

## **'WSJ has woeful lack of knowledge of M'sia'**

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COMMENT The Wall Street Journal takes aim at Malaysia, but once again displays a woeful lack of knowledge and understanding of our country and its history.

Malaysia has been a democracy since independence in 1957. Elections are fiercely contested, and the opposition won five out of the country's 13 states in 2008. Political discourse is vibrant and noisy.

The "voices of dissent" that the opposition's former leader, Anwar Ibrahim, claims not to be able to hear are dominant in Malaysia's online news media, which has far more readers here than the print press.

If anyone doubts Malaysians' "fundamental liberties", they can easily see for themselves how free anyone is to criticise the government on these news sites.

Anwar (photo) mentions the recent Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota) as "encroaching" on those liberties. But he fails to mention that it explicitly states that "No person shall be arrested and detained solely for his political belief or political activity".

Pota in fact further secures the liberties of Malaysians: both their freedom to speak out, and their freedom from extremists who pose a real threat to the country.

Anwar may not take this threat seriously, but the Malaysian government does.

The WSJ gives Anwar the platform to raise false and politically motivated allegations of corruption against our prime minister.

Perhaps it might have been relevant for the WSJ to mention that Anwar himself was convicted of corruption in 1999. The verdict was not overturned.

He is currently in jail after a legal process that lasted years. He was first acquitted, then convicted, allowed to appeal, and only when that failed did he go to prison. If he truly believed in his innocence, he could have submitted his own DNA to the court.

If the charge had been "trumped up", as the WSJ falsely says, that would have proven it. But he did not – hardly the action of an innocent man.

Far from "sowing communal and religious animosity", the government of Prime Minister Najib Razak early on launched the 1Malaysia policy.

This is the greatest attempt in Malaysia's history to forge a national identity that includes all races and religions, and the prime minister regularly attends the festivals of

non-Muslims, going to churches and temples to share the celebrations of fellow Malaysians.

Anwar and the opposition, however, never supported 1Malaysia. Why not? Was it because Anwar himself had a well-documented history of rabble-rousing and extremism, as well as of spouting anti-Semitic remarks – as the WSJ well knows but again fails to mention.

The suggestion that Malaysia is in danger of becoming a “failed state” would be laughable – if it were not for the fact that some people take Anwar seriously and will believe what he says, no matter how wild or imaginary.

Here is what some other people have said about Malaysia recently:

- Bloomberg rated Malaysia as the world’s 5th most promising emerging market in 2015.
- The IMF’s latest report on our country was titled: “Favourable Prospects for Malaysia’s Diversified Economy”.
- A Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations wrote: “Malaysian political discourse is becoming far more open than it was even a decade ago.”
- The ratings agency Fitch recently upgraded the outlook for Malaysia.

This is the truth about Malaysia today. It is a pity that the WSJ has fallen for desperate, unfounded allegations by a politician and presented them as facts – thereby taking sides in internal Malaysian politics.

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