

Headline	Straight talking		
MediaTitle	UNRESERVED		
Date	21 Dec 2012	Color	Full Color
Section	NEWS	Circulation	10,000
Page No	31	Readership	30,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	528 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 1,737
Frequency	Bi-Monthly	PR Value	RM 5,211



Straight talking

For over two decades Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir has been sharing her thoughts in a column for an English daily. These 'Musings' have been compiled in a book – 'Telling It Straight' – which was launched recently, writes AINA AHMAD.

DATIN Paduka Marina Mahathir is not your average columnist. For a start, she pretty much writes whatever comes to her mind, essentially without fear or favour, that is as far as the newspaper that publishes her column is willing to go.

She is also the daughter of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's longest serving prime minister (from 1981 to 2003) and is quite vocal on the international and local socio-political arenas. Both Marina and her father still make the headlines from time to time, proof that their opinions still matter. Sometimes they make the news because Marina endorses issues which her father vehemently opposes.

So when Marina attended a *Telling It Straight* book-signing event at Borders MidValley in Kuala Lumpur recently, it was not an average crowd that she drew. Among them were representatives from embassies of countries normally associated with championing of freedom of speech and human rights.

Her mother, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was also there, together with Datin Seri Maznah Rais, wife of Information Communication and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim.

Telling It Straight is a compilation of Marina's articles that were published under *The Star's* "Musings" column. With a foreword by political scientist and historian Dr Farish A. Noor, the compilation comprises the best of Marina's takes on the issues, ideas and institutions of the day, published between 2003 and 2012, as well as two unpublished articles.

The 90 columns are presented thematically, some with specially written introductions to provide context, and cover a wide range of topics, ranging from human trafficking, the underclass and flashmobs to Islamic law enforcement, corruption and examples of plain idiocy.

"Think of it as the greatest hits. I thought it would be nice to put it all in one place. And there have been many over the years, 26 columns a year over 20 years, you do the math," Marina said.

Telling It Straight is the third compilation of her works since 2003. "Musings" appears fortnightly on Wednesdays.



MARINA (THIRD FROM LEFT) WITH MUM TUN DR SITI HASMAH AND DAUGHTERS INEZA (LEFT) AND SHAISTA

She is also a popular blogger and her writings have appeared in numerous other print and online publications.

When *The Star* invited her to start a column 23 years ago, she was told to write about her family and "things that I like. I grew to write about other things. I just write what I feel and not with anyone in mind.

"Some readers tell me that I write what they are also thinking. It is kind of nice to know that there are also people out there who think like you do, that you are not alone."

On allegations that she is free to write anything only because her father is Tun Dr Mahathir, Marina said it's not true as she writes based on facts and not gossips and rumours. Over the years she has been asked, politely, by the editors at *The Star* to tone down her column, who explained to her that the newspaper faced pressure over quite a number of her articles.

But pressure or not, Marina said "out of the whole lot, very few were cut or went unpublished".

And she doesn't just focus on any one particular topic, preferring to delve into all things that touch a nerve with her.

"When I feel that something is not right, I write about it. Having said that, I do like to write about women (issues) and gender equality. There's still not enough being written on these topics."

For those who want to start a blog, column or write a book, Marina has this to say: "Just start. You should write what you like. What's important is to write what you think, what you feel. There is no sign for you to start, just begin. As for the topic, something will always come up, always."

The outspoken social and political commentator began her career in advocacy by addressing the HIV/AIDS issues in Malaysia. A graduate of the University of Sussex, she was president of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) for more than a decade, and was also chairperson of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF).

Through her work with the MAC and MAF, Marina came into contact with numerous vulnerable groups including the transgender community, drug users, sex workers, migrant workers and people with HIV. After leaving her position as MAC president in 2006, Marina went on to focus on issues related to Islam and gender equality.

■ *'Telling It Straight'* is available at all Borders stores at RM39.90

