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The good ship Malaysia will sail on

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THESE are days of the instant book. Mayhap being written now is the first chapter of The Rise and Fall of Anwar Ibrahim. All the elements of a bestseller are there - politics, sex and religion too.

The fall from grace of someone with so much promise surely demands scrutiny. There are echoes of Greek tragedy: drama that is about to unfold for all to discern an yet nothing can be done to affect its outcome.

As for newspapers there is the opening paragraph of the Asian Wall Street Journal editorial, "The business of newspapers is selling newspapers and nothing sells better than sex". But its commentary was on President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.

A future historian rummaging through the past would undoubtedly take note of how Malaysians took in stride a series of major events within the space of a fortnight - the imposition of currency controls to overcome continued economic turmoil, dismissal of a Deputy Prime Minister, opening of the Commonwealth Games attended by some 100,000 people and at the same time a few kilometres away a rally in support of the sacked minister, official visit by Queen Elizabeth and protest rallies not far away not far away from one of the venues, and finally the closing of the Commonwealth Games with undiminished fervour.

Meanwhile amid other rallies in Permatang Pauh, Melaka, Kota Baru and other places a book by Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, The Singapore Story containing critical comments on the late Tunku Abdul Rahman and his successor Tun Abdul Razak went on sale at local bookshops.

It was sold out almost immediately perhaps because of a call to ban it. Equally ludicrous was the call to ban his entry to Malaysia.

That no such prohibitions were imposed is a measure too of the nation's maturity.

Surely Malaysians do not read books singing paeans of praise for them only and banning those critical of the country, its policies or its leaders past and present. Only Nazis burned books.

Occasional hiccups between close neighbours do not efface the friendly and family ties between Malaysians and Singaporeans.

Taken note of also is the spate of critical comments among certain sections of the foreign media on Malaysia on almost everything that she does.

They are meant to put us down, but as the Malay saying goes the good ship Malaysia will sail along while the dog barks. No longer are we led by the nose ring.

As evident also news about Anwar's rallies, statements or speeches do not jostle for space in newspapers or on television. They appear every day and some are in the front page of the national dailies.

Joining sections of the foreign media in denigrating the country are unruly elements in some of the rallies. And so there were cries of "Go back to Sri Pentas. CNN is okay. Foreign media is right."

For CNN there was special coverage by Maria Ressa who covered the Indonesian student riots and violence which led to President Suharto's fall. And on CNBC a report on Moody's downgrading of Malaysian banks was aired yet again the next night.

Much earlier were the adverse reports prior to the Commonwealth Games questioning Malaysia's ability to host them.

There were dire warnings about smog about to envelope all those at Bukit

Jalil and snide reports about the death penalty vis-a-vis the country's anti-dadah policy.

The jaundiced reports continued even after the hugely successful opening of the Games with comments on "Kowtowing to local dignitaries" and about political storms which, however, were not recorded on the Richter scale.

As Lee Kuan Yew said when addressing the Foreign Correspondents Association in Singapore, "Malaysia, despite the bad press it is getting, has an economy that is sound in its bases and there is no danger of political disorder".

Revealing too was his comment, "I feel sad more for Dr Mahathir than for Anwar. There was his earlier comments that Muslims do not believe in gays and gay rights.

Aimed at the target was a commentary in Berita Harian earlier this week by its woman columnist, Tun Teja, about Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Irish wit and dramatist who sued his accuser after being charged with being a sodomite but lost his case and was sentenced to two years' hard labour.

In a barbed reference to the present she concluded, "I hear that the former bendahara has also alleged that the confessions by his two friends are yet other slanders against his character. I do hope the former bendahara fully realises the implication and consequence of his charge.

For if the charge or the denial is found to be "wild" as the whites say it, he might well be the second Wilde in history."

As recorded Wilde fled to France after his release to renew his writing. Once mentioned was his play "Salome", meant to shock the Paris audience by its portrayal of unnatural passion. It was banned by the censors.

Also mentioned was Wilde's use of the "epigrammatic wit" and his name was associated with the French intellectual Rochefoucauld, famous for his epigrams, one of which reads: "Evil as well as good has its hero".

Reviewed some time back was the book Le Testamen Francais by Andreai Makins which won prestigious literary awards in France and has been translated into 22 languages. Strangely enough the reviewer remembered a minor character, Pashka, the school dunce and loner from a poor home who "climbs the trees to watch the stars."

Alas, such innocence has no place in the world these days, especially that of politics. Good night, sweet dreams.

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