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# Malaysian soap to work up a lather

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## Malaysian soap to work up a lather

**Lim Kay Tong**

**By**

THE long-awaited Malaysian soap opera, PJ, will make its debut over Ch 3 on Thursday at 8.30 pm.

PJ doesn't stand for Petaling Jaya in this case. But RTM's new series of the same name has all the combinations which promise a mixture of Peyton Place and Dallas.

You'd think, then, that Kuala Lumpur's suburban enclave would be ideal for the same suds and lather which froth willingly from American TV soap operas.

Admittedly, some of the location shooting was done in PJ — Petaling Jaya, that is. But PJ, in this case, stands for Puspa and Johan, and Petaling Jaya isn't the main subject.

For the man who conceived PJ, Malaysia's Information Minister, Datuk Sri Adip Adam, had more in mind for this series than family, neighbourhood or regional scandals.

### Messages

He wanted, through PJ, to get certain messages across to Malaysians. So the story of the rise of a kampung boy, Johan, has underlying themes: Social inter-

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themes. Racial integration, Malaysia's Look East policy, the work ethic and technology transfer.

What better way to dress these themes than in a rags-to-riches tale — minus, of course, the seamier side of Dallas and Peyton Place.

Johan's (played by Singaporean Osman Zailani) daughter, Puspa (Melisa Zaila), is critically ill. A friend offers to lend him \$20,000 to pay for the girl's operation, but Puspa dies in hospital.

Instead of being demoralised by her death, Johan is spurred on to make something of himself.

He uses the country's New Economic Policy to help him set up PJ Holdings. The business thrives, but not without some peripheral trouble.

## J R

For thrown in for good measure is a JR equivalent, Rosman (another Singaporean, Aziz Singh), and Johan's feuding sons.

But some messages appear to be signposted. Puspa is born on Malaysia's Independence Day, Aug 31, 1957. She dies in 1969, the year of intense racial strife in Malaysia.

Even with dubious

symbols such as these, Datuk Sri Adip Adam has assured viewers that government propaganda won't be overdone.

Whether this will be so or not, the series is ambitious in intent.

RTM's director-general, Zain Mahmud, hopes that Malaysia's first try at a long-running series in Bahasa Malaysia (a seven-year run is anticipated) will drive home the government's concept on modernisation.

The first four episodes of PJ will be telecast on consecutive Thursdays, after which the series will alternate with RTM's Bangsawan series.



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