

Love and loathing in Malaysia
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And another major figure providing us writers with an audience is the widely admired and loved Pak Chong who, having started his working life as a construction labourer, then languished in prison for eight years on suspicion of socialist activism, has by now become one of Asia's leading publishers of academic and activist literature through his Strategic Information and Research Development (SIRD), and its book-retailing arm, Gerakbudaya.

Just as I'm indebted to Steven, Prem and their colleagues at Malaysiakini for publishing my weekly columns online for the past five years or so, I have to thank Pak Chong first for collecting my columns into hard-copy books, and now for sponsoring my return to Malaysia to belatedly launch them.

I say "belatedly" because I was for one reason or another never able to get to Malaysia at the appropriate times to launch each book individually.

But now, finally, all four of Pak Chong's books of my Malaysiakini columns - 'Mad about Malaysia', 'Even madder about Malaysia', 'Missing Malaysia' and '1Malaysia.con' - are to be launched this coming Friday, Dec 16, at 7pm at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in KL.

And immediately following the launch will be a forum on the future of the Malaysian media between Steven Gan, members of the audience and me, moderated by Dr Carmen Nge, Assistant Professor/Dean, Faculty of Creative Industries, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar).

But despite all this good fellowship I'm enjoying, this brief return to Malaysia by no means entirely a love-fest.

In fact, the more I see of Malaysia at first-hand again after so long observing and writing about it from a distance, the more intense my loathing for all the repression, corruption and outright criminality that my Malaysians are subjected to by the ever-ruling Umno/BN regime.

And nothing brings this sense of loathing home to me more intensely than the process of forcing myself, as long as I'm here, to read the appalling local mainstream press.

Only the English-language sector of it, thank goodness, as my illiteracy in any other tongue spares me the horrors of the hardest-core regime-controlled hate-rags like Utusan Malaysia.

But The Star and New Straits Times are disgusting enough to be going on with, due to not only their blatant pro-Umno/BN bias in selecting which 'good news' to report, spin and if necessary fabricate about the government and which 'bad news' to neglect to mention, but their sickeningly sycophantic treatment of any story whatever about the 'officially' powerful and privileged.

Arguably monstrous investment schemes

For example, last Monday, Dec 12, both these so-called 'newspapers' carried virtually identical front-page 'stories' positively swooning over the alleged success of one of the Umno/BN regime's monster and arguably monstrous investment schemes.

The Star headlined its take on this non-story 'A greater Iskandar', with a picture of the prime minister trying on a tie, and quoted him as declaring that "There is no doubt that Iskandar will be a vanguard for Malaysia and the region in the years ahead."

In case any readers were thick enough to miss the message, the tale continued inside the paper with four more puff-pieces headed 'JPO (Johor Premium Outlets) set for more top brands', 'Premium Outlets a hit

among the celebs, too,' 'Najib lauds southern corridor as a national success story', and, to show that Umno/BN has a heart for non-celebs as well, 'Home sweet home in Iskandar'.

The New Straits Times headed its shameless sales-pitch 'Iskandar Malaysia soars', then followed it up with items headed 'Investors see Johor's potential', '12 new deals worth RM1.73b inked', and as a sop to the peasants, 'A roof for all under the Iskandar sun'.

Having parroted the government's sell on the Iskandar scheme, the NST then switched to plugging the prime minister himself with the story 'King lauds government under Najib', that quoted the outgoing Yang di-Pertuan Agong as saying that he was "concerned about the inclination of certain parties to raise sensitive and racial issues and to politicise matters which should not be politicised".

It was my understanding that royalty should not permit itself to be politicised. But apparently not, as The Star ran a somewhat similar article stating that the Sultan of Selangor "advised the Malay community to stay united in protecting the sanctity of Islam and not be divided due to differences in political ideologies and beliefs", which sounds to me tantamount to advocating a concerted Malay vote for Umno.

Considering that this is the kind of rubbish that the mainstream press prints in support of its Umno/BN overlords, it's small wonder that I, or anyone else who sincerely loves Malaysia, take to writing, blogging, or whatever else he or she can possibly do to oppose this lying, cheating, thieving and altogether utterly loathsome regime.

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