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More leaders should write books

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JUDGING from the line of people waiting yesterday at the Times bookshop at Lot 10 for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's signature for his new book, *The Asian Renaissance*, one will not be surprised if the book is a hit. Some bought as many as 20 copies, perhaps to take advantage of the rare opportunity of having our leader's autograph. Never mind how many in the crowd will actually read the book or when one will get a chance to read the book.

The important point is that Anwar, like our prime minister, has set an example which should be followed by other leaders, politics, corporate or social, putting their thoughts onto a book for others to share and understand the thinking of the person.

Everyone perhaps remembers Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's controversial book, *The Malay Dilemma*, which was banned for a long, long time. A banned book on the other hand has always been sought after and *The Malay Dilemma* was no exception.

It is true that writing a book is no easy task, especially in our society where many would not care to spend time reading. Writing a book for money in Malaysia should not be the objective for those leaders mentioned above.

However, imagine if corporate leaders, such as Tan Sri Azman Hashim, Tan Sri Shamsuddin, Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad, Tan Sri Rashid Hussein or Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong, and many others were to write a book, either by themselves or jointly with somebody else, the amount of first hand knowledge and insight will not only benefit our students but also the general public.

These corporate leaders can certainly bridge the gap between theory and practice and their immense contribution to the knowledge that they can impart.

Even if there are books, chances are they are written by academicians or meant as textbooks but seldom fulfil both the interest of general reading and textbooks as well. The struggle and success of these corporate leaders should serve well to motivate others, especially the younger generation, of the need to have a continuous stream of aggressive entrepreneurs. A book by them could also provide some insight on how decisions are made when confronted with certain crises.

Imagine the story behind Lim Goh Tong's success of building an entertainment empire in the sky starting with practically nothing. Or how Azman Hashim, the employee, became the entrepreneur par excellence in banking and finance, or Shamsuddin's switch from working in a telecommunications company to owning one.

The frenzy in reading certainly has not caught on in Malaysia unlike countries like the US and the UK. A bestseller list of books in Malaysia would probably be nothing compared with that of New York Times or Doubleday but the fact still remains that a book of one's thoughts, experiences, insight, observations can be useful to so many.

Perhaps the main excuse is time. Although not everyone is a born writer, a book need not be written by oneself. Someone else, a professional writer, can be hired to sit down and produce the book as a joint effort.

There is also the consideration of time in a different aspect. Some people might feel that the time is not right for them to produce a book. This is true as we have seen with the example of *The Malay Dilemma*. However, one can always chronicle first the ideas or points which could

later form part of a book and this exercise can stretch over a number of years until perhaps when one is either retiring or have had enough of the rat race. This culture of writing a book has never been one that has been encouraged or motivated because publishers certainly look for avenues which will bring them high returns and not books which will only sell a few hundred copies. For the publisher, the thinking would probably be, better to concentrate on certain "types" of books or imported books. Why bother persuading people like Yahaya Ahmad who has enough problems of his own to write a book when one can enjoy good profits by bringing in foreign titles which are bestsellers?

Language is certainly not a problem either in English or Bahasa Malaysia. Maybe price is a hindrance to some people but locally-produced books should be much cheaper than imported ones.

Imagine the wealth of knowledge gained by society if these people set aside everyday bits and pieces of their experiences and later turning them into a book. Original works are certainly worth more than anything else in books.

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