



# 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), *masyarakat madani* (civil society) and *Islam Hadhari* (civillisation 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.

But for me, Rose Chan, the Tropicana Cabaret in Jalan Ipoh and the Cave in Jalan Ampang were part and parcel of my growing up and 'urbanisation'.

If you read the works of the great Islamic scholar and historian Ibnu Khaldun, you would know that urbanisation is an integral part of civilisation.

Those were the days when, despite the May 13 racial riots, we could still call each other by the race we belonged to. A Malay was called *Melayu*. A Chinese was called *Cina* and an Indian was called *India*.

Today, everything is so sanitised that life is often stifling. In the name of sensitivity, we have discouraged or even banned some of the most common practices. In most instances, we do it blindly and with scant regard for history.

When my sister got married in the early sixties, we had several important ceremonies – the *akad nikah* (the solemnisation of marriage), the *berarak* (procession), the *bersanding* when the bride and groom were seated on the *pelamin* (dais) for the blessing ceremony, the *bersilat* (exposition of the Malay art of self-defence) and the nightlong recital of the Quran.

The wedding procession was accompanied by the *gendang keling* (Indian drum) comprising the *gendang* (drum), *serunai* (flute) and gong.

Nobody took offence. *Keling* is the Malay term that refers to the people of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Hindu Empire of Kalinga in the northern part of East Java.

### **Avoiding a socio-economic catastrophe**

TODAY, it would appear that many Malaysians are taking sensitivity a bit too far, or are using racial, communal and religious sensitivity to stop others from speaking up.

Fewer and fewer people are willing to speak up and speak out, leading to the truth not being told.

Some months ago, a Chinese minister, in not so many words, suggested that we do away with social contracts. It was, I believe, in response to the call at the Umno General Assembly for the revival of the NEP or an affirmative plan similar to it.

The issue died as quickly as it was raised. The fact that the social contract is embedded in the Constitution and the

### **THE NAKED TRUTH**

IT is all too easy to profile Malay youths as potential drug-addicts and Indian youths as potential small-time criminals, or that the non-Chinese do not make good businessmen.

If they are, we must know why. We must find out who imports and distributes *dadah*. We must find who runs criminal syndicates and gangs.

We must know who brings in foreign women and runs

NEP was implemented to address the economic inequality among the races seems to have escaped attention.

I dare say that the minister would not be leading his own Chinese-based party and serving the Cabinet for decades had it not been for the high level of tolerance that the NEP had created among Malaysians of all races and religions.

For as long as we live with the present Constitution, which we as Malays, Chinese, Indians and other races agreed upon before our country became independent, we have to respect its spirit and provisions.

There may be a need to remind the minister of that date; at midnight on Aug 31, 1957 the very same Constitution gave over a million immigrant Chinese and Indians their political rights by granting them citizenship. Overnight they enjoyed the same political rights as the indigenous people – one person, one vote.

In return, the indigenous people were guaranteed their socio-economic rights without the new citizens being deprived of theirs.

Even then, thanks to British colonial policies, the immigrants were way ahead of their indigenous counterparts in wealth ownership.

Now that Malay ministers, well-heeled young Umno types and a host of *pegawai khas* (special officers) have revisited rural poverty in their victorious campaign in Kelantan, they should be more committed to reviving the NEP-type, growth-with-distribution development policy.

Don't call it the NEP if we are afraid that it will drive away investors. Or for that matter, don't give it any label. Just consider the fact that the United Nations, the World Bank and a growing band of liberal economists now acknowledge that growth with equitable distribution is the best way to promote and sustain long-term economic growth.

There wouldn't have been the Kuoks, Queks, Yeohs, Anandas and Syed Mokhtars – at least not in their current gigantic sizes – had our forefathers not had the courage to introduce a growth-with-distribution policy called the NEP.

We must be warned not only by what happened on May 13 in 1969 but also by the recent rioting in France and the abject poverty of African-Americans that was recently exposed by Hurricane Katrina.

prostitution rings. If these foreigners had come to our country as students, we must find out which private universities and colleges had issued them with offer letters.

And if they are engaged in undesirable activities, we must find out who is responsible for hiring them. And if they disappear, who makes them disappear.

As for the run-ins these foreigners occasionally have with the law enforcement officers, I would be the last

person to say that our law enforcement agencies are blameless.

There are black sheep in every enforcement agency. The bigger the agency and the more power it has, the larger the number of corrupt and unscrupulous officers.

This is the sad reality that we must face and work hard to solve. The setting up of commissions and panels means nothing if their reports and recommendations are not diligently implemented and independently monitored.

The series of bad raps faced by the police in recent weeks is symptomatic of a force that has been left too much and for far too long to its own devices.

A recent independent review by the Royal Commission to Enhance the Operation and Management of the Royal Malaysian Police had exposed both the flaws as well the strengths of the force.

If only part of its report had been implemented, many of the recent controversies, including the court-ordered release of an Emergency Ordinance detainee and the illegal videotaping of the body search of a female detainee in Petaling Jaya, could have been avoided or, at least, minimised.

While the formation of an independent panel under the chairmanship of Tun Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah to investigate the videotaping incident is commendable, the real question is: What is the government doing with the commission's May report and what will it do with the panel's findings?

Dzaiddin and his panel members also served on the Royal Commission. Dzaiddin was its chairman.

### The body search dilemma

WE can be rushing to China and elsewhere to apologise because we are afraid of losing tourist dollars, but please make sure that we do not do so at the expense of our sovereignty and dignity.

First and foremost, we must understand the issue and get our facts right. We are no longer somebody's colony. Our forefathers had fought hard to free us from colonial subjugation.

During the sitting of the commission, the commissioners were told that the stripping of male and female detainees was a common lock-up procedure. In some cases, suspects were made to squat several times to determine that no hidden drugs or other dangerous items were hidden in their orifice.

This body search has to be carried out in private – away from the view of others except the supervising police personnel. A female suspect is to be stripped-searched only by a policewoman.

The commission heard complaints from members of the public that they had been forced to strip and squat

in front of other suspects in the lock-up. One was even asked to sing loudly.

A Malay woman, who operates a video shop, told the commission that she was detained by the police when they found several *Reformasi* VCDs and Parti Keadilan Rakyat souvenirs in her car. She was taken to the Kapar Police Station where she was ordered to strip naked and do the *ketuk ketampi* in the lock-up where 20 other women were detained (pg 340 of the report).

A Malay policewoman who supervised the body search told the commission that she was not taught the procedure at the Police Training Centre but was taught by her seniors.

The commission, in its report, among others, noted that 'there are no proper guidelines on strip searches and police officers conduct searches in different ways according to what is practised in particular police stations (pg 341)'.

To avoid abuse and to give all parties protection, the commission recommended proper video surveillance of lock-ups and that all interrogations should be videotaped.

As a member of the commission, I am glad that many individuals and groups are urging the government to implement the recommendations of the commission.

The commission's report, submitted to the Government in May, is very thorough. Almost all the abuses and shortcomings reported by the media in recent weeks were addressed.

Our concern should not only be for those whose cases are highlighted by the Press or are raised in Parliament, but also for the majority who suffer indignity in silence and away from media spotlight.

### Fear factor

THE decision to dispatch a minister to China at a time when we are still unclear about the identity of the detainee reminds me of the Malay *hikayat*, which tells stories of Malay Sultans sending the *bunga emas* tribute to the Emperors of China.

Just to put things in perspective, everywhere in the world suspects are made to strip. At American airports this happens regularly, more so after the Sept 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Muslims, Chinese, Indians, Mexicans and a host of other non-Europeans are regularly profiled and targeted as possible terrorists and illegal immigrants.

What we must avoid is inflicting the kind of cruelty and indignity the US is inflicting on Iraqi, al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects around the world.

We are a *hadhari* (civilised) nation and we are nobody's vassal state! 