

Remembering our revolutionaries

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ITS that time of the year again when those who celebrate Christmas would have reflected on the birth and life of Jesus Christ.

In my opinion, one doesn't need to believe in Jesus' divinity to acknowledge that he was a public intellectual who stood up to the power structures of his time, spoke out courageously, and acted to uphold justice.

If we recognise this of the historical person of Jesus, then it should be no surprise to us that he was put to death for the message he proclaimed.

Indeed, Jesus' life as a visionary and revolutionary continues to resonate until today. Such is the power of a life well and courageously lived in the interest of others so that we continue to celebrate Christmas to commemorate his birth.

This year, several Malaysian revolutionaries passed away. It is very unlikely that their birth and life will ever be celebrated in the same way as Christmas is. But this does not negate the fact that their lives were lived in the pursuit of truth, accountability, justice and fairness.

These were the Malaysians who

were remembered at a Suqiam fundraising dinner earlier this month for their real and courageous contributions to Malaysia:

» **Rashid Maidin (1917-2006)**

An anti-fascist, anti-colonial resistance fighter, Rashid was a leader in the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army. He was the first Malay member of the Communist Party of Malaya and headed Regiment 10 of the Malayan Races Liberation Army. He spent his final days in exile in south Thailand.

» **Chong King Liong (1933-2006)**

The seventh Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall president was deemed one of the most important leaders in the history of Malaysian Chinese society.

Under his leadership, he mobilised and organised the Chinese society against discriminatory government policies in the 1980s, and was involved in the 1987 mass gathering at Tien Hou Temple.

After the 1987 mass arrests of Operasi Lalang, Chong fought for the release of detainees who were held without trial. It was during his time that the KL Selangor Chinese

Assembly Hall's Chinese Resource Centre and Civil Rights Committee were set up. The latter remains vocal on human rights issues.

» **Abdul Razak Khalifah (1938-2006)**

A political activist, Razak joined the now defunct Parti Rakyat Malaysia in 1959, and rose through the ranks to become a central working committee member.

He was active in trade unions and social justice issues. He was the organising secretary of the United Malayan Estate Workers' Union, and a participant of the historical Asahan rubber workers' strike.

» **M.G.G. Pillai (1939-2006)**

A journalist, M.G.G. was the first Malaysian to receive the prestigious Nieman Fellowship. Apart from the *Malay Mail*, he also worked for several regional media, including *Reuters* in Singapore and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

In 1990, he was banned from Singapore for criticising the government. He was known as a Malaysian pioneer in online journalism when in 1995, he started the first Internet news group called

Sang Kancil where he posted commentaries and analyses of current issues. He later started his own Web site, www.MGGPillai.com.

» **Bishan Singh (1941-2006)**

A consumer activist and environmentalist, Bishan founded the Sustainable Development Network, Pahang and led the Federation of Malaysian Consumers' Associations for four terms.

He was appointed Malaysian Environmental NGOs chairperson and was senior adviser for a Food and Agriculture Organisation programme.

He was a recipient of several state and government awards, including this year's Langkawi Award, and was named one of DiGi's Amazing Malaysians this year.

» **Rita Raj (1944-2006)**

For over 30 years, Rita was a staunch supporter of women's rights and women's reproductive and sexual rights. She was involved with various women's groups, nationally and internationally, including the Women's Aid Organisation, the Boston Women's Health Collective, the World Health Organisation, and the United Nations Development Fund for

Women.

Her work helped to influence legislation on domestic violence in Malaysia.

» **Tan Soi Kow @ Umar Tan Abdullah (unknown D.O.B- 2006)**

An activist who was fondly known as "Ah Tan", Umar Tan was a "reformist" who went to the streets with thousands of other Malaysians in 1998 to protest the jailing of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He was a Parti Keadilan Rakyat member, and an organiser.

We may not know any of these fellow citizens, and some may not even agree that they were revolutionaries but these were Malaysians who, nonetheless, tried to make a difference to right the wrongs in society, often at high personal cost.

In my mind, they don't need to be Jesus Christ for us to remember them for the lives they chose to live.

by my

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