

Celebrating Malaysian authors and books

Self-healing and divine guidance rule in fiction and non-fiction categories

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians are turning to books on self-healing, divine guidance and finding peace so much so that two books with these themes in common ended up being voted as readers' favourite written works at this year's Popular-The Star Readers' Choice Awards (RCA).

Time to Heal by Norhafsa Hamid and *Healing the Heart: Leaving Darkness for Light* by Sharifah Nadirah and Muhammad Anas clinched the top prize in the fiction and non-fiction categories, respectively.

Time to Heal is a tale of grieving and acceptance by a young boy who lost his twin brother.

Norhafsa, whose novel takes readers along as the conflicted character embarks on a journey of coping with death, responding to a loss and trying to move on, said the recognition meant a lot to local English language authors like her.

"I'm very happy with the fact that readers can relate to the story and the message conveyed in it. At the end of the day, it's all about the message in the book, whether it has reached readers or not, and if it has, then to me that's already a success on its own."

"For authors out there, keep on writing and pushing on – I hope one day to see our books distributed in the international scene," she said when met after the

prize-giving ceremony at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here yesterday.

The second prize in this year's fiction category went to *Daughter of the Moon Goddess* by Tan Sue Lynn, inspired by the legend of Chang'er, the moon goddess in Chinese mythology, in which a young woman's quest to free her mother pits her against the most powerful immortal in the realm.

Third prize went to Karina Robles Bahrin for her book *The Accidental Malay*, in which the ambitions of a young woman who wishes to inherit her family's billion-ringgit *bak kwa* (a dried savoury sweetmeat made of pork) company is upended when she discovers that she is actually a Malay-Muslim.

On the non-fiction side, Sharifah said her win for *Healing the Heart: Leaving Darkness for Light* – which gently guides readers on a spiritual journey of making peace with one's struggles and embracing divine peace – was "really unexpected".

The book was written with the hope of serving as a companion for anyone facing personal challenges, frustration and loneliness, and shows ways for individuals to rebuild social and divine connections, she said.

"This book can be a friend for people out there facing problems and feeling lonely – this book will be a friend and show the ways to actually find hope, faith and love and being able to reconnect with

Literary recognition: Chor (fourth from right), Wee (third from right) and Ng (fourth from left) with the award winners at the prize-giving ceremony at BookFest@Malaysia 2023, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. – AZMAN GHANI/The Star

the people out there as well as guidance to reconnect with God and achieve self-transcendence.

"I'd like to thank Iman Publication for making my book fly this high. I've never earned an award before – this is my first," she said.

The second prize for non-fiction went to Datuk Dr Anas Alam Faizli's *Rich Malaysia, Poor Malaysians*, in which he examines the country's socio-economic issues and deliberates on issues plaguing the country to ensure how future generations can inherit a better Malaysia.

The third prize went to Datin Vivy Yusof for her autobiography *The First Decade: My Journey from Blogger to Entrepreneur*, in which she recollects her journey as a young entrepreneur building up a multimillion-ringgit fashion empire.

All winners received certificates of recognition while the first prize winners went home with trophies and cash prizes of RM3,000, with the second and third prize winners receiving RM1,500 and RM1,000, respectively.

Meanwhile, awards in the fiction and non-fiction category for Malay books were given out at the same ceremony under the Popular-BH Anugerah Pilihan Pembaca (APP).

The Popular-The Star RCA and Popular-BH APP were held in conjunction with BookFest@Malaysia 2023, which was launched by Deputy Education Minister Lim Hui Ying yesterday.

Lim said as a rapidly developing nation, Malaysia needs knowledge-based human capital if the country is to develop faster as an economy, adding that Malaysians need to read extensively to expand their knowledge base and keep abreast of ever-changing times.

"I am delighted to note that this year's BookFest offers a vast array of quality literature in English, Chinese and Malay. It stands as a testament to the richness of our diverse cultural heritage."

"Additionally, there will be a plethora of events, activities, workshops and talks designed to enlighten and educate," she said in her speech.

The awards for Popular-The Star RCA were presented by Star Media Group Bhd chairman Tan Sri Chor Chee Heung and *The Star*'s chief content officer Esther Ng, as well as Popular Holdings Ltd chairman Desmond Wee.

Wee said the RCA and APP awards, which are into their 13th edition, embody Popular's mission of instilling the love for reading by affirming and recognising the endeavours of local authors in

English and Malay.

He said each award features 10 nominees each in the fiction and non-fiction categories in English and Malay, with nominated authors selected from last year's bestselling titles in Popular bookstores nationwide.

"It is only human to think that the grass is greener on the other side, yet we (only need to) look at the potpourri of local talent we have from all backgrounds."

"At Popular, we believe that there is an abundance of local talent."

"We believe that if we continue to promote, encourage and affirm local talent, it will definitely strengthen the Malaysian literary industry," Wee said.

Nominees for the fiction category included Hanna Alkaf for *Queen of the Tiles*, Posthumous Child by former policeman Rozlan Mohd Noor and *Once Upon a Time in Malaysia* by Murale Pillai.

Malaysia's longest-serving trade and industry minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, former Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Ariff Yusof, Puchong MP Yeo Bee Yin and Setiawangsa MP Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad were among those who made it to the list of nominees in the non-fiction category.

Bookfest@Malaysia 2023 started yesterday and runs until June 11 at the KL Convention Centre.

