

Don't ban it if you don't get it
Malaysiakini.com
May 21, 2007
Azly Rahman

There is nothing more frightening than active ignorance. - Goethe, German philosopher

The Internal Security Ministry denied that it had seized 10 copies of the book on May 13, clarifying that it had only taken the books to check the contents. The books would be returned if they contained nothing that violated the Printing Press and Publications Act 1984.

Deputy Minister Fu Ah Kiow said news reports stating that the books were seized were incorrect and believed that the matter was being deliberately blown out of proportion to gain publicity. "It is just a very ordinary procedure, something that the officers will do if they receive reports about any publication that may be unfavourable for the public.

"They will still carry out their duties even if there is no report," he told reporters. Fu was asked to comment on the books taken from a bookstore in Mid-Valley Megamall in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday. Fu said his officers were still reading the contents.' (The Star)

The above news report still amplified the culture of book banning we have had since independence. To be telling schoolchildren and parents that we ban books is not conveying a smart message for our smart schools. Why not tell these children to think and think freely and to read and read voraciously? Why use the schools to promote the message of active ignorance?

Active ignorance

In our history, one of the most famous books banned was of course The Malay Dilemma by a medical doctor from Titi Gajah, Kedah. The author later became Malaysia's fourth prime minister, staying in power for 22 years. We banned Kassim Ahmad, Othman Ali, Karen Armstrong, and many work of national and international authors who proposed new line of thinking about society. We ban good movies on the Malaysian early political experience that tries to enrich our youth with a radical perspective of this nation and its narration.

We were even afraid of our respectable social scientist Dr. Lim Teck Ghee's Asli findings on the New Economic Policy, written with such a refreshing and constructivist perspective. Through the repressive Internal Security Act, we jailed out intellectuals – without trial – people like Lim Kit Siang, Dr Syed Husin Ali, Kassim Ahmad, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, and many others who lived their lives presenting alternative viewpoints for a better Malaysian future. We have installed a government of active ignorance, interested in the advancement of poor understanding of human development. We continue to live a national life of contradiction.

We prefer to glorify leaders of Mat Rempits and make our youth stoned glued to 100 television channels, useless programmes such as Akademi Fantasia, and soap operas that mainly sell useless products to housewives. These do not increase the value to the nation's collective intelligence. Reading good books does.

As we move towards a "Biotech" nation, send the first Malay Muslim astronaut into space, drop 10 Mat Rempits from the sky in the North Pole, we ban a book that could have explained all the three events of cultural contradictions I mentioned.

What's still wrong with us?

What's wrong with those who are thinking of possibly calling for the ban? Can't they read and analyze and write their own rebuttal of the historical account of May 13, 1969?

If an American youth in his 20s can do a good documentary "Loose Change" to rebut the Bush Regime's "official view" of 9/11, why can't the government do as such? Why stop others from reading about another interpretation of history? What kind of standard of intellectual rigour helped elect those senators who called for the ban?

I thought, "senators", like the Romans and the Greeks were supposed to be scholarly as inspired by Cicero and Socrates? I thought we elect politicians because we think they are profound scholars such as Kung Fu'Tze, Lao Tzu, Krishnamurthi, Za'ba, W.S. Rendra, Syed Hussein Alattas, and Jose Rizal.

What is wrong with this country? I thought we are more mentally advanced than the many a war-torn nation that summarily execute journalists and truth-tellers? I thought this is the year 2007 and that we have declared to produce tens of thousands of those with PhDs

Why not encourage each other to read the book first and write a review of it – we will be respected. If one's command of the English Language is poor, take time to improve it before deciding to become a representative of the people in a world in which the rakyat will continue to challenge politicians on intellectual and moral grounds.

The power of the bloggers is showing us that politicians need to work harder to become more intelligent in their decision-making. Look at how many corruption cases are beginning to get attended to in this otherwise "Sleepy Hollow" country called Malaysia? Look at how many "Rip Van Winkles" among the politicians are beginning to wake up from their siesta and slumber in some Malaysian Catskills Mountains of upstate New York and scrambling to explain why they need to be more accountable. We elect them and we want them to behave.

Instead of spending long hours at country clubs and golf courses, read and read and improve your ability to analyze whatever "controversial" books published. Don't ban the May 13 book if you don't understand!

Talk about controversial issues

We must remove the clauses that prohibit us from talking about so-called controversial issues. We are an intelligent nation expecting to live in a more intelligent environment. We must banish unintelligent leaders who are still living with a May 13, 1969 frame of mind. From whom do these prohibitions and banning serve?

We must allow as many writers and scholars as possible to write critical analyses of issues that affect our lives – from the role of the Communist Party in fighting for Independence and the root cause of the May 13 1969 riots to the by-election of Ijok and the cognitive inabilities of rude, vulgar, racists and sexist politicians who continue to be given the power to define Malaysian parliamentary culture.

We are letting this beautiful country move aimlessly in an euphoric state of pseudo-intellectualism when we can do more than ban books, witch-hunt our university students, silence our academicians, criminalise our intellectuals, shy away from inter-faith

dialogues, angry at newer findings on the ownership in the NEP, forced our university administrators to police our students, spew vulgarities in our August house, allow Ministers to make unintelligent statements on responsible and socially-conscious bloggers, and countless other acts that are stopping our nation from thinking and organising collective action on radical change.

We need to be serious about becoming a nation of better thinkers. We need to remove the hurdles. This will require the rakyat to demand that we remove leaders in politics, academia, social services, public education and all sectors that are anti-intellectual.

We need a new brand of leaders who will move this nation forward and create a new republic of virtue, morality, peace and justice for all races.

In the case of the book, it is time the Ministry of Information and Ministry of Internal Security each have a website to publish review of books instead of using their power to ban what it has not properly understood. This will be a more respectable thing to do. This will launch the two ministries into the Space Age – from the Age of Dinosaur. From the year 1957 to year 2007.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/67481>