

Publication: The Straits Times

Date: 5 May 2016

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Published MAY 5, 2016, 5:00 AM SGT



From left: Mr Tahir presenting copies of his book to former Indonesian presidents Dr Habibie and Dr Yudhoyono yesterday. The book traces the Indonesian billionaire's rags-to-riches journey, and he hopes it will inspire his countrymen. PHOTO: MATTHIAS HO FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

BRAINS AND BRAWN

You need to fight hard and work smart to convert opportunities into gains.

BILLIONAIRE AND PHILANTHROPIST TAHIR, founder of the Mayapada Group, wants to tell his fellow Indonesians that there still are opportunities in the country.

Indonesian billionaire and philanthropist Tahir wants the story of his life to inspire his fellow countrymen, and he tells them there still are opportunities in the country.

"But you need to fight hard and work smart to convert opportunities into gains," the founder of the Mayapada Group said at the launch of the Chinese edition of his biography, Living Sacrifice, yesterday.

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Mr Tahir, 64, who goes by a single name, said love for his country was among the reasons behind the book, written by Ms Alberthiene Endah and first published in Bahasa Indonesia last year.

The son of a rickshaw maker in Surabaya, Mr Tahir traces his childhood and his undergraduate days at the then Nanyang University in Singapore - where he met and married the daughter of Indonesian tycoon and Lippo Group founder Mochtar Riady - to his business success after he set up the Mayapada group of companies in 1986.

Today, the conglomerate includes the Mayapada Bank, hospitals and duty-free shops, as well as interests in newspaper publishing and real estate investment.

At the book launch at Singapore Management University (SMU), witnessed by former Indonesian presidents B.J. Habibie and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Mr Tahir presented cheques of \$100,000 each to four charities.

They are the President's Challenge 2016, Nee Soon Citizens' Consultative Committee Community Development and Welfare Fund, the Paediatric Oncology Treatment for Children from Asean Region, and Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund.

Dr Yudhoyono, in a lecture at the event, spoke of guiding principles that helped him govern a country of some 250 million people who had, as he put it, "a lot of freedom but not enough opportunities".

Dr Yudhoyono, who was president from 2004 to 2014, said his "recipe" had four ingredients.

First, drill down to the details in any matter, but "do not lose yourself in them". Second, assemble a team that is competent and has integrity. Third, coordinate communications well, otherwise "miscommunications, mistrust and misunderstandings will lead to missteps and missed opportunities".

And lastly, "keep your eye on the ball, the ball being your key objective". For him, the objectives included ending communal strife and boosting growth.

At the question and answer session moderated by SMU president Arnoud de Meyer, Mr Tahir asked Dr Yudhoyono for the "secret" to his serving two full terms when there were four presidents within six years before him.

Responding, Dr Yudhoyono noted that Indonesian politics was "noisy", expectations high and protests could come not only from the people but also from Parliament.

But two things helped him get through, he said: "I prayed to God, and I had a lot of patience."

Dr Habibie, president from 1998 to 1999, said that the approach to leading a country well was to focus on lifting its middle class through "a positive synergy" of culture, relationships and by having a good grasp of "the mechanisms of science and technology".

Dr Tahir's book, translated and published by Lianhe Zaobao, is available at leading bookshops for \$41.50 before GST.