



By Helen Ang

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I refer to the Malaysiakini report **Ean Yong furious Teoh's bank account revealed.**

I've always wondered who it is that frequent five-star shopping malls like the Pavilion or browse in those posh bungalow boutiques. Now I know it's not Teoh Beng Hock. He was a lot like me, an ordinary wage earner.

We learn from the MACC that Beng Hock had slim savings amounting to RM3,611.36. Counsel for MACC at the inquest, Abdul Razak Musa inferred this to support his contention that Beng Hock was in dire need of money to get married at short notice...to what purpose this insinuation by the authorities, I do not know.

But here is a case of Razak being unfamiliar with Chinese urban lifestyle. Of all the Chinese weddings I know of, every single one has made a profit from the reception dinner. The 'ang pow' collection, more often than not, generously exceeds the cost of the banquet. After paying the restaurant bill, the bride and groom hosts usually have change left over.

The mainstream media and Umno bloggers have tried hard to push the theory that Beng Hock committed suicide, and financial problems being one of the triggers. Since Malaysia has a teeming working class, then it follows (if we concur with this Umnonista line of thought) that we must be a highly suicidal country with 30-year-olds plunging out of high-rise windows every three seconds.

We're also told that Beng Hock's pay was RM1,800 a month. After income tax, EPF and other deductions, it'll be certainly somewhat less. Salaries for graduates have remained stagnant while the price of things have doubled and tripled.

What Beng Hock earns puts him in the salary range of the vast majority of Malaysian households. The Household Income Survey said 27.1 percent of households fall in the income bracket of RM1,000-RM1,999 (Statistics Department preliminary findings for year 2008.)

The next biggest category is 20 percent for the RM1,999-RM2,999 bracket.

Those earning less than RM1,000 make up 8.5 percent of households. Overall, 55.6 percent of Malaysian households earn less than RM3,000 monthly. Beng Hock was very much Encik Average in terms of income class.

Beng Hock's fiancé is a schoolteacher. It's not a career that rakes in big money either. But they had each other. And they had the happiness of expecting a child, and soon building a home.

Never mind that the cost of a piece of Italian tile from Mohd Khir Toyo's RM24 million ringgit mansion is likely more than Beng Hock's monthly disposable income. Not everyone can be the

chief minister of an Umno 'developed state'.

These two young people, Beng Hock and his fiancé, looked like a loving couple in the photographs we see. They would have had their own modest dreams and hopes for the future.

Nonetheless, Generation X in Malaysia are comparatively worse off compared to their parents' generation – a bygone era when petrol prices did not keep going boing, boing like a pogo stick.

Today, for instance, many young newlyweds would be hard-pressed to afford a honeymoon abroad because of the ringgit's adverse currency exchange rate. That is unless they or their parents belong to the 1.1 percent of Malaysian households earning between RM10k and RM11k a month.

The rich, those earning RM10,000 and above, comprise a total of 5.2 percent populating the upper reaches of household income. Hence we can see that the BN government, through its mismanagement of our economy the past decades, has truly benefitted only about 5 percent of materially successful Malaysians.

Whereas more than 50 percent have trouble making ends meet on RM3,000 or less a month due to our poor purchasing power.

In power for 52 years and squandering the country's immense oil wealth, the Barisan Nasional government clearly has not done well by its people at all. If MACC is implying – by its line of questioning witnesses in the inquest – that the deceased was depressingly cash-strapped, then half of Malaysia is in the same boat when going by salary scale.

We're talking here about the majority of Malaysians who make an honest living. They put in long hours at the office. Do overtime. Some even take on second jobs. That's the sad lot of the Everyman.

Pictures of Beng Hock show him as a wholesome-looking young man. It would seem he was a prudent one too. At least he put enough by to afford a car.

Many Malaysians take the bus, crowd in standing-room only LRTs and even ride the KL highways on their motorcycles. In rain, under the sun, they're exposed to soaking or scorching elements of nature. Should a traffic accident happen, flesh and bone will mesh with mangled metal for these motorcyclists and their pillion riders.

Indeed, given the atrocious state of our public transport system, I'd say the BN government's

Infrastructure plans were ill-thought out. This has led to Malaysian roads becoming saddled not only with the ubiquitous 'kap cai' (but crispy Kancils that give rise to the same 'body-meets-mangled-metal' scenario when cars collide.

The sad plight of our nation could well be one of the reasons that Beng Hock chose, rather optimistically, to take a job with the Pakatan Rakyat state government. He'd wanted to help bring about reform because BN rule had dismally failed the common folk.

While I'm not aware of his personal financial circumstances, I am acquainted with someone else who took a pay cut moving from the private sector to work for Pakatan. Before signing on as the YB's aide, Beng Hock used to be a reporter (a job that pays more).

While the mainstream media such as Utusan Malaysia has gone all out to portray the Chinese community as 'ultra kiasu' and avaricious, young idealists like Beng Hock and my friend mentioned above dispel their malicious and fallacious ethnic stereotyping.

When Beng Hock's child grows older, I hope its mother Ms Soh Cher Wei will tell the boy or girl that whatever it says on Beng Hock's payslip, whatever it says in his bank balance, all right-thinking Malaysians honour and respect Papa's idealism.

So thank you, MACC, for your revelations which serve as a timely reminder on why we need to fight for justice for Teoh Beng Hock. He was clearly Everyman – one of our own.

Picture / [Justice for Beng Hock](#)