

Rose Chan Benefited from the NEP

The New Economic Policy had benefited all and sundry in Malaysia, from striptease dancers to business magnates. So why are some quarters still wary about its reintroduction?

AH ... HOW I sometimes miss the old simpler days. The days when we didn't have to wait for Parliament to show us a blurred video recording of the rear view of a partly hidden naked woman to start a conversation going.

Those were the days when for a few ringgit, a measure of courage and a few hours to spare, one could unabashedly attend a Rose Chan matinee show at the basement of the now demolished China Insurance Building in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

Penerapan nilai-nilai Islam (the inculcation of Islamic values), *masjarakat madani* (civil society) and *Islam Hadhari* (civillisational Islam) were still many, many years away.

We were simpler people. We were less judgemental. The Muslims did not wear the *ketayap* (skull cap) to show off their piousness and people of various races made friends easily.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was taking hold. Malays and other recent migrants to Kuala Lumpur were beginning to enjoy a better life. The Chinese-controlled businesses that survived the May 13, 1969 burning and looting were beginning to thrive again.

With the economy growing rapidly and wealth more evenly spread, the once-poor *kampung* Malays and plantation Indians were beginning to enjoy a higher level of income. They became the new consumers. The Chinese, being traders, suppliers and builders, were the first to benefit from the expanding economy.

The Malays and Indians who could once own only bicycles and second-hand motorcycles and lived in squatter huts in Kampung Pandan, Kampung Kerinchi and Sentul could, by then, own bigger motorcycles or even second-hand motorcars.

Thanks to the expansion of the low-cost housing programme, many could afford to leave the squatter huts for better homes. Once in the new homes, they went to Chinese-owned shops to buy gas cookers, radio and television sets, refrigerators, beds and sofas, light fittings,

curtains and fans on hire purchase.

And with some money left for entertainment, the less pious ones visited the Chinese-owned Rose Chan review, nightclubs, cabarets and massage parlours.

"Those were the days, my friend,
We thought they'd never end,
We'd sing and dance forever and a day,
We'd live the life we choose,
We'd fight and never lose,
For we were young and sure to have our way ..."

Forced to be good

ROSE Chan has long gone. Writer Danny Lim in his compelling story about the stripper grandly called the 'Flower of Malaya' (*TheEdgeDaily* website) said she died on May 26, 1987 at her home in Butterworth.

I am not sure though about her protégés Annie Cheah and another striptease dancer whom we only knew as 'Miss Bombshell Barbara Tan'.



Today, if you are a Muslim, irrespective of whether you're good, bad or indifferent, most of these establishments are out of bounds. There are signboards everywhere that read: '*Orang Islam tidak dibenarkan*' (Muslims are not allowed). We are being legislated to be good!

Some years ago, on a casual visit to Penang, I stumbled upon a Rose Chan Exhibition at one secluded corner of the Komtar Building, the seat of the Penang State Government. That was my last encounter with whatever was left of Rose Chan.

Many of her satisfied clients and fans are either dead or are too old to remember those carefree days. Among her surviving and mentally alert fans, many have chosen to erase those memories from their minds because they are now *ketayap*-wearing and mosque-frequenting dads and granddads.