

For Review

“ Malaysian Cartoonist Zunar has given us what is quite rare in the world of human rights and political cartooning. He opens the door into the anatomy of how a tyrant and demagogue uses the tools and institutions of state power to stop the critics that would point the world’s attention to their lawlessness, tyranny and demagoguery.”

**Dr Robert Russell**  
Executive Director of Cartoonists  
Rights Network International (CRNI)

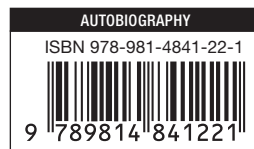


This book chronicles Zunar’s fight through cartoons from 2009 to 2018. Peppared within these pages are some of Zunar’s timeless philosophies on cartooning, which have kept him going despite the odds stacked against him – arrests, court charges, banning of books, travel ban.

Zunar also sheds light on the methodological approach he utilises in his cartoons to effectively deliver his messages. From the conception of a cartoon right down to inking it, Zunar bares what goes on in his mind when he draws these cartoons.

From being labelled controversial to becoming an award-winning cartoonist, this is Zunar’s fight through cartoons in his own words.

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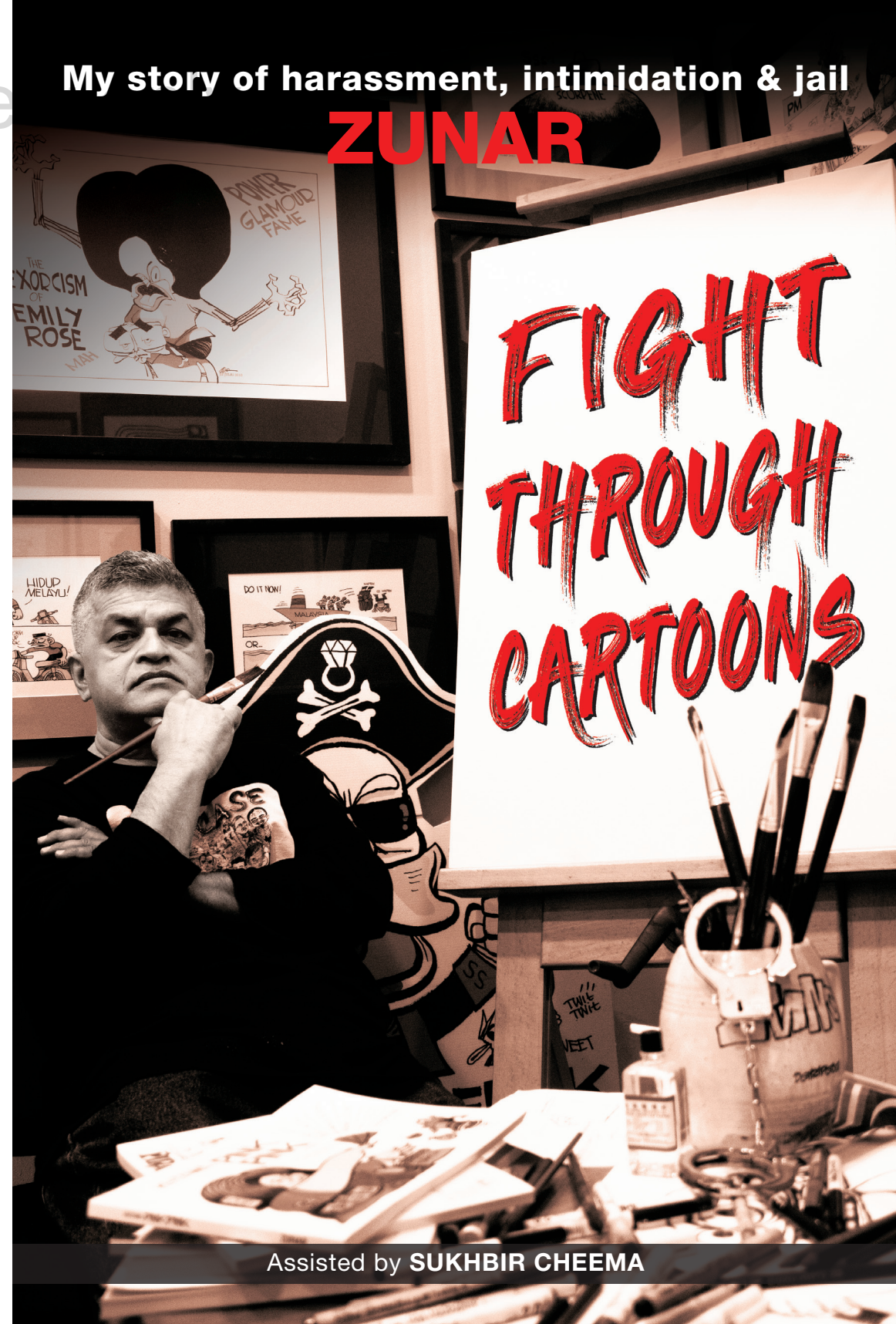
ZUNAR

FIGHT THROUGH CARTOONS

Marshall Cavendish Editions mc

My story of harassment, intimidation & jail

ZUNAR



Assisted by SUKHBIR CHEEMA

For Review only

**FIGHT  
THROUGH  
CARTOONS**

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# FIGHT THROUGH CARTOONS

My story of harassment,  
intimidation & jail

## ZUNAR

Assisted by SUKHBIR CHEEMA

 Marshall Cavendish  
Editions

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To ,  
“Kartini”

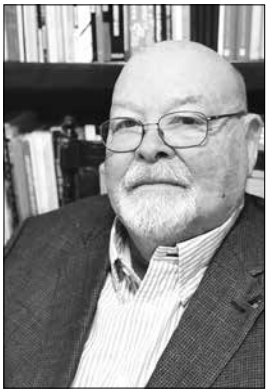
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## TRUTH OVER TYRANNY

ZUNAR'S *FIGHT THROUGH CARTOONS* is not so much about a world-famous cartoonist and the cartoons that have played such a role in changing the history of his country of Malaysia as it is a journey through pain, bravery, risk-taking, and, we hope (because his story is far from over), a final victory for courage and Zunar's breed of truth over tyranny.

His book is important to the history of the battle for human rights. It is not the typical inventory of political cartoons about a certain topic or over a particular political period. Zunar has given us what is quite rare in the world of human rights and political cartooning. He opens the door into the anatomy of how a tyrant and demagogue uses the tools and institutions of state power to stop the critics that would point the world's attention to their lawlessness, tyranny and demagoguery.

The best political cartoonists are a breed apart. They land somewhere in between Don Quixote tilting at windmills, and

Gandhi making salt under the noses of the British. Very serious stuff that we are expected to laugh at: Samuel Clemens once wrote, "Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand." Confirming this, 25 years ago one of the first lessons I learned, as a human rights worker focusing on political cartoonists in trouble, was that tyrants can usually survive any challenge except that of their people laughing at them. Rebels can be defeated by the army with a couple of tanks. International human rights organizations can be deconstructed into powerless paper tigers. Your nation's resources can be sold to powerful international corporate interests who will protect the tyrant and thereby protect their investors. Laughing at tyrants can have some strange results. One of our clients reported that a man in a small town picked up a newspaper off the street, turned to the political cartoon and started laughing hysterically. A passing policeman arrested him and charged him with insulting the head of state. Not the cartoonist: the reader who laughed.

What is so important about Zunar's *Fight Through Cartoons* is how he gives historians, human rights students and workers, political cartoonists, free-speech advocates, and freedom of speech researchers an insider's personal roadmap on how a tyrannical government shuts down free speech. This one man's intimate roadmap about his own personal journey is relatively difficult to find in the literature surrounding freedom of speech and human rights.

No action takes place in isolation. Everything is context. For the tyrants of the world to be countered by mere mortals, the world of the tyrant and the tyrants' reach must be understood in great depth. The modern democracies, and the large and hopefully powerful nongovernmental organizations whose missions charge them to fight the tyrants, all must operate under policies, management procedures, chains of command, competing interests with other organizations, considerations about their funding sources, that

put limitations on their actions. The well entrenched tyrant is not bothered by any considerations of the democratic process. Once the tyrant has gained control over the legislative bodies, the police and crime investigators, the judicial system right up to the Supreme Court and, of course, the media, the tyrant pays little attention to traditional rules or regulations of democratic governance. They are free to constantly and immediately evolve strategies and methods to crush those who challenge them. Bilateral and multilateral agencies like the UN must adhere to all the above bureaucratic challenges when changing policies or taking new directions to counteract the dance of the tyrants. Any good self-respecting tyrant can run circles around the administratively restricted governments and agencies working against him or her.

Zunar is showing us how he used the tyrant's own systems created to work against him to work for him. How very clever and, in so doing, he challenges the status quo of the human rights advocacy world to confront their own inability to respond quickly to the ever-changing new strategies and methods of the tyrant. In his book, *Fight Through Cartoons*, we see Zunar in the ring with a George Foreman, and he's just dancing around, fluttering like a butterfly and stinging like a bee.

In the world of editorial cartoonists, we like to think that a good political cartoon makes you think. For me, that doesn't do it. If the cartoonist doesn't make me feel, then the job isn't complete. It might be the difference between the very best cartoons motivating readers to write a letter of complaint to a congressperson or local politician, but when you are made to feel, you join a movement in protest in the streets.

Zunar's now infamous cartoon of him in chains, handcuffs and ropes straining with his pen in his mouth to complete a drawing

is such a cartoon. The cartoon was drawn during one of his darkest days when he was facing continued arrests, harassment, possibly years in prison, and when the Najib government seemed to be at the peak of its power – this was the time that he produced the most emotionally powerful cartoon of his life. This cartoon helped galvanize and focus the entire human rights and cartooning world to feel what it's like to have their lives stripped, their character dirtied, their honor compromised, and their whole family terrorized. Anyone who has ever had the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath them and left to dangle alone in the cold or who has been shunned by their community will feel exactly what Zunar has felt.



I will also say that in my 25 years of experience with Cartoonist Rights Network International and the dozens upon dozens of cartoonists I and our Board of Directors and staff have worked with over the years, that post-traumatic stress disorder at some level or another is the most common short and long impact that a cartoonist under extreme threat can feel. Their ability to plan, their inability to see their situation clearly and objectively, the slow but inexorable withdrawal of friends and even family, the institutions of power that should be protecting now used against you, it all leaves the cartoonist with a profound sense of isolation and helplessness. It seems that there is no one there to help you. No one understands what you have experienced. Things are going on in your head and in your life that you dare not speak about. While to my knowledge none of our cartoonists have committed suicide, many of them are left broken, strangers in strange lands, with no guidelines on how to climb out, and persevere and survive.



Most, like Zunar, have shown incredible moral resilience and a willingness to dare to hope and continue fighting under any circumstances.

A few years ago, when Zunar and I were having breakfast over our kitchen table in my home, I asked him bluntly, “Zunar, why don’t you just leave the country, seek a foreign safe haven home, and put all of this behind you?” He looked at me as if I were speaking another language. Despite being one of the most even-tempered people I’ve ever met, he almost got up out of his chair and said, “Who the hell are these people to think that this is their country? This is my country, this is our country, why should I even consider leaving it. No, I stay and fight. They leave.”

This is the call that Zunar has made: tell the truth, fight tyranny. His wife is just as brave as he is, and luckily for them, in the last national election in Malaysia, the old corrupt government has been replaced. Zunar’s decade-long fight is over for now. Of course, until the new regime finds that the taste of money is sweet, and when you’re at the top of the heap, the stuff is all around you.

**Dr Robert Russell**

Executive Director  
Cartoonists Rights Network International



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FOR OVER 60 YEARS SINCE Malaysia's independence on August 31, 1957, the country has been ruled by Barisan Nasional, a coalition consisting of race-based parties such as the United Malays National Organisation (Umno), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). While the coalition's founding fathers will always be remembered for the role they played in the country's independence, the recent generation of leaders have only led the coalition to disgrace.

Yet the coalition stayed strong in power because many of Malaysia's older generation who lived through the independence era had grown comfortable with and accustomed to Barisan Nasional, which had played a pivotal role in granting the nation independence from the British. By the 1980s, despite the political persecutions by Mahathir Mohamad, many Malaysians felt that they



should not rock the boat because the country was doing well economically under Mahathir. It was during Mahathir's first tenure as prime minister when oppressive archaic law such as the Internal Security Act was used to silence critics. It was also during this period that Barisan Nasional gradually grew even more corrupt through the practice of cronyism.

The first cracks in the coalition became visible in 1998 when Mahathir sacked his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, and subsequently jailed him on trumped-up sodomy charges. Mahathir had set the wheels in motion for the gradual demise of the world's oldest ruling government and the eventual first democratic change of power in Malaysia.



The late 1990s was marked the era of Reformasi (Reformation). Malaysians gradually awoke to the type of government that they were dealing with. Among them was Zunar, who had taken a sabbatical from cartooning.

The events of that year brought him to his senses and he decided to use cartoons as a platform to voice his feelings and thoughts about his country.

By the time Anwar was released from prison in 2004, Mahathir was succeeded by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Anwar rose to the limelight again, this time as a charismatic opposition leader who united his party, the Parti



Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), together with other opposition parties such as the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), to form Malaysia's strongest opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (People's Coalition).

During the 12th general election on March 8, 2008, Pakatan Rakyat dealt a blow to Barisan Nasional. For the first time since 1969, the ruling government no longer held two-thirds' majority in the Malaysian parliament.

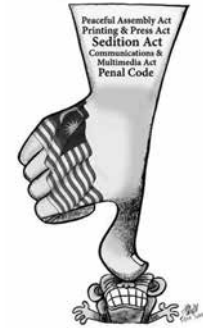
Abdullah Badawi stepped down a year after the elections and was succeeded by his deputy, the scandal riddled Najib Razak, on April 3, 2009.

This period marked a dark time for Malaysia: under Najib's tenure, corruption was at its peak. This snowballed to a rise in the cost of living. Coupled with that were several high-profile scandals under Najib's belt, such as the murder of Mongolian model Altantuyaa Shaariibuu, the Scorpene submarine scandal and brazen corruption in the form of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal.



Under Najib's rule, the media was controlled heavily, the police no longer protected the innocent and the judiciary was no longer as trustworthy as it used to be. Prominent critics of Najib's government were harassed and intimidated. Zunar had thousands of his books seized, nearly all of his titles banned, his printers threatened, his assistants arrested by the police, and he was punched, jailed and banned from travelling. The list of tactics the government utilised to silence the cartoonist was exhaustive.

In Malaysian newspapers, Zunar's cartoons were not found. Media organisations were not allowed to publish his cartoons as they were deemed controversial and seditious. Anything that painted Najib's government in a negative light was omitted from the papers. Several major dailies were also biased in their reporting. The only media organisation which was bold enough to showcase his cartoons was Malaysia's first independent news portal, Malaysiakini, which was free from the government's influence. They, too, were harassed by Najib's government and were threatened into silence.



Yet, despite the odds stacked against him, Zunar continued to punch his way through cartoons, utilising out-of-the-box tactics, which were not only humorous but effective as well.

In the process of writing this book, Zunar has remarked that his struggle against the Barisan Nasional regime was akin to a chess game. There were times when he was a step ahead of his opponent and there were moments when they were ahead.



Politics, however, is more than a chess game to Zunar. It is a game that can seal the fate of the country and determine the lives of millions of Malaysians. At the political forefront, Najib could not be removed easily as he continued staying in power after the 13th general election in 2013. His second term as prime minister was worse than the first as more news about Barisan Nasional's mismanagement of the nation surfaced, thanks to the Internet.

# For Review only

During this period, opposition leader Anwar was sentenced to prison, again, in 2015. It was a blatant attempt at political assassination to silence one of the strongest proponents of change in Malaysia. Najib was preparing to woo the voters and continue to stay on in power. With Anwar out of the coming election, Najib had an open path towards his electoral victory.

Following the 13th general election, he immediately started on a silencing spree, targeting all of his critics in what is now dubbed Operasi Lalang II (Operation Lalang II). While domestically many activists, lawyers, opposition lawmakers, journalists, academics and cartoonists such as Zunar were thrown behind bars and charged under the colonial era Sedition Act, internationally, Malaysia became a laughing stock.

The morale of the nation plummeted as Najib began tightening his grip on power, unperturbed by the 1MDB scandal which broke out in 2015. Zunar was charged under the Sedition Act for nine counts of criticising the government on Twitter and satirising Najib, his wife, Rosmah Mansor, and lawmakers from Barisan Nasional. Just for drawing cartoons that criticised the ruling government, Zunar found himself staring at 43 years in jail.



However, censorship was not new to Zunar. When he was 18, a cartoon he had drawn for a school magazine was blackened. In Malaysia, a culture of self-censorship has been prevalent and instilled in the minds of children at a young age under Barisan Nasional's rule. It was one of the methods employed to keep Malaysians dumbed down through education.

By 2016, issues of race and religion began surfacing again with several incidences that tried to test the united strength of the Malaysian people. PAS broke off from Pakatan Rakyat and began getting cosier with Umno. All hope was lost.

Online, cartoonists such as Zunar began doubling their efforts to educate the public through social media on how politics played a role in the lives of the common people and stressed the importance of casting aside racial and religious differences to get together to boot out a corrupt and tyrannical government.

Utilising various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to reach out to as many Malaysians as possible, Zunar gave many the courage to laugh at the oppressors through his cartoons.

As Malaysia descended into a state of hopelessness by late 2016, through a political twist, Mahathir re-entered the political fray and joined hands with his former nemesis turned ally, Anwar, to form Pakatan Harapan (Coalition of Hope) in an effort to end Najib's misrule and Barisan Nasional's mismanagement of Malaysia.

On May 9, 2018, at the historic 14th general election, Malaysia won a new government for herself.

While on television and in the newspapers these two names were mentioned frequently in the same breath, the true change was actually made possible thanks to the Malaysian people. Behind it all were the many activists and cartoonists such as Zunar, who played a pivotal role in bringing about the end of Barisan Nasional's 60 years in power.

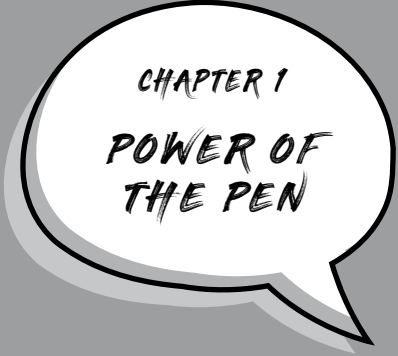
This book chronicles Zunar's fight through cartoons from 2009 to 2018. Peppered within the pages of this book are some of Zunar's timeless philosophies on cartooning, which kept him going despite the odds stacked against him. These philosophies, if reflected on and internalised, could inspire anyone who wishes to fight injustice through the arts.

In this book, Zunar also sheds light on the methodological approach he utilises in his cartoons to effectively deliver his messages. From the conception of a cartoon right down to inking it, Zunar bares what goes on his mind when he draws his cartoons.

From being labelled controversial to becoming an award-winning cartoonist, this is Zunar's fight through cartoons in his own words.

**Sukhbir Cheema**

Writer, Cartoonist & Co-Founder of Eksentrika



CHAPTER 1  
POWER OF  
THE PEN

## ***POWER OF THE PEN*** Method of drawing cartoons

LOOKING BACK ON MY SCHOOL DAYS, drawing cartoons was just a hobby for me. Initially, I wanted to be a scientist, but along the way, my life took a different path. Now, I have ended up with a studio full of pens, pencils, brushes, ink and paper.

I don't draw what I see. I draw what I think. Some cartoonists have to go out to get inspired, but I don't travel. I only travel for events and exhibitions. For my cartoons, I travel in my mind. The way I draw cartoons is different from other cartoonists. Speaking about talent, however, I have to admit that technically, I'm not as good as some cartoonists in terms of strokes and artistic touch.

However, I believe that technical skill is not the only quality required in drawing political cartoons. I would say that good political cartoons should consist of 50% technique and 50% subject matter. Or it could be 30% technique and 70% about the subject. That is why, for me, the information, the stand and the direction are very important in my work. The process is usually like this: I start off by researching the issue in question. I research about issues

from different perspectives and do not limit myself to only a few sources. The Internet has made me more resourceful.

Sometimes, some of these issues are related to people I know personally, so I would call them to get more details on the matter, as news can sometimes be misreported and become inaccurate.

Through this detailed and thorough research, I am able to defend my cartoons when they come under legal or political attack. After the research process, I take a stand on the issue and lock it in.

Next in my process would be the direction of the cartoon. This basically means how I want people to react when they see my cartoons. What do I expect my readers' reaction to be? I make sure that my cartoons have a very clear direction.

The last step is when the joke comes in. At this point, I have not started drawing yet. All of these are still in my mind and it can take six to seven hours before I finally turn them into visual images on paper.

For me, it is important that the jokes must be in line with my earlier three steps. A joke must support my research, my stand and the direction of the cartoon.

If the joke is not in line with my stand and the available facts, I will not use it.

Only when I get the joke will I begin drawing the concept for the cartoon. I will not draw directly on drawing paper but I will do a very rough sketch of the concept on a small piece of paper or any scrap of paper which I find on my table.

During the concept stage, I decide on the size of the object I am drawing in order to make it more impactful in highlighting the issue.

This is why on one day I may draw character A bigger than character B, and on other days, character B may be bigger than character A. The same goes for other objects such as a ring, a Birkin bag or a money bag.

In terms of presentation, I also need to decide if a cartoon should be drawn in one, two or more panels.

Whatever I draw, it must support the message to be conveyed. Sometimes, I am about to finish a drawing when I realise that the drawing overshadows the message. When this happens, I would adjust or even redraw the cartoon in order to make the message visually captivating.

This step can vary from one cartoon to the next.

My aim is to draw cartoons which explore issues at a deeper level and not just remain on the surface of issues. I believe that when a cartoonist goes deeper into an issue, he or she will gain a better understanding about it.

I don't want my readers to just laugh, I want them to get emotional. This is why I go deep into an issue. The analogy is as follows: if I stand on a beach, I can see the ocean with so many beautiful things on the surface, but that is not good enough for my cartoon; I have to dive deep into the ocean and see things from that perspective. Through this process will I know what is inside the hearts of the people and draw a cartoon that reflects their emotions and sentiments. The art that comes from hands, reaches eyes, but the

art that comes from the heart, reaches hearts. It is challenging, but I am happy doing it this way, my way.

After I'm satisfied with the visual concept, I then start to sketch using a pencil on drawing paper. I have A3-sized special drawing paper that I feel comfortable with. After penciling, I use pen and brush to ink my cartoons in black and white. After all is completed, I scan it to my laptop and use Photoshop to colour it.

On inking my cartoons, the chosen colours play an important role, too. I select colours which make my cartoons impactful. From the concept to colouring, the entire process can take up to three or four hours.

To draw a cartoon, or (my preferred word) to "compose" a cartoon, takes me up to 12 hours.

I believe a simple cartoon is more effective for the people. Sometimes, you just need one object to represent all the issues. Sometimes, you need very little words as well.

I make sure to use simple words. I have English and Malay readers who read my cartoons, so I use words which can be understood by both groups. For example, the word "sapu", which means "steal" in Malay, is understood by everyone in Malaysia.

Visually, my cartoons are very minimal. I don't draw backgrounds and leave it as simple as possible. This is because the issues in my cartoons are very heavy, so I want people to have a clear mind to read and focus on the message that I want to convey to them.

In terms of using words, I also change them depending on the issues at the time. In my early cartoons, I used a lot of English

words but, later on, I began using more Malay words, too. This is because I think English readers, who are normally from a middle-class background, already have a knowledge about the issues in the country, but by using more Malay words, I can engage more people on the street and those in the rural areas. In the more recent cartoons, I try to minimise the use of words and concentrate more on visuals.

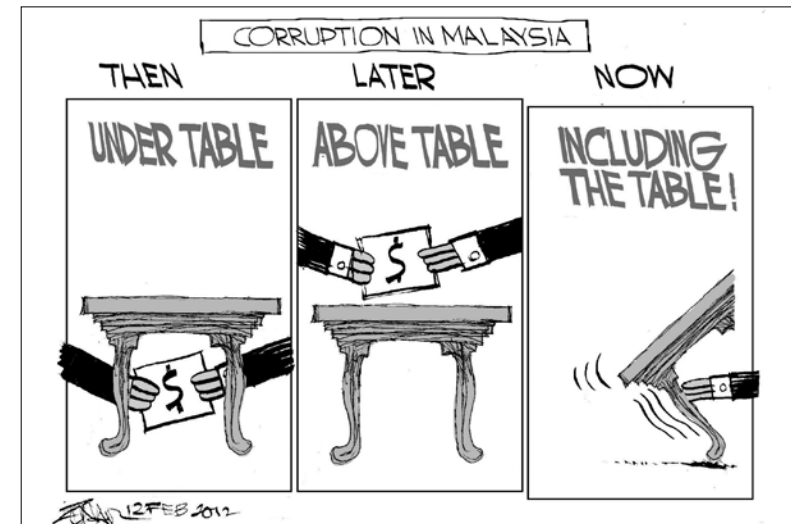
I usually work in the mornings, when my mind is fresh. This is when the ideas I get are solid because my mind is more energetic. I sometimes even wake up at 5am to draw.

The other reason why mornings are very important to me is because my cartoons should be uploaded early in the morning. This is the time when traffic in social media is at its peak, when people have taken their breakfast and before they go to work — it is the best time to reach maximum readers. Since my cartoons can only be published on the Internet and through social media, this is a very important approach and process for my cartoons.



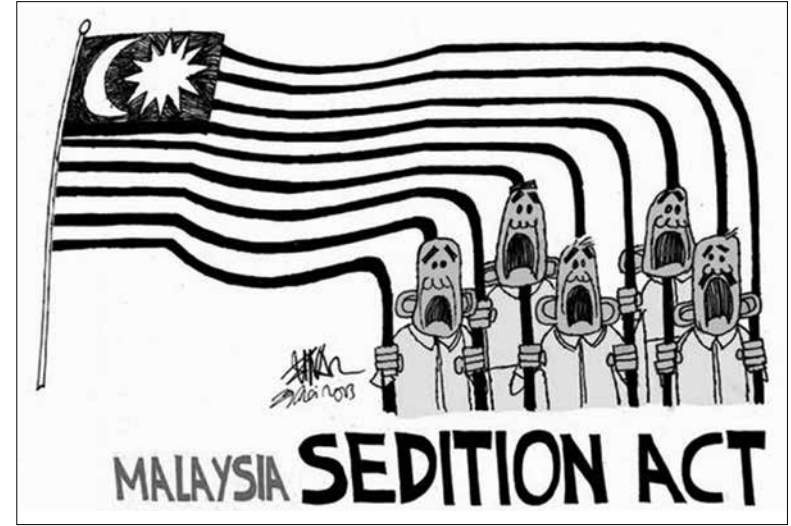
A sample of my doodles which nobody understands, including myself, with the passage of time.

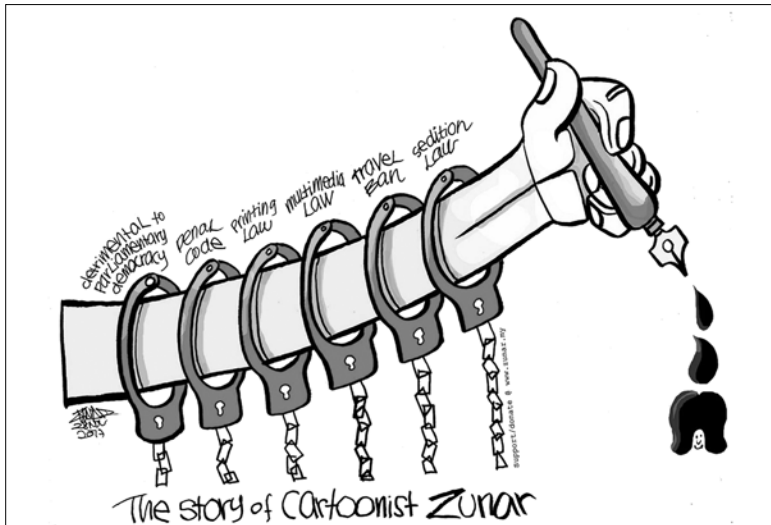
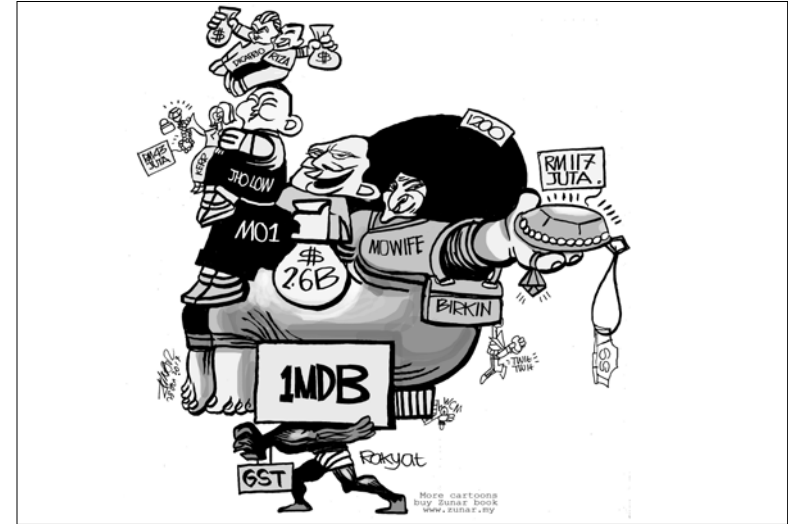
Below and on the following pages are some of my iconic cartoons.



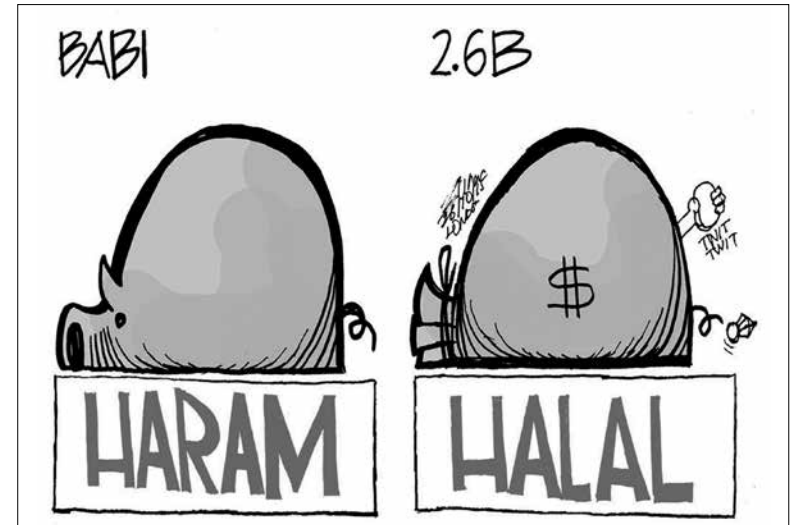
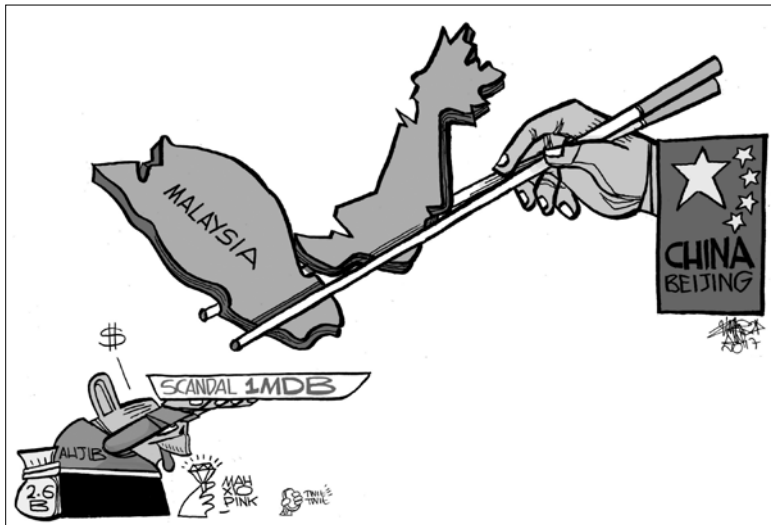
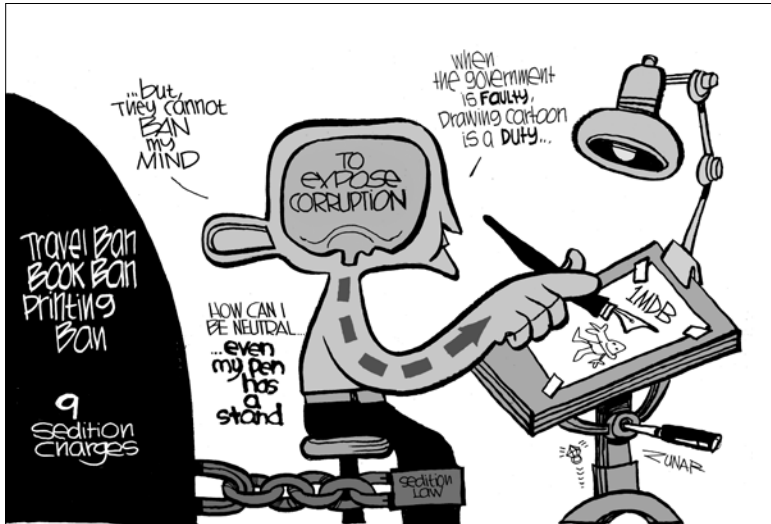


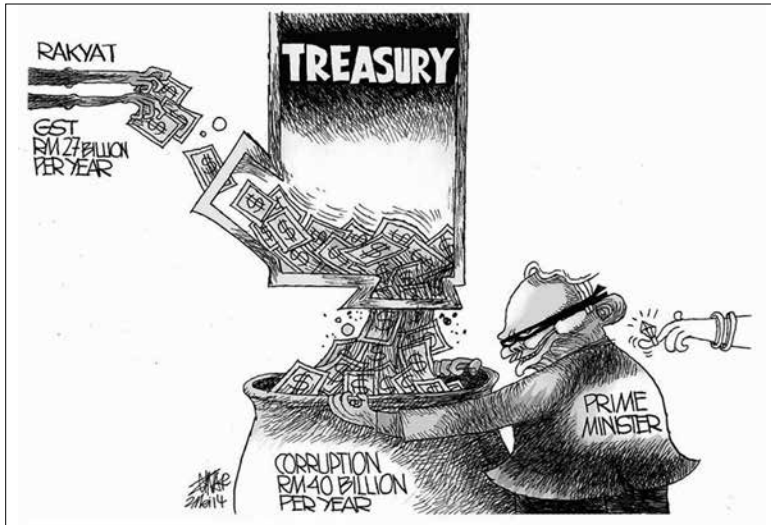
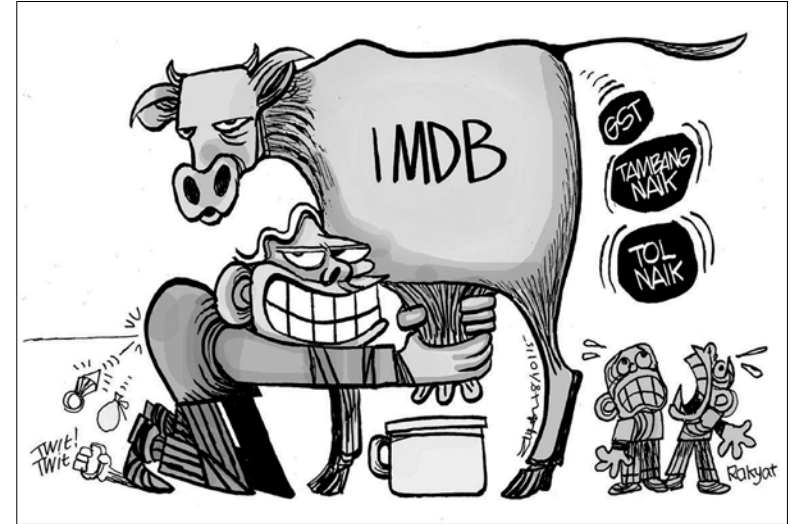
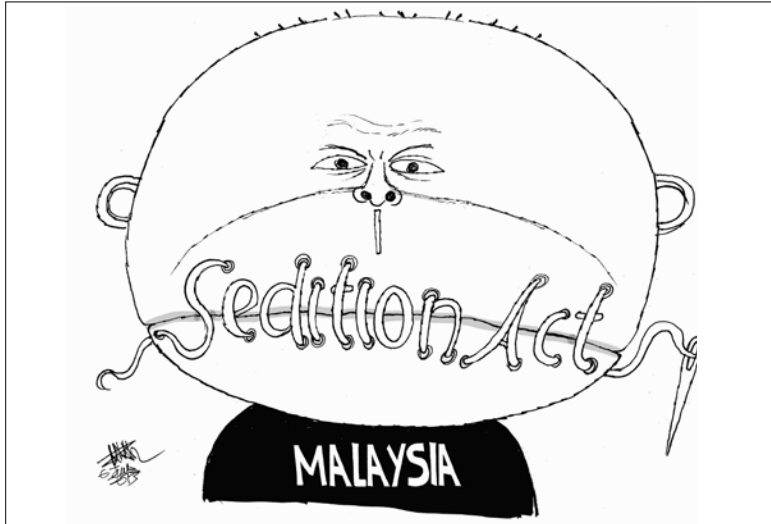
# For Review only





# For Review only





For Review only



CHAPTER 2  
THEY CANNOT  
BAN MY MIND

## *THEY CANNOT BAN MY MIND* The story of *Gedung Kartun*

I HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED DRAWING cartoons from as early as I can remember, but I did not have any formal education in art or cartooning. This was due to my late parents, SM Anwarul Haque and Khadizah Mohamad, wanting me to study science because, for them, it was an area which held a very bright future for me. I was sent to a science stream school, but this did not stop me from drawing cartoons. I started very early, but I am not able to recall the age when I started to draw. My first cartoon was published by a children's magazine called *Bambino* when I was 12 years old. After that, I kept sending more cartoons to the publisher and once in a while they would get published. I did not get any payment but would receive a free copy with a thank-you note stamped on it. This was a priceless gift for me at that time and I used to show it to every friend in my village; it was special because others had to buy the magazine while I had a complimentary copy.

As time passed, I started to develop the idea of including some sort of message in my cartoons. I think this is the best way of cartooning, even though it is not in the Malaysian culture to do

so. Not surprisingly, my first controversy came when I was 17 years old and in Form 5: I was reprimanded for drawing a cartoon in the school's magazine that criticised the teachers. This was the moment when I began to view things critically. Later in my career, in my early 30s, the same thing happened when I worked for a newspaper called *Berita Harian*.

I went to university to take a science course as I had obtained good results in chemistry and biology. In the first year of university, I faced a dilemma of whether to choose art or science. I went to the university's administrator to change my course to architecture, but I was not successful because I did not have any qualifications in the arts. I started to lose interest in science and did not take the first-year examination. Finally, I dropped out from the course and university. I did not tell my parents for six months. They thought I was still in university while I stayed in Kuala Lumpur and worked as a construction labourer and cleaner, and took several jobs as a factory worker until I got an offer to work in a government hospital.

While I had a steady job at the hospital, I continued to draw cartoons. My career as a cartoonist progressed very well. By then, I already had a permanent column in a magazine called *Gila Gila*. During the day, I did laboratory work analysing lab test results and in the night, I drew cartoons. When I had more columns to fill, I faced the question of whether to become a full-time cartoonist or work in the field of science. The government job was secure with a stable future, but working as a cartoonist was not. This dilemma went on for some time until I started to lose my mathematical skills because I was focusing more on drawing. As a result, I started to make mistakes in my laboratory test reports. I was constantly scolded by my superior because the mistakes I made were life threatening to the patients. I then resigned and became a freelance cartoonist with various magazines and newspapers.

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In general, the cartooning industry in Malaysia was booming with the rise of many professional cartoonists and publications. However, I was still not able to convey messages in my cartoons because of the strict censorship by the editors of the magazines and newspapers.

Still, there was something missing in the cartooning scene in Malaysia. We had many cartoonists drawing for newspapers and magazines, but the content of the cartoons lacked any political message and criticism. Even when there was such content, it was usually in the form of propaganda for the government.

This was strange, because we had so many issues of corruption and abuse of power around us, such as the murder of the Mongolian model, Altantuya Shaariibuu, and the Scorpene submarine scandal. There were just no cartoons on these issues of the day.

While I was contributing daily political cartoons for *Malaysiakini*, which focused on fighting corruption and abuse of power, I felt there was a need to gather a group of cartoonists to produce satirical works as a team. I started to plan a political cartoon magazine. I wanted the magazine to be really punchy and impactful, unlike those already available in the market.

My vision was to make readers aware of what was happening at that time. I felt it was important to use cartoons as a tool of information and education in society. I noticed there were several fresh, independent cartoonists who shared their cartoons on social media, such as Jonos, Haili, Johnny Ong, Ronasina and others. So I called them and few others to discuss my idea. We finally agreed to come out with a cartoon magazine titled *Gedung Kartun* (Cartoon Store).

We gathered some capital from donors and the public to obtain an office that included a studio in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. We set up a company called Sepakat Efektif in May 2009, with 12 staff members, including cartoonists, editors, graphic artists, administrators and marketing personnel. They were editor Fandiramli, chief cartoonist Jonos, who had cartoonists under him such as Ronasina, Roy, Cabai, Madsein, Kidol, Haili, Enot, Kawe, Oly, Abdullah Jones, Deng, Ubilepoh, Nur, Dikuk and Fahmi — and myself as the chief editor.

Nazruddin Abu Bakar and Munirah Yasin helped me with the magazine's graphics and multimedia was under Syafiq Sunny. On the management side, Jasmine Ng served as the administrative head, Azzam Supardi as the production manager, Israq Ismail was in charge of the magazine's distribution, while Maisuri Zainal took care of the management of the company. The magazine was to be printed by K Vin Publisher.

We submitted a licence application, together with a mock-up of the magazine, to the Home Ministry (KDN) for approval. The approval by the ministry was compulsory. To give *Gedung Kartun* more bite, I contacted respectable national laureate, A. Samad Said, to contribute his writings, and I was extraordinarily pleased when he agreed as he was (and is) such a big name with a large following in Malaysia. In addition, the other famous writer and poet, Pyanhabib, had also agreed to contribute to *Gedung Kartun*.

We started the groundwork with meetings, discussions and brainstorming sessions to come up with the full idea and concept of the magazine. We agreed it would be 100% satire from the front to the back cover, be it in the form of cartoons, illustrations, comics or writings. The magazine focused on the four big political issues at that time.

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First, the Scorpene scandal and the murder of Altantuya. These were in reference to the purchase of two submarines from a French company in 2002 when Prime Minister Najib Razak was Defence Minister. It was reported by foreign media that there was a million-dollar kickback. During the negotiations in Paris, Altantuya, who was said to be very close to Najib, was present. Altantuya was killed in 2006 in Malaysia and those who were arrested were close associates of Najib.

Second, the death of opposition political aide, Teoh Beng Hock, who was found dead at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) building after he was investigated by the commission. The third major issue was the imprisonment of the charismatic and popular opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim. The fourth issue was the lavish spending of the prime minister's wife, Rosmah Mansor, and the misuse of power by Najib's administration.

While waiting for the approval from KDN, everybody started to work towards the deadline. Along the way, there were many other cartoonists who sent in their cartoons as contributors. Several weeks later, my marketing staff informed me that we had received a serial number from KDN as initial approval for the licence. This was good news and things looked smooth.

The big day finally arrived on August 23, 2009 when the first batch of *Gedung Kartun* was delivered to my office. I was relieved and excited because all the hard work was paying off. More importantly, my dream of having my type of cartooning published was finally becoming a reality. All of the creative and management staff were happy because their months of sweat and effort were paying off. The new era of cartooning had begun. This was the one and only satirical cartoon magazine in Malaysia that dared to criticise with its strong, punchy and provocative messages.

The magazine was distributed to bookstores nationwide and it sold for RM5. It was a very low price because I wanted more Malaysians, especially in the rural areas, to be able to afford the magazine. The precedent had been set up and I thought it would be followed by others. To show my appreciation and happiness, I hosted a small *buka puasa* (breaking fast) ceremony for the staff and all those who were involved in the magazine.

While having the meal, I spoke about a plan to launch this magazine officially and to invite some politicians to launch it. A few names were suggested but one of the writers, Pyanhabib, suggested that I should invite Home Ministry officers to launch *Gedung Kartun*. I laughed and said it was a funny idea but did not take it seriously. Everybody laughed as well.

On August 25, 2009, two days after the publication, I was at my office with my staff, planning the materials for the second issue of *Gedung Kartun*. My clerk, Maisuri, suddenly rushed into my room with a panicked look on her face. She told me there were six suspicious but smart-looking people in coat and tie at the door who wanted to see to me. I asked her who they were, but she said she didn't know. So I went out to the front door to find out for myself.

The group of people introduced themselves as officers from the Home Ministry's Publications Control and Al-Quran Text Division. I asked them to come in and take a seat. At that moment, I suddenly remembered the joke about having Home Ministry officers launch *Gedung Kartun*. I felt that something was not right and I asked them what the matter was. The head of the team told me that she had received a report that I had published an illegal magazine without a licence (permit) from the Home Ministry. Obviously, she was referring to *Gedung Kartun*. As a result of this,



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she said she wanted to confiscate the magazines. I told her it was not true as I had applied for the permit and had official verbal approval, and that it would only take some time to receive the official documents. I picked up a copy and showed them the serial number at the top of the cover, but they said the serial number was not official.

After a heated shouting exchange, I finally had to back down and they began to seize the magazines. It was unfortunate that I had 408 copies of *Gedung Kartun* at the lobby area of my office that were supposed to be distributed later. I asked for a warrant but they said that under the Printing Presses and Publication Act (PPPA), they did not need a warrant to confiscate “illegal magazines”. I had no choice but to let them take all the magazines. However, since I could not do anything to stop them, I decided to make it difficult for them by creating a big issue out of it. I made them count and recount, and put on proper record the copies that were to be taken. I did this to buy time.

While the officers busied themselves counting the magazines, I secretly contacted a journalist from alternative web-portal Malaysiakini to come over, but my contact told me it would take him around half an hour to arrive, so I had to buy more time. After the counting had finished, the officer informed me that the total number of magazines was 408. I said I was not satisfied because the number should be more than that, and I asked for a recount. This was a tactic to ensure the journalist would arrive before the officers left my office.

The tactic paid off because the journalist arrived before the second recount was completed. All the magazines were taken and I couldn't do anything to stop them, but before they stepped out of my office, the news was already circulating on the Internet. The headline,

“KDN serbu pejabat Zunar” (Home Ministry raids Zunar's office), went viral online. The reaction from the public was sarcastic and cynical. Many slammed the government for harassing a cartoonist.

I suspect the raid was not because of the licence, but what was on the cover of *Gedung Kartun*. The cover depicted Prime Minister Najib Razak holding a flag to celebrate Malaysia's independence day and shouting, “Merdeka!” (Freedom!) The cartoon also shows him holding a Mongolian flag and a small character pulling on his trousers and saying, “You got it wrong, Sir. That is not a Malaysian flag, it's a Mongolian flag.” The cartoon made fun of the issue of the murder of the Mongolian model, Altantuya. The public believed that this was somehow connected to the prime minister because the suspects arrested were his advisor and bodyguard. This issue was considered taboo and a very sensitive topic in Malaysia. No mainstream media dared to publish an opinion or make big news out of it.

The next day, Home Ministry officers raided the printer, K Vin Publisher, in Seri Kembangan, Selangor. They confiscated printing plates and warned the printer that their whole business licence would be revoked if they continued to print my books and magazines. For the record, the printing licence falls under the jurisdiction of the PPPA. In Malaysia, not only publishers but also printers have to renew their licence every year according to the law. So this is a tactic used by the government to control them.

A few days later, the printer was raided again, this time by a different team of Home Ministry officers. These were very harsh actions meant to scare the printer and serve as a warning to me.

Several days after that, I received a call from one of the Home Ministry's officers summoning me to their office in Shah Alam for

investigation. Ironically, the building I was summoned to was the same one where Teoh Beng Hock was found dead.

When I arrived, the officer led me to a room where I could see the confiscated copies of *Gedung Kartun*. He told me that I was being investigated under section 5(1) of the PPPA. If found guilty, I could be imprisoned for three years and fined RM20,000 (about US\$5,000). I was interrogated for an hour. At the end, I told the officer: “You can ban my books, you can ban my cartoons, but you cannot ban my mind. I will keep drawing until the last drop of my ink.”

This was to make it clear to him that there is no way he could stop me. I continued by saying: “Even if I don’t have paper, I will use toilet tissue to draw. I will continue to draw because this is my right as a cartoonist.”

This whole episode was not something I had planned. I actually wanted the magazine to be well distributed in the shops so that it could reach out to as many Malaysians as possible. The important thing was to get the message out to make people aware of what was going on in the country.

As a result of the raids, many bookshops were scared to sell the magazine. Some even began returning the copies to me. However, the reaction from the public was good, both locally and internationally, because this was a big issue. I received many emails from international cartoonists who said that my cartoons must have been very funny even though they had yet to read them.

In financial terms, sales of the magazine was poor as the bookshops were unable to sell them due to the Home Ministry’s intimidation and harassment. I had to change my plan. So together with Jonos and a few cartoonists, we went to public places to sell the magazine

directly to people. We went to mosques and shopping malls, and even to opposition political rallies. We also opened an online order site. People started to order the magazine by paying into my account and I posted the copies to them. We also started to use a subscription scheme, so people could subscribe to the magazine 12 months in advance; no one knew then that this would be the one and only issue.



The cover of *Gedung Kartun*.

However, the money from the sales was still not enough to cover the printing cost, let alone the entire operational cost. With limited monetary resources, it was difficult for me to use creative ways to deliver the message to the people. Nonetheless, it remains the duty of cartoonists to stand up against a corrupt regime and highlight the people’s voice in their works.

I sketch with heart and draw with brain.

The raid on my office, the harassment against the printer and the intimidation of the bookstores were big challenges for me, but the fight through cartoons had to go on.



This was the earliest cartoon which got me in trouble during my school days at Sekolah Menengah Pendang, Kedah, for criticising my teachers in 1979.



This cartoon which criticised the country's defence system led the editor of *Berita Harian* to receive a show cause letter from the government in 1992.



Brainstorming session with the editorial team of *Gedung Kartun*.



The raid by the Home Ministry officers at my office where they confiscated 408 copies of *Gedung Kartun*.

NEWS

### Comic mag with Najib waving Mongolian flag seized

Salhan K Ahmad | Published: 25 Aug 2009, 12:53 pm | Modified: 25 Aug 2009, 12:53 pm

A+ A-

The Home Ministry today confiscated 408 copies of humour magazine Gedung Kartun which featured a caricature of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak waving a Mongolian flag and shouting Merdeka on the front cover of its inaugural issue.

The 10.45am raid was carried out by the ministry's Publication Control and Al Quran Text division at the publisher Sepakat Efektif Sdn Bhd in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.



According to ministry officials, the bi-weekly magazine, which

BERITA

### Kilang cetak Gedung Kartun diserbu

Jimadie Shah Othman | Diterbitkan 26 Ogs 2009, 1:26 tengahari | Dikemaskini 26 Ogs 2009, 1:26 tengahari

A+ A-

kemaskini 4.09pm Selepas menyerbu pejabat *Gedung Kartun* semalam, Kementerian Dalam Negeri (KDN) hari ini menyerbu kilang percetakannya dan merampas plat reka bentuk cetakan majalah humor itu.

Selain merampas 408 naskhah majalah humor politik semalam, kementerian itu juga dikatakan turut mengadakan rampasan serupa di dua buah negeri.

Enam pegawai bahagian penerbitan KDN tiba di K Vin Publisher di Seri Kembangan, Serdang jam 11.30 pagi ini dan berada di situ selama hampir sejam.

News clippings from Malaysiakini. The second headline in Malay reads "Gedung Kartun printer raided".

CHAPTER 3  
PINCH OR  
PUNCH?

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thank you to Malaysiakini, *The Star*, *The New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian*, Free Malaysia Today, Cilisos, AFP, AP, Reuters, BBC, Al Jazeera, mediarakyat, Aliran, Din Merican, Melissa Goh, *The Sun Daily*, *Sinar Harian*, *Kosmo*, *Harian Metro*, *Utusan*, *Bernama*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Independent*, Khairul Ryezal, Manan Vatsyayana, Yahoo News Singapore, Wikipedia, Getty Images, Counter Currents.org, Zunar.my and many others for the images in this book.



*Photo by Yong Norliza Kassim*

ZUNAR IS A POLITICAL CARTOONIST from Malaysia, who has been drawing editorial cartoons for over 30 years. With his slogan, “How Can I be Neutral, Even My Pen Has a Stand”, he exposes corruption and abuse of power committed by the government of Malaysia through his art.

Zunar has been arrested and detained for drawing cartoons that challenged official views. His books have been banned by the Malaysian government and his office raided by law enforcement officers. The factories that printed his books have also been raided and vendors throughout the country were often warned not to sell his books.

In 2015, Zunar was selected by Amnesty International as the first Malaysian for their biggest annual international campaign, ‘Write for Rights (#W4R) 2015’. His various international awards received over the years include the Cartooning For Peace Award 2016 (Geneva) and the International Press Freedom Award 2015 (New York).