the interests of the developing world, in international negotiations of complex and technical international, regional, and bilateral trade agreements, especially in relation to primary commodities. Such agreements had historically favoured the interests of the developed countries. At high-level meetings of the World Trade Organization and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), she became recognized not simply as Malaysia's voice, but also that of ASEAN member countries and other developing nations. Her strong voice helped to ensure that negotiations were not one-sided.

10. At one APEC conference of leaders, held in 2005, she challenged US President George W. Bush. As she was about to speak on the unfair imposition of duties on palm oil imports by some developed countries, President Bush interrupted saying: *"Madame Minister, before you speak, I'd like to say something. My colleagues have reminded me that when you speak, I have to listen"*. Her Rapid-fire reputation clearly preceded her! She equally commanded the respect of highly seasoned trade negotiators such as Warren Christopher, and others such as Prime Minister Hashimoto of Japan. Many of these global figures later became golfing partners, with matches played at our wonderful local courses right here in KL.

11. Rafidah's education from childhood - at Kampong Baru Malay Girls School; then Convent Bukit Nanas in KL; followed by the Singapore Science Institute; and the Victoria Institution—gave her a multi-cultural perspective on life from the start, yet without undermining her Islamic religious values. This education enabled her to understand and appreciate people of different cultural backgrounds, and of course to enjoy their festive celebrations. She paints an appealing picture of those days, when little emphasis was put on ethnic differences, and instead we all shared in each others' events. Religion was no bar to this, as all preferences and taboos were respected. This shared multi-cultural heritage has greatly enriched us as nation, and not just in our festivals and our food, to the benefit of us all.

12. Rafidah has always been the representative of all Malaysians, accepting, respecting and welcoming of diversity, and fuelled by her strong desire to drive our multi-ethnic nation forward. As she puts it: *"We have all built this nation together, and we must continue to do so"*. She is a shining example of the benefits of a multicultural education, and clearly learnt much from the wonderful if strict convent education she received. This includes strong moral values, which as she emphasises throughout the book, are universal and shared by us all, whatever our backgrounds or religions. She

illustrates this in her story of what happened when she found some money on the ground at school, saying:

"I always quote what the Sister told us regarding honesty. She said that if one found a five-sen coin on the floor, one should not take it because it could be someone's recess money or bus fare home. One should give it to the teacher to find out who has lost the five sen, and to return it to the owner."

13. Rafidah has been, and remains, a powerful role model. As a Malay woman she managed to integrate her own family life with her three children with her challenging work responsibilities. As she says in the book, *"Social adulation is transient, but family ties are for life"*. She is very matter of fact about how she managed this juggling act, preferring to set out her organizational and management skills, which are clearly formidable. She does share one amusing story, about leaving her new-born youngest child with her parents straight after being discharged from hospital, before donning office attire to go and meet the prime-minister, in order to take her place as a new Yang Berhormat.

14. She was and remains concerned about women's welfare, discrimination, equal pay, fairness, and ensuring their permanent work status, as well as reaching out to rural women and helping to

overcome the constraints they face in accessing services and work. As a member of the National Council of Women's Organisations, on which she eventually served as Vice President, she was instrumental in establishing the Department of Women's Affairs in the early 1980s, some 40 years ago.

15. In March 2008, following the country's 12th General Election, Rafidah was not re-appointed as a member of the cabinet, although she remained a member of parliament until 2013. In her book, she expresses concern that many people are being driven by ambition, greed, and corruption in their political careers, rather than by serving the national interest. As Rafidah puts it, *"It is very concerning when there are those in government who do not regard corruption as haram, providing ridiculous 'justifications' and, worse still using religion"*. She later adds that it is time for a national *"reset of social values, principles, attitudes and norms"*, as well as national institutions.

16. Rafidah learnt from her parents that however blessed one may be by circumstances, life is at its core about working hard, in roles humble and great, and earning just rewards as a result, and it is about caring for others. All are integral to leading an honourable and *berkhat* life. She learnt these values in her childhood, from her parents and religion, as well as from her education. She shares

many examples in the book of how these values have been applied throughout her life. She describes vividly the frugality and ingenuity of the way she and her family held her wedding, and how she furnished her first home with her husband. Such stories help to remind us that the real rewards in life come from family, with achievements and contributions coming next. They remind us of the importance of family values, of hard work, and of continued nation-building, which we must all undertake together, looking to the example of leaders and trail-blazers such as Rafidah.

17. Rafidah Aziz ialah seorang '*towering personality*'. Apakah faktor-faktor yang berperanan dan mempengaruhi terbinanya personaliti tersebut:

Pertama: Nilai murni yang disemai oleh ibu bapa; didikan yang serba lengkap di sekolah; pendedahan kepada masyarakat Malaysia yang berlainan agama, berbilang kaum dan pelbagai budaya sejak di bangku sekolah; pasangan hidup dan keluarga yang mematuhi dan mengamalkan disiplin; serta sifat menghargai jasa ibu bapa, guru-guru dan rakan-rakan sepekerjaan dan sepermainan.

Kedua: Meletakkan dirinya sebagai seorang berjiwa *Malaysian*, melihat dan melayani setiap rakyat sebagai warga

negara Malaysia yang wajar diberikan layanan secara adil dan saksama, tanpa prejudis – tanpa diskriminasi.

Ketiga: Keupayaan dan kepetahan menguasai Bahasa Inggeris dengan fasih dan baik lalu membolehkannya berhujah dan berdebat tanpa merasa kekok dan tidak berasa inferior ketika berada di pentas antarabangsa.

Keempat: Memilih kehidupan yang berkat melalui pendapatan yang halal dan menolak rasuah.

18. Banyak pelajaran yang pembaca boleh peroleh daripada buku ini, Beta memilih menumpukan kepada tiga perkara:

Pertama: Peringatan Presiden Nelson Mandela akan pentingnya pendidikan. Nelson Mandela diceritakan dalam bab 6, muka surat 105, semasa berada dalam penjara, secara berterusan menghantar mesej mengandungi tiga patah perkataan “*education before revolution*”. Nelson Mandela menegaskan pentingnya anak-anak kulit hitam Afrika mempersiapkan diri dengan menguasai ilmu pengetahuan untuk bersedia mengambil alih jawatan-jawatan utama di Afrika Selatan apabila tiba masanya. Sayangnya, nasihat Mandela tidak dihiraukan, di sebaliknya mereka memilih untuk

berjuang di jalan-jalan raya, dan apabila mereka berjaya memperoleh kuasa, tidak ramai orang kulit hitam yang memiliki persiapan pendidikan yang setimpal untuk mengambil tanggungjawab penting dan utama dalam negara.

Kedua: Kebimbangan apabila ada kalangan guru-guru di sekolah yang mentafsirkan agama secara sempit dan subjektif, berdasarkan peristiwa yang dicatatkan dalam bab 8, muka surat 143, apabila anak beliau mendapat arahan bahawa pelajar-pelajar Islam tidak dibenarkan menyertai kumpulan koir dan sekali gus tidak boleh menyertai konsert hujung tahun yang dianjurkan oleh sekolah.

Ketiga: Malaysia tidak akan dimusnahkan melalui peperangan, tetapi boleh dimusnahkan oleh '*common enemies*' atau musuh bersama yang mengandungi faktor-faktor berikut:

- Tetapan minda yang negatif dan toksik.
- Sikap destruktif.
- Nilai sesat yang merupakan antitesis kepada nilai yang diterima secara universal.
- Kepercayaan yang tidak lagi relevan pada era semasa.

- Amalan yang tidak boleh diterima oleh sesiapaapun.
- Sikap tamak yang menghakis nilai murni lantas mendorong kepada amalan rasuah dan salah guna kuasa.
- Prasangka tanpa asas.

19. Semoga penulisan yang dihasilkan oleh Rafidah dapat dijadikan bahan rujukan dan kompas panduan kepada generasi muda terutama yang memilih berkecimpung dalam dunia politik. Khidmat bakti Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz kepada negara dan rakyat, malah kepada insan sejagat, semoganya diterima oleh Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala sebagai amal makruf yang diberikan ganjaran dunia – ganjaran akhirat.

Dengan lafaz Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim, Beta melancarkan 'Rapid-Fire Rafidah: Being Malaysian First'.