

Malaysia, the land of cartoons
Malaysiakini.com
June 29, 2010

OPINION Most of my cartoons are drawn based on local issues. Therefore, it is not a surprise that my cartoons are not well-known outside Malaysia. Foreigners may recognise my drawings, but they never get the joke.

Whenever the government bans my books and magazines, the decision becomes widespread news locally and internationally under such headlines as 'Malaysia bans political cartoons critical of government'.

NONEI believe many people across the globe must have laughed when they discovered the grounds of the most recent ban. Home Ministry secretary-general Mahmood Adam said the cartoons are a threat to national security!

I can accept it if my cartoons are barred from appearing in mainstream newspapers such as New Straits Times, Star or other government-controlled newspapers.

But to ban my books and to threaten my readers and vendors with up to three years' jail or a fine of up to RM20,000 is an act that truly reflects 1Funny Malaysia.

I have received many emails from people in countries like Australia, Canada, Taiwan and the US, requesting copies of my books, with notes like: "p.s: Your book is so funny. I laughed before I read it."

Malaysians are exposed to many funny things in daily life. Just turn to the national news on television and one cannot stop laughing at statements by the prime minister and his cabinet ministers.

Nobody could hold their laughter when the PM once placed the holy Quran on his head and issued a denial of involvement in a criminal case.

NONEAnd it was funnier than the Raja Lawak comedy show when he negotiated for votes using taxpayers' money by saying "you help me, I help you" - even if the Election Commission and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission saw nothing wrong with this.

Now, if a sergeant has the expertise to steal a jet engine, imagine how much more of an expert our majors or generals would be. Yet none of them represented Malaysia in the Scorpene submarine deal - instead it was political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda! Ha, ha, ha!

I once thought that the reason behind the collapse of the ceiling in the Kuala Lumpur court complex was due to too much laughter at the judgments delivered. (Sorry for exaggerating.)

Duty to deliver

It is quite common that, from time to time, the works of political cartoonists are banned around the world, but this action has been limited to cartoons in newspapers and magazines.

And how many of these decisions were because the subject poked fun at the government or

was critical of the government?

This happened to Thomas Nast who constantly knocked William M Tweed, the leader of Tammany Hall, the political machine that controlled politics in New York. But that was in the middle of the 1860s!

US congressman Jack Kemp has pointed out that a transparent government will acknowledge the role of political cartoonists. He indicated that even on a bad day, we have to admit cartooning plays an important role in a free press.

petrol price hike protest 2 najib cartoon fan dance
Even when the government is savaged by a clever cartoon, we might still laugh at the aptitude or the art of the cartoonist.

It's a duty for me as a political cartoonist to expose the corruption of the BN government, to draw subjects that fail to be highlighted by other cartoonists - subjects such as Altantuya Shaariibuu, the Scorpene deal, Apco or the conspiracy against Anwar Ibrahim.

The more corrupt the government is, the more creative I will be. Malaysia is a land of cartoons... and its cabinet ministers are comical characters in disguise.

So don't blame me; politicians provide the jokes - I just transfer them onto paper.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/135845>