

Speaking his mind

> In his memoir, prominent Malaysian economist Tan Sri Ramon V. Navaratnam writes candidly of his life and times, and the issues that irked him

BY **BISSME S.**

TO WRITE in a way that is honest, sincere and not offensive: that is one of the challenges that Tan Sri Ramon V. Navaratnam faced when writing his memoir, *My Life and Times: A Memoir*.

"I have to constantly review and revise the sensitive political issues that I have highlighted so that it will not cause any misunderstandings," says the 75-year-old father of three and grandfather of four.

The memoir traced his early years as a child during the Japanese Occupation to his college days and his almost 30 years working for the government, the majority of which was as an economist in the Treasury department, including his promotion to deputy secretary-general of the Finance Ministry in 1979 and secretary-general of the Transport Ministry in 1986.

After his retirement in 1989, Ramon took on the job of CEO of Bank Baruh for five years and is currently the corporate adviser to the Sunway Group.

In *My Life and Times: A Memoir*, Ramon not only wrote about his life but also stated his opinion on many issues considered sensitive - from the abuse of the NEP (New Economic Policy) to the deplorable state of the Tamil schools.

Ramon is ready to face any brickbats and criticisms that are thrown at him with the publication of his memoir. But he says any

criticism must be valid. "Anybody who wants to criticise me must do it on a good basis. That means they must find my information inaccurate and that I'm trying to be provocative.

"If I wrote it as a fact and it had a moral to it, then I think I have a right to express my opinion."

Ramon's nationalistic sentiment can be found all over the book. "I hate it when people say 'this can only happen in this country,'" he says. "It is as if they are a great wise sage

who has travelled all around the world and can make comparative studies.

"It is the same all over the world. Human beings are human beings ... they cheat, they lie and they play politics. It is only at different degrees.

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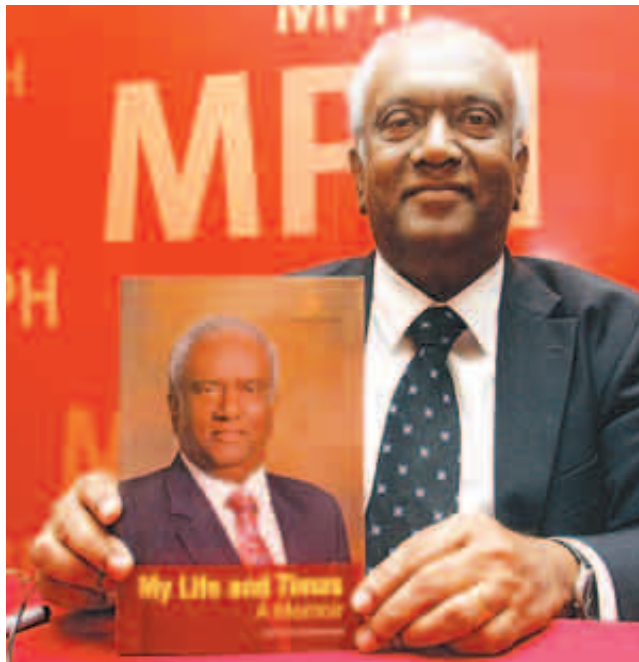
He says that any kind of extremist and racial supremacy views are bad. "You can see what's happened in Germany and many parts of the world.

"I am afraid of the silent majority. They do not speak up. You tell me how many people speak up in this country."

Ramon hopes his book will provide a little insight on his generation to today's youngsters.

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- Ramon V. Navaratnam



"Born just before World War II, my generation had struggled and endured the trials and tribulations during the Japanese Occupation," he says.

"Somehow, we survived and moved along as our country moved towards independence. We became the first generation of Malaysians who had the privilege to lay the foundation of independence and the formation of modern Malaysia."

Ramon adds that he is not one for complaining. "Grumbling and complaining, it can be soul destroying. You will become unproductive and negative. My biggest strength is that I never allowed myself to be bitter, angry or negative. I always kept away from those who grumble and complain."

He declares that there is a no greater satisfaction than serving your country. "There are more things in life than money and fame," says this author of economic tomes such as *Managing the Malaysian Economy*, *Malaysia's Economic Recovery*, *Malaysia's Economic Sustainability*, and *Malaysia's Socioeconomic Challenges - Winds of Change*.

My Life and Times: A Memoir is priced at RM60 and available at major bookstores.

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10. **WHAT THE DOG SAW AND OTHER ADVENTURES** - Malcolm Gladwell

IN A CAPSULE

War

Author: Sebastian Junger
Publisher: Twelve

AS WITH *The Perfect Storm* (W.W. Norton and Co; 1997), Junger writes his new book, *War*, based on what he observed - interviews and research done when he followed a platoon to a remote outpost called Restrepo in eastern Afghanistan's Korengal Valley.

The book is unique because the focus is on the soldiers themselves, their relationship with each other and how they coped with the death and destruction that surrounded them on a daily basis.

War is actually an extension of Junger's self-financed documentary *Restrepo* and the articles he wrote for *Vanity Fair* magazine on the subject.



Many soldiers were interviewed and many stories told but what comes across is the camaraderie among the soldiers due to the dangerous situations they constantly find themselves in.

The book is about the common soldier, each with his own reason for serving in the war and each with his own emotional baggage to carry.

There is no glossing over of facts on how civilians in Afghanistan are often casualties during skirmishes with the enemy. The sad dreary situation the soldiers and the tribesmen find themselves in is really quite tragic.

The book begins and ends with a soldier called O'Bryne, whose downward spiral is pitiful, and more or less represents what most enlisted men go through when each day is supposed to be their last.

Read this for the insight it gives into the messy business called war. - **S. Indra Sathiabalan**

Fang

Author: James Patterson
Publisher: Little, Brown and Company

THIS novel is from the *Maximum Ride* series based on a group of winged mutant children raised in test tubes who escaped captivity and used their 'gifts' to help mankind.

Maximum Ride (or Max), aged 15, is the leader and Fang is her best friend and second-in-command. The others are Angel, Gazzy, Iggy and Nudge as well as their talking mutant dog Total and normal mutt Akila.

Running from evil forces and saving the world has made Max one tough cookie but it still did not prepare her for a horrifying prophetic



message. Angel says Fang will be the first to die - and Angel is never wrong!

The appearance of Dylan adds to her headache as he was created to be Max's perfect half. Now, not only does she have to resist what fate has lined up for her, she is also determined to protect Fang from being killed.

Max also has to tackle Angel who wants to take over the flock.

Meanwhile, the apocalypse looms near and Max is approached by Dr Gunther-Hagen, who wants her to help him in his project to change humans to the mutants so that they can survive the apocalypse.

Peppered with humour and told from Max's perspective, *Fang* offers a world of fantasy and adventure with all the ingredients to pull in the younger reader. - **Sharon Wong**

Under the Dome

Author: Stephen King
Publisher: Hodder

STEPHEN KING first had the idea for this novel in 1976, began it, abandoned it and did not return to it until 2007 when he finally felt confident of tackling the technical problems that his theme posed.

The reading public has reason to be grateful for the 31-year maturation period: the result is an epic that is both thought-provoking and insanelly readable.

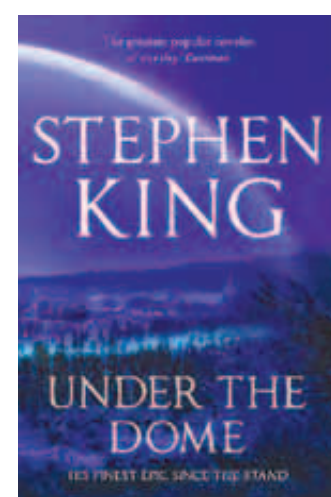
The town of Chester's Mill, Maine, is mysteriously encased in an invisible, impenetrable barrier, cutting the population off from the outside world (just like in *The Simpsons Movie*).

In a surprisingly but believably short time, the normal rules of civic society are ditched.

Used-car salesman Big Jim Rennie becomes the town's dictator, aided by a specially recruited police force of vicious thugs.

Colonel Dale Barbara, an Iraq war veteran, leads the outnumbered opposition.

It's a straightforward fight



between good and evil - or liberal values and naked power. Yet, it is not as simplistic as this might suggest.

Barbara, the good guy, has a guilty conscience about his part in interrogating terror suspects in Baghdad, while Rennie's son, a psychotic killer, experiences the best feeling he's ever had when he rescues a little girl and feels her arms around his neck.

Both heroes and villains are human and believable, and King handles the huge cast of characters with much aplomb.

Some may find the storytelling style too direct, and King has a habit of using dialogue to reveal exactly what he wants us to know about that character at that point.

It was also a mistake to include a dog who can understand human speech, including messages from ghosts.

But you have to admire the verve, the energy, the endless invention.

It's popular literature, yes. But if only all popular literature were this good.

Readable but a bit bulky at 877 pages, *Under the Dome* is gripping enough so that you won't want to put it down until the last page. - **Brandon Robshaw**