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With the tagline ‘Making Ideas Work’, Penang Institute encourages bold and innovative thinking not only in academic disciplines, but also through supporting literature by way of events such as book launches and public literature seminars; participation in the annual George Town Literary Festival; and through its renowned magazine Penang Monthly. Its policy brief, ISSUES, was launched in June 2017, and its Penang Institute Podcasts series in August 2018.

The ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organization established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute’s research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC), and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

ISEAS Publishing, an established academic press, has issued more than 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD) is an independent publishing house founded in January 2000 in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. The SIRD list focuses on Malaysian and Southeast Asian studies, economics, gender studies, social sciences, politics and international relations. Our books address the scholarly community, students, the NGO and development communities, policymakers, activists and the wider public. SIRD also distributes titles (via its sister organisation, GB Gerakbudaya Enterprise Sdn Bhd) published by scholarly and institutional presses, NGOs and other independent publishers. We also organise seminars, forums and group discussions. All this, we believe, is conducive to the development and consolidation of the notions of civil liberty and democracy.
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Catharsis: A Second Chance for Democracy in Malaysia
Foreword

by Liew Chin Tong

Reading Ooi Kee Beng’s *Catharsis* a month or so after the historic 9 May 2018 general election has been such a joy. These pages essentially express the early warning signs of the 2018 electoral tsunami. It is just that those on the Barisan Nasional side couldn’t be bothered to listen, and many supporters on the Pakatan Harapan side probably thought it was outlandish to think that BN could be defeated against all the odds.

Kee Beng was one of the earliest to see the importance of the emergence of Dr Mahathir Mohamad as opposition leader and of his tactical moves to reconcile with Anwar Ibrahim.

Kee Beng’s words are sharp and pointed: For instance, ‘a resignation by Mahathir (from UMNO) is not a throwing in of the towel but a declaration of war.’ But his concerns go beyond commenting on who would win and who would lose.

Nation building is what he cares about. How to shape a Malaysia that is at ease with itself and its multiethnic heritage in the rapidly changing world full of challenges – but also opportunities. Malaysia is not merely a collection of races and religions but a platform for individual citizens to thrive as citizens of a nation that they can all be proud of.

Kee Beng returned to the region in 2004 after having sojourned for more than two decades in Europe. I returned from Australia in 2005. Since our first meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2005, we have in many ways participated in each other’s careers, which somehow intertwined with the great changes in Malaysian politics that have been occurring since then. In the closing days of 2006, I was reading the then recently published *The Reluctant Politician* before it hit the bookshelves to
become one of the most sold non-fiction books in Malaysian history, and through which Kee Beng became a favourite name among the Malaysian reading public. I remember clearly being at his house in Singapore in December 2007 telling him about my reluctance to contest in Penang as I wasn’t sure about how much support could be gained in his hometown. I had no personal ties there.

So very much has happened ever since.

It is my great pleasure to have known Kee Beng all these years and to have him as one of my intellectual mentors.

In the ‘New Malaysia’, post-GE14, leaders will have to listen to the voices of public intellectuals such as Kee Beng, not only to broaden their horizons but also in order to see more clearly what they otherwise are too busy or too biased to see, before it is too late.