

*The Politics of  
Ethnic Chinese Unity*

Dr. Ling Liong Sik

AND

*The Politics of  
Ethnic  
Chinese Unity*

G. P. DANIEL

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**TIMES**

Times  
an imprint of  
Federal Publications Sdn. Bhd.,  
Times Subang  
Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park,  
Batu Tiga,  
40000 Shah Alam,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan,  
Malaysia.

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First Print 1995

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ISBN: 967-914-877-7

Printed by: Percetakan Warisan Sendirian Berhad

APB736092

06 OCT 1995

NASKAH PEMELIHARAAN  
PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA

*DEDICATION*

This book is dedicated to  
**PARUVATHY SUPPIAH PILLAY**  
who has remained  
a constant source of  
inspiration  
in my life.

There is now a post-Merdeka, post 1969 generation of Malaysian Chinese, indeed Malaysian Malays, Indians, Kadazans, Ibans, Dayaks and others. Let us not divide them with the inherited bondage of communalism, racism or theories of superiority or dominance."

- *Dr. Ling Liong Sik*

"Chinese people like to talk politics, that's for sure, but they shy away from actual engagement. This is a kind of paranoia, a totally unfounded fear. Most people muddle their way through life and never exercise their own legitimate rights or know how to make use of the power they have...Chinese people's ignorance of their own rights and powers is a serious problem...This is a question of power, not money. Chinese people think that forbearance is a virtue. Actually passivity in the face of injustice comes from being insulted so often that one becomes numb to it. But by praising this deficiency as "forbearance" Chinese people can put their conscience at ease. Few Chinese are willing to fight for their own rights.

*Yang Bo*

(*The ugly Chinaman and the crisis of Chinese Culture* 1991)

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## THE AUTHOR

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The author who hails from Seremban, Negeri Sembilan is a former student of the Anglo-Chinese Secondary School Seremban and studied law at the University of Kent at Canterbury, United Kingdom.

For many years, he was a member of the government's media personnel particularly in Johor and Angkasapuri-Kuala Lumpur, where he gained valuable insights into the local political process. Since it was one of the essentials of his job to interact with both the grassroots and the policy makers on a daily basis, this gave him first hand experience of working in the field among the voters and public has given him an edge in articulating and interpreting local and national issues. The fact that these early experiences and observations were made first hand at parliamentary constituencies represented by "political heavyweights" such as Lee San Choon, a former Malaysian Chinese Association(MCA) President and Cabinet Minister, S.Subramaniam, the incumbent Malaysian Indian Congress(MIC) Deputy President and Musa bin Hitam, a former Deputy Prime Minister and United Malay National Organization(UMNO) Deputy President have all gone to impress and influence the author's knowledge and views.

The author is currently working on another book on the Malaysian Indian community and the politics of the Malaysian Indian Congress.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This book attempts to give an incisive and up to date account of the current political realities that underpin ethnic Chinese politics in Malaysia. Besides MCA and Democratic Action Party(DAP), there are other parties within the *Barisan Nasional(BN)* and outside BN, parties which at times claim and clamor to represent Chinese interests in Malaysia, even if it is their professed claim to be multi-racial and pluralist in nature.

This book differs from the stereotypical view held by the bulk of ethnic Chinese and others in Malaysia and goes on to examine the "radical" image of DAP and "conservative" image of MCA as popularly believed currently.

I have deliberately chosen to speculate on ethnic Chinese politics with a view to the fourth wave in Malaysian "politics" which currently witnesses fierce intra ethnic competition among ethnic leaders while the bulk of post-*Merdeka* generation Malaysians have gained a key station in life and are in a position to influence the voting trends now and in the future.

It is standard for authors to absolve others for and what appears in a book; it is even more imperative in this case, for no two people, would agree entirely about the increasingly important role of Malaysia's second largest ethnic community. This book is meant for general readers



from both the ethnic Chinese community and the non-Chinese communities.

The historical facts on which this book is based come from standard works, though the interpretation of events, why they happened and what they mean are my own. For the most part, the observations made here are drawn from my own firsthand experience.

This is a book for ethnic political activists, not for communal politicking. It highlights the efforts to make viable strives to a political system that is rooted in majority dominance that has yet to fully develop into a political system in line with Malaysia's aspiration to be a developed nation by 2020. A system which is able to smoothly accommodate non-dominant and minority ethnic groups desires for more egalitarian civil and political rights.

Are the non-dominant ethnic Chinese and other minority groups, victims of nationalist exploitation, corrupt politicking and bureaucratic restrictions? Nationalism (loyalty and the right to an equal place under the Malaysian sun with other groups) is the ultimate and constantly growing sentiment among all ethnic and racial groups in Malaysia.

The past political history of the ethnic Chinese has seen a great many mistakes in judgment and calculation, on the basis of their insular, parochial mentality and narrow vision. An insularity that has never been fully understood nor grasped the political effects of the onslaught of Malay nationalism, Islamic extremism and the long-term strategies of UMNO.

The point of this new focus on ethnic Chinese politics is to achieve a better equilibrium within the Malaysia polity,

while stimulating views and ideas that can have a healthy effect on the Malaysian democratic system.

In so far as we Malaysians believe and subscribe to the theory that a true measure of humanity is the quantum of freedom that people manage to win for themselves in this life, then the ethnic Chinese Malaysians are a successful lot seen from the context of their political struggle from the time Malayan Union was abandoned in 1946 up until the recent birth of Semangat 46, a radical Malay political party.

It is the author's impression that in Malaysia today, the non-dominant ethnic groups are submissive in appearance only. However, it would be naive to believe that such ethnic groups intend to remain passive until the end of time, and on the contrary, there is no doubt that these ethnic groups likely to assert themselves more cohesively and effectively if and when there is an acute leadership crisis within the dominant Malay ethnic group.

If this happens, however, unlike in the past, the dominant UMNO groups shall not be able to call for repressive measures against ethnic minorities and the non-dominant ethnic Chinese groups because Dr Mahathir Mohamed has broken new ground as an international figure in third world politics. While being the UMNO President he has successfully set a new standard in inter-ethnic, inter-racial relations within Malaysia, establishing it as a role model to other nations around the globe.

Hence, UMNO's younger leaders can no longer afford to become "small" by "shrinking" to the level of playing racial and communal politics as happened in the past.

To conclude, if a man is a democrat, he does not have to be told to be one. If a man is not a democrat, he cannot be

ordered to be one. A people can be taught democracy but without a levelheaded legal, judicial, constitutional, parliamentary system and healthy public opinion to buttress the necessary inculcation; healthy, mass participative democracy cannot fully crystallize in Malaysia.

Finally, I ask for indulgence for the mistakes contained herein and wish to state that I am alone responsible for this book.

G.P. DANIEL

## CHAPTER 1

# The Challenge of Political Leadership

**W**hat is the meaning and substance of good political leadership? Many questions and thoughts come to our minds when we reflect on this question.

The author in this book attempts to focus on the low-profile but unique leadership style of the Malaysian Chinese Association(MCA) President, Dato Sri Dr. Ling Liong Sik and his relentless attempt to forge genuine political unity within the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia.

The MCA President has broken new ground in forging this new Chinese Unity, since the tragic circumstances under which - the office of MCA President and the leadership of the Chinese community was thrust upon him - some eight years ago in 1986.

It was a sad and black day for the many thousands of MCA stalwarts and the Chinese community itself, when former MCA President Tan Koon Swan and a number of senior MCA leaders lost their political credibility due to the legal and criminal problems that affected them.

Scandal, squabble and turmoil ruled the day, it was a time when MCA was at its lowest point. A time when the party was plunged in to debt, the MCA headquarters was about to be repossessed by the creditors and "Feng Shui" experts were speculating on the architectural wisdom of the building having been erected with its present frontage and perspective. Koperatif Serbaguna Malaysia (KSM) collapsed with 24 other deposit taking cooperatives, an event that shook the foundation of a large cross-section of ethnic Chinese families - whose self-confidence about their future became even more grim and fatalistic.

The question or even the thought of speculation on Chinese ethnic political unity was then a matter of a joke among both informed and uninformed Malaysians - whether such speculation was at an intellectual forum or at coffee shops. Worse still, no one was prepared to concede anything in order to talk about MCA leadership and Chinese political unity then.

It was at this moment of Malaysian history, a moment of desperation and uncertainty both inside MCA and within the Chinese community that Dr. Ling Liong Sik became the fifth President of MCA and took over the leadership of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia.

What then is good political leadership? Is it characterized by a kind of leadership that waffles when faced with opposition and adversity? Or is it just acting or pretending to care for large and real issues and problems as non-important ones or magnifying superficial symptoms and

problems of the community that as real issues and problems -pretend to be taking the followers towards some lofty ideals and vision?

Worse still, is it a kind of gimmick, when some self centered politicians pretend to be leaders and statesmanlike and manipulate and orchestrate the mass media, and public opinion to win at the polls, without really caring about the future of the Chinese community or all Malaysians?

Are we Malaysians intelligent, sensitive and mature enough to notice these traits among contemporary politicians?

As Malaysia progresses through its thirty seventh year of nationhood it has already made a mark as a developing nation that is about to become fully developed like the first and second world nations. We would like to believe that today we have leaders who can be a role model not only to us but to future generations as well.

We would like to believe that the elite who lead the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans or any other ethnic group have touched a golden age where they would be leaders of such recognized integrity, that their followers would accept their proposals as they were formed from high lofty ideals.

In truth, nowever, we have a situation where the most effective communal and racial leaders have often demonstrated subservience to public opinion and a willingness to play to the gallery, by abandoning principles for the sake of compromise and communal heroism. In other words, qualities not necessarily held in high esteem by the post-*Merdeka* generation of "new Malaysians" who are able to transcend and look beyond - racist ideologies.

Since MCA was formed, racism and communalism have, in many ways, been their worst enemies because on such

issues as language, culture, educational opportunities, economic and other opportunities to sustain social and political mobility among ethnic Chinese, they (the MCA) were outbidden by radical Malay groups on the one hand and by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) at the other hand.

Torn between the forces of moderation and radicalism, MCA's fortunes in successive elections fluctuated and vacillated.

However, an equilibrium has now been struck and the balance has shifted in MCA's favour; DAP is at the receiving end. Credit for making this possible must go to Dr. Ling Liong Sik himself.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Ling's brand of politicking and soft-spoken style of making his points in private and in public without fanfare and dramatization is an anathema to the sensational type of politicking displayed by some to appeal to the gallery, as often orchestrated in public forums and in parliament.

Dr. Ling has proven that leadership is always a struggle and often a feud. During the tenure of his office since 1986 as the leader of the Chinese community and a senior Cabinet Minister, he has maintained a low-key, non-abrasive approach. His avoidance of cheap, sensational, soap opera tactics to obtain publicity, and his unwavering stand on various issues dear to the ethnic Chinese, without going overboard to the extreme, has won him a permanent, widespread national appeal.

Leaders must have a vision. Followers must respond to it. Leaders develop a plan. Followers organise to implement the plan. Leaders have willpower. Followers allow themselves to be guided by that will.

However, the history of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia from the abortive Malayan Union in 1946 up until

the birth of the chauvinist radical Malay party Semangat 46 (S46), is a case which goes to prove that ethnic Chinese as followers have often been *bad* followers.

In this sense, as followers, they were a hazy and a not very estimable lot of people to be dominated or served, mesmerised or flattered.<sup>2</sup>

Lim Kit Siang, the opposition leader recently attempted to criticise Dato Sri Dr. Ling Liong Sik as trying to be the greatest of Presidents in the annals of MCA history. By making this accusation the DAP leader had overlooked the role played by the followers, in this case the ethnic Chinese, who are traditional supporters of MCA and DAP respectively.

Leaders may be noble or may play the greatest role in contemporary Malaysia, but the talk of the nobility of leaders, the need for them and the reliance of the masses (*rakyat*) on them raises the other suspicion that the followers are not always very noble.

Without followers, noble and not so noble, the best ideas, determination, focus, clear goals, sense of priorities, strongest will, and the most wonderful of smiles shall all come to naught - without being able to make any tangible impact.

However, in Malaysian politics, especially in relation to Chinese ethnic politics vis-a-vis the other ethnic groups, for the Chinese community to emerge as a single - minded, cohesive political unit, "*one heart and one mind*", it is not necessarily the noblest call that gets answered but the answerable call that gets a response.

Thus, it is not the MCA (which appears to be communally organised) but the DAP (which gives the impression of being multi-racial with high ideals and so on) that is really



playing a limited political role by finding a common platform with Parti Islam SeMalaysia(PAS) and S46 under the Gagasan Rakyat line-up. Otherwise how can the DAP espouse full equality for non-Malays while keeping an unholy alliance with radical Malay parties such as PAS and S46.

Dr. Ling's leadership of the MCA and the Chinese community has been and still is a matter of mutually determinative alliance and activity between the leader and the followers. The ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, whether from West or East Malaysia have a say in what they are being led to believe and support. Any leader who fails to recognise this fact within the Chinese community or neglects to keep in touch with such realities within the ethnic Chinese community, is in danger of soon finding himself without followers.

Dr. Ling has successfully put this point across to the Chinese community in Malaysia by asking them to decide on their own political identity, either by giving undivided support to the MCA to enhance the MCA's bargaining position in the Barisan Nasional(BN) or erode, and deplete their political strength by wasting their votes in supporting the Democratic Action Party(DAP).

By keeping this option open for the Chinese community in Malaysia, without having to take an anti-Malay or anti-UMNO(United Malay National Organisation) stand, Dr. Ling has temporised many racial and controversial issues that could wreck Malaysian National unity. An event that would ultimately benefit no one ethnic group or people. But, Dr. Ling still has sufficient control and say over ethnic Chinese and other Malaysian national issues and problems at any given time, so that when the need arises, the MCA is able to take more direct action to resolve any issue or problem that would weaken Chinese ethnic political and

other interests in the context of the changing Malaysian political scene. This is the competitive edge of Dr. Ling Liong Sik in contrast to Lim Kit Siang's attempts to woo the Chinese to his side.

The most significant element of Dr. Ling's fine political leadership is the way he has made chauvinistic MCA leaders accept, albeit grudgingly the realities that underpin Malaysian politics, without them having to feel inferior or subordinate to UMNO.

In order to know just how far he could go at any given time, Dr. Ling as MCA leader, Cabinet Minister or ethnic Chinese community leader, it is essential that first of all he understands the ethnic Chinese political mind, the mixture of motives in his fellow Chinese, the counterbalancing and overwhelming intensities with which various pressure groups within the ethnic Chinese community hold differing positions, and in what directions these positions are changing day by day. In other words, as their leader he understands and knows the followers far better and in greater depth than they need to understand him.

Dr. Ling has often been criticised by the DAP as being an ignoramus leader because he hesitates between taking a strong anti-UMNO stand, while gently fathering a kind of political unity among ethnic Chinese. He has been described as a *Lame duck* Minister and the MCA itself has been criticised as a marginalised political party, even though it has an ongoing power-holding and power-sharing pact with the UMNO dominated BN government.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Dr. Ling is far sighted enough to know that the MCA as the vanguard of Chinese political interests in Malaysia since *Merdeka* has come a long way through many episodes of struggle and uncertainty in their search for

greater egalitarianism and sense of fair-play from the government; that their ability to master their own destiny is a political parable in Malaysia that history can never deny, but that this has to be achieved within a framework of political stability and without sacrificing national unity.

He has successfully put forward the formula and strategy to contain and control foolish racist sentiments within the ethnic Chinese community, without the need for MCA to take a low-profile, under-dog position to address ethnic Chinese rights. He has tamed and temporised such negative Chinese chauvinism, whether it is within the community or the MCA itself, while simultaneously searching for greater Chinese political unity by marshaling support from all sections of Chinese groups and organisations; he has put the MCA to the forefront by providing effective leadership to the Chinese community once again. If this vision of his is successfully translated into electoral victory, MCA would probably edge into a dominant political position at the expense of DAP, and if this happens, DAP would find it almost impossible to regain Chinese confidence and support in the future.

The ethnic Chinese today in Malaysia need a clear break from their past political fumbling, a clean slate to rewrite their future. To this end they have to make peace with UMNO while at the same time repudiating any kind of link with racist political views. This can only happen if there is a level of political consciousness that is tangible and real to make the MCA a force to be reckoned with.

The DAP's approach is to view the Chinese ethnic community as some kind of passive political audience that had to be worked upon with many strings to be pulled, with great care being taken to ensure that the strings are

with great care being taken to ensure that the strings are kept to avoid any tangling.

Dr. Ling on the other hand is trying to forge some kind of intra-ethnic political unity within the Chinese that is based on a minimum policy coherence (if not ideological consistency) to mould the post-*Merdeka* generation of Chinese into a socially cohesive, coherent political group instead of just being passive observers of what is going on in UMNO, PAS and S46.

Dr. Ling Liong Sik is extremely gentle, soft-spoken, affable and easy to talk with. His views on Chinese ethnic issues and problems and national issues and problems have always been balanced and moderated, and therefore appeal to many Malaysians. He has never displayed a combative style of politicking, whether at MCA forums or at any other public or parliamentary gathering, and is committed to the view that all problems could be sorted out and resolved through constructive negotiation and goodwill.

Dr. Ling's leadership of the MCA and the Chinese community and the way he has tackled national issues goes to prove the correctness of his sense of direction. That is, that great leadership is not a zero-sum game. Ultimately, what is given to the leader is not taken from the followers. Both the leader and follower - *get* only by giving. That is the fundamental difference in both leadership style and policy between Dr. Ling and Lim Kit Siang's relationship with the Chinese community in Malaysia.

#### **Notes:**

- 1 Speaking at the 41st MCA General Assembly, Dr. Ling recalled the past MCA - DAP relationship when he said: "...in the past whenever the DAP yelled out an issue, the MCA would be scurrying around

for a solution. That has changed. Our members will now tell them: you have your own agenda, we have our own constructive one".

- 2 For example - since its inception the MCA was often betrayed by Chinese followers. This can be understood, when on many occasions in the past, MCA was placed in a dilemma by the very acts of various Chinese groups. A case in point, was when MCA gained a major concession for the Chinese community when the citizenship provision of "jus soli" was accepted. However when MCA had gained this concession, it was alarmed and embarrassed when in mid 1956 a conference was held, representing more than 700 Chinese organisations, which urged the Chinese to boycott the MCA, threatened to set up a rival organization, and which disagreed with the constitutional provisions worked out by the Alliance, and decided to send a delegation to London to submit a memorandum to the Royal Constitutional Commission (Reid Commission). Similar incidents have happened on many occasions and have triggered particular crises within the Chinese community. This throws light on MCA's continuing dilemma.
- 3 See: "Langkawi Project - Best proof of MCA's complete marginalization in Government: *The Rocket* Volume 26/3 (1993) pp 7-8.

Also - "Liong Sik a Lame Duck Minister...*The Rocket* Volume 26/2, 1993.

## CHAPTER 2

# Prognosis of a New Malaysian

**M**alaysia is not a typical Third World Nation as generally assumed by most Malaysians and others. Nor is it just a plural society like other South East Asian countries and other nations around the globe.

Despite having many similar characteristics of other multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual neighbouring countries, Malaysia has, nevertheless, since independence in 1957, successfully evolved a political system that is distinct and truly original to Malaysian culture and style alone.

It is the author's view that, the consociationalist model of democracy as it originally applied to some small western nations - such as the Netherlands, and Austria appear to have developed as both a political and state-craftsmanship system in Malaysia.

The politics of ethnic accommodation and cooperation based on the consociationalist model of government and politics

refers to a form and situation in which two or more ethnic groups - on the basis of numbers and power - almost equal each other and yet tend to cooperate with each other whilst remaining substantially separate in their not so watertight activities. This is done via elite accommodation and agreement, while the respective leaders of such different ethnic groups continue to retain the support of their individual/group ethnic followers.

The Government in Malaysia, under the National Front or *Barisan Nasional* (BN) (and its tradition) appear to follow such a pattern of state-craftsmanship - that is unique to the Malaysian scene.

Ethnic conflict could be particularly acrimonious and bitter if a situation developed between such almost equal ethnic groups, particularly when each group tends to believe (real or imagined) that each by itself is capable of achieving power - whether by the ballot box or by other means.

The ultimate achievement of national unity, cooperation and consensus may be even more difficult and problematic in developing countries like Malaysia, particularly when racial, religious and economic disparities and cleavages between such groups are much deeper and genuinely acute. This has a tendency to reinforce each group's fears and frustrations at the fundamental cost of nation building and national unity.

From a historical perspective, since the abortive Malayan Union (1946), *Merdeka* 1957, and the post-May 13, 1969 reorganisation of the political processes of the nation more than any other factors - racial composition and racial arithmetics and calculations alone have dominated the whole Malaysian political scene.

The same historical and political process rooted in race and ethnicity has shaped and given character to the pattern of

the local economy, the constitution, the re-constitution and amendment of the supreme laws of the land. In effect it has stamped its mark on Malaysian democracy and influenced the shaping of both the government and the party system of the nation.

Public opinion that is articulated within Malaysian society is and has been strongly racial and ethnic in flavour and it too has had a significant impact on the institutions and organs of government and politics in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the May 13, 1969 crisis and the political accommodation orchestrated among local political parties, particularly within the *Barisan Nasional* in the aftermath of the 1971 National Operations Council(NOC) Rule, has whittled down ideological differences between political parties in Malaysia except on the party platforms and in election campaigns. In their place practical cooperation on the solution of the real problems of the country became the characteristic element of Malaysian political development, particularly since Dato Sri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981. Since then consensus has been the keyword to an understanding of Malaysian policies and the process of national development. However, as pointed out by Dr. Ling Liong Sik,<sup>1</sup> the electoral system - particularly on matters related to delineation of the electoral boundaries - continues to be a nagging issue in Malaysia.

Transcending all these factors is a pragmatism which has remained the hallmark of Malaysian democracy and the basis of political action - with the exception of the 1987 UMNO elections which proved to be a temporary interruption.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of UMNO's deregistration by a High Court order in 1988, UMNO Baru has substantially regained its former place in the Malaysian polity.



Dr. Ling Liong Sik chaired the first *Barisan Nasional* meeting when the Prime Minister was without a political party, but unanimous de facto support for Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir was self-evident in the said meeting and from then on Dr. Mahathir has not only retrieved UMNO's original position but has made a lasting impact on the Malaysian political scene.<sup>2</sup>

Under Dr. Mahathir's leadership, a new wave of neo-liberal conservatism, privatisation, cooperation between the Public and private sectors (the Malaysia Inc. concept), industrialisation, and consumer consciousness at home, has been nurtured and has taken root. There is also a greater tendency towards an international and global outlook among Malaysian intellectuals and entrepreneurs all of which has worked to reduce racism and ethnic prejudice and hardcore Islamic extremism. Dr. Ling as leader of the MCA (which has remained as a Senior partner in Alliance and *Barisan Nasional* despite its vacillating and crisis-ridden past) often has exhorted the need to have a fully developed and well-crystallized political culture among post-*Merdeka* generations of Malaysians and voters. This being the most effective bulwark against sudden changes in the political course or shifts to political extremes in Malaysia.

Most Malaysians today are industrious and relatively well educated, however, scepticism and fear of the political and cultural dominance of a larger ethnic group is still widespread among smaller ethnic groups such as the Chinese, the Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other minorities. The fact of this scepticism is quite common amongst the Malaysian population and is rooted in their political experience.

The most reliable prognosis of a new Malaysian is well captured in the words of Dr. Ling Liong Sik:<sup>3</sup>

"A new Malaysian that is more confident, more secure, and ever willing to learn, to cooperate and to progress. And it is this new breed of Malaysians, that is bringing Malaysia to ever and brighter tomorrow's."

**Notes:**

- 1 See "Equal Rights - Equal opportunities" - Keynote Address by Dr. Ling Liong Sik. Source MCA HQ. A compilation of speeches on key issues. pp 55-56.

"In the area of political representation, the MCA will study the implication of the rural-urban weightage in the delimitation of constituencies. The fact that Malaysian Chinese are almost all urban dwellers and therefore unevenly distributed has meant a de facto dilution of Chinese votes. The development of this dilution of power are as follows: in 1955, there was a provision that no constituency should differ by 50% in size. In 1957, it was amended such that no constituency should differ by 15% in size from the average size constituency. In 1962, the position reverted back to that of 1955. In 1973, there was a complete removal of limitations. This meant that the Election Commission's discretion is absolute and it is possible to have as evidence in the last General Election, a situation whereby we had an urban constituency of 90,000 and a rural area of 9000 voters - a disparity of 10 times.

- 2 It is notable that more political and institutional modernisation of the Malaysian polity has taken place in Malaysia under Dr. Mahathir's premiership in contrast to any other Prime Minister in Malaysian history. For example, his move to remove the criminal immunity and (in some areas civil immunity as well) of the Malaysian Royalty is a landmark step forward to consolidate the sovereignty and rights of the people - a step that received overwhelming appreciation and support by a vast majority of Malaysians.
- 3 See Presidential address by Dr. Ling Liong Sik at the MCA 41st Annual General Assembly held at Dewan San Choon on 18 June 1994.

## CHAPTER 3

# Background to Chinese Politics in Malaysia— from Malayan Union to *Merdeka.*

The traditional historical perspective of Chinese involvement in Malayan affairs (Malaysian) from the end of Second World War to independence in 1957, has been to view the Chinese community (immigrant, stateless and Straits Settlement Chinese citizens) as passive observers and by-standers in history - while Malay nationalism and the Malay community played a dominant role in achieving *Merdeka*.

It is the author's view that this assumption is not an accurate perception of pre-*Merdeka* history, since the bulk of Chinese were transient aliens and not citizens added to which, the period itself may be termed the "no-politics era". On the contrary, with the advent of a party political system when United UMNO(United Malay National Organisation) mobilised the mass of the Malays against the Malayan Union Proposal in 1946, the Chinese through the MCP(Malayan Communist Party) and later MCA(Malaysian Chinese Association) (1949) made a tangible contribution towards the development of the polity.

### **From Malayan Union to *Merdeka* (1957)**

After the Second World War, when the British returned to Malaya and re-established their hegemony, they effected extremely drastic changes in the whole constitutionalpolitical framework.

The colonial office had taken the decision before the end of the war to establish a Malayan Union with the objectives to create (i) a more effective and centralised government and (ii) to make available citizenship to the non-Malays so as to promote a sense of unity and belonging among them.

In the post-war milieu with its burgeoning sense of nationalism among most colonized peoples, the British policy-makers were moved on the one side by their desire to see Malaya progress towards self-government and on the other to establish complete colonial control over the country so that its immense natural resources could be fully utilized to bolster the financial viability and well-being of post-war Britain. There was also an element of admiration on the part of the British for the Malayan Chinese who had borne the brunt of the Japanese brutality during the occupation. As a result of this it was widely felt among British administrators and policy makers that the Chinese deserved better treatment than that which had been given to them during the pre-war period.

Under the Malayan Union plan, the straits settlements of Penang and Malacca and the nine Malay states were to be brought under one centralised government, with a capital based in Kuala Lumpur. Sovereignty was to be transferred from the nine Malay Rulers to the British Crown. Non-Malays claiming Malaya as their home (based on birth or domicile) were to be made eligible for equal citizenship rights with the Malays. The Malayan Union was inaugurated in 1946. However it did not work and soon had to be scrapped.

The Malays were totally opposed to this drastic departure from what had been the basis of pre-war British rule. It is part of our history that Dato' Onn bin Jaafar, a prominent Malay from Johore, provided the leadership and the kind of dynamism for the intense nationalism generated among the Malays. Dato' Onn was able to take advantage of the upsurge in Malay national consciousness and founded the first all-Malaya political organisation of the Malays under UMNO. The sole objective of the new organisation was to mobilise Malay opposition to the Malayan Union which was considered a grave threat to their interests.

It needs to be borne in mind that, on the whole, the non-Malays (and that includes the Chinese) who were to benefit greatly from the Malayan Union as it allowed them citizenship and all the rights emanating from it, made no significant nor tangible effort to register their support for the scheme. They (the non-Malays/Chinese) were still too shaken by the brutal experiences of the Japanese occupation period and were largely preoccupied with their daily existence. Their long experience of not being accepted as Malaysians and being treated only as transient aliens had made them unsure of their capacity to influence British policy.

Until the end, by which time it was already too late, the non-Malays did not make any determined efforts to counter Malay opposition to the plan and their support for it. As a result, the British had little hesitation in revoking the plan and seeking an alternative constitutional arrangement. The British nevertheless shrewdly incorporated the new constitutional scheme that embraced the establishment of a strong central government and the creation of a common Malaysian citizenship available also to the immigrant non-Malays. After prolonged consultations with the Malays, and with their full consent, the British established the Federation of Malaya in 1948 including the nine Malay states and the two settlements of Penang and Malacca.

Curiously, the Malays at the time saw in the change a great victory for themselves. It was however, totally illusory. Even though the Malayan Union plan was dropped, the key elements of the plan were incorporated into the Federation of Malayan Agreement of 1948. A strong central government was created and most importantly - the non-Malays for the first time were accorded a status with political rights and obligations with the conferment of Malayan (Malaysian) citizenship to them.

The availability of citizenship to the non-Malays and their acceptance as Malaysians - changed dramatically their political perspective and attitudes. For the first time, the non-Malays no longer considered themselves as mere transient aliens, but as lawful citizens of equal worth enjoying a basic and fundamental right to participate in the politics of the country. If Malaya (Malaysia) was their new home, then it was rightful and imperative that they exercised their legitimate political role. As a consequence there was a marked increase of political activity among non-Malays - particularly among the Chinese community in Malaysia. Until this episode in Malaysian history, full political participation among the Chinese community was

much restricted to the small but radical group that had been influenced by the Malayan Communist Party(MCP).

The very first local elections held in Malaya i.e. in Georgetown (Penang) in late 1951 and in Kuala Lumpur in early 1952, opened the door for the non-Malays to actively participate and show special interest in the political process of the country. These events also for the first time brought together the United Malays National Organization(UMNO) and the Malaysian Chinese Association(MCA) - on a common political platform i.e. the basis of Alliance - a forerunner to the current *Barisan Nasional* concept.

The immediate post-war years saw the formation of a number of political parties in the country. The Indians had founded the Malaysian Indian Congress(MIC) in 1946 to look after the interests of their community. The Malayan Chinese Association had been formed in 1949 - at the height of the communist 'Emergency' most politically-inclined Chinese especially those in business or the professions were attracted to the Malayan Chinese Association. Since the country's politics were discussed on the basis of racial loyalties and calling, it was only natural for the Chinese who had only recently acquired a new status of citizenship who a welcome change from their earlier position as transient aliens to turn towards the MCA for support.

The MCA was also a formidable political party at that time, occupying an important position on the local political scene. MCA had also, joined UMNO, the party that represented the indigenous Malays and together Alliance had been forged as a omnipresent voice of the nation. Bound by such traditions and role the MCA not only played a key role when nascent nationalism developed in Malaysia, but once independence was granted - MCA emerged as a clear player as part of the ruling political coalition. The British in Malaya at that time also saw the urgent need to woo the Chinese

away from the Malayan Communist Party through a new political organisation. The founding of the MCA "gave the British a better chance of obtaining cooperation from the Chinese community with a view to ending the Emergency".<sup>1</sup>

Malaya was also making a rapid advance towards *Merdeka*. The idea that the constitution of independent Malaya be drafted by an independent constitutional commission was first made by the Alliance on a petition to the Rulers on 31st August 1954. This was reaffirmed in the Alliance manifesto for the 1955 Federal Legislative Elections. It was envisaged that, such a commission from abroad would be free from local prejudices and influence. There was also the belief and suspicion that a commission consisting of local people could not be totally independent because they would be bound to be influenced by local political and other interests. The arrival of a constitutional commission, consisting of eminent constitutional experts from various Commonwealth countries provided a new opportunity for local political parties to articulate their views, ideologies and stand on national and constitutional issues.

However, along the road to independence i.e. the transitional period between 1953 to 1956, politics in Malay largely operated in an atmosphere of euphoria. Only a few years earlier Malaya had no politics and no political parties. The various racial segments of the population had remain entirely separated from each other. There had been little political contact among them. Hence, the first political parties had been exclusively communal organizations.

These dramatic changes during the pre-independence period (1953- 1956), ultimately confirmed that Alliance had emerged as a new political reality and it had successfully attracted an overwhelming popular support among all the racial segments in Malayan society at that time. The Alliance



(UMNO-MCA-MIC) had also emerged as the recognized spokesman of the nation.

The coalition scored its biggest success in the 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections when it won 51 of the 52 seats contested.

The victory, demolished the entire opposition and fortified Alliance (the coalition of UMNO-MCA-MIC) as the ultimate representatives of the Malayan people. It mobilised substantial support from all racial groups - which was unthinkable when the Federation of Malaya Agreement had been established in 1948, obviously, the success of the Alliance signalled an unprecedented level of cooperation among the various racial groups.

But independence did not materialise as a panacea. The traditional fears and suspicions of each other among the various racial segments were to reassert themselves. However, this fear asserted itself in greater intensity as the neutral rulers - i.e. the British were no longer in the picture anymore. It was in this new environment of racial confrontation and conflict that the Malayan Chinese Association, despite its first victory of getting substantial citizenship for the Chinese community, and becoming a ruling partner of the government, attempted to address the demands of the Chinese community, in the aftermath of 1957 Independence.

#### Notes:

- 1 K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, University of Malaya Press. 1965 p. 152.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Story of MCA

**A**s the story goes, the Malaysian Chinese Association(MCA) at the onset, was born into a dilemma at the time of its inception.<sup>1</sup>

While the Malayan Union Scheme (1946) had provided the catalyst for the rise of the Malay modern political consciousness, no such impetus was there to unite the Chinese as a single-minded political force. At that time, the Chinese grouped themselves into various clans, guilds, Kuo Min Tang (KMT) supporters and communist sympathisers.

It was not until the Emergency that the various sectors of the Chinese community realised the need to form an organisation that could look after the interests of the Chinese and also provide an alternative leadership base to the Malayan Communist Party(MCP).

The MCA was formed on 27 February 1949.

Even though Tun Tan Cheng Lock had been associated with the formation of MCA, the real initiative to form the MCA

was taken by sixteen Chinese Federal Councilors reportedly with the blessing of the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney.

The real promoters from behind the scenes were actually Yong Shook Lin, H.S. Lee, Tan Siew Sin, Khoo Teik Ee and Leong Yew Koh.

The MCA was first organised as a welfare organisation to look after the interests of Chinese squatters being resettled in the New Villages, with finances coming from donations and a lucrative lottery.

Originally, the MCA had a number of roles;

- (i) It offered an alternative to rival the communists in providing another focus for Chinese loyalties.
- (ii) Socially, it raised funds to help with the resettlement of the Chinese squatters.
- (iii) Looking beyond the immediate future, it was a respectable body which could see to it that Chinese interests were fully considered in any future constitutional changes.

The MCA at the time of its inception had power, but no broad support base of its own, and it picked up the image of a wealthy man's association working with the Government (*The towkay image*).<sup>2</sup>

The original constitution of MCA, adopted at a general meeting in June 1949, had as its primary aims the promotion of inter-ethnic goodwill, the welfare of the Chinese, and peaceful and orderly progress in Malaya. It did not consider itself a political organisation and members were at liberty to join political parties.

Only in late 1951 Tun Tan Cheng Lock decided to turn the MCA into a political organisation and drafted a Memorandum of Reorganization of the MCA that the central working committee approved on 20 June 1952.

The MCA is a mass membership party, although it has often been referred to as a patron party and a party of notables because of its links at the elite level with the Chinese business community and various Chinese associations.

The party is organised at the base by ward branches and divisions, brought into official existence by a constitutional amendment of 1959.

The next level, that is the State Assemblies (later the State Liaison Committees) possessed considerable power, much more than their UMNO/MIC counterparts, and until the 1971 constitutional amendments, the state organisations tended to act with a great deal of independence, both in terms of their financial resource base and also in terms of their autonomy and ability to interpret the policy directives that came from the centre.

The current national organisation is headed by an elected President, a Deputy President, six Vice-Presidents, and appointed administrative officials.

The most powerful policy-making body of the MCA is the General Working Committee – now called the Central Committee which comprises eighteen members elected by the General Assembly and five members appointed by the President.

In 1961 a special Presidential Committee was instituted which functions as an Inner Cabinet.<sup>3</sup>

The MCA Youth wing was formed in Malacca in 1954 and held its first National Delegates Conference in 1955. The Youth wing has its own set of officers and its own meetings. In the main it attracted Chinese educated members in the past, and has often tended to be more outspoken in its defence of Chinese interest than the parent body.

The current MCA National Youth has a total number of 230,000 members and is considered to be the most powerful vanguard of the MCA. The MCA National Youth is also the largest Chinese Youth organization in the country. Under Dr Ling's leadership, a degree of autonomy and liberty has been given to the Youth movement to voice its grievances and views, particularly those that touch on the legitimate interests of the Chinese community in Malaysia. But the national leadership has been cautious enough to trim and temporise any kind of racist or chauvinistic enmity or prejudice and viewpoints from penetrating the Youth body, without having to sap the vitality, energies and resources of the youth movement.

The recent outburst among UMNO Baru Youth leaders that the MCA Youth had questioned the 30 percent quota given to *Bumiputras* in the kind of economic and business opportunities given to ethnic Malays is both unfounded and shallow.

While UMNO Vice-President Najib Tun Abdul Razak has maintained that the 30 percent quota is still necessary for the ethnic Malays to catch up with the progress of other communities, nevertheless, to suggest that the implementation and duration (of the time of the said quota) and its implementation of these concessions should not be questioned by MCA Youth is not an enlightened response.

It must be borne in mind that, the symbolic use and value of numbers, notably 30 percent is a product of the New

Economic Policy 1970-1990 which is now defunct. There are Malaysians, whether they are *Bumiputras*, ethnic Chinese or ethnic Indians, who still tend to hold strongly to the quota system based on numbers who may not have any clear knowledge about its application.

Indeed, the numbers idea has not only permeated the *Bumiputras*, administrators, policy makers, print and media practitioners but the same idea has spread to the non-Malays who also tend to think in term of numbers and ask for percentage shares of benefits.

Another area, which is cited as causing frustration to ethnic Chinese specifically and to non-Malays in general is the argument advanced by MCA think tank -Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research (INSAP) that in the area of tertiary education the *Bumiputras* are already well ahead of their 30 percent quota, and they no longer need public-policy assistance in this direction.

Proportionate positive discrimination policies designed to help disadvantaged native and indigenous groups does not give the policy makers and implementors a blanket no holds barred mandate to set the policy and implement it as they deem fit and proper.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, MCA National Youth's courtesy meeting held with the Prime Minister on the 14 June 1994, must be accepted in good faith by radical Malay groups, especially the UMNO Youth, because the legitimate grievances and expectations of ethnic Chinese need to be seen in a holistic way as part of the national problem and not as an isolated ethnic Chinese problem.

The women's wing of the MCA - Wanita MCA was incepted in 1975 and has also grown in numbers and in terms of the quality of service rendered to the community.

The successful adoption of the 1994 Domestic Violence Act and Wanita MCA's recent attempt to have the 1958 *Distribution Ordinance* reviewed in relation to non-Muslim women who die interstate (that is without leaving a will) to a facilitate a smoother and fairer distribution of her inheritance to her spouse and children is a laudable move that will reduce the discrimination based on gender/sex in Malaysia.

Looking back on its history, the MCA has retained its operational form on three basic principles:

- (i) accommodation for maintaining racial harmony.
- (ii) retaining access to the highest policy-making organs of the government
- (iii) and acting as the sole spokesman for the Chinese community

But on a number of occasions the MCA has been almost written off, but the party has demonstrated a strong propensity for survival in a crisis.

For instance in 1962, Tun Tan Siew Sin, the late MCA President said that "*at the moment some of our detractors claim that MCA is down, so much down in fact that it is on the way out, and probably in a cheap coffin too*".<sup>5</sup>

It is well documented that the MCA gained a major concession for the ethnic Chinese by obtaining the citizenship provision of *jus soli*. However, it is also noted that the MCA having gained this most vital concession (from the British and the Malay Nationalist groups) reaped little reward or gratitude from the Chinese community itself.<sup>6</sup>

The MCA landed in another crisis in 1959 that split the party. The incident also shattered the myth of equality within the Alliance, because UMNO at that time was forced to oppose a shift in the political balance and this split the MCA (see Dr. Ling's view - Kedah MCA speech).

In 1958 a new group of MCA leaders were elected into office who were determined to fight for Chinese interests more vigorously and to take a tougher stand with UMNO.

In 1959 the said new MCA leadership pushed for more liberal policies on language and education and sought more candidacies for the coming parliamentary elections.

The crisis broke when a confidential letter from Dr. Lim Chong Eu to the Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, strongly seeking additional candidacies for the MCA was made public. Among other things, Dr. Lim Chong Eu had put forward the theory that the fears of the Chinese community had been heightened by the electoral success of PAS (at that time) in Kelantan and Terengganu, and that such fears could only be alleviated by giving the MCA enough seats to deny the Malays the two thirds majority in Parliament necessary to change the constitution.

Once publicly pressured, UMNO would not consider the demands of the MCA. The Tunku replied that the letter was a stab in the back and said that in order for MCA to remain in the Alliance, Dr. Lim Chong Eu must withdraw all its demands, purge certain chauvinists and the mandate to personally select all MCA candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

To make matters even worse, the MCA leadership found itself by-passed on Alliance matters when UMNO leaders



consulted directly with a certain MCA leaders who were in the Cabinet.

On 12 July 1959, the MCA Central General Committee voted 89 - 60 to accept Tunku's terms and remain in the Alliance, Dr. Lim resigned later in the year.

Tun Tan Siew Sin saw through the point that the Government could do a number of things to get its way without having to change the constitution, and that the MCA would not be gaining much protection if it had 40 seats but was out of the Government.

Although the crisis was resolved and the Alliance was saved, the MCA by responding to Chinese demands in order to enhance its image and to thwart outbidders, ended by losing more prestige among the Chinese and some seats to Chinese Independents in the 1959 elections.

### Notes:

- 1 Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948-1960*, (London 1975) p.266.
- 2 Perhaps the reader should compare notes on the MCA's *towkay* image having long been discarded. Quote:..."An analysis of our membership structure shows that 25% of MCA members are general workers, 17% rubber tappers, fisherman, farmers, hawkers, and shopkeepers, 7% businessmen, whilst others include salesman, teachers, housewives and professionals. Hence the MCA is indeed a representative party with a good cross-section of the Chinese community. It is no longer a *towkay* party but truly a democratic party of the people".

See keynote address by Dr. Ling at the official opening of the political seminar on "The Dilemma of the Malaysian Chinese and the Future Role of the New MCA" pp. 97 A compilation of speeches on key issues by MCA Leaders (MCA HQ Publication).

- 3 The incumbent MCA Presidential Council meets at Tuesday weekly meetings to discuss immediate issues, to make decisions pertaining to urgent issues of the day and to formulate immediate strategies that need to be taken. Secretary-General's Report 1994 MCA HQ.
- 4 "The Federal Constitution recognizes universal rights and speaks of specific racial rights only as an exception in an almost apologetic tone. No national policy should be discriminatory on grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth alone." To have that formal discrimination will make nonsense of article 8 of the Federal Constitution, because, in my view, Article 153 does not allow an across the board quota of 30 percent, 50 percent or any percent." See Kok Wee Kiat - Facing the Future pp. 19-20. The Future of Malaysian Chinese. MCA 1988.
- 5 Collection of articles about and speeches of Tun Tan Siew Sin 1955 -- 1970 Penang USM Library Collection.
- 6 K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya KL 1965 pp. 163-4.

## CHAPTER 5

# Formation of Malaysia and the problems of MCA

**T**he formation of Malaysia in 1963 with Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore shifted and realigned the ethnic equilibrium between the indigenous Malays and the non-Malays, specifically the balance against the ethnic Chinese.

The re-constitution of a new nation from Malaya to Malaysia is also a major plank in the political history of Malaysia, because in terms of geography, political boundaries, population expansion and diversity, this episode opened a new chapter in Malaysian politics.

Even though the communal ethnic based political process founded on the collaboration of Alliance ethnic groups, based on the Alliance formula dominated the political scenario, new elements were injected into the incumbent

political system with the membership of Singapore Sabah and Sarawak.

What were the implications of these for MCA, which was at that time an important lynchpin in the government and party that held power and administered the nation at that time? i.e. Alliance government.

From *Merdeka* up until the formation of Malaysia, UMNO and MCA as power-holders and power-sharers in the government, had maintained a dominant and almost equal position at the pinnacle of policy making.

Even though the Tunku as Prime Minister with his colleagues in UMNO had the ultimate say in many matters, it was common knowledge that the MCA had played a formidable role together with UMNO in shaping the destiny of the newly independent state.

The events that led to the self-withdrawal of Dr. Lim Chong Eu from MCA leadership, even though they exposed the Tunku's control over the Alliance, UMNO should not be seen as consciously imposing a politically domineering relationship on the MCA.

For all purpose and substance, the UMNO-MCA relationship then was mutually supportive and a very good partnership.

However, the formation of Malaysia, with the entrance of Singapore into the polity opened the door for Lee Kuan Yew to make a strong bid to disturb this balanced relationship between UMNO and MCA.

At that time in history, some parties in Malaya were receptive, but UMNO was not, although from time to time Tunku favoured the inclusion of Singapore as a unit in the

Federation of Malaya, but not as an equal partner of Malaya in a new Federation.

The critical factor was that the inclusion of Singapore would have introduced two serious threats to the political system in its existing form: i.e. the delicate racial balance in which nevertheless the Malays were in ultimate control, would have been prejudiced.

Another part of the picture, concerned the idea of a union between Malaya and the Borneo States, which was current then in UMNO circles from about 1956 and well established by 1960.<sup>1</sup>

This idea was further buttressed among other things by the submission made by Datuk Senu Abdul Rahman the incumbent ambassador to Indonesia then, that the indigenous people of Borneo could be classified as Malays.

Consequently, it was believed that the addition of these (Borneo) states would not imperil the majority position of the Malays.<sup>2</sup>

The threat of communism in Malaya at that time - particularly based on the ongoing suspicion that communist support was mainly drawn from the Chinese community, further accentuated the Chinese dilemma, because of the very precarious Chinese position in Sarawak.

The *Cobbold Report*<sup>3</sup> observed:

In the absence of some project like Malaysia, the Chinese, with their rapidly increasing population and their earlier start over other races in education, would expect, when independence came, to be in an unassailable position in Sarawak. This, in turn, could put the communists, with their highly developed organisation, to work on the fears and

frustrations of the great body of non-communist Chinese in an equally unassailable position....

The formation of Malaysia, with the entry of Singapore, a predominantly ethnic Chinese populated state, and the leadership style of Lee Kuan Yew, brought into focus (with hindsight) the kind of moderate role played by MCA compared to other parties that vied to win support of the Chinese community in Malaysia at that time.

The 1964 elections realistically captured the political style of PAP vis-a-vis the style of MCA.

Originally, the strategy of PAP seems to have been trying to divide the UMNO and MCA, by showing the worthlessness of the MCA as a partner in the Alliance and by attempting to replace it in the Alliance.

The political differences between Alliance and the PAP developed rapidly during 1964. PAP's strategy and the line of its struggle became clear when in the 1964 elections, the party fielded candidates only in the MCA held seats, as opposed to the UMNO held seats. (A practice that is still loyally followed by the DAP, or otherwise Lim Kit Siang also conforms to the theory of UMNO dominance.)

But the attempt by the Singapore based PAP to separate UMNO and MCA in the immediate aftermath of the formation of Malaysia failed. Since the Tunku and other UMNO members had come to the support of the MCA, any direct attack on the MCA was also viewed as an attack on UMNO itself.

The PAP's style of politicking, its challenge to the bargain made by the two largest ethnic groups in 1957 on the basis of the Alliance formula through its Malaysian Malaysia

theme, its objection to the exclusion from the decision making centre and the desire for a coalition or to replace the MCA in the Alliance, led to heightened political tensions.

Both UMNO and MCA were caught in a very difficult position and were seriously cross-pressured. MCA's position was genuinely acute, because on one hand, the MCA feared that the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew's racial mathematics would alarm the Malays. On the other hand, the MCA felt it was necessary to press for Chinese claims more vigorously within the Alliance in order to compete with the PAP for the support of the Chinese community.

A parallel situation can be seen in the context of MCA and DAP's relationship with the Chinese community, a situation that can be related to present day of Malaysian ethnic Chinese politics.

#### **Notes:**

- 1 Mohamed Noordin Sopiee: *From Malayan Union to Singapore separation: Political Unification in the Malaysian Region 1945 - 1965* (Kuala Lumpur 1974) p. 128.
- 2 *ibid.* pp. 137, 144.
- 3 *ibid.* p. 8.

## CHAPTER 6

# The Birth of Democratic Action Party

**E**thnic Chinese politics in Malaysia since independence has been dominated by MCA. But this is not to say that there were no other contenders to woo Chinese support besides MCA.

The Labour Party, the Peoples Progressive Party, Party Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, Pekemas and other smaller parties - all of which professed to have a multi-racial, multi-religious ideological platform, ended up seeking Chinese support to become political parties to be reckoned with and (or) ended up primarily relying on Chinese support for themselves, even though their professed aim was to be a multi-racial party.

As we speak of the past, up until today multi-racialism as an alternative political system could not and has not taken root



in Malaysia. A multi-racial political agenda never became a reality in Malaysian politics and this is a fact of life, based on the historical struggle of these parties.

On 19 March 1966 the Democratic Action Party (DAP) was registered. The DAP's manifesto was set out in the Setapak Declaration of 29 July 1967. The Party's aim was to establish by constitutional means a non-racial democratic socialist pattern of society in Malaysia.

Ideologically, the DAP looked at communal cleavages in class terms. It subscribed to the belief that, at the root, communal divisions were the result of economic imbalances between the communities. The DAP supported racial equality and the concept of a "Malaysian Malaysia" and opposed any kind of racial hegemony.

Initially, the party was willing to make minimal concessions, namely accepting Malay as the National Language as long as the other languages were not suppressed, and accepting Malay special rights if they were not abused and if they could be geared to helping rural Malays rather than creating an elite Malay capitalist class.

However, the DAP opposed the Government's education policy as a violation of constitutional guarantees. In the beginning the party also felt obliged to support Internal Security Laws, because the DAP then believed the ISA had been used successfully by the PAP in Singapore, but sought vigilance in its exercise.

The DAP is organised at the base by branches, each with its own set of officers. At the top the party's executive body is the Central Executive Committee, which is elected by the National Triennial Delegates Congress. The most prominent position in the party is that of Secretary-General. The other positions within the Central Executive Committee include the

Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, two Deputy Secretary-Generals, other national officers and five committee members.

The DAP has two wings, DAP Youth and Wanita DAP. Neither wing has played a significant role in the party. Within the national organization, political areas and subjects are divided into bureau and sub-committees.

The DAP proclaims itself as a multi-racial party, but real control of the party is in ethnic Chinese hands and support for the party come mainly from urban working-class Chinese.

Since the May 13 1969 general elections, the party's focus has been on MCA/MIC seats in the general elections, and over the years, the party has often mounted an increasingly vicious battle with the MCA both at the election platform and in the vernacular print mass media.

Contrary to its professed ideology, since its formation the DAP has been alternating between multi-racialism at one end and a strong communal appeal to the Chinese community in Malaysia at the other. With one leg in multi-racialism and another leg in ethnic Chinese political appeal, DAP for the duration of its struggle from the 1960's until now has often juggled issues and problems that are raised in the media and appears as the strongest critic of the government in the *Dewan Rakyat*.

The DAP has also rapidly become one of the strongest non-Malay based opposition party to emerge in Peninsular Malaysia, with an organised and active party machinery.

The MCA was a natural target for the DAP, but the party during its formative years was also suspicious of other non-Malay parties and initially antagonistic towards the Labour Party.

It has been noted that the DAP emerged at a time when ethnic Chinese confidence in the MCA was particularly low, that is at a time when many young Chinese were disillusioned with the system.

The era when the DAP made impressive inroads into the Chinese community is different from the present self-confidence and vitality of the Chinese community and it appears that in the post 1990's era, the DAP will find it increasingly difficult to win support from ethnic Chinese, particularly the post *Merdeka* generation of ethnic Chinese whose *weltenshauung* is no longer a worldview shared with their parents who may have been sympathetic to the DAP in the 1970's and 1980's.

The modus operandi of the DAP has been to seek the support of the non-Malays and it has not been successful in capturing substantial Malay votes during the last two decades.

There is no reason now to be convinced that some day the DAP would emerge as a multi-racial party. Unlike the MCA that has shared power with UMNO in administering the nation since 1955, the DAP basically has no experience in administering the nation, nor has it any exposure in policy making or implementing them in multi-racial Malaysian society.

## CHAPTER 7

# May 13 1969: Focus on the MCA

### MCA And The Language Controversy

Another critical episode in Malaysia history that profoundly affected the fate of MCA is the May 13 1969 incident and the total transformation of the Malaysian political system in the aftermath of National Operations Council (NOC) rule led by late Tun Abdul Razak.

At the time of the *Merdeka* 1957 declaration, the Chinese had benefited immediately from the citizenship provisions particularly the proviso based on *jus soli* as it was worked out in the Alliance bargain. Nevertheless the proclamation of Malay as the sole official language, which was also part of the Alliance bargain of 1957 was deferred for ten years from the date of Independence.

However, in 1965, a major controversy developed within the Alliance particularly between UMNO and the MCA. As the deferral period had almost expired, and as the due date for

the implementation of the National Language policy was approaching, agitation began over the terms the language legislation should take.

The MCA Youth joined the various Chinese guilds and associations and Chinese teachers' associations in urging the Government to provide for a wider use of the Chinese Language, even to make it an official language, and for more assistance for Chinese education.<sup>1</sup>

This move was countered by the formation (first in July 1964) of a National Language action front determined to secure the full implementation of the language agreement.

The UMNO Youth also spoke out, favouring a review of the constitutional provisions granting citizenship to non-Malays if the demand for Chinese to be made an official language continued.<sup>2</sup>

Sensing the danger, the President of the MCA warned that it would take a constitutional amendment to make Chinese an official language, and this was impossible.

**Quote:**

*If the MCA does not back this demand, then those who are behind this agitation will start a whispering campaign to the effect that the MCA does not care about Chinese right and interests ...(and) if on the other hand, the MCA backs this demand there will be a head-on-collision with UMNO and this will mean the end of the Alliance.*<sup>3</sup>

This was followed by the formation of a top level Alliance Action Committee to discuss the issue of language, as well

as the Malaysian Malaysia concept and the relationship of the constituent parties in the Alliance.<sup>4</sup>

After this the issue settled down to a quiet but steady drone until the National Language Bill of 1967 was presented to the Parliament.

Although there was no consideration of Chinese becoming an official language, the Bill represented a compromise, allowing the use of English translations in certain spheres of government, and the MCA leadership felt relieved and grateful.

However, the language issue did not settle with an Act of Parliament. Hence the dilemma faced by MCA.

The Malay community on the whole felt that the compromises were a betrayal. In February and March there were Malay protests and demonstrations, and the *ultras* within UMNO gained many sympathizers.

Contrary to popular assumption, there were two groups of *ultras* in UMNO then. There was the group of old-time *ultras* actively involved in the language issue, and a smaller new group of so-called *ultras* unhappy about the Government's economic programme and inadequate help being afforded the Malays.

Even though the language issue, which some political observers had often thought might result in bloodshed, was on the whole settled peacefully, the compromise weakened the Tunku's position and he was never again the unchallenged leader of the Malay community.<sup>5</sup>

## The MCA and Elections

The year 1955 marks a crucial point in the history of the Alliance, the forerunner to the present Barisan Nasional concept. Because in that year, the Alliance went to the July 1955 Legislative Council elections from a position of strength. The party organisation which had been recently enlarged with the addition of the MIC, was sound and furthermore the party was identified with the effort to achieve Independence. By this time, the Alliance had already built up a good track record by having had accumulated a string of municipal and state election victories.

Nevertheless, the biggest problem facing the Alliance was the allocation of seats for the component parties, the same problem remains a sticky issue among Barisan Nasional component parties until today. The MCA has often braced itself to tackle this problem on many occasions prior to general elections.

In 1955, the registered electorate was approximately 84 percent Malay, 11 percent Chinese and less than 5 percent Indians.

Delegates to the June 1955 UMNO General Assembly demanded 90 percent Malay candidates and the Tunku had to threaten to resign before the allocation of seats was settled at UMNO (35), MCA (15) and the MIC (2).

The election results gave the Alliance - a massive mandate with over 81 percent of the votes cast, and 51 of the 52 seats contested.

In August 1959 the Federal elections were held for the first fully-elected Dewan Rakyat (Parliament) of 104 seats, and

the elections took place in a different climate since the magic of *Merdeka* had already evaporated.

Partly due to the liberalisation of citizenship in the 1957 constitution, there were now seven times as many Chinese eligible to vote. The percentage of voters, by community was now: Malays - 56.8 percent; Chinese - 35.6 percent; Indians - 7.4 percent; and others - 0.2 percent.

State elections preceded the federal one and surprisingly PAS captured the state governments of Kelantan and Terengganu winning 28 of 30 and 13 of 24 state seats respectively.

The pressure exerted by an uncompromising Malay communal party in these two heavily Malay populated states was felt on UMNO and consequently UMNO was not ready to give concessions over seats or their education policy, when the MCA crisis broke out. The Alliance was saved when the Tunku's ultimatums were met, but the MCA was split and had to contest the elections in a weakened state. The Alliance campaigned as the government party, mainly by highlighting the needs of fully implementing the provisions of the 1957 constitution.

Opposition parties such as the PPP - for example called for equal rights and privileges, official status for Chinese and Tamil languages and education in the mother tongue in vernacular schools. PAS on the other side, called for tighter citizenship and immigration laws, a *Melayu* nationality, Malay to be immediately made as the national and only official language, and the restriction to Malays of the posts of *Menteri Besar*, Government Ministers, and heads of the armed forces. PAS also called *Merdeka* an empty victory in which UMNO had sold out Malay sovereignty. The Alliance won an easy majority of 74 of the 104 seats, but captured



only 51.8 percent of the votes and suffered losses in both Malay and non-Malay seats.

As for the 1964 general elections, the overriding issue was the confrontation (*Konfrantasi*) with Indonesia over the formation of Malaysia. The Alliance improved its position in 1964 by winning 89 of the 104 seats or 58.3 percent of the popular vote. UMNO slightly improved its position, the MIC held its seats, and the much beleaguered MCA improved its percentage of wins per seats contested from 61 percent in 1959 to 81 percent in 1964.

One of the salient features of the 1969 general elections was the absence of any outstandingly important new national issues. The election campaign therefore centered more on perennial communal issues, and the effervescent tempo of rhetoric sent communal tensions soaring.

Dr. Mahathir then wrote: <sup>6</sup>

*Realizing that the Malay and Chinese opposition were gaining support through racist appeal, The Alliance Party candidates also resorted to racial politics towards the end of the election campaign. The result was explosive. Responsibility disappeared, to be replaced by unlimited license to appeal to the grossest sentiments in the name of democracy.*

At that time, UMNO had appeared to have weathered the crisis of the 1967 Language Bill comprise, which had created dissent and displeasure among most Malays. It was also generally assumed that the Alliance would win federally, the only questions being by how much and with what kind of support and contribution from the MCA. There was also uprising and internal revolt against the Tunku's leadership.

UMNO was also alarmed at the spreading influence of PAS in the predominantly Malay states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu. As the foundation of UMNO rested on solid and undivided Malay support, a change on this flank could not be ignored. As a consequence, Alliance campaign strategy emphasised those themes and policies that were biased in appeal to Malay votes.

The MCA despite having gained prestige as a result of the 1967 Language Bill, became embroiled in controversy over the Chinese language *Merdeka* University proposals. Nevertheless, fearing UMNO reaction, the MCA renounced the University scheme. However, sections of the Chinese community viewed this as an MCA sell-out, and the controversy became a campaign issue which caused the MCA much embarrassment and threatened to break party discipline. Later, rather reluctantly Tun Tan Siew Sin agreed to accept the idea.

*In spite of both the original stand and the about face, the issue cost MCA substantial support. The MCA therefore concentrated its attack on warning the voters of what would happen if the MCA lost. The incumbent MCA leader Tun Tan Siew Sin said that if the opposition manages to take control of key seats from the MCA, it would mean that the nation will be ruled by an Alliance Government without Chinese participation. In April 1969, he warned that support for DAP would end in polarisation and pressures on the moderates.*<sup>7</sup>

The 1969 general election results gave the Alliance a reduced Federal majority of 66 of 103 seats and only 48.5 percent of the popular vote. The MCA was badly beaten, winning only 13 of the 33 seats it contested. However, contrary to the immediate post-election impression, there

was no mass defection of Chinese from the party, but rather the effect of the opposition in unity.

In 1969, the MCA lost several seats that it traditionally won only by the pluralities. In the states the situation was even more precarious. The Alliance lost again to PAS in Kelantan, though by a reduced margin, and lost control of Penang to Gerakan which won 16 of the 24 state seats. In Perak and Selangor it appeared as though the Alliance could lose control to an opposition coalition, thus raising the spectre of a possible non-Malay *Menteri Besar*. However, Gerakan refused to participate in any coalitions and the Alliance was able to form governments in the two states. In Kedah and Terengganu the Alliance won by reduced margins and in Perlis PAS made significant advances.

Even though, the Alliance still held the majority Federally and had captured 9 out of the 11 state Governments, it nevertheless felt that the election results were not only a great setback but as virtually threatening its survival.

Riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May 1969 which were followed by changes in the political system in the aftermath of National Operations Council (NOC) rule led by Tun Abdul Razak.

The 1969 election results and the subsequent riots left the Alliance in a shambles. The parties, especially UMNO had been in power so long that it considered itself permanent and indispensable, and attacks on the party or its leaders were considered as threatening the political system itself.

Malay discontent found expressions in groups within UMNO and among students, and centered on urging the Tunku to resign. The Tunku was blamed for not taking steps to eradicate Malay poverty, for conceding too many Chinese

demands, including those of the MCA, and, indirectly for allowing non-Malay parties to believe that it would be possible for them to come to power through the electoral process.<sup>8</sup>

By the year 1971, Tun Razak was solidly in control of UMNO and the party constitutional amendments had changed the power balance within UMNO in favour of the Supreme Executive Council.

Tun Razak as new Prime Minister and UMNO leader wanted UMNO policies to be more congruent with Malay aspirations, while he need not be constantly pressured by the demands of Malay extremists.

The MCA as a party had reached its lowest point after the 1969 elections following MCA's shocking defeat, the party announced that it would not participate in the cabinet because the Chinese community had rejected the party; however it reversed its position in the light of the Emergency.

The MCA amended its constitution in September 1970. Despite encouragement from Chinese associations and amendments to the party constitution which gave the President wider powers, the efforts to rejuvenate the MCA seemed stymied.

In January 1971, Tun Dr. Ismail (a former Deputy Prime Minister) warned that it would be better for UMNO to break with the MCA and the MIC if the two Alliance parties continued to be neither dead nor alive<sup>10</sup>

Tun Tan Siew Sin's initial reaction was one of anger. The MCA he said, was a target for extremist Malays on the one hand and chauvinist Chinese on the other.<sup>11</sup>

**Notes:**

- 1 Straits Times of 1965: 2 August, 6 August, 18 August, 30 August, 4 September, 8 September and 16 September.
- 2 Straits Times 16 September 1965.
- 3 Straits Times 2 August 1965.
- 4 "Malaysian 21 - man Talks Agenda," by Samad Mahadi 3 Sept 1965.
- 5 Vasil, The Malaysian General Elections of 1967. p 15 also op.cit p. 141: quote:
- 6 Dr. Mahathir Mohamad: Problems of Democratic Nation Building in Malaysia p. 14.
- 7 Straits Times 17 March 1969
- 8 Straits Times 17 April 1969
- 9 See, Vasil, The Malaysian General Elections of 1969 p. 15  
Quote:  
"The elections of 1969, which were followed by the May 13 riots, represented the culmination and the peak, of unbridled outbidding in the Malaysian political system. (But)...After the riots, the rules of the political game were altered, and the sensitive issues which were so amenable to outbidding were proscribed from the political market".
- 10 Straits Times (Malaysia) 18 January 1971.
- 11 Straits Times (Malaysia) 19 January 1971.

## CHAPTER 8

# MCA after May 13, 1969

### The MCA and National Front

The Chinese Unity Movement was launched in February 1971, and although the movement was not sponsored by the MCA, Tun Tan and some other MCA officials were actively involved in it. The movement, directed by a 10-men liaison committee, gathered the support of the English educated professionals and the Chinese educated teachers and businessmen, as well as popular Chinese support.

The popularity of the movement, and its style of mass rallies, soon alarmed both UMNO leaders and most of the MCA hierarchy, who grew increasingly worried about the MCA's lack of control over it. The movement also caused increasing dissension within the MCA and Tan Sri T.H.Tan resigned from the party's Central Working Committee in protest against the movement usurping MCA authority.

Under pressure, the liaison committee attempted to register the movement, but when Tun Tan objected and two of its founder members were arrested under the Sedition Act, the attempt at registration was dropped.

A number of the members later joined the MCA and added to the new blood campaign being activated in Perak, but the Unity Movement phase was dead.

The Perak based Task Force disagreed with the Unity Movement's rally approach because it offered no way of turning emotions and ideas into concrete action. Known as the Perak Task Force, and working with the MCA as an MCA-financed special or parallel organization, it quietly mobilised and organised grassroots support among the Chinese.

The success of the Task Force, organised by Dato Teh Siew Eng, led to similar bodies being set up in other states, and the reformation of the MCA seemed irrepressible, despite the grumbling of the MCA old guard.

The UMNO leaders also seemed satisfied with the Task Force approach as a means to get the MCA back on its feet. In December 1971, Tun Razak appointed Dr. Lim Keng Yaik a leader of the Perak Task Force, as Minister with Special Functions (New Villages).

However by mid- 1973, the reform movement had degenerated into a determined fight within the party between the *new bloods* and the *old guards*.

The events that followed worked against the Perak Task Force. Tan Sri Khaw Kai Boh who had backed them died; disillusionment and disenchantment over the Alliance coalitions in Penang and especially in Perak led to the

expulsion of two Task Force leaders from the MCA; the tone of some of the new leaders became increasingly strident and chauvinistic.

In the end probably convinced that there was a plan to remove him as MCA president, Tun Tan turned against the *new bloods*, and the Task Force group was outmaneuvered and ultimately forced out of the party.

Consequently, after several years of trying to reform the MCA in order to regain grassroots support and to create a new image, the result was an internal power struggle which split and further damaged the party and left the Chinese community as hopelessly disunited as ever. Although the MCA had survived many obituaries, the internal rifts, combined with the new Alliance coalition building strategy, seemed to relegate the MCA to the position of a rump party.

The May 13, 1969 incidents, had opened up a new political situation in the country, and there was a general feeling among the top UMNO leadership that the bargain struck in 1957 and the Alliance Party as constituted were inadequate for ensuring racial harmony. Soon after the riots, Tun Razak and a small group of close advisors explored ways and means to develop a new strategy for governing. Hence the idea of National Front was mooted. It was decided that it had been a mistake to have policies which fluctuated according to communal pressures and that what was pressingly needed was a clear long-term political and socio-economic policy for the nation.

Tan Sri Muhammad Ghazali bin Shafie, an intellect of his time's ideas, strongly penetrated the decision making process at that time. To quote Tan Sri Muhammad Ghazali:



*The politics of this country has been and must remain for the foreseeable future-native based ...It must be a native base which believes not in false compromises or in compulsion but in cooperation with all the other races in the country". 12*

The establishment of the National Consultative Council (NCC) was the first step in translating these ideas into action. The successes of the NCC and of the test case coalition government in Sarawak contributed to Tun Razak's decision to pursue a coalition party upon the return to parliamentary rule, in conjunction with the passing of the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971, and the proclamation of the *Rukun Negara*, the second Malaysia Plan and the New Economic Policy.

The coalition strategy served both to legitimise UMNO's approach and to reduce criticisms and outbidding by political opponents. Some other reasons were also mentioned for the creation of the National Front, that Tun Razak wanted to put his own stamp on Malaysia's political history, or that the National Front helped consolidate Tun Razak's power within UMNO. Tun Razak also noted that the National Front was not much different from the Alliance, only larger.<sup>13</sup> However, it has been suggested that the NF is different from the Alliance in that MCA cannot be blamed for many things now that there are other Chinese-based parties in the coalition and because of the acknowledged dominance of UMNO in the Government.

The 1972-74 period was one of turmoil for the MCA. Its problems began when the Party's rejuvenation efforts declined into a power struggle. The Alliance coalition agreements with Gerakan and PPP heightened the conflict to crisis proportions. In April 1972, a leading section of the Perak MCA strongly opposed the coalition with PPP. This

led to the expulsion of two Perak MCA Task Force leaders, and an escalating conflict that eventually resulted in the expulsion or resignation of most of the *new bloods*. During the same period, the MCA reportedly engaged in a series of merger talks with the DAP, Gerakan and the PPP, in an effort to gain more support from the Chinese community and to strengthen its position in the Alliance<sup>14</sup>. However, no agreements were reached.

As plans for a National Front developed, the MCA became increasingly alarmed that its position might be weakened in any new arrangement. In late 1973 the MCA voiced its apprehensions, saying that the party could not accept a compromise on the number of seats for the MCA. While many MCA members were reluctant to cooperate with the new coalition partners, the main obstacle concerned the distribution of electoral seats.

On 8 April 1974, the President of the MCA and Minister of Finance Tun Tan Siew Sin, just recovering from a serious operation announced that he was retiring. The new acting President Datuk Lee San Choon inherited the MCA's political dilemma.

On 17 April 1974 the MCA Central Committee issued a policy statement declaring that it agreed with the National Front concept and was willing to enter into serious discussion with the other parties, so long as by being in the NF, the MCA would not lose its identity as the vehicle for the channeling of the political aspirations of the Chinese.

With the tone set by the policy statement and Datuk Hussein Onn's assurance that the MCA would not be disadvantaged, the MCA leadership moved cautiously to bring around the rank and file gradually to affirm the MCA's participation in the National Front.

**Notes:**

- 12 Straits Times (M) 6 March, 14 September, 22 September.
- 13 Pelopor (UMNO Publication) No. 3 (1975) pp 15-16.
- 14 Straits Times (Malaysia) 11 July 1972 Editorial on the secret MCA-DAP talks.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# Cultural Heritage and Vision for the future

**W**ithin the ethnic Chinese community, there are several types of Chinese organisations and groups which have specific purposes and objectives and a strong ethnic orientation in varying degrees.

The most important organisations are the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Chinese Guilds and Associations, the Chinese Assembly Halls, the United Chinese School Teacher's Association (UCSTA) and the All-Malaya Chinese Schools Management Association (AMCSMA).

The Chamber of Commerce probably has the most specific interests although their support for Chinese tradition and culture is still strong. Often in the past and recently, there has been an alignment with the MCA and considerable

overlapping of office holders. This has been especially useful to the MCA where fund raising is concerned.

During the discussion on the terms of Independence in 1957, the Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations broke with the MCA, and sent their own delegation to London, asking for better citizenship provisions, equal rights for citizens and multi-lingualism. However their representations had no effect. After 1957 their demands continued, and helped to bring about the split in the MCA that occurred in 1959. The UCSTA and AMCSMA also joined them in their efforts. The same groups were also active in putting forward the Chinese point of view between 1965-67, in preparation for the decision on language policy due to be taken by 1967. After 1969 the focus shifted somewhat, and when political discussion was resumed in 1971 the UCSTA and the AMCSMA concentrated on the issues of defending the existence of Chinese primary schools and expanding the numbers of independent Chinese secondary schools. In their submission to the Ministerial Committee set up in 1974 to review the future of education policy, the two groups and the MCA attempted to cooperate but without much success.

The intransigence, conflict and vacillating stance taken by Chinese Guilds and Associations (on the original stand taken by the MCA) on matters related to culture and education since *Merdeka* until recently when the *Merdeka* University issue was dropped is well documented and is part of history.

However, since Dr. Ling took over the MCA leadership, he has successfully temporised such conflict in the Chinese community, by taking control of the dissent and problems caused by Chinese Guilds and Associations in the country.

This he has done, firstly by having some kind of direct access to and understanding between himself and the Chinese Guilds and Associations. Secondly, there is now substantial overlap of office bearers in the MCA and Chinese Guilds and Associations. Thirdly, MCA Youth has taken a number of radical stands on issues and problems related to ethnic Chinese culture, and of education language. However, the way such issues and matters have been articulated and pursued by the MCA Youth wing has been well contained and moulded by the tact of Dr. Ling's leadership style.

Culture and education are often of substantial concern to ethnic Chinese. Before *Merdeka* the promotion of Chinese education and cultural activities was not problematic since at that time a *laissez faire* environment prevailed. The British practiced a liberal attitude towards the cultural needs and aspirations of the ethnic Chinese. However, since *Merdeka*, there have been substantial changes in the field of education and culture that has made deep inroads into the lives of ethnic Chinese. First among these is the introduction of the National Education Policy that actively promoted *Bahasa Melayu* both as the national and the official language.

The National Education Policy confined the teaching and learning of the Chinese language within the national education system to the primary level. The surviving handful of Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (ICSS) only provides limited avenues for Secondary Chinese education and only a small number of students succeed in pursuing tertiary Chinese education outside Malaysia.

Since language and literature have been identified as an important conduit for the propagation of culture, most young Malaysian ethnic Chinese, particularly those of the

post-*Merdeka* generation, do not have sufficient proficiency in the Chinese language to understand and appreciate the finer points of Chinese culture, let alone promote it.

The magnitude of the problem is acute because almost seventy percent of the Chinese population today belongs to the post-*Merdeka* generation who are below thirty years of age. The younger generation of Malaysian Chinese is not in a position to promote or sustain the same cultural heritage and values as their forefathers. Hence it has been suggested that indigenous Chinese culture and values cannot be expected to grow within the Malaysian environment.

This situation has been exacerbated in the cultural field where there have been no active measures to promote the continued growth of Chinese cultural activities and practice. In fact it has been shown that various constraints were imposed to the extent that the Chinese community found its cultural activities seriously hampered. During the two decades of implementation of the NEP the cultural freedom of ethnic Chinese has been progressively curtailed in order to give prominence to essentially Malay - Muslim based culture.

Generally, the ethnic Malaysian Chinese expect greater freedom in the pursuit of cultural activities. For those who have a strong Chinese background, the preservation of Chinese culture in their lifestyle is of great significance. They feel more threatened about cultural erosion than the younger generations.

From the ethnic Chinese standpoint, a common system of values and perceptions toward their culture must be established, although it has been conceded that, by virtue of the fact that the Chinese community is made up of members with diverse backgrounds to adhere strictly to an

indigenous Chinese culture is extremely difficult. While most Chinese tend to become emotional when any of these customs or cultural elements are encroached upon, the younger generation, by their own choice (or ignorance) have not been concerned over the need to sustain their own cultural heritage.

Whilst there is no common perception as to the acceptable degree of preservation of culture, most Malaysian Chinese do, however, want a National Cultural Policy that gives equal opportunity in the process of nurturing and evolving a cosmopolitan flavor of national culture as against attempts to define and impose cultural beliefs and practices by official pronouncement.

Dr. Ling Liong Sik has succinctly summed up the *Chinese dilemma* with regard to the erosion of the cultural heritage of the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, via alternative action plans for the MCA and the Chinese community to assess and to arrest this on-going erosion of cultural heritage of the community.<sup>1</sup>

*Culture is another area in which inappropriate policies can have a destabilizing effect on socio-economic development.*

Dr. Ling has proposed new cultural strategies to generate national unity for the post 1990 period. Among other things, it has been suggested that any official guidelines adopted by the Government for cultural development must be derived from proper consultation and general discussion amongst the various communities.

At the same time, all political parties and the civil service implementing policies must respect the following principles derived from the provisions of the constitution and Rukun



Negara so that they can continue to form the basis of cultural and religious development in the country:

*The principle of cultural and religious equality and democracy in which all members of the society "are free to practice and profess their own religious, customs and cultures. (Rukun Negara p. 9 para 4)*

*the principle of a liberal and tolerant approach towards the rich and diverse cultures so that the country's diversity can be an asset and a source of strength.*

*the principle of non-discriminatory official policies in financial and other aspects so that the different cultures and religions of all the ethnic groups can be nurtured without exception.*

To conclude, it has been suggested that, it is timely for the Chinese community to take stock of their present state of affairs and self-determine their future goals, in so far as the cultural heritage of the ethnic Chinese is concerned.

As Malaysia approaches the mid-point of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, it is imperative that Malaysian Chinese adopt a clear vision with regard to Chinese education and culture as a common platform for the Chinese people. This is important, not only for bringing about a more cohesive community but, more importantly, for consolidating Chinese political strength.<sup>2</sup>

### Notes:

- 1 The Malaysian Unity Plan our vision beyond 1990. A key note address by Dr. Ling Liong Sik, President of MCA.
- 2 The Future of Malaysian Chinese, David Chua: The Chinese Education and Cultural Vision: pp 57-84.

## CHAPTER 10

# The New Chinese Challenges

**I**t is often said that the Malaysian Chinese community today is at crossroads. Dr. Ling has on many occasions emphasised the pressing need for the community to take stock of its position in Malaysian society and determine the future directions it should take to enable the second largest ethnic community to play a more meaningful and effective role in nation-building.

Now is the time to determine how the community should stand as a cohesive social unit and political group in mastering its own political future.

The aftermath of May 1969 saw the steady decline and erosion of the political power of the Chinese Community. Following the National Operations Council (NOC) rule, the ground rules of the political process in the country were changed. As a pre-condition for a return to parliamentary democracy, the late Tun Razak insisted that there must be a

two thirds majority support for the Constitution Amendment Bill 1971, which changed the character of Malaysian politics. Thereafter, there is also evidence to support the view that a handful of Tun Razak's advisors, including Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, a former Minister and the visionary of "*Rukun Negara*", concurred, confided and masterminded the entire political philosophy and policies of the nation in the aftermath of May 13 1969 and NOC rule.

That event in history had and still has strong implications for the political future of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia and this can be underlined on the following basis:-

The New Economic Policy (1971-1990), the vigorous implementation of the Education Policy, the promulgation of "*Rukun Negara*" and the introduction of the dichotomy of Bumiputras and non-Bumiputras were for the first time widely emphasised in all spheres of policy formulation and implementation.

The implication of these for ethnic Chinese rights and civil rights is well propounded by Dr. Ling Liong Sik.<sup>2</sup>

*..... the attainment or achievement of equal rights and opportunities must be the ultimate objective of all citizens of this country. This is based on the premise that all men are equal. It is reflected in our legal system, it is reflected in our religious system and it should be reflected in all other systems, e.g. education, political, constitutional and socio-economic. This is the challenge facing us today for the future.*

For all Malaysians to enjoy equal opportunities and rights in the future, certain fundamental principles must be established to guide future leaders of the country.

There must be immediate and well-meaning recognition of the fact that the diversity in race, culture and religion has contributed and will continue to contribute positively to the making of a great Malaysia. It has been further reiterated that these factors should not inhibit the development of Malaysian unity and identity.

Any attempt or tendency to impose or create a unilateral concept of national unity and culture will have adverse consequences for our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society.

The MCA under the leadership of Dr. Ling has also recognised the new reality that while the real Malaysian constitutional rights are well entrenched, it is ultimately up to the Chinese community to monitor and ensure that these constitutional rights are not eroded or deprived further.

Only enlightened Chinese political consciousness and awareness will ensure that the MCA would be able to effectively represent their rights and interests. Dr. Ling has made the point that insofar as he is the MCA leader, his leadership has offered the indemnity and guarantees that, MCA is fully conscious and aware of the legitimate rights and interests of the Malaysian Chinese and will push forward to protect these rights and strive to ensure that they will not be eroded from now on.

As Dr. Ling narrates, for a long time, the MCA has been a favourite punching bag of the community. The many prolonged crises that MCA has undergone have not helped. During such crisis times, the MCA was the butt of many a cocktail joke. But the MCA is now a born-again MCA, rejuvenated with new vision, new programmes of action and a new set of basic principles and fundamental commitments.

It has come to be believed by the incumbent MCA leader that there is an urgent and ambitious need to develop a proud tradition of political service among ethnic Chinese.

For too long, many Malaysian Chinese have viewed politics as a dirty game. Politics, per se is not dirty. Perhaps, individual players may be dirty. But, for the Chinese community to successfully compete in the political arena, it must be able to bring to the arena, good men and women who are prepared to fight and sacrifice for the community and the nation.

It is of no use shouting slogans on the side-lines. The Chinese community has to participate in the political process themselves if they want a core of good people to come to the fore to provide dedicated service and sincere leadership.

Since taking over the leadership of the party in 1986, Dr. Ling Liong Sik has successfully reformed the MCA and in the process, restored basic decency and respect to political life, especially within the Chinese community.

To do this, the MCA has long discarded its historically acquired *towkay image*. Today, the MCA practices an *open door* policy towards recruitment of new members. The MCA is genuinely more representative of the Chinese Community than it was in the past. The membership structure since 1988 has steadily changed to reflect a composition of rubber tappers, fisherman, farmers, hawkers and shopkeepers, businessmen whilst others include salesman, teachers, housewives and professionals.

The MCA has called for a new morality in politics and government service. Free of corruption, free of bureaucratic bottlenecks and regulations. The party leadership has also

emphasised on the need to have the right frame of mind among members and non-members, to speak out against injustices and to what is right and what is wrong.

It has also been brought into sharp focus that, within the *Barisan Nasional*, no one component party has two-thirds majority of Parliamentary seats. The *Barisan* needs the support of all ethnic groups and component parties if it needs to exercise the two-thirds majority it collectively holds. The *Barisan* is also committed to power-sharing and fair play.

What has been seen as the new challenge faced by the Chinese community is to strengthen the bargaining power of the MCA within the *Barisan* system.

Since, Malaysians believe and practise parliamentary democracy, the will of the people is supreme. The MCA leadership without hesitation subscribes to this basic democratic principle. Political leadership and the community's leadership must be accountable to the people and the leadership must be continually justified. The party's leadership has taken note of the fact that today's voters are increasingly sophisticated and are continuously becoming politically mature.

To meet this rising challenge and expectations, the party President, Dr. Ling, has reminded MCA rank and file and top echelon leaders on the vital need for the MCA to demonstrate that as a representative party, the leaders are worthy of the people's continued support. The MCA during his tenure of leadership has proved itself to be capable of performing and producing results. The approach has been to be result-oriented and the party has adopted a new strategy to deliver the goods.

Hence, increasingly, the MCA has selected representatives who have proper social vision, a commitment to a cause and to basic principles, a sense of purpose and a dedication to serve. Dr. Ling has often outlined the need to have people who are brave enough to fight injustices, people who are concerned enough to serve on the ground, people who are committed enough to endure a long, hard political struggle. A struggle to better the position of the community. To ensure that MP's elected by the voters can be effective spokesman of the community, much effort has been placed on research and planning.

Strategic situation and statistical analysis and viable position papers have been undertaken, which have been useful to initiate policy changes and make adjustments whenever a need there has been to do so.

The kind of pro-active leadership that has been brought about at party and Chinese community level leadership has been significant. For many years, the Chinese community has been contented with ad-hoc and piece-meal adjustments to policies which affect them. It has been observed, that in the past the MCA and ethnic Chinese often reacted when issues and problems arose. When the MCA scored a point or removed an irritant, the MCA was applauded to be a champion of the community. When the party could not deliver, the MCA leaders were cursed. But the party leader has conceded that piecemeal steps are not sufficient to arrest the erosion of Chinese political and civil rights positions.

All these measures alone would not and cannot deliver the ethnic Chinese Community from its present dilemma.

Particularly in the area of political representation, Dr.Ling has reiterated the acute need to study the implication of the

rural-urban weightage in the delimitation of constituencies. The structural imbalance that strikes at the root of adequate political representation for Chinese voters, is a long-standing political problem faced by the Chinese Community.

The fact that Malaysian Chinese are almost all urban dwellers and therefore are unevenly distributed has meant a *de facto* dilution of Chinese votes. The development of this dilution of power is as follows: in 1955, there was a provision that no constituency should differ by 50% in size. In 1957, it was amended such that no constituency should differ by 15% in size from the average size constituency. In 1962, the position reverted to the 1955 position. In 1973, there was a complete removal of limitations. This meant that the Election Commission's discretion is absolute, and it is possible to have, as evidenced in the last General Election, a situation whereby there was an urban constituency of 90,000 voters and a rural area of 9000 voters a disparity of ten times.

To sum up, in so far as matters related to ethnic Chinese political and civil rights are concerned, the highest policy making body in Malaysia is the Cabinet and also it has been brought home to the Chinese voters to be conversant with the fact that, Yang Di Pertuan Agong acts in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet, there is no other alternative but for the community to be effectively represented at Cabinet level.

That kind of political representation will be crucial, in the way the future of the ethnic Chinese is determined. It is for the community to decide on the kind of political support to be given in the proper direction, which in turn will determine their political destiny.



**Notes:**

- 1 See : the search for a new formula. After 13 May 1969, there was a general feeling among the top UMNO leadership that the "bargain" struck in 1957 and the Alliance Party as constituted was inadequate for ensuring racial harmony. P.177 (Diane M. Mauzy) Quote:

Tan Sri Muhammad Ghazali bin Shafie wrote : ..." the politics in this country has been and must remain for the foreseeable future, native - based.....

- 2 "Equal Rights - Equal Opportunities" - keynote address by Dr. Ling Liong Sik at Political Seminar on 2nd April 1986. See also speech made on 29/3/1986 at MCA Muar Division political Seminar. Also "Role of MCA elected Representatives" - made at MCA HQ on 11th April 1986.

## CHAPTER 11

# Education and Development of Human Resources

**I**t was recently observed by MCA intellectuals that the ethnic Chinese community should no longer harp on the frustrations and short-comings of the New Economic Policy (1971-1990). Instead, it was about time the community applied a more positive attitude harnessing and concentrating its efforts towards securing a better future for ethnic Chinese and all Malaysians.

To over look and forget how the National Economic Policy (NEP) has affected the lives of a generation of fellow Malaysians spanning a time frame of two decades (1971-1990) is, however, impossible. Nevertheless, it is conceded that the Government during this era has successfully provided substantial educational and human resources development opportunities to many Malaysians with a

strong bias towards the *Bumiputra* community based on the premise of positive discrimination.

Nevertheless, education has remained the most sticky and controversial and problematic political issue in this country since *Merdeka*. The political nature of the problem manifested itself with regard to the language controversy and the acute competition for places in local tertiary institutions of learning.

The political will of the Government to enhance and improve the quality of the nation's human resources capital is well demonstrated by the rapid expansion of tertiary educational opportunities<sup>1</sup>

In 1980, there was a total enrollment of 36,800 at public institutions of higher learning. This increased to 70,000 by 1985, representing an increase of 90%. Local private institutions had an enrollment in certificate and diploma level education of 10,060 in 1980. This rapidly expanded to 31,980 in 1985 representing an increase of 217%.

There has also been a rapid expansion in recent years of twinning programmes for degree courses. As at 1985, if students studying overseas are included, there was a total enrollment of 136,277 compared to 76,595 in 1980 a total increase of 78%.

Dr. Ling Liong Sik's master strategy to resolve this pressing issue has been categorised in a four fold manner that is being carried out in a simultaneous and proactive way:-

#### No. 1

The focus at state policy making level is aimed at attempting to influence the Prime Minister and the

Government machinery to formulate just and fair policies that are moulded by taking into account the aspirations and fears of all ethnic groups particularly insofar as the ethnic Chinese community is concerned.

As a major plank in this direction on matters related to the ethnic Chinese language and the competence of ethnic Chinese students in the study of Bahasa Malaysia, Dr. Ling has made resilient, long-term plans towards achieving success.

On matters related to the allocation of places for students at local tertiary institutions of learning, the Chinese community and its leaders, particularly from the MCA have shown greater intellectual and political awareness and articulation in contrast to other ethnic leaders in putting forward the case for deserving ethnic Chinese students.

Dr. Ling in a keynote address on the Malaysia Unity Plan: our vision beyond 1990 spoke on the above mentioned strategy<sup>2</sup>.

*...Another important part of the MUP deals with social development, in particular access to education and public education policy. This is an issue that is fraught with deep implications for it reaches into the life of every Malaysian home. It is also an issue that affects our young people in whose hands the future of the country lies. If the post 1990 plan handles it wisely, education can be the cement that glues together the nation, if not wisely it can be the single most important factor bringing about discord, disunity and national weakness.*

The incumbent MCA President has also pointed out that the

MUP's plan for education for the post-NEP period is contained in fifteen major recommendations. Future development is premised on a strategy of accelerated educational growth in which no particular group would experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation.

It is observed that the said strategy would emphasize and increase the level of participation of all Malaysians not on the basis of ethnicity but on merit and need. Besides these new strategies and targets, the MUP also advocates enlightened and fair-minded policies towards the development of mother-tongue education (the teaching of mother-tongue languages including Chinese, Tamil, Iban, Kadazan and those of other non-Malay groups) and the welfare of students from non-Bahasa Malaysia medium schools<sup>3</sup>.

## No. 2

The second thrust has been to find ways and means to build self-help projects mooted and carried out by the party machinery itself via educational trust instruments such as the Tunku Abdul Rahman College, Kojadi, Langkawi Project and others.

The Tunku Abdul Rahman College, when fully completed by the year 2000 will provide 16,000 places annually for aspiring Malaysians seeking higher educational opportunities. The college was set-up to complement and supplement the efforts of government in providing opportunities for higher education, especially to those many thousand qualified secondary school leavers who are not able to enter local institutions of higher learning. In 1980 the student population of the college was only 6772. It is expected to reach 16,000 by 2000. It is estimated that one out of every two Chinese post-secondary school students has

passed through the gates of TAR College. That is to say, that almost every Chinese family has had some kind of direct connection with TAR College at some point of time since 1980.

Critics from both inside MCA and outside, particularly the opposition politicians; continue to argue that the MCA is politically weak and impotent because MCA leaders are unable to get large allocations of money from the Government for Chinese education. They also question whether the TAR College is given on par recognition like MARA and other local universities by the Government.

From both the standpoint of politics, defined as a mean to gain power only and from the standpoint of providing maximum educational opportunities for ethnic Chinese youths, the DAP argument is naive and limited. By exhorting the MCA leaders to gain more educational concessions for the Chinese and by ridiculing MCA efforts to provide educational opportunities to ethnic Chinese youth through its own self help projects such as TAR and Langkawi Project and others, the DAP has gone into a battle of ethnic and racist outbidding against the MCA and UMNO. This, without having a professed plan either to gain political power or solve the problems faced by ethnic Chinese students who are in dire need of such opportunities.

Since its inception, the DAP has had no plans to gain political power as a ruling political party, being satisfied with playing a limited role as opposition critic at State Assemblies and Parliament. Only recently, the Tanjung II and Tanjung III projects were put forward, whereby DAP has openly admitted its professed plan to wrest control of the state of Penang from Gerakan.

By playing a limited role in Malaysian politics, the DAP has not been successful in any way in influencing the formulation of public education policies.

For nearly two decades, the DAP has attempted to project itself as a more radical party than MCA to urban working class ethnic Chinese groups by exhorting the MCA to get more concessions for the Chinese in language and educational matters. It has also, on different occasions, ridiculed MCA's stand on ethnic educational language matters such as the Merdeka University and the 1960 Education Act.

The greatest irony of it all is that for nearly two decades, the DAP had no plans to gain power as an alternative to UMNO nor did the party ever have a plan to share power with UMNO (as in the Alliance/BN by the MCA). DAP leaders have been contended to remain as critics at the Dewan Rakyat and at State Assembly sittings. It was only recently, that the DAP on the basis of the Gagasan Rakyat offered itself to the electorate with a view to share power with S46 and PAS as an alternative government to Barisan Nasional in the 1990 elections. The DAP failed to achieve this discreet cooperation and this marriage of political convenience within the Gagasan Rakyat continues.

The above reinforces Dr. Ling Liong Sik's contention that since its formation, the DAP in the context of Malaysian politics had no purpose or plans to play tangible role in policy formulation in Malaysia. This argument is illustrated with regard to DAP's stand on the language controversy and the formulation of educational policy, and its implementation under the NEP for the two decades from 1971-1990.

Hence the DAP, because of the kind of political stand it has taken on educational policy, language and ethnic Chinese

cultural issues in the process of nation building from the mid 1960's has undermined its own credibility. How? by only playing a limited role in politics, without having plans to gain power or access to the seat of policy formulation i.e. the Cabinet and Executive Council respectively. Such a limited opposition role as played by the DAP has not benefited the party nor has it benefited the ethnic Chinese community.

It is suggested that in so far as educational opportunities for ethnic Chinese youths and the formulation and implementation of the public education policy is concerned, DAP's own stand and the party's criticism of Dr. Ling and the MCA is both very shallow and sloppy. Much of DAP criticism of MCA's efforts to provide educational opportunities to ethnic Chinese Youths through self-help projects such as the TAR College and Langkawi Project is either incorrect or based upon misinterpretation.

The bulk of ethnic Chinese students who are academically competent but denied entry into local universities and colleges cannot wait for time to pass. It would be a crucial waste of human resources if their intelligence, talents and skills were not pushed in the right direction for full exploitation of their potential. Rather than merely criticizing the educational policy and standing by the sidelines, Dr. Ling and his colleagues in MCA have attempted to develop self-help projects whereby the financial resources and energies of the community can provide more funds either as loans or scholarships to ethnic Chinese students who by choice or due to circumstances, decide to go overseas for study.

Therefore MCA's attempts to embark on ambitious self-help education projects such as TAR, Langkawi Project and KOJADI are based on the realities of Malaysian politics. Hence education and opportunities for learning at tertiary



centres of learning are no longer highly explosive politicised issues.

Perhaps, MCA critics such as DAP and others have overlooked the fact that the political sting that was attached to the portfolio of the Minister of Education was removed when Anwar Ibrahim left the Education Portfolio and the Ministry's name was changed to that of Kementerian Pendidikan. In addition to this, the Malaysia Incorporated concept and privatisation policies of the state have removed governmental monopoly and bias toward educational issues. A number of private colleges and other twinning programs have also mushroomed in Kuala Lumpur, making the city a focal point for educational training and learning both for Malaysian youths and students from other developing countries on the basis of south-south cooperation.

DAP's stand on education policy appears to be outdated and less progressive. The dynamism shown by Dr. Ling's efforts to create maximum educational opportunities for ethnic Chinese youths either through (i) governmental effort, (ii) MCA-directed self-help projects or (iii) indirect efforts such as fund raising, all go to show the real concern the MCA leader has for the future progress of the community through education.

### No. 3

The third thrust of the MCA's educational projects touches upon a number of areas. This was spelled out as "a national project to uplift the standard of education in all the Chinese primary schools located in new villages and other less developed areas".

Since the establishment of the first Chinese school in the country, Chinese primary schools have come a long way.

Both in terms of physical and mental achievements within the school and among students as well as in the context of its role within the national education system.

These schools have since earned a rightful place in the national education system. Nevertheless it has been sadly noted that the poor conditions in many of the new village schools is not conducive for educational performance and success. On the contrary, such an environment in these schools often discourages the parents from sending their children there.

The poor performance of students from such schools in the UPSR exams provides the acid test for determining their future educational achievement potential at secondary schools. For example, only 39 out of the 364 Chinese primary schools located in new villages managed to attain a 50 percent passing rate in Bahasa Malaysia (Tulisan) in the UPSR in 1992. Their competence and agility in Chinese and English language are also inferior compared to students from urban Chinese schools.

Dr. Ling Liong Sik has been extremely conscientious about the educational achievement of ethnic Chinese primary school students.

The old adage that "we may be poor, but our children should not be in want of education" reflects the importance attached to education in the community.

The ten point guideline formulated by Dr. Ling and his officers at the MCA HQ in the confidence that the guideline would be useful to parents in guiding their children to unleash their full potential are applicable to the educational progress and achievement of all strata of Malaysians and need not be confined to ethnic Chinese alone.

The ten points are summarized as follows:

- (i) showing more interest in a child's school work;
- (ii) ensuring a conducive learning environment at home;
- (iii) knowing about peer-group pressure;
- (iv) encouraging the reading habit;
- (v) facilitate access to library and reference materials;
- (vi) general moral and logistics support;
- (vii) seeking help from friends and relatives;
- (viii) concerned about general mental developments;
- (ix) constant interaction with the child's teachers;
- (x) encouraging the child to take up a healthy sport.

Education should and must be viewed as a long term investment. The long-term effort is to focus on New Villages and Chinese primary schools in these villages as potential centres to be moulded on the pattern of role model students who perform with distinctions in urban schools.

The efforts to set up a "comprehensive Resource Centre in each and every Chinese primary school in the new villages and other less developed areas" is poised to provide long-term benefits towards upgrading of ethnic Chinese students from rural areas.

#### No. 4

The fourth dimension of Dr. Ling's master strategy to upgrade and provide maximum educational opportunities to ethnic Chinese youths and students is the attempt to raise funds for such educational activities.

The Langkawi project has been described as a well-planned move to strengthen the educational basis of the children in rural areas. The efforts have captured the interests and energies of many Malaysians including multi-national corporations.

The Langkawi Project's primary aim is to help improve the educational achievements of children from the rural and urban poor, irrespective of race. The fundraising achieved its RM20 million target a few months ago.

The Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) College fundraising project was also a formidable accomplishment since a sum of RM30 million was collected in just one year.

#### **No. 5**

The fifth point of the strategy has been the MCA's attempt to break into the "exclusive domain" of the influential Chinese educationists' movement, who are historically often contended as the party's traditional foe.

Recently, however, the party appears to have made peace with the Chinese educationists' movement. Within the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia, this latest development is well received and is seen as a significant breakthrough for Dr. Ling's well disciplined party. Confrontation has given way to consensus and this has attracted substantial support and publicity in the vernacular media.

Dong Jiao Zong is the umbrella term used to refer to the Dong Zong (United Chinese School Committee's Association) and the Jiao Zong (United Chinese School Teacher's Association) two groups that have traditionally played a leading role in articulating and mobilising Chinese public opinion in the area of education and culture.

Not to be taken lightly, Dong Jiao Zong represents a segment of Malaysian Chinese intelligentsia and literary units that has emerged as a powerful pressure group within the ethnic Chinese community. The kind of role the movement plays particularly during elections could be of significant impact in the way votes are cast either for MCA candidates or opposition candidates.

These Chinese educationists have often and traditionally criticised and berated the MCA for not using their influence to secure more assistance for Chinese education from the Government. But Dr. Ling's ability to influence and temporise this group to work together with MCA for the betterment of the ethnic Chinese community is a landmark victory for the MCA leader. Dr Ling now had made it clear that he is genuinely concerned with and is trying to mobilise Chinese political unity in Malaysia.

The election of Ong Chiow Chuen, an MCA member from Negeri Sembilan, who had defeated veteran Chinese educationist Loot Ting Yee for the leadership of the United Chinese School Teachers Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM) marks a new era in the relationship between MCA and Chinese educationists.

It is public knowledge within the ethnic Chinese community that, for many years, both associations held views and objectives that differed from those of Chinese-based political parties of the Barisan Nasional coalition. The election of Ong surprised many ethnic Chinese.

MCA grassroots members also make up 80 percent of boards of governors' members in Chinese schools and they could replace these leaders and probably adopt a more constructive and positive approach in dealing with Chinese education and related issues.

Some political observers see the election of a moderate leader of the educationist movement as another of Dr. Ling's shrewd moves to transform this sphere of negative force into a positive one. This is in line with the synchronisation of MCA's aspirations with those of the Chinese community's, particularly on issues related to education.

Dr. Ling's message when launching the Chinese Independent Schools funds in Seremban, made it clear to the ethnic Chinese citizens that the need for producing positive and optimistic Malaysians who are able to actualise the many targets of Vision 2020 was the current focus of MCA and Barisan Nasional. Hence the message to the 60 independent secondary schools was that they must move with the times and actively participate in the nation's mainstream activities so as to play a constructive role in the creation of a united Malaysian nation.

At the time of writing, the MCA appears to have reached its target of raising RM6 million to help Chinese independent schools.

The incumbent MCA leader's ability to cross barriers and foster good relations with various Chinese community associations augers well. In the process, unity and consensus have become the ultimate ideals for Dr. Ling for a community which for a long time in Malaysian history never took a united and cohesive stand on political and educational problems and issues. This is a new development.

#### **Notes:**

- 1 The Malaysian challenges in the 1990's strategies for Growth and Development MCA (1990); pp. 61-117: Chua Jui Meng.
- 2 The Malaysian Unity Plan: Our vision beyond 1990. A keynote address by Dr. Ling Liong Sik President of MCA.

## CHAPTER 12

# The lowest point in UMNO history and Dr. Ling holds the National Front Fort

**O**n February 4 1988, the Kuala Lumpur High Court declared UMNO an unlawful society following the dismissal of a suit against UMNO brought by eleven members.

The court declared that the party had been an unlawful society when its 38th general assembly and election took

place on April 24 1987. All of UNMO's assets were subsequently turned over to the official Assignee.

In February 1988, Former UMNO leaders, including Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, the Mentris Besar and Chief Ministers and former UMNO Supreme Council members submitted an application to register a party called UMNO 88, a day after another group tried to register UMNO Malaysia.

The Registrar of Societies however rejected both the applications as the old UMNO yet to be deregistered. This was followed by a new UMNO Committee submitting a fresh application to the Registrar of Societies. Dr. Mahathir meanwhile made it clear that the Government would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to resolve the problems faced by UMNO.

On February 16 1988, MCA President Dr.Ling Liong Sik became the first non-UMNO acting chairman of the Barisan Nasional which admitted a new member, the UMNO Baru, into the Barisan Nasional fold.

Dr. Mahathir thereafter announced a new party, Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu (Baru) or United Malays National Organisation. This was followed by a statement made by UMNO Secretary-General, Mohamed Rahmat, on January 24 1992, confirming that the new UMNO had prepared all the necessary documents for claiming the assets of the old UMNO and would hand then over to the official Assignee.

By this time, the UMNO headquarters had received 700,000 letters certifying that the signa tories were members of the old UMNO and the figure was substantial enough to support the party's claim to the assets.



On August 3 1993, a special bill was tabled in Parliament, with a view to amend the Societies Act 1966 to facilitate the transfer of assets and liabilities of a society whose registration had been cancelled to that of the new society.

A recent announcement by the Law Minister on July 24 1994, settled once and for all, the issue of assets of the old UMNO which was deregistered in 1988, since a proper claim had been made to the court by the official Assignee to transfer these assets to the new UMNO. In other words, the de facto members and lawful assets and liabilities of the old UMNO no longer legally exist except in the body and form of the new UMNO.

This episode in UMNO and Barisan Nasional history has important legal, constitutional and political implications. This is because, not only has the new UMNO successfully acquired the 'de jure' and 'de facto' status of the old UMNO in terms of membership, assets and liabilities, but more significantly, UMNO Baru has reestablished its original political status quo and remains a party to be reckoned with in the context of the nation's political processes.

Nevertheless MCA intellectuals continue to claim that the Chinese political dilemma is real and self-suffocating under the onslaught of UMNO dominance and even arrogance.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a steady political decline in the influence of the Malaysian Chinese in the overall scheme of things, i.e., in term of percentage of votes cast in support of MCA candidates, seats won in respective parliamentary and state assembly elections. It is also suggested that, ethnic Chinese community were most politically active and vocal during the tenure of Tunku Abdul Rahman's premiership, and that ethnic Chinese community lost interest in politics in the aftermath of the May 13 1969 tragedy.

Even though the Chinese Unity Movement was launched during the premiership of Tun Abdul Razak, and his visit to Communist China boosted the election performance of the newly formed Barisan Nasional in the 1974 General Elections, it is never the less noted that Chinese political unity suffered its severest loss in this immediate post 1969 era.

MCA political commentators see the extension of the political dilemma facing the Chinese community in the community's response to Malay domination in Malaysian politics in general and UMNO domination in particular.<sup>2</sup> It has been asserted that, while the Chinese continue to bicker and remain politically and socially incohesive and disunited, UMNO has shown remarkable political sophistication in maintaining its support among the Malays.

One final point with regard to the erosion and steady decline of the political agility of the ethnic Chinese is with regards to the community's total inability to choose, or to have any kind of positive representative say in the choice of the Prime Minister of the nation.

It is claimed by the same MCA insiders that unless some fundamental changes come about, the manner in which the Prime Minister of the nation is chosen will remain as the monopoly of the 1600 strong UMNO General Assembly triennially. Even though the Chinese participate in the Barisan Nasional through MCA, Gerakan, SUPP, and SNAP, only UMNO decides who is going to be the Prime Minister of the country.<sup>3</sup>

While these political observations of The MCA think tank continue to stand, inherently there is a marked missing point in such a train of political thought among MCA intellectuals.

The personality of Dr. Ling Liong Sik and his rise as a resilient leader of the ethnic Chinese community albeit as the president of MCA (since Gerakan also has a large ethnic Chinese following) is of important historical and political significance.

Firstly, Dr. Ling Liong Sik is the only MCA President, who is not from or in anyway connected to the Tunku Abdul Rahman era, and his ascendance in Malaysian politics has taken place at a time when UMNO itself has made a clean break from the Tunku's era.

The political philosophy of the Tunku and his political spirit and personality so well captured and superimposed onto the 1957 Merdeka constitution has been radically changed and altered. Altered both in terms of political ideologue and legalism by a totally different kind of thought, spirit, and action by Tunku's successors from the time of late Tun Abdul Razak until now. Therefore the old barometer used to gauge the political activism of the ethnic Chinese, from the perspective of pre 1969 and post 1969 as observed by MCA insiders is not realistic.

Secondly and even more significant than Dr. Ling's mere political personality as observed in point one above, it can be observed that, in so far as Dr. Ling's political leadership of the ethnic Chinese community is concerned, there is no distinguishable communication generation gap in his style and model of leadership. This is evidenced from the fact that from his ascendance as MCA President in 1986 until now, Dr. Ling has endeavored to keep in close touch both with the Chinese old guard who are from the Merdeka generation and with the post Merdeka generation of ethnic Chinese who attained adulthood during the period of the New Economic Policy (1971-1990) and the Education Act

that was vigorously implemented from 1967 onwards. Dr. Ling's ability to transcend this "communication generation gap," has given him a potent political status in the community, and crystallised his personality as a cementing lynch-pin that has pulled together the community's political energies, talents and resources.

It is rather ironic that, the Secretary-General of the Democratic Action Party, Lim Kit Siang, has very sharply observed this emerging political personality of Dr. Ling Liong Sik. Recently Kit Siang has said that Dr. Ling is trying to be the "greatest President" in the history of the Malaysian Chinese Association. Even though this remark was made in a negative sense by the opposition leader, nevertheless, there is a positive side to this observation since Dr. Ling's *potent* change agent political form has impressed both the older and the younger generation of ethnic Chinese.

Another senior party leader from the DAP, Patta recently commented that a grand MCA 45th year anniversary celebration held at Ipoh, had posed a new and more formidable challenge in wooing Chinese support, because MCA seems to have made more impact within the Chinese community than had been delivered by the DAP.

It is conceded that the ethnic Chinese community has until now been trapped and helpless due to the onslaught of dominant UMNO politics. However, Dr. Ling's role as acting Barisan Nasional President, during the critical period when the old UMNO was deregistered, has boosted the political personality of the MCA President both within UMNO and ethnic Chinese circles.

As leader of the largest Chinese-based party in Malaysia Dr. Ling's role in supporting the fortunes of UMNO, when the latter was deregistered, has opened a new door for the

MCA to play a more assertive role. As a political party it has no reason to be self-conscious as a subordinate party within the Barisan framework, as genuinely worried by MCA intellectuals. Instead MCA must consider itself to be on par with other political parties and must resolve to nurture an equal partner relationship with others.

The local mass media, especially the English Language print media, should have given wider and more objective coverage to Dr. Ling for the kind of role he played when UMNO's political fortunes were at their lowest, when the party was deregistered. UMNO influenced print and electronic media must also give coverage to ethnic based news and documentaries particularly when Malaysia is fast emerging as a role model to many other, countries, where ethnic relations are fragile compared with our system.

Local intellectuals who generate a lot of new ideas on the role of the new Malay from the standpoint of UMNO's proactive role in strengthening Malay and Islamic nationalism must give due recognition to Dr. Ling's eminent political role as the chief spokesman of the ethnic Chinese community, instead of downplaying his contribution made towards the improvement of MCA-UMNO relations.

Obviously, Dr. Ling is blazing a new trail in fostering stronger inter Sino-Malay relations and this bodes well for future UMNO-MCA relations and the party's capacity to resolve a varied number of ethnic Chinese problems based on civil and political rights and genuine liberty.

#### **Notes:**

- 1, 2, 3 - See - The future of Malaysian Chinese pp - 21-34.  
"The Chinese Political Dilemma"  
Michael Yeoh Oon Kheng.

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## CHAPTER 13

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# The PAS' Hudud Laws and Ethnic Chinese

**I**n Malaysian politics, the opposition parties DAP and PAS have always appeared to be more radical than the Barisan Nasional particularly when compared against its component parties such as the Malaysian Chinese Association.

Dr. Mahathir, the Prime Minister recently complained that the DAP and the opposition MPs far from doing anything good in Malaysia were more fond of "digging for dirty things" while trying to create the impression that PAS and DAP were in some way virtuous.

PAS by enacting its own brand of hudud laws in the name of Islam, has gone even a step further as though its leaders are all self-appointed, self-styled, self-righteous moral and religious guardians of all Malaysians including the non-

Muslims. PAS believes that their brand of Islam is the only true faith in this multi-religious plural Malaysian society.

However, the history of nation-states all over the globe tells us that it is this kind of self-appointed, self-styled, moralistic, self-righteous individuals who dogmatically believe that their path is the only true path in human societies who only too often turn into oppressors. That lesson is now in danger of being repeated in Malaysia with PAS' desire to whittle down the secular state created by our founding fathers of Merdeka by introducing its own brand of Islam and Hudud law with the concomitant ambition to set up an Islamic state .

The post-Merdeka generation of Malaysians, whether they are Chinese, Indians, Malays or other ethnic groups must be constantly reminded that Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Although, Islam is the official religion of the country, Article 3 of the Federal Constitution provides for the practice of other religions in peace and harmony in any part of the federation including the predominantly Malay-Muslim dominated states of Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Terengganu.

Similarly, Articles 8 (2) and 12 (1) provide for no discrimination against citizens on religious grounds and upholds the right of every religious group to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children of its own religion.

It is therefore inherently necessary that there is not only simple religious tolerance in Malaysia, but also profound acceptance of every Malaysian's civil and constitutional right to his or her religious sensitivities. The raw exploitation of religion to secure political power will bring into power oppressors together with the dangerous

consequences that are self evident in many countries around the globe.

Dr. Mahathir said in Parliament on 19 January 1993:

*... I have already explained that Islamic laws cannot be implemented blindly. If we do not implement Islamic laws, it does not mean that we do not believe in Islam, for in Islam, we have to consider the prevailing circumstances. The situation in Malaysia does not permit the implementation of Islamic laws. If all the citizens are Muslims and they want Islamic law to be implemented, then it may be done. But the situation in Malaysia does not permit the implementation of Islamic laws and furthermore, Islam permit us to be flexible....*

While on the other hand, Clause 5 of PAS constitution states that the aims of PAS are to: strive to bring about in this country, a society and administration, based on Islamic principles and decrees to the will of Allah."

The hudud laws' controversy exposes the sharp theological divide between the muslim/malay based parties of UMNO, PAS and Semangat 46. While UMNO appears to be approaching the implementation of Quranic injunctions pragmatically, PAS' view is that they are to be implemented literally. UMNO propagates values that are universal and are also found in the teachings of other major religions. There is a school of thought in Islam, which advocates the belief that Islam guarantees non-Muslims their full human rights. Islam must lend protection not only to non-Muslims' lives and properties but also their house of worship and their crosses. If the true spirit of Islam is practiced by Muslim political leaders, non-Muslims have little to worry about. However, this is conditional on the presence of



enlightened Muslim leaders and a system of government and administration that is ultra-perfect and utopian.

If there is genuine Islamic resurgence in Malaysia without the pressure of political motives or the desire to set up an Islamic state, ethnic Chinese and non-Muslim Malaysians have nothing to fear concerning the new wave of Islam that has now become a current topic of debate and discussion among Malaysians of Islamic faith.

The Merdeka constitution of 1957, both in the spirit and letter of the law has clearly laid down the need to keep the *God-Caesar dichotomy* separate and distinct by creating a secular state.

The call by PAS' and its friends from other political parties to establish a theocratic Islamic state is a mischievous attempt to undermine the on-going civil and social order established from Merdeka until now in plural Malaysia. This is particularly true when one considers that through thirty-five years of UMNO-MCA-MIC cooperation and collaboration, Malaysia has advanced and progressed well as a leading developing country. Why is there now a need to disturb that status quo?

Since its inception PAS as a political party never even came close to articulating political and civil issues and problems that are near and dear to the non-Malay / non-Muslim Malaysians. Throughout its existence as a political party PAS has never worried about its racist image. Haji Hadi Awang a PAS leader of considerable charisma some time ago publicly announced that, since Islam was a universal religion, even a non-Malay could become Prime Minister as long as he or she was a pious Muslim<sup>1</sup>.

However, the way in which the Hudud Laws were passed in Kelantan and the manner in which it was attempted to impose them on non-Muslim ethnic Chinese and Indians in Kelantan by ignoring their sentiments and with no proper dialogue, adds weight to the author's suspicion that PAS is not concerned about genuine Islamic awakening in Malaysia. On the contrary, the brand of Islam propounded by PAS is another kind of political ideology that is rooted in racism. The motive being to embarrass and trap UMNO leaders who have, since Merdeka, a tradition of working closely with MCA and MIC leaders.

It is the author's view that the issues of Malay identity and Malay nationalism (traditionally finding focus in issues such as language and special rights) need a new identity. This is because both of the traditional focal issues have been successfully achieved in the aftermath of May 13 1969 and as a result of the New Economic Policy.

It is cited for this reason that PAS Islam as the final extension of Malay nationalism with its own distinguishing features of Malayness through which the political mobilisation of the Malay community can take place. For more than a generation, Malaysian political process has been carried out and had been dependent upon ethnic allegiance and loyalty for the crucial mobilisation of the rakyat. PAS' call to establish religious unity via radical change of the secular constitution with a view to establish an Islamic state is an ambition which is founded on an oppressive and impractical ideology directed against the interests of non-Muslim/non-Malay citizens in Malaysia.

The challenge of vision 2020 is to establish a mature, fully developed liberal and tolerant society in which the ethnic, political and civil rights of all Malaysians shall have a place

to materialise and crystallize within the large Malaysian family. This to be on par with the developed nations whether the role. Model is the USA, or Western Europe.

By developing of Malaysia into a powerful industrial and trading nation without giving corresponding attention to the progress the legal, political and humanistic system, Malaysian policy-makers and planners would be making a grave mistake in forging a new destiny for Malaysians by 2020.

The renewed and constant emphasis on Islam as an alternative system of state craft, set apart and separate from western models of democracy as put forward by local the print and electronic media and Muslim scholars and change agents, has opened a new floodgate in the Malaysian polity.

Unless and until non-Muslim Malaysians, particularly the large and dominant minority ethnic group of Chinese, develop into a resilient political bulwark against these theocratic trends, the successful accomplishment of vision 2020 and the preservation and protection of the secular legal, constitutional and political system together with the liberal lifestyles and value systems is on the threshold of being undermined and eroded. This is the new and ultimate challenge for the ethnic Chinese and non-Muslim Malaysians.

Dr. Ling as President of the MCA and leader of the largest Chinese political party in Malaysia, has consistently upheld the federal constitution which does not provide for the implementation of PAS' hudud laws.

There is evidence to support the view that the DAP inspite of taking a liberal stand on various political and constitutional issues has in the past tacitly supported

Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (which included PAS), notably at in the 1990 general elections. The party had also at some early point agreed on the hudud laws but made a *volte face* when they realised that PAS' intentions to set up an Islamic state was real and not a political gimmick to gain votes from the Muslim community.

It must be brought home to the ethnic Chinese, Muslims/Malays and non-Muslims alike that, Malaysia's on-going achievements and success in economic development would not have been possible if not for the political stability and social harmony we enjoy for which all Malaysians have sacrificed and striven for since independence.

In ensuring that the spirit of tolerance and goodwill continues, Malaysians should reject all forms of extremism to prevent any chance of intolerance from destroying the country.

Dr. Ling Liong Sik has stated this very succinctly:

*The MCA has always chosen partners who are moderates and are willing to discuss. Malaysia has no room for extremists and religious fanatics. Moderation is the key to success for the country. Moderation in demands and speech will create a conducive atmosphere for everybody.*

It is therefore particularly urgent in Malaysia today, that decision-makers should be conversant with cultural and religious pluralism because we shall discover by the year 2020, that we need them.

1 Asiaweek March 8, 1985.

## CHAPTER 14

# Political Unity of Ethnic Chinese and The Third Wave in Malaysian Politics

**A** renowned Chinese author once observed that some of the most admirable elements of Chinese political thought bear similarities to current concepts, such as the age old notion that the ruler will be punished like his subjects... which is concomitant to our concept of egalitarianism and belief in the Rule of law. Similarly the view that to acquire all the good things in life requires a

struggle. Such a view can be identified with the modern day notion of industriousness, thrift and enterprise.

Regrettably however, this positive aspect of Chinese culture has not been matched by strong political motivation. On the contrary, there is a sense of indifference and resignation towards their political destiny amongst the bulk of ethnic Chinese. This lack of clear political vision and sense of direction among ethnic Chinese has been further exacerbated by the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the importance of politics amongst them.

Politics is very important not only to the Malay community but also to the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. No matter what we do for a living, one new law legislated by Parliament can bring about the kind of change that can result in the instant disappearance of wealth, freedom and even lives.

In so far as Malaysian politics is concerned, there is a school of thought that is based on the view that since Tunku Abdul Rahman retired as the Prime Minister in 1970 and in the aftermath of the May 13, 1969 racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, the non-Malays and in particular the ethnic Chinese have shown a sharp sense of apathy towards the ongoing political changes that have taken place in Malaysia.

The Chinese lack of interest in politics in the early days was mainly because they always felt that they were immigrants. The colonialists are also to be blamed. This is because, the colonialists recognised that the Malays needed to be protected and therefore automatically cast them into positions of power and the ethnic Chinese into the area they did best, commerce and trade. The Chinese detachment from political life was reversed with the early involvement of the MCA during Tun Tan Cheng Lock's time. From then on, the efforts of not only the early Chinese but the Malay leaders have greatly encouraged the non-Malays to play an

active part in local politics through their actions, messages and their vision for the country. Such early efforts have been successful and now the Chinese have realised that their involvement in politics is not entirely to influence their economic progress but also because of their sense of loyalty and love for their race, religion and country. Admittedly, such efforts have not been easy, but the painstaking and unrelenting efforts have greatly encouraged the Chinese to inject their talents into politics and not into commerce and economics alone. This success is supported by the confidence that there would be enough economic wealth in Malaysia for everyone.

The present Chinese, particularly the post-Merdeka generations of ethnic Chinese are a new breed altogether. Having been born in Malaysia, the bulk of them are conscious of their stake and future in this country. They appreciate the advantages of working harmoniously with the other communities not only in commerce and economics, but also in politics in building the nation into a respected one. They have come to terms with the political realities of this country like the Malays, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other ethnic groups, by assuming and accepting equal responsibility in ensuring a stable political climate in order to sustain or to increase the momentum of growth in the country. Nevertheless it should be noted that this whole generation of young Malaysians who have grown up since Merdeka in 1957 find it increasingly difficult to accept discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin. Young Malaysians expect to be treated equally and justly in the way opportunities are distributed. They expect their legitimate civil and constitutional rights to be protected. Hence, it is necessary for the ethnic Chinese to be united as a single-minded political force, for them to play their role in making the future of this nation. The necessity is now more profound than the past political efforts of the Chinese community.

There is often an impression that the ethnic Chinese have a strong tendency to be politically divided. From a historical perspective, the Chinese as a community, have a tradition of individualism, based on disunity, petty faction squabbles and individualistic leadership. This is demonstrated by the numerous different political parties trying to represent the Chinese. MCA, Gerakan, DAP, and those in Sabah and Sarawak and the many thousands of Chinese Guilds and Associations, each competing for the same support within the same community. There has been also a strong political tendency among the Chinese that witnesses their inability to stick to a particular course of action, preferring to change horses mid stream. This tendency manifests itself in the General Elections when Chinese support vacillates and changes between the MCA in one election and then the DAP in the next. For example, at the General Elections in August 1986, the urban Chinese delivered a strong protest vote to the Barisan Nasional in general and the MCA, in particular. This trend was reversed in the 1990 General Elections. This pattern of alternation of the community's support between the MCA and DAP in succeeding General Elections, has proportionately weakened the ethnic Chinese community's bargaining position inside the Barisan Nasional. This also accounts for the Chinese community's feeble response to Malay domination in Malaysian politics in general and UMNO domination in particular.

The changing demographic trend does not favour a critical political breakthrough for the Chinese community. Recent demographic studies have shown that the Chinese percentage of the Malaysian population would be 28.8%, down from 34% by the year 2000 while the Malay share would increase from 56% to 62.8%. By the year 2100 it is projected that the Chinese population would represent only 13% of the total while the Malay population would increase to 83%.



These population trends will have great implications for the Malaysian nation where the share of resources is based on the quota system, on the basis of the proportion of population of each ethnic community. The on-going search for Chinese political unity and consensus amongst the ethnic Malaysian Chinese will have a direct effect and bearing on the way in which traditional, colonial divide and rule tactics are ultimately checked and put a stop to.

These political trends have posed new challenges to the MCA leadership at many levels. A strong sense of moral and political will, rooted in a committed stand on principles is the ultimate acid test for the party and community in order, to forge a united political stand. This is made with a caveat. The MCA and ethnic Chinese must be aware of the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society. There will always be a need to compromise and negotiate without the need to capitulate. The struggle for fairness, justice and equality within the Malaysian political forum cannot be achieved, if each political party represents only the interests of its own individual ethnic group e.g. UMNO representing Malays, MCA representing Chinese and so forth. The parties must collaborate on equal terms with each other.

Dr Ling Liong Sik has often exhorted the Chinese community to respond more positively to the MCA and help to make the MCA into a strong, dynamic political force. It is the MCA that can achieve a political breakthrough for the Malaysian Chinese. It is the MCA that is well poised to prevent any further erosion of the Chinese political position. If it cannot, no other Chinese-based party can.

The MCA is not synonymous with the ethnic Chinese community, neither is the entire Malaysian Chinese community MCA, but the MCA is certainly very much a

part, a vital and significant part, of the Malaysian Chinese community. The Malaysian Chinese community's destiny is the MCA's destiny and in the present political setting, MCA's destiny is the Malaysian Chinese community's destiny.

There are other inherent cultural factors that have made the Chinese weak as a political group. It has been suggested that the legacy of Confucianism and the conservatism of that epoch has encouraged an excessive fear of authority, and inhibited the development of equality or any other cooperative efforts. There is an old Chinese saying "People have six emotions and seven desires". The critical goal in life is survival. The Chinese are extremely shrewd, and staying alive has become their highest principle and all consuming ideal. Years of practical experience have also taught the Chinese to mind their own business. The onus and responsibility is therefore on the MCA to provide the kind of a visionary and progressive leadership through its proactive approach to introduce whatever structural changes and political reforms that are needed.

Chinese political unity also needs to be seen within the context of Malaysian politics which may be divided into three critical waves. The first wave was during the period before and after Merdeka up until 1969. The second wave represented the period after the May Elections of 1969 up until the time when inter-ethnic political rivalry dominated the political scene. Now, with the ascent of post-Merdeka generation of Malaysians coming to terms with the everyday life of the nation, Malaysian politics has touched down on to the third wave, that is the post NEP-Vision 2020 era. It is believed that as the nation advances towards greater industrialisation and a fully developed political status, inter-ethnic rivalries will give way to intra-ethnic rivalries with a greater emphasis on individualism, civil and

human rights issues. This third phase, therefore poses both danger and opportunities for the Malaysian Chinese. As intra-ethnic rivalries develop within the majority ethnic group, it is vital for the Malaysian Chinese to play a more effective and committed role in maintaining the political stability of the nation by uniting and throwing their support behind the Government. In this context, the Malaysian Chinese are approaching an important crossroads as the 21st century dawns. The destiny of the Malaysian Chinese and consequently of the Malaysian nation itself will depend upon MCA's leadership and the kind of responses it invokes amongst the ethnic Chinese.

This third wave is becoming a reality and characterised by the nation's search for greater egalitarianism and fairplay in every sphere of Malaysian life.

This can be seen from the search for:

- 1 fundamental human rights;
- 2 greater freedom of choice to practice each individual's religion and customs;
- 3 right to choose the education in one's own mother tongue;
- 4 right to enter any field of business;
- 5 right to have reasonable access to jobs in the public sector, scholarships and university places for non-Malay ethnic groups;
- 6 the need to have a just and corruption-free government.

Dr Ling Liong Sik's call for deregulation and greater liberalisation, a call originally made in the mid 1970s has

## CHAPTER 15

# MCA in The Government and The DAP in Opposition

**I**t is the professed claim of DAP and its leaders that the party is a multi-racial party and that the party thrives to establish a genuine, pluralist Malaysian society.

However, in reality, since its formation and since the party contested the first general elections in 1969, the DAP has often attempted to articulate Chinese political problems and issues as their central party manifesto in a more radical manner. The party's success in General Elections has been largely dependent on urban-working classes ethnic Chinese support.

Recently it was reported that in terms of significance, as advised by the Protocol Division of the Prime Minister's Department, the office of the opposition leaders in Parliament is more senior in line than that of a Menteri Besar or Chief Minister.

From November 1975, Lim Kit Siang, the party's Secretary-General has been the Opposition Leader in Parliament. He has during his tenure as Opposition leader brought into focus matters related to abuse of Executive power and also issues related to corruption, etc., which have been fairly well received by many Malaysians. However, if Kit Siang had always remained and performed his role only as opposition leader during the last two decades, this would have given a tremendous boost to his personality and the contribution he has made towards state-crafts-manship and politics in Malaysia. But, Kit Siang has also very assertively championed ethnic Chinese issues even though he was the opposition leader. Herein lies the major weakness of the Democratic Action Party (DAP)

Even though Kit Siang recently denied that he had ever claimed himself to be some kind of a champion of any race or ethnic group, the fact remains that for the last two decades, the DAP's and Lim Kit Siang's political activities have been submerged within the enclaves of race, ethnicity and language issues just like UMNO, MCA and MIC. The only distinctive difference is that, while articulating racial and ethnic issues as the logic of the party's practical, grassroots base, the DAP has also maintained, a simultaneous double faced image as a party striving for multi-racial Malaysia.

The party has often been very critical of the MCA as a component of BN and has often fielded candidates against MCA and MIC in the general elections. It has also given up its original stance, made at the Setapak declaration, by not

attempting to make any kind of inroads into UMNO-based or Malay voter-based constituencies.

The DAP as an opposition party has subscribed to the theory of UMNO dominance in Malaysian politics by only playing a limited opposition role without offering a solution to form an alternative government in Malaysia. The first attempt at the latter was made in the 1990 General Elections when DAP teamed up with S46 and PAS under the *Gagasan Rakyat* electoral pact. Thus, for many years of its existence, the DAP has remained more as a protest movement in Malaysia than offering itself as a genuine alternative opposition party for the Malaysian electorate. This has been a fundamental weakness in DAP's political struggle since 1969.

Recently, Kit Siang criticised Dr Ling Liong Sik as a *lame duck* Minister and also described MCA representation in the cabinet as a 'marginalized' political representation. An attempt was also made to belittle MCA's fund-raising activities such as *Langkawi Project* as a nominal and small financial activity compared to the days when MCA president the late Tun Tan Siew Sin as Finance Minister could allocate funds in the millions by "the stroke of a pen." Even though this argument is poorly presented, even if post-Merdeka generations of Malaysians accept the Opposition leader's logic in its literal form, still Kit Siang is wrong, because Dr Ling Liong Sik as a Cabinet Minister representing the community and as MCA President wields more influence and has the final say in the way monies are allocated for Chinese new villages and Chinese Independent Schools, than whatever can be done by the opposition leader himself for these two Chinese socio-cultural institutions.

The Official Secrets Act (OSA) law is the single most significant piece of government legislation that has crippled

the potential of opposition Members of Parliament from playing an active role in Parliament by being able to ask searching questions.

The DAP particularly Lim Kit Siang as opposition leader has often accused the Barisan Nasional government of being afraid of giving proper information, and that it is difficult to win investors' confidence by suppressing information and democracy by using laws such as the OSA and the Internal Security Act (ISA). However, as the longest serving Opposition leader in Malaysian Parliamentary history (since 1975), Lim Kit Siang's track record needs to be highlighted.

Since becoming the Opposition leader in 1975, Lim Kit Siang has not even been successful in working out a gentlemen's agreement' with his government counterpart to establish a clear understanding and clear guidelines on the allocation of time, choice of procedures, etc., to carry out and discharge the duties of opposition Members of Parliament effectively, honorably, with decorum and professionalism. Nor has there been any encouragement of strong sense of commitment towards Parliamentarianism.

Unlike the British system, the Malaysian Parliament is not supreme but is bound by the Constitution and it is possible for the courts to rule that some of Parliament's actions are contrary to the Constitution and therefore invalid. The Dewan Rakyat also has functions other than legislation. The House often acts as a forum for allowing grievances to be aired and also provides a venue in which government policies can be stated and debated. One method popularly used by Members of Parliament to redress grievances is by asking Ministers questions in Parliament. Questions can be asked about the policy of public corporations but not about details of their operations. If a question about a public corporation is asked, it is very much up to the respective Minister to decide how much information he will give.

Whether Kit Siang as Opposition leader and key spokesman for Chinese ethnic issues, has enough options and scope in the Dewan Rakyat is an important yardstick to measure the opposition leader's performance in Parliament. The Constitution Amendment Act of 1971, amended Articles 63 and 72 of the Constitution and removed the protection MPs and (State Assemblymen) enjoyed from court proceedings in respect of anything said by them in the legislature. MPs, and SA are consequently subject to the provisions of the Sedition Act, as amended, which barred discussion of the principle (but not implementation) of certain constitutional provisions, most of which affected relations between the ethnic groups. This Constitutional Amendment Act was a landmark in Malaysian politics, because on its aftermath, the ground rules of the political game were substantially altered and the impact of this law was decisive on the ethnic Chinese community.

It is worth noting that in every single General Election before 1969, i.e., 1955, 1959 and 1964, the majority of Malaysian Chinese rallied behind the MCA. Neither the Opposition Socialist Front nor the PAP led by Lee Kuan Yew in 1964 were able to breach the majority Chinese support for the MCA. In as much as the Chinese community was cohesive before May 1969 in support of the MCA representatives in Government so were they rewarded by their strong economic position and by the holding of key Ministerial portfolios such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. However, the 1969 General Election was the turning point of the Malaysian Chinese's fortune in Malaysia. The Chinese threw their majority support behind the then Opposition, i.e., the supposedly multi-racial parties, the DAP, Gerakan and the PPP. In contrast while the Chinese fragmented politically, the majority of Malays effectively coalesced behind UMNO. This political episode represents a double loss for the Chinese community. As a minority race vis-a-vis the Malays



the Chinese had fragmented their political will whereas the Malays, had largely consolidated their political will and sense of direction.

The consistent weakening of the Chinese political will at each General Election since 1969, meant that besides the Constitution Amendment Act 1971, some of the other ground rules have also changed in accordance with the wishes of the dominant majority, who tend to see the Chinese community largely as an opposition community. The support of segments of the Chinese for the DAP has also created a new stigma for all Chinese, including the loyal supporters of the government, since this trend has been interpreted as an anti-establishment trend among the whole ethnic Chinese community. An important ground rule that had changed is the increasing weightage given to rural areas in the delineation of constituencies. This has resulted in an increasing number of Malay majority seats. since then, in the General Election of 1978 and 1986, the majority of Chinese have voted for the opposition DAP whilst in 1974 and 1982, the DAP took 9 seats in each election thereby fragmenting Chinese political unity.

The DAP's multi-racialism is only a veneer since it has been consistently rejected by the majority of Malays who constitute the political majority in present day Malaysia. The DAP has, therefore, in real terms weakened Chinese representation in Government because as an opposition, it has no voice in the formulation or implementation of Government policies. Since 1969, it has never been able to win Malay majority parliamentary seats.

Since the DAP draws its support mainly from the Malaysian Chinese and in view of the fact that only 20% of Parliamentary seats in Peninsular Malaysia and 17% of the total Malaysian Parliamentary seats are Chinese majority

seats, going by racial arithmetic it can never form the government of this country. At best, the two decades of DAP political struggle can only be viewed as that of a protest movement, because in spite of being the largest opposition party, DAP's contribution in Parliament and in government affairs has been minimal.

Within the *Dewan Rakyat* itself, not many Opposition amendments are accepted or passed as laws by Parliament. In the important field of economic policy formulations, there is not much the opposition MPs can do in tangible terms because they are often disadvantaged and handicapped by lack of knowledge and access to information. As has been stated earlier there seems little hope for any form of cooperation with the government on the establishment of ground rules for parliamentary business because of the intransigence of the opposition leader.

A real opposition in the Westminster type of parliamentary democracy plays the role of a watch-dog against abuses of governmental powers and in the positive and proper criticism of government policies but it also must have the organisational set up and ability to formulate policies for the setting up of an alternative government.

The DAP by playing a limited opposition role without the strategy to become a shadow government highlights the fundamental weakness of the party. Since 1969 because of this, the Chinese community has been the victim of this blunder. By dissipating the Chinese vote, the DAP has only managed to weaken the political position of the community as it is unable to offer any real alternative. Neither has the DAP obtained nor has it any plausible policies or plans to get the Malay support essential to enable it to form, an alternative government.

The MCA on the other hand also plays the role of the critic of government in various forums open to them, inside and outside the establishment. Unlike the DAP, the MCA has a power sharing pact with UMNO and other component parties in the Barisan Nasional and by virtue of this power-sharing pact, MCA members and the Chinese community is represented by Dr Ling Liong Sik who is a senior Cabinet Minister. It need to be borne in mind that the actual government of the country is the Cabinet. Members of the Cabinet are appointed by the Yang Di Pertuan Agong on the advice of the Prime Minister, who has discretion in choosing the Cabinet, giving due attention to political status, political support, representation and ability.

Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang's recent criticism of the MCA as a marginalised party is naive considering that the inner workings of the Cabinet are known to Cabinet Ministers alone. The Opposition leader has no access to what is going on inside the Cabinet.

The Cabinet usually meets once a week. The Prime Minister (or in his absence, the Deputy Prime Minister) presides. The Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department as head of the Cabinet Secretariat is responsible for summoning meetings of the Cabinet, arranging the agenda, distributing papers for discussion, keeping minutes and passing on the decisions of the Cabinet to government bodies required to implement them.

Records of discussions are not kept, the minutes are merely a statement of what has been decided and a direction to the Ministers concerned to implement the decisions. Minutes are also not made public. Information about the workings of the Cabinet is therefore slight, and still less is known about the committees which are set up by the Cabinet. Knowledge of what Cabinet meetings are likely to discuss is very

difficult to obtain. The rare occasion recently when the Cabinet decided to fix chicken prices in the market only gives a rare insight that the Cabinet is capable of making a decision on any issue that is current and vital at any point in time.

Cabinet meetings are believed to be informal in the sense that votes are seldom taken. The general tendency for extreme secrecy is well known. Given the situation that the inner workings of the Cabinet are so different from any other organ of the government Kit Siang's outburst that the MCA is a marginalised party is not founded on fact nor on an understanding of the role Dr Ling Liong Sik plays both as a Cabinet Minister and also as MCA representative in the government.

The Cabinet is also collectively responsible to parliament, i.e., *Dewan Rakyat*. The constitutional position on collective responsibility means that a colleague who does not agree with policy does not make that disagreement public. Debates on policy issues stay within the Cabinet which having reached a decision presents a united front. Public dissent should be preceded by resignation, or is likely to be followed shortly by dismissal.

During the UMNO 1987 General Assembly elections, (the meeting was later declared defunct by the High Court) a number of Cabinet Ministers who were still ministers publicly criticised the Prime Minister in their campaigns for support from UMNO members. But the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir did not revoke their appointment as Ministers by advising the Yang Di Pertuan Agong to do so. On the contrary, the Prime Minister waited patiently and only in the aftermath of the 1987 UMNO elections, dropped these dissenting Cabinet Ministers from the Cabinet. Hence, DAP's constant agitation in Parliament and outside the

Dewan Rakyat asking and exhorting MCA Cabinet Ministers to make their own independent stand particularly on Chinese education and language issues appears to be naive, considering that MCA Ministers as Cabinet members have to uphold this constitutional principle of collective responsibility of the Cabinet.

The extent to which Dr Ling Liong Sik as Cabinet Minister and MCA President has successfully influenced his colleagues in the Cabinet and his friends in the Barisan Nasional so that policies, plans and programmes implemented in a way to bring maximum benefit to the ethnic Chinese and towards achievement of political stability and unity in the country, is the ultimate test to make a proper appraisal of any MCA Cabinet Minister's performances.

The kind of relationship Dr Ling Liong Sik maintains with the Prime Minister is a key factor that can measure the performance of the leaders of the ethnic Chinese community. It should be remembered that constitutionally, the appointment of the Prime Minister needs to be acceptable not only to UMNO but to the Barisan Nasional as well.

Dr Ling Liong Sik's contribution and role in the formulation of the post-New Economic Policy (1970-1990) era particularly his role in the establishment of the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC) sheds some light on his accomplishment as MCA leader and Cabinet Minister.

## CHAPTER 16

# The Future

**D**r Ling Liong Sik's search for genuine Chinese political unity in Malaysia is not an empty dream. Since becoming the MCA leader, he has often gone to the grassroots of the ethnic Chinese community in trying to give them a new sense of mission with renewed energy and vitality. He has also built a large network of contacts among agents of change and among pressure groups within the community, and this has helped him to formulate the Malaysian Unity Action Plan programme in a proactive and consistent manner.

The marshalling of grassroots ethnic Chinese support, his attempt to influence the undercurrents of public opinion within the community in a proactive manner, and his ability to pool the resources and talents of the ethnic Chinese community since he took over the MCA's leadership in 1986, has brought about a certain change within the community that has broken the sense of fatalism that once permeated the party and community. The provision of educational opportunities for ethnic Chinese through his efforts to influence public policy formulation and the many

self-help educational projects has now borne fruit. The long-standing controversy and political agitation that surrounded the intake of non-Malay ethnic Chinese students into local universities has been successfully defused and this has removed a sticky point in Chinese communal politics.

As a consequence, the DAP no longer sets the agenda for debate and discussion within the ethnic Chinese community. On the contrary, it is now the MCA that calls the shots in the way ethnic Chinese issues and problems are articulated by concerned ethnic Chinese political, social and educational activists.

The party's membership from the original 300 has now swelled beyond 650,000 today. Under Dr Ling Liong Sik's initiative the MCA established the Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy research (INSAP) to carry out independent research on issues covering politics, education, economics and race relations, especially those relevant to the interest and aspirations of the Malaysian Chinese community. In his speech at the launch of INSAP on 21st February 1986, Dr Ling Liong Sik said he was confident the Institute could become "a watchdog of the Malaysian Chinese community and play a useful monitoring role." Since then, INSAP has been fulfilling its role, drawing professional and academicians into its fold. Its diverse membership has helped in weeding out what Dr. Ling called "the degree of alienation and frustration among certain sections of society."

INSAP has identified 4 strategic areas:

- political and constitutional development;
- economic trends and analysis;

- race relations; and
- human resources and educational development

Through discussions and seminars, INSAP has been successful in garnering the views of the community regarding various issues and this feedback has in turn helped generate ideas and points in the Institute's recommendations to the party headquarters. These have served as useful inputs to the party leadership's decision-making and policy formulation capabilities.

The run-up to the drafting of a new policy to replace the New Economic Policy (1970-1990) which was due to expire in 1990 was a testing time for the MCA. An article from the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) in 1988 that provided a glimpse of the structure of the new policy was perhaps an early sign of the difficult path that was to lead to the new policy.

The Review quoted the then Finance Minister, Daim Zainuddin as saying that the government would continue to stress on areas identified in the New Economic Policy (NEP) when the policy expires in 1990. In that article, Daim was quoted as saying, *"The thrust (of the new policy) will be basically the same; the twin prongs of the NEP—poverty eradication and restructuring of society—will remain the same"*.

Apparently disturbed by the contents of the article, a 'tired' MCA President Dr. Ling went on a six-week no pay leave in October 1989, stating that MCA's review of the political situation then had been a "frustrating and painful process". The major reason for this was that various pledges made had remained unfulfilled. Dr Ling returned to Malaysia on



19th November 1989, dismissing rumours that he would resign from the government and with a renewed resolve to be with the Chinese community in the "struggle for justice and fairness to all." He reiterated that, his basic view remained the same: that multi-racial cooperation in multi-racial Malaysia is needed.

### **National Economic Consultative Council (NECC)**

The MCA's promise, as voiced out by Dr Ling was reflected in the Party's struggle during the long and often tiring deliberations at the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC).

The MCA submitted its Malaysian Unity Plan to the NECC as the party's proposal for the post 1990 policy. The MUP outlined the Party's aspirations for an economic policy based on merit rather than communal factors, stressing that spirit of competition among all races was the key factor that would enable the country to scale greater heights and achieve higher economic growth. The MUP was drawn up after garnering feedbacks from all levels of the Chinese community through a series of seminars and forums conducted by the party. The MUP sought to ensure that there was just and equal participation for all citizens who were willing to work hard. Throughout the NECC deliberations and negotiations, the MCA had remained relentless and undaunted in its efforts to represent Chinese interest against extreme Malay demands.

In sharp contrast to the MCA position in the NECC, several parties and organisations such as the DAP and Dong Jiao Zhong acted in vacillating manner. The DAP went through a series of ins and outs during the duration of the NECC sessions. The party was in when things were smooth and out when the discussions got tough and needed intellectual reasoning and presentation. The DAP pulled out of the

Council on August 20, 1990 citing the undemocratic spirit, process and procedures as the reasons. It resumed participation on September 12, 1990, only to announce its pulling out again on 4 November, claiming that its members who were not fluent in *Bahasa Melayu* were not allowed to speak in English. Subsequently, the party stated its willingness to reconsider its position if the NECC became a "genuine consensus seeking forum."

DAP's Secretary-General Lim Kit Siang, in trying to explain his Party's stand on the NECC in October 1990, said his party would opt out of the NECC unless the Government makes an official stand to abolish the quota system, a stand the MCA eventually succeeded in making within the NECC as reflected in the National Development Policy (NDP). The NDP now gives emphasis on the quality of participation and not the quantity.

### **National Development Plan**

On the basis of recommendations of the NECC, the second Outline Perspective Plan or OPP2 was passed by Parliament in 1991. These recommendations were consistent with the MCA's points outlined in the MUP.

National unity remains the foremost and ultimate goal of the NDP, which forms the basis of the OPP2. The NDP stresses on the creation of a single Malaysian nationality or *Bangsa Malaysia*. This means, ultimately, all Malaysians will be known as Malaysians, without any classification into specific racial groups. This concept allows all Malaysians the freedom to practice their own cultures, religions and beliefs without any prejudices.

The NDP also emphasises the need to promote excellence and competitiveness among all Malaysians. Towards this end, the NDP encourages the utilisation of the resources

and strengths of the different communities to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses for the common good of the country. The NDP therefore provides opportunities for all to participate actively in national development.

The NDP emphasizes rapid economic growth. This is important as the nation wants to ensure that it is not left out of the rapidly developing far east region. The Plan does not suggest a time frame for the 30 per cent target, and thus lays less emphasis on the numerical targets and quotas. The Chinese community will be encouraged to start businesses or expand their companies and corporations. Under the Plan, the government also acknowledged the declining participation of non-Bumiputras in government services and modern agriculture. It has committed itself to increasing the participation of the Chinese and Indians at all levels of government service and modern agriculture including better access to land.

Under the OPP2, the government has also agreed to take more Chinese and Indians into residential schools and vocational and technical institutions. Allocation to the Tunku Abdul Rahman College has also been increased 10-fold from RM2 million to RM 20 million.

The objectives of the NDP will be implemented within the context of rapid economic growth. The aim is to sustain and increase economic growth by capitalising on the country's strengths and at the same time playing down its weaknesses. The Chinese will have nothing to fear within this context. Everyone will have a slice of the expanding economic cake. No one will be worse off if the economy can sustain and increase its growth rate. The NDP's target is to maintain a national growth rate of 7 per cent. Translated into ringgit and sen, the per capita income of Malaysians is

expected to reach RM 17,000 by the year 2000—the end of the NDP period.

The NDP also recognises the extent of urban poverty, which affects the majority of the Chinese, especially those in new villages. The Chinese in new villages who have been facing land shortages, will be given the opportunities to extend their land area to alleviate problems associated with congestion and to enable them to reap economic benefits from the land. The infrastructure of these new villages will also be improved with sufficient allocations from the government.

The main challenge facing the party will be to channel the support of all Chinese to further strengthen it as a negotiating force within the government. To do so, the party must successfully present itself as a Party that provides the results to problems faced by the community and to sell its strong belief that the country and its people will stand to lose without peace and harmony in a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. If that peace and harmony is threatened, so will be the well being of the populace. The result will not be beneficial to anyone. There will be no winners if such a situation arises. The MCA's strong point is its record. This proud record of over 45 years of toiling for the community will provide the stamina for the Party for many more decades of success and achievements.

## CHAPTER 17

# Extracts of Dr. Ling Liong Sik's speeches (from 1986 to 1994)

### **Historic Note**

All of you feel as I do that this beloved nation of ours, Malaysia, and we Malaysians, individually and collectively, stand at crossroads in our history.

### **Bumiputra Success**

Bumiputra achievements in employment and education have been just as impressive...studies show that as of 1984, as a result of massive government investment in Bumiputra education, the relation between race and educational achievement had disappeared. This means that Bumiputras are equally if not more represented in all levels of

education, including post-secondary and college and university.

### **Quota System**

For the post-1990 period the structural and policy adjustments should be taken to their logical end. There should be equality of opportunities with merit and excellence rewarded. Guaranteed outcome systems such as quotas should be phased out. In their place, there should be competition to ensure efficiency and cost effectiveness. Only in this way can the distortions and inefficiencies of the Malaysian economy be removed.

Change is required, change towards a more competitive, less government managed, less ethnically divisive economic environment.

The poor and disadvantaged Malaysians whatever their ethnic or social grouping or geographical location have a right to benefit from the state to compensate for their handicap.

### **Land For The Landless**

It is not only important to continue to modernise agriculture so as to enhance productivity but it is equally necessary to embark on a land distribution programme that can benefit the genuinely landless and land hungry agricultural population in the traditional villages, plantations and New Villages.

### **Rules of Access & Interpretation**

The rules of access should be clearly spelled out and widely publicised so that there is no scope for discriminatory interpretation on the part of implementation officers, and to ensure that the schemes actually reach those for whom they were intended.

## **Red Tape**

Policy makers and planners at local, state and federal levels should begin with the removal of administrative regulations, cumbersome procedures and rigid licensing provisions that often drive these enterprises to operate illegally or without official sanction.

## **Basis of Development**

The basis of development begins at home with small and medium scale enterprises. A blend of liberal land, credit, infrastructural and technical assistance should be provided.

## **Land Development**

Another issue that is close to my heart is that there must be a liberal and well-directed land allocation policy that can revitalise the rural sector. State governments must provide land to the plantations and new villages where the rural non-Malays are located.

## **Impact of Education Policy**

Access to education and the public education policy is an issue that is fraught with deep implications for it reaches into the life of every Malaysian home.

## **Civil Service**

In a plural society such as Malaysia's the role of the Civil Service is even more important than in homogenous societies since civil servants by implementing policies in a fair and just manner, can directly influence a multi-racial society to live in harmony through the formulation and implementation of fair and balanced policies that have the effect of reducing ethnic differences and creating the conditions for greater socio-economic development and stronger national unity.

If we wish our political and administrative institutions to be sensitive to the norms and priorities of the different communities we must ensure that representatives from all communities are actively and jointly engaged in the process of policy making and policy implementation at all levels.

### **Need For Race Relations Act**

Government should legislate for a Race Relations Act which emphasises commitment to the achievement of a genuinely integrated society where there is equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.

### **The Merdeka Contract [Alliance formula]**

The Merdeka social contract which recognises the legitimate interests of the various ethnic communities had been formulated after firm and principled negotiations between UMNO and MCA leaders. We shall uphold the Merdeka contract, upon which the Malaysian nation was founded.

We have never wavered in our consistent stand and have chosen to reject political expediency and extremism in our approach.

### **Position of The Chinese community**

The improvement in the political and social climates in Malaysia since October 1987 has restored confidence in the existing institutions and reaffirmed commitment to our unique democratic and liberal way of life.

The successful turnaround of the MCA when some have given up hope on the party, demonstrates that with vision, with perseverance, determination forward, planning and hard-work, we can overcome the most difficult problems.



The MCA is a microcosm of the Malaysian Chinese community.

The maxim to learn is not to give up hope, never to lose heart, not to despair.

The overseas Chinese communities in Asia must recognise that they should uphold their respective nationalities first and foremost, and owe ultimate loyalty to their respective nations.

I have no doubt that Chinese Guilds & Associations will continue to have an equally important role to play in the 1990's.

#### **Criteria For The Formulation of Government Policies**

- All our national policies must place emphasis on national unity and political stability as the most vital goals.
- There must be recognition of the international competitive environment we operate in.
- The pursuit of rapid economic growth in order to enlarge the economic cake must also be encouraged through a process of deregulation and liberalisation and structural adjustments whenever necessary.
- The existence of socio-economic imbalances should also be recognised and attention must also be given to correction of these imbalances so that the poor and needy of all racial and geographical groupings will not be left out of the national mainstream.

#### **On Opposition Politics**

The opposition has lately called for the replacement of the Barisan Nasional Government by a so called alternative government. This is a dangerous and misleading call for the result can be disastrous.

A poor alternative is no alternative let no one be deceived by the political chicanery of the DAP.

### **On Islamic State**

The Chinese community must recognise that in an Islamic state non-Muslims cannot hold Government office and have no right to vote.

Non-Muslims will be much worse off in an Islamic state as they will be deprived of their basic rights.

The Chinese community must send a clear message that they do not want to live in an Islamic state.

The danger ahead is that sympathy or protest votes for the opposition in the next election will not merely remain protest or anti-establishment votes but strong support for an Islamic state.

### **Religious Freedom**

Religious festivals and religious activities can be freely carried out without any undue restriction or interference.

The Federal constitution safeguards religious freedom for all.

The government will continue to consider reasonable requests for financial assistance by temples and wherever possible we will endeavour to assist. This proves that religious freedom to us is not mere rhetoric but is a fundamental principle we strongly believe in and actively support.

Malaysians [need] to be more tolerant and understanding so as to better appreciate the sensitivities and feelings of other races and religious groups.

All the religions preach basic common values such as honesty, integrity, charity and tolerance. Let us therefore seek consensus on the sort of common value systems that we are proud to uphold as Malaysians.

Religious freedom is sacrosanct and non-negotiable. What is important is that lines of communication between the various racial and religious groups are kept open.

### **A New Modus Operandi**

We believe in dialogue. We believe in negotiation ...negotiation is never easy. It requires stamina, patience, perseverance and a spirit of goodwill and give and take.

Sitting down at the negotiation table does not mean that one has to abandon one's principles. Sitting down to negotiate means an exploration of the perception of others and a reaching out for common areas of agreement.

We must not refuse to talk. It is a danger to our peace and stability if there is a breakdown in communication particularly between the different races, when we are unable to talk things over to resolve our differences.

Building bridges of understanding and reaching out to seek compromise and consensus is a vital aspect of multi-racial living.

### **On ethnic Chinese Culture**

The Chinese opera charity shows organised by guilds and associations has profound significance. In fact, the Chinese opera is a part and parcel of the Chinese culture.

### **National Unity**

We should strive for a feeling of oneness, to create a truly united nation of equals.

The pursuit of national unity must be the primary goal and central purpose of all national policies as without unity our stability will be threatened and our progress retarded.

National unity can be achieved if all Malaysians reduce and minimise ethnic, cultural and religious polarisation and maximise inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-religious harmony and social cohesion through cooperation and mutual help.

### **Chinese Language & Education**

Let me give a strong and unequivocal commitment on behalf of the Barisan Nasional Government that the character of Chinese primary school's will not be changed.

The Chinese community need not be unduly worried about the future of Chinese education in Malaysia if the community can throw its full weight behind the MCA we will safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the Chinese community within the context of our multi-racial society.

The MCA is conscious of its role and responsibilities as the custodian for the legitimate interests of the Chinese community.

### **Being a Clansmen**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to meet with you, my clansmen, being myself a Foochow.

The Foochow community in Malaysia is a small one, particularly in comparison with the Hokkiens, Cantonese and the Khék. Yet, despite being small, the Foochows in Malaysia have made a meaningful contribution to the political, economic and social development of the country a contribution and a positive role to be proud of.

I send my warmest personal greeting to all my fellow Foochow clan-members in Kuching and wish you all great success, good health and much happiness.

### **Charity And Benevolence**

I believe charity and benevolence have no racial barriers.

In this materialistic world of self-aggrandisement, it is touching to know that there are a large number of Malaysians who care.

### **Politics And Business**

Politics and business should be separated so that there is no conflict of interest situation. This is especially necessary in the privatisation process as otherwise it will encourage abuses, malpractices and inefficiency.

### **Bureaucracy**

The bureaucracy should be further reduced in size and scope and quality should be emphasised in place of quantity.

A genuine multi-racial bureaucracy will enhance public participation and accountability and help unify the country's different racial groups.

### **Politics and National Life**

The party [MCA] is intact and will remain united strong and stable. Despite the acrimonious run-up to our General Assembly [1990], wisdom and patience have prevailed.

In out visits to various parts of the country I can detect a changing mood in the minds and attitudes of the Chinese voters who are less belligerent and not anti-establishment as before.

The increasingly better-educated and more sophisticated electorate will evaluate the performance and track record of the various political parties. We are proud that we have a fine tradition of service and an excellent track record compared to the empty rhetoric, malicious lies and false allegations of the opposition in particular the DAP.

If Malaysians do not resist attempts to deny others their legitimate rights, if they do not have the moral courage to speak out for moderation and fairness then the present multi-racial system of government and participation will be lost and we will be plunged towards political instability and turmoil.

Pluralism and democracy should be the watchwords of politics for us in the 1990's, excellence, innovativeness and resilience should be our economic watchwords.

We have in this country more than one third of our population below fifteen years old or about 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  million young people. There can be no justification moral, social, political - for dividing them into categories of more or less privileged. All our citizens of the country, are entitled to fair and equal treatment in all spheres. If any sort of discrimination is practiced towards them during their tender years of life then they are likely to carry the scars and resentment for a long time.

Let us promote a sense of Malaysian nationalism through non-racial policies while respecting the different social cultural and religious origins of our young.

Ours is not the party [MCA] of the rabble rousers or the egoists who blow their trumpets.

Together with unity, no tasks whether in the new village or in Parliament is insurmountable.

The multi-racial and multi-religious character of our Malaysian society necessitates a fine balancing act to reconcile the different interests of the various communities living in this country.

To resolve the problem of racial polarisation we need confidence-building measures so that Malaysians of various races will have trust and renewed confidence in one another.

The next century marks the beginning of a new millennium. The 1990's as the last decade of this century promise to be an exciting and challenging period.

Character assassinations will no longer be effective for the electorate has become wise and will not easily succumb to such negative and destructive activities.

### **Malaysian Chinese Association**

Let me take this occasion to pay tribute to the 518,000 MCA members throughout the country who have stood so loyally by the party despite adversities and set-backs.

To be effective in leading the Chinese community, MCA leaders and activists must be able to analyse emerging trends and issues [this] can facilitate problem solution.

The Barisan Nasional has an internal system of checks and balances and built-in mechanisms to resolve differences and problems ...nevertheless, there are weakness within the Barisan Nasional system.

Chinese political strength in Malaysia is already limited...let us not waste our limited political strength by fragmenting our votes between several Chinese based parties.

More and more Chinese are coming forward to support our mission to secure a better future for them and their children.

It is the philosophy of the MCA that development of our human resources take place in a just and fair manner that gives every Malaysian an equal chance to develop his fullest potential and contribute to the nation's economy.

Time does not stand still we live in a dynamic and rapidly changing world...we need to continually keep pace with dynamic changes, the ability to manage is crucial for our long-term survival in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious environment.

The pursuit of justice, fairness and moderation will be our guiding principles and remain the foundation of our political philosophy.

In 1959, when the MCA suffered its first party crisis following the resignation of Dr. Lim Chong Eu as MCA President, it was a Kedah MCA leader, Dato Dr. Cheah Toon Lock who stabilised the party as Acting President.

Political negotiation in Malaysia is in the final analysis a numbers game. It is therefore up to the Chinese community to decide whether to strengthen the MCA's hand and negotiating position.

We are a fair, liberal and democratic party which is large enough to accommodate differences in opinions and tolerant enough to allow dissent.

#### **MCA**

Let it not be mistaken that the MCA today is without strength and influence. We have regained our credibility by delivering on our problems. We have overcome our past problems and removed weaknesses. We have won back the



trust and confidence of the Chinese community through our pro-active and sincere approach.

### **Leadership**

the torch of leadership that passes on to each generation of leaders will rekindle the hopes and aspirations of Malaysians of all races and creeds who have dedicated ourselves to our motherland.

[If]...the youth leaders of today lack the understanding and sensitivity required of a truly national multi-racial leader then we will have a future which will be threatened by religious and racial bigots.

### **Rule of Law, Justice and Constitutional**

The rule of law and the preservation of the liberal, democratic Parliamentary system in our multi-racial nation are essential for building a truly united Malaysian nation where justice, liberty and equality are basic principles for nation-building.

### **More on the contributions made by the Chinese.**

The Federation of Selangor and Federal Territory Chinese Guilds and Associations - which is a very large organization comprising more than 50 guilds and associations in various commercial fields...Since its establishment several decades ago, it has made great contributions not only to all its members but also to the community and nation as a whole. Its efforts and activities are valuable and deserves the admiration of the public.

The Chinese Medical Aid department is a charity organisation which provides free medical service to the poor and needy. Since its establishment in 1954, the hospital has provided free medical service to more than one million

people - irrespective of their racial origins and religious creeds.

There are more than 4,000 guilds and associations throughout Malaysia. If they are to go all-out to the public, I believe that they are sure to make great contributions to the community and the country.

The pioneering spirit of our forefathers have enabled the Chinese to become successful in Malaysia.

Through our sweat, toil and tears we have contributed to the building of a prosperous Malaysian nation.

Through our spirit of self-reliance we have endured, survived and even thrived.

### **The Ubiquitous Coffee-shop**

There is no doubt that traditional coffee shops are part and parcel of life in Malaysia and Singapore.

The ubiquitous coffee shops found on almost every street corners in the past have remained till this day despite the growing popularity of modern eating places such as fast-food chains and air-conditioned restaurants.

The traditional coffee shops have contributed to social and economic life in the country and were focal points for social and community interactions.

Coffee shops are at the front line and are effective mechanisms to provide the Government with the general feedback from the public at large...through regular feedback and analysis the Government can learn the mood of the people and help to remedy weaknesses.