

# Malaysiakini at WACC

Pradip Thomas

The tradition of lunch seminars at WACC - recent speakers included Sam Gregory from the NY-based Witness, Linda Hartke from the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, CRIS Co-ordinator Myriam Horngren and WACC staff Ana Fiol, continued on April 10th with a presentation by Premesh Chandran, one of the founders of the web-based Malaysian news service, Malaysiakini. Founded in 1999 as an alternative news source to the government-controlled press and broadcasting, Malaysiakini has quickly become an established, and credible source of opinion on all sorts of issues traditionally prone to government spin. While this pioneer news service has many admirers within Malaysia and outside, the Malaysian government is not a huge fan.

Premesh started his presentation with a story of a raid carried out by the police earlier this year at the office of Malaysiakini, that was provoked by a 'seditious' article that was featured on their news service. The police took away 19 computers and four servers although it did not take long for them to release the 'detainees!' given the national and international furore that the raid generated.

Premesh spoke at length of the context of Malaysia, its many contradictions, between tradition and modernity, its embrace of the knowledge economy on the one hand and not allowing locals to have access to knowledge that would make a difference on the other, between the tourist image of a plural, multi-ethnic Malaysia as against the reality of Malay dominance, freedom on the net versus the many ways in which the government used its power to regulate the media and bring erring journalists to task, the gap between a younger generation who are open to technology and other social and political solutions and the older lot who are blind to change, its authoritarian politics, low levels of toleration for oppositional views and politics and its frequent detentions of those who are identified as a threat to national security.

Liza Felkete from the Institute of Race Relations and Au Mei Po Mabel, whose fiancée Tiem Chau is under detention in Malaysia were also among those present at the seminar.

Pradip Thomas