

NASKHAH PEMELIHARAAN
TERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA

22 DEC 1989

Racial Politics
in
MALAYSIA

by

Goh Cheng Teik

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~~Perpustakaan Nasional~~

Racial Politics in Malaysia

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He makes out a case to substantiate his belief that the new generations of Chinese, Indians and others who are the descendants of the early non-indigenous people, have no emotional attachments whatsoever to any other country other than Malaysia.

They love Malaysia, they want to struggle for Malaysia and devote their entire life to build Malaysia as a strong and peaceful nation where all the races live as brothers and sisters. But, unfortunately, adults pass on their racial prejudices and poison the minds of the young. And, warns, the author, because of this, the danger of ethnic conflict is ever present, just waiting to be ignited.

However, despite dark predictions by prophets of doom that Malaysia's multi-ethnic society would collapse, the nation continues to thrive three decades after achieving independence. This is because there are people still who have the maturity and sanity to realise the importance of preserving inter-racial harmony.

He is convinced that the Malays who form the biggest majority are a race who have been brought up by their religion to do good unto others and to accept their fellow-human beings as brothers and sisters. He is convinced that the various races of Malaysia have their own strengths and human values which will complement each other to make this nation a truly peacefully one. He points out that despite some

Publisher's Foreword

Racial Politics in Malaysia is an earnest appeal to Malaysians to discard prejudices and join hands to harness the multi-resources of this tropical paradise and build a nation that is not only strong economically as a fast-emerging industrial country, but, equally importantly, also praiseworthy for unity despite its diversity.

Goh Cheng-Teik --- historian-academician-politician-author-shrewd-student-of-society --- does not mince his words. Drawing from his vast personal experience of the nation's path to independence and the multi-faceted forces --- internal and external --- that played and are continuing to play a vital role in shaping the minds of the races of Malaysia, Dr Goh drives home this important message : there are too many racial prejudices being harboured by the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and others which are the main stumbling causes preventing this resource-rich nation from speedily getting on with the business of nation-building. And the sad thing is that many of these prejudices are being perpetuated by power - seeking politicians and thoughtless parents.

Deputy Speaker	Shuib b. Ahmad	533	13	Elected
	Abdul Rahman Mahmud	313		
	Shamsuri Salleh	203		
	Mohamed Amin b. Daud	203		
	Azmar Atar bin Othman	107		
Central Committee Members	Mohd Yusoff Noor	1030		Elected
	Muhyiddin bin Mohd Yassin	990		Elected
	Mohd Khalil Yaakob	903		Elected
	Tunku Ahmad Rithaudeen b. Tunku Ismail	875		Elected
	Mohamad bin Yaacob	849		Elected
	Sabbaruddin Chik	829		Elected
	Muhammad bin Muhammad Taib	807		Elected
	Mohd Tajol Rosli Ghazali	796		Elected
	Abu Hassan b. Haji Omar	780		Elected
	Siti Zaharah Sulaiman	762		Elected
	Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir	760		Elected
	Mohd Isa Abdul Samad	746		Elected
	Rahmah Osman	736		Elected
	Osman Haji Aroff	719		Elected
	Sharir b. Abdul Samad	718		Elected
	Zainal Abidin Zin	717		Elected
	Abdul Hamid Pawanteh	717		Elected
	Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik	712		Elected

Central Committee Members	Radzi Sheikh Ahmad	704	Elected
	Marina Yusoff	702	Elected
	Abdul Rahim b. Abu Bakar	687	
	Khalid Yunus	683	
	Abdul Ajib Ahmad	660	
	Megat Junid Megat Ayub	648	
	Wan Abu Bakar Wan Mohamed	647	
	Napsiah Omar	644	
	Mohd. Adib b. Mohd. Adam	644	
	Syed Hamid Syed Jaafar Albar	643	
	Suhaimi Kamaruddin	633	
	Mohd. Kassim b. Ahmad	626	
	Kamaruddin Mohd Isa	614	
	Mohd Rahmat	614	
	Mustafa Mohamad	550	
	Ibrahim Ali	545	
	Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin	533	
	Abdul Malik Ahmad	503	
	Ibrahim Azli Hassan	502	
	Syed Nahar Shahabuddin	499	
	Sharifah Dorah Syed Mohamed	442	
	Daud Taha	436	
	Dusuki Ahmad	432	
	Osman Saad	423	

Central Committee Members	Zakaria Abdul Rahman	415
	Abdullah Ahmad	412
	Awang Jabbar	407
	Zainal Abidin Johari	376
	Alias Ali	370
	Nawawi Mat Awin	363
	Tajuddin Abdul Rahman	351
	Nik Husein Abdul Rahman	255
	Ahmad Shahibuddin bin Md. Nor	245
	Abu Bakar Daud	221
	Yahya Shafie	215
	Hisan Ibrahim	202
	Suleiman Palestin	189
	Mohd Zain Ibrahim	185
	Abu Bakar Rautin	154
	Mohd Tawfik Ismail	146
	Abu Bakar Shaari	140
	Syed Hasan Al Atas	137
	Nordin Selat	100
	Mohd. Shariiff Omar	91
Abdul Razak Samah	76	
Kamarulzaman Bahadun	71	
Hang Tuah Arshad	53	
Ahmad Mustafa Hassan	25	
Idris Abdul Raof	20	
Ahmad Haji Abdul Manaf	19	

☉ MAR. 1990

Author's Foreword

This essay was written when I was a visiting fellow at Cambridge University's Centre of International Studies for the 1989 Lent Term. I am grateful to Sir Harry Hinsley, Master of St. John's College, Professor D.A. Low, President of Clare Hall and Professor R.T.B. Langhorne, Fellow of St. John's College, for their kind hospitality.

Though I have drawn heavily on my personal knowledge of Malaysian politics, I have also consulted books and periodicals at the Library of the Institute of South-East Asian Studies, Singapore, and the Library of the South Asian Centre, Cambridge. My thanks go to Dr. Kernial Singh Sandhu and Miss Ch'ng Kim See of Singapore and Dr. Gordon Johnson and Dr. Lionel Carter of Cambridge.

The Lee Foundation of Malaysia made a grant towards the research of this essay. I am indebted to Mr. Lee Seng Peng and Dr. Lee Boon Chim and their Foundation.

Needless to say, I am alone responsible for the views expressed in this book.

March 1989
Cambridge

Goh Cheng Teik

isolated incidents, the various races of this country have lived peacefully as far back from the founding of Malacca in 1400.

The author firmly believes that a plural society is evolving and slowly restructuring itself, correcting anomalies inherited from the past and slowly but surely becoming less plural in terms of race.

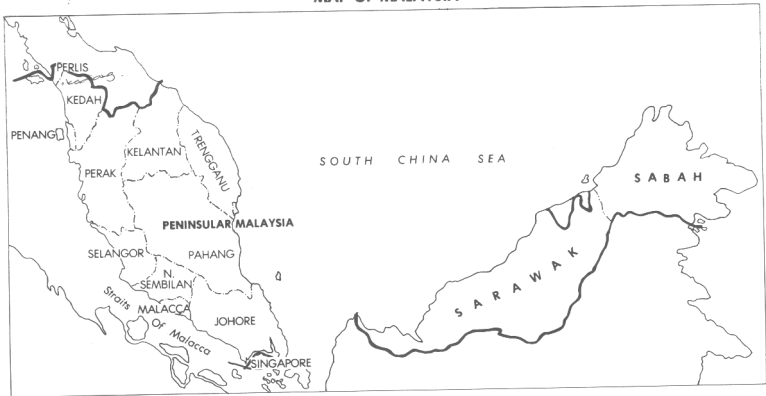
It is for this reason that he pleads for sanity: people, especially politicians, should not deliberately make use of racial prejudices for their own gains.

He goes even as far as to propose that race-oriented policies such as the New Economic Policy should be allowed to lapse and that future economic policies be based not on ethnicity but on the needs of the citizens.

Although the book does not really contain anything totally new so far as the reasons for the nation's racial prejudices and mistrust and what should be done to overcome them are concerned, perhaps this is the first time that anyone has ever written a book in a simple, bold and very frank manner what the racial prejudices in Malaysia are, why they are there, the terrible danger if they are allowed to continue to be there, and what can be done to curb them. As Dr Goh says, prevention is better than cure.

June 1989
Petaling Jaya

MAP OF MALAYSIA



Chapter One

Introduction: Prevention Is Better Than Cure

Geographically speaking, the Federation of Malaysia is disparate enough. Its main part, comprising the states of the Malay Peninsula, is separated from its eastern wing, consisting of the states of Sarawak and Sabah, by the vast South China Sea. However, this difficulty of geographical disparate-ness, which is being steadily overcome by expanding networks of sea and air transportation and telecommunications, is dwarfed by the problem of ethnic heterogeneity!

Malaysia is not quite an asia-in-miniature but the variety of peoples inhabiting its 330,307 square kilometres of land is staggering indeed. Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans and Kadazans are the main races. These are frequently mentioned and, consequently, better known outside the country. Though lesser known, the other ethnic groups are no less im-

Malaysia's Population By Region And Ethnic Origin, 1986 (Estimates)

Peninsular Malaysia

Total	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others
13,322,684	7,590,060	4,313,962	1,334,157	84,505

Sarawak

Total	Malays	Chinese	Melanaus	Ibans
1,515,174	309,679	443,904	87,248	449,166
	Bidayuhs	Other Indigenes		Others
	126,335	80,760		18,082

Sabah

Total	Bumiputras * and Others **	Chinese
1,271,278	1,083,951	187,327

Malaysia

Total	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Ibans
16,109,136	7,899,739	4,945,193	1,334,157	449,166
	Bumiputras and Others (Sabah)			Others
	1,083,951			396,930

* The bumiputras (natives) were not differentiated according to ethnic origins in the 1980 Census, which forms the basis for the 1986 estimated figures. This arose from the insistence of the Sabah State Government under Harris Salleh that the natives in his state be lumped together. For gauging the size of the Kadazan population, it is necessary to fall back on the 1979 Census. In that year, the composition of the native population in percentage terms was as follows. Kadazans 42.0%; Malays 4.2%; Muruts 7.1%; Bajaus 17.8% and other Indigenes 28.9%.

** The Others here refers mainly to the Indonesians and Filipinos residing in Sabah.

portant. They range from the Aborigines, Thais and Eurasians of the Malay Peninsula to the Melanaus, Bidayuhs, Kayans, Kenyahs and Kelabits of Sarawak and the Bajaus, Muruts, Sulus, Illanuns and Kadazans of Sabah.

In 1957 Britain granted independence to Malaya. Then the federation was made up of nine sultanates protected by Britain (Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johore, Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan) and two settlements (Penang and Malacca) which had been directly colonised. In 1963, Malaya was enlarged to become Malaysia, with Singapore (also a directly-ruled colony), Sarawak (ceded by the Brookes to the British Crown) and Sabah (inherited by Britain from the North Borneo Company) joining this federation. Two years later (in 1965), Singapore left the federation and became an independent republic on its own but Sarawak and Sabah remained.⁽¹⁾

Whether in 1957 or 1963, the social and political conditions prevailing then were not highly conducive to the unity of the country's diverse races. The different ethnic groups had been living under a common political roof provided by Britain and had been sharing legal, administrative and economic systems that were essentially the same but the differences amongst them exceeded their similarities.

(1) See James P. Ongkili, *Nation-Building in Malaysia, 1946-1974*, Singapore, 1985.

The proportion of foreign-born inhabitants was still high. In 1957, 16% of the residents in Malaya had been born outside the country — in China, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Arabia and elsewhere. In 1963, 7% of the residents of Sarawak and 11% of the residents of Sabah had not been born locally.⁽²⁾

The emotional attachments of the first-generation immigrants were still unclear. Owing to family connections, they had to write to their relatives in their lands of origins, visit them as often as they could and remit to them as much of their savings as possible. The more prosperous immigrants were under pressure from fellow clansmen to donate towards the maintenance or construction of schools, temples and ancestral halls in their native villages.

The political loyalties of the inhabitants were equally ambiguous. There was as yet no single focal point for them to focus their loyalties on. In the pre-World War Two period, the Colonial Office in London had looked upon its colonies in equatorial Asia as merely real estates. So long as the occupants did not cause disorder or jeopardize the profit-making activities of expatriate companies, the Colonial Government was prepared to allow them to pursue their own interests freely, even to the extent of involving themselves in the power struggles of their ancestral homelands. After World War Two though,

(2) The figures are based on the 1957 Census for Malaya and the 1960 Census conducted for Sarawak and Sabah.

the policy was partially amended. Immigration controls were rigorously enforced. Restrictions on involvement in external politics were imposed. A modest beginning was made to encourage the immigrants and others to acquire a sense of belonging to the country.

Today the situation is radically different. Peninsular Malaysia has been independent for over a generation whilst East Malaysia has been so for a quarter-century. The passage of time seems to have brought about fundamental changes in the social and political conditions of Malaysia as a whole. They are no longer as unfavourable towards national unity as they were before.

Only a small percent of Malaysia's citizenry are foreign-born. The overwhelming majority of Malaysian nationals have been born here. They have also been brought up and educated here. Generations of local-born Malaysians are now in full control of the government and administration and are in the process of doing the same in commerce, industry and other sectors of the economy.

Whether born in Peninsular or East Malaysia, whether born of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban or Kadazan parents, whether professing faith in the Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Sikh religion, these local-born citizens have only known one motherland in their life-time: Malaysia. Even those

with immigrant ancestors are no longer emotional about their countries of origins.

With the emergence of the independent nation-state of Malaysia, a definite focal-point of loyalty for everybody domiciled here has come into existence for the past three decades. Admittedly the process of inculcating a common love for King and Country in the hearts of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans or Kadazans takes a very long time, longer than a generation, but, judging from the spontaneous behaviour of ordinary Malaysians in daily life, one can say that satisfactory progress has been achieved so far.

Let me cite a few examples. When Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang reigned as the Paramount Ruler of Malaysia, he made an official visit to Penang, the oldest English settlement in South-East Asia which also happens to have an ethnic Chinese-majority population. This state had ceased to have a sultan as far back as the eighteenth century. To the amazement of observers, the Penangites received Sultan Ahmad Shah with great warmth and affection. Apart from flocking to attend a Ten-Thousand-Person Dinner held in his honour, these "Queen's Chinese"⁽³⁾ swarmed around him, trying to catch a glimpse of this Malay Muslim sultan!

(3) This term is used to denote those Chinese in Penang and other Straits Settlements who are noted for their love of things English.

When Malaysia's multi-ethnic badminton team took on the Indonesians in the semi-finals and the Chinese, the defending champions, in the finals of the 1988 Thomas Cup Championship at Stadium Negara, Kuala Lumpur, the scenes captured on Malaysian television were highly significant. Whether to cheer on Razif Sidek, Cheah Soon Kit, or other Malaysian stars against their Indonesian or Chinese opponents, the local spectators comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians and others could be seen standing on their seats and shouting at the top of their voices in a spontaneous outburst of excitement and enthusiasm.⁽⁴⁾

In the light of these and other positive changes in the social and political climate of this country, Malaysians of all ethnic origins have a right to expect to live as members of a large family in an agreeable and tension-free atmosphere and to enjoy together the fruits of their labour. Unfortunately, they have not yet been able to enjoy this right. Malaysia's multi-ethnic society appears calm on the surface but, as the Malay proverb correctly cautions us, *jika air tenang, jangan sangka tiada buaya* (when the water looks calm, don't imagine there are no crocodiles). Inter-ethnic tension is still very much in existence inside Malaysian society. Only a slight provocation is required to cause it to erupt into the open.

(4) Cheah Soon Kit and Ong Beng Teong beat an Indonesian doubles' pair and paved the way for Malaysia to enter the finals. Razif Sidek put up a gallant fight against China's third singles player in the finals.



Anwar Ibrahim

A case in point is the row over Chinese school teachers in October 1987. The education department had promoted 87 ethnic Chinese teachers to the posts of headmasters and senior assistants in Chinese-medium primary schools. By right, these promotions ought to have made the Chinese community happy but unfortunately they did not. There was a snag. The appointees had no formal qualification to teach in the Chinese language. Anwar Ibrahim, the Minister of Education, defended his department's action on the ground that these teachers were ethnically Chinese, they were overdue for promotions and they had, through years of teaching English or Malay subjects in Chinese schools, acquired a working knowledge of Mandarin. The Chinese educationists did not accept his explanation. Language, not ethnicity, was the issue. Placing ethnic Chinese headmasters not proficient in the Chinese language to administer Chinese-language schools would still result in a lowering of the standard of Mandarin and a dilution of the Chinese character of these schools.

On 11th October, the Chinese educationists sponsored a protest meeting in Kuala Lumpur. About 2,000 persons attended this rally. They included politicians from the Malaysian Chinese Association (Lee Kim Sai, MCA Deputy President and Minister of Labour and Yap Pian Hon, MCA Youth Chairman and Selangor State Executive Councillor), Gerakan (Ong Kim Tin, Gerakan Education Bureau Chairman and Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of

Energy Posts and Telecommunications) and the Democratic Action Party (Lim Kit Siang, DAP Secretary-General and Leader of the Opposition). After hearing speeches demanding immediate revocation of the controversial appointments, the meeting resolved to fix a deadline for the Minister to act, failing which pupils in affected schools would be asked to boycott classes. Ethnic Chinese cabinet ministers from MCA and Gerakan tried to assure the educationists that their request would be met in due course. In the end, the educationists voted — by a majority vote — to call off the proposed action (after the deadline had expired) but certain schools which did not receive the news on time proceeded with the boycott.

The reactions from the Malays were swift. The leaders and members of the United Malays National Organization were shocked, angered and outraged by the audacity of their allies, MCA and Gerakan, to team up with the Opposition Party, the DAP, to oppose a government in which they were represented. UMNO's youth wing held a mass rally on 17th October at the TPCA Stadium in Kuala Lumpur. In spite of pouring rain, speaker after speaker denounced the actions of MCA, Gerakan and DAP and gave vent to their racial feelings. When a deranged Malay soldier ran amok on 18th October in the Chow Kit locality of Kuala Lumpur, the worst scene of inter-racial ethnic violence in May 1969, rumours of

racial clashes spread like wild fire throughout the country.

Then UMNO itself announced that another rally would be held — this time at the huge Merdeka Stadium in the federal capital. The stated purpose of this rally scheduled for 1st November was to enable party members and supporters throughout the country to celebrate UMNO's 41st anniversary. As the days went by, the target size of the crowd for this rally kept rising — from 20,000 to 50,000, then to 200,000 and eventually to 500,000! The proposed rally should prove to the world that the Malays were united, said Sanusi Junid, UMNO's Secretary-General, to a gathering of UMNO members. "Go back to the kampongs and spread the word that all Malays must come to the rally, whether they have to travel here by car, bus, train or plane,"⁽⁵⁾. The sponsors evidently wanted this meeting to be the biggest-ever gathering of Malays in history.

As the big day drew nearer and nearer, racial tension rose higher and higher. Many Chinese shop-owners operating in the vicinity of Merdeka Stadium planned to shut down that day, send their employees home and bring their own families outstation. Worried housewives everywhere stocked up food provisions in anticipation of riots and curfews.

On October 27th, the government acted. On the

(5) See *The Star*, 26.10.87.

firm advice of the police, it announced a ban on all public gatherings, including the UMNO rally scheduled for November 1st. At the same time, it deployed the Internal Security Act, which provides for detention without trial, to detain 106 persons, including Lim Fong Seng and Sim Mow Yu, the two most prominent Chinese educationists; Lim Kit Siang, the DAP Leader of the Opposition; Yap Pian Hon from MCA, Ong Kim Tin from Gerakan, Ibrahim Ali from UMNO and Chandra Muzaffar, head of Aliran, an influential opinion group.

Like a lightning flash, this October 1987 incident had revealed all the weaknesses concealed in the inner recesses of Malaysia's plural society. Had potent, latent emotions not lain hidden below, a minor row over schoolmasters could not have flared into a major confrontation between the Malay and Chinese races within the span of a few weeks! Only the prudent counsel of the Inspector-General of Police (Haniff Omar) and the statesmanship of the Prime Minister (Mahathir Mohamad) halted the nation at the brink of disaster.

Prevention is better than cure, says an old English proverb. The events of October 1987 should open the eyes of all Malaysians to the crocodiles of ethnic conflict lurking in the waters of Malaysia's plural society. These creatures can rear their ugly heads and open their big mouths at short notice. Next time the country may not be that lucky.



Lim Kit Siang

Wars start in the minds of men, says the United Nations. "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."⁽⁶⁾ Accordingly, to prevent ethnic conflict in Malaysia in the future, action must now be initiated in the minds of all concerned. Every Malaysian, old or young, male or female, ought to examine his or her own mind, gather together the dust and dirt of ethnic prejudice that have accumulated over the years and sweep this rubbish away! For the older Malaysians, this task may prove difficult. At their age, prejudices tend to die hard. For the youngsters, however, it may not be an impossible mission to accomplish. They have been born in an independent Malaysia. They have grown up together. Now they are studying or working together. They share more aspirations in common with each other than their parents or grandparents. They can show the way to construct the defences of peace in the minds of citizens inhabiting a multi-ethnic nation.

(6) From the UNESCO Constitution, 1945.

Chapter Two

Harmony In A Plural Society

Plural societies elsewhere have so far not been too successful in achieving national integration. Lebanon, for example, is now in a state of civil war. Once upon a time, the harmony that prevailed amongst the Maronites, Sunnis, Shi'ites and Druzes was acclaimed in the Middle East and throughout the world. Now not only are these ethnic groups in conflict with each other but outsiders, notably the Palestinians, Israelis and Syrians, have been allowed to involve themselves in the Lebanese civil war.⁽⁷⁾

Sri Lanka is another theatre of civil strife. This island-paradise in the Indian Ocean has now been plunged into violence. Extremists from the Tamil community, an ethnic minority, have formed an in-

(7) See Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, London, 1987 and David McDowall, *Lebanon; A Conflict of Minorities*, London, Minorities Rights Group Ltd., Report No. 61.

surgent force, the Tamil Tigers, and have risen in armed revolt against the elected Sinhalese-dominated government. Colombo has been forced to invite India to send peace-keeping forces to help maintain law and order in the Tamil-inhabited parts of the island but the rebellion continues.⁽⁸⁾

Fiji, another group of island-paradises in the South Pacific, has lately failed in national integration. In 1987 military units led by a native Fijian colonel staged two *coup d'états* in a row. Ministers of the elected, multi-ethnic government, which had enjoyed wide support from both ethnic Indian and native Fijian voters, were arrested. The constitution was abrogated. Parliament was dissolved. The judiciary was abandoned. Power has been placed in the hands of the military government.⁽⁹⁾

Looking at the performances of these plural societies in different sections of the globe, one can understand why some observers view the long-term prospects for national integration in Malaysia with scepticism. For Malaysians, pessimistic forecasts about their country are nothing new. From the year

(8) See S.J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, London, 1986 and A. Jayaratnam Wilson, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict*, London, 1988.

(9) See R.S. Milne, *Politics in Ethnically Bipolar States: Guyana, Malaysia, Fiji*, Vancouver, 1981 and Hugh Tinker et al. *Fiji*, London, Minority Rights Group Report No. 75.

of independence onwards, gloomy prophecies have been heard or read. For instance, Rupert Emerson, a scholar from Harvard, predicted a collapse of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society as far back as 1960.

"Here, on the basis of what has happened elsewhere, the gloom-seeking prophet was and perhaps still is, entitled to assume that radical discord must soon bring upon open civil strife or strong man rule or both, but the governing coalition, the Alliance, has been able to hold the leading Malay, Chinese, and Indian parties together within the constitutional framework. The country has been independent, however, only since 1957, and the precedents suggest that the momentum derived from the colonial period and the elan coming from winning independence take a longer time than this to run down."⁽¹⁰⁾

So far, Emerson's prophecy of doom has not been fulfilled. Needless to say, ethnic consciousness is still strong and shows no sign of declining in its intensity. Amongst the Ibans of Sarawak and the Kadazans of Sabah, for instance, it has actually been on the increase. However, viewed in a broad social, economic and historical perspective, the general picture is both favourable and encouraging.

(10) R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p. 278.

In the first place, the Malays, the largest and most important indigenous race, are philosophically resigned to fate and the existence of immigrants in their midst. "(Fatalism) characterises the Malay attitude to life," writes Mahathir Mohamad in *The Malay Dilemma*. "It makes acceptance of everything, whether good or bad, possible with unprotesting tolerance and resignation ... It does not encourage resistance and certainly it does not engender a rebellious spirit ... This whole philosophy is contained in the Malay axiom — *Rezeki sa-chupak tak akan jadi sa-gantang*, or *One's lot of a quart will never become a gallon*. In other words, fate decides all and to strive to better one's lot is useless unless fate wills such betterment."⁽¹¹⁾

Since independence, a few Malays, particularly those who have been highly politicised, had openly voiced regret over the presence of Chinese, Indians and other races of immigrant origins in their midst and the conferment of citizenship on them. This was, of course, uncharacteristic of the Malay race. Invariably, those Malays were reacting to perceived provocations. For example, after the insults hurled at the Malay race by some unruly opposition supporters during victory processions in Kuala Lumpur after the May 1969 general elections, some Malays in Kampong Baru and elsewhere did feel humiliated and did desire — in that agitated state of mind — to see the

(11) See Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, p. 158.

Chinese and Indians thrown out of the country.⁽¹²⁾

As staunch Muslims the Malays accept fate. It was fate, historical fate, which brought the different races together under the Malaysian roof. The Chinese, Indians, Sri Lankans, Arabs and others were brought into or allowed to enter this country by the Colonial Government. Moreover, the immigrant races proved to be assets. They helped to open up the country to modern economic development.

The Malays are prepared to welcome new neighbours and to show friendliness to them. At the same time, their neighbours must also show goodwill and reciprocate goodwill with goodwill. Islam teaches the Malays to regard all human beings as descendants of Adam and to acknowledge everybody, including Chinese, Indians, Ibans and Kadazans, as brothers and sisters of the same human family. They are not permitted by their religion to be antagonistic to any person on account of his race or to return illwill for goodwill shown to them.

In the second place, the strengths possessed by each race do complement each other and can make up for

(12) For references on the 1969 disturbances, see John Slimming *Malaysia: Death of a Democracy*, London, 1969; Tunku Abdul Rahman, *May 13 — Before & After*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969; Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, 1971; Karl von Vorys, *Democracy Without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia*, Princeton, 1975 and The National Operations' Council, *The May 13 Tragedy*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969.

each other's weaknesses. They can be harnessed and synergised to bring forth a highly talented and resourceful nationality in Asia.

The Malays are meek, gentle, polite, patient and tolerant. Contrary to popular misconception, they are not at all fanatical. They practise give-and-take in their day-to-day relationship with Chinese, Indian and other neighbours. They are capable of compromise. They can accept the views and wishes of others if these are presented in a manner that is polite and that conforms to their etiquette and custom. The Malays are taught by their religion to be a forgiving people. If somebody has done something wrong but shows regret sincerely, his apology is accepted and the past is forgotten. It is unIslamic to continue nursing a grudge or seeking revenge against a person who has admitted his wrong-doing.

The Chinese are down-to-earth. Their ancient philosophies have taught them to shun extremes and to follow the Middle Path in their dealings with fellow human-beings. To live and let live has become a characteristic of the Chinese people. Since settling down in this country, the Chinese have been obliged by necessity to further refine the art of adaptation and accommodation. They have to make friends and influence people in their new surroundings. They may sound dogmatic and appear inflexible at times, particularly when they are speaking from public rostrums, but they become extremely realistic and pragmatic as soon as they sit at a round table to discuss and solve problems.

The Indians are carefree, agreeable and uncom-

plaining. They tend to have few material wants. They live and eat frugally (though their women folk can be lavish in their clothings and adornments on festive occasions). They organise their lives around their Hindu temples, celebrating the feast days of their deities and other festivals of their religious calendar. They do not show any enthusiasm to proselitize amongst others. They are remarkably liberal and indulgent towards Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and believers of other faiths.

The Dayaks, Bidayuhs, Melanaus, Kadazans, Bajaus, Sulus and other natives of East Malaysia are loyal, courageous, amicable and hospitable. Late contact with modern civilisation has meant a delayed enjoyment of the amenities of the modern era but, on the other hand, it has allowed them to preserve many of their traditional virtues. They are fearless when confronting enemies and courageous when facing dangers. They are caring towards neighbours, kind hearted towards friends and generous towards strangers.

In the third place, the various races have managed to live side-by-side with each other in peace and harmony for centuries. From the founding of Malacca (1400) until the outbreak of the Pacific War (1941), inter-racial conflict was an exception, rather than the rule. Even the heavy influx of immigrants from China and India which followed the establishment of the British raj in Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah did not give rise to any major inter-racial violence. There was violence, especially in Perak and Selangor, but it was intra-racial, for example, amongst the Chinese immigrants themselves.

The war between Japan and Britain in 1941-5 resulted in a temporary breakdown in the peace between the Malay and the Chinese communities in Malaysia. As part of its tactics to undermine respect for the colonial powers, Japan tried to pose as a champion of suppressed nationalities and tried to stir up Malay nationalism against British Imperialism. As a countertactic, Britain utilised her war-time alliance with China against Japan to arouse the feelings of the ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia against the Japanese invaders. During the interval between the sudden surrender of the Japanese in August 1945 and the arrival of British soldiers in October 1945, Chinese resistance fighters allied to Britain emerged from their jungle hide-outs and summarily executed victims accused of collaborating with the Japanese. Amongst their victims were not only Chinese and Indians but also Malays. Because Malays were killed by these Chinese guerrillas, inter-racial clashes broke out in Johore and elsewhere and wrecked the inter-racial good-will that had existed until then.⁽¹³⁾ The subsequent revolt of these old Chinese comrades against the British themselves in 1948 further exacerbated race relations, with the Malays actively siding the British against the Chinese rebels.

(13) For a detailed study, see Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-1946*, Singapore, 1983.

The rise of the tri-racial Alliance led by Tunku Abdul Rahman in the 1950s defused the situation and paved the way for a gradual restoration of goodwill and harmony. By degrees, the Tunku's party managed to convince the Malays that the insurgency was the work of the communists; it did not enjoy the support of non-communist Chinese and the Malays and the non-communist Chinese could cooperate to end the insurgency and build a free, independent, united nation together.

Since independence in 1957, the different races have managed again to live in peace and tranquility. Certain prophets of doom predicted civil war as soon as the Colonial soldiers withdrew but throughout the past three decades, only one major conflict has taken place, namely, the riots which broke out in the aftermath of the 1969 general elections. An emergency was declared and democracy suspended. However, because the disturbances were contained and confined to the capital city and order was quickly restored, the suspension of parliament lasted only eighteen months. Power was handed back to the elected government and the effort to heal the wounds of conflict and strengthen inter-racial goodwill and harmony resumed and intensified.

In the fourth place, Malaysia's plural society has been evolving and restructuring itself and correcting the anomalies inherited from the past. In the process, it has become less plural than it was before.

After the War, the Colonial Government decided upon a fresh approach towards tropical plural societies. As far as Malaya was concerned, it pledged to use government as "the common link which will draw together the communities of Malaya and provide a sense of common interest and the development of common institutions."⁽¹⁵⁾ When race relations deteriorated in the late 1940s, Malcolm MacDonald, the British Governor-General for South-East Asia, took the initiative to bring moderate leaders from the different communities together and actively guided them towards inter-communal cooperation and national integration.

After independence was achieved for Malaya in 1957, the task of redressing imbalances was accorded the highest priority in the agenda of the nation. Abdul Razak, the energetic and dynamic Deputy Premier, was assigned the portfolio of rural development and charged with the job of upgrading the basic amenities in the rural areas and raising the incomes of the rural folks. When Sarawak and Sabah joined Malaysia in 1963, this all-important programme of rural development was extended to these two hitherto underdeveloped states. Between 1957 and 1987, a total of 15.5 billion ringgits or 16.5% of federal development expenditure was spent directly on agriculture and rural development for both West and East

(15) *Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy*, Command Paper No. 6724, p. 3.

Before the Pacific War, the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and others constituted, in the language of J.S. Furnivall, a true medley of peoples. They mixed but did not combine.⁽¹⁴⁾ "Over these countries (with plural societies) the imperial power imposes the steel frame of its imported state system," wrote Margery Perham in *The Times* on 13.3.1942. "Relying upon its strength and in harmony with its main economic purpose, diverse groups, native or immigrant, pursue their material ends. Outside a few points of economic interaction, they can minimise contacts with other groups." The dichotomies were quite glaring. For instance, the Chinese, Indians, and other non-Malays, tended to be concentrated in the high-income, export-oriented sectors of the economy and participated in the mining of tin, planting of rubber and so on whilst the Malays lagged behind in the peasant economy and survived on subsistent farming and fishing. A majority of the non-Malays lived in the towns, which were generally better provided with piped water, electricity and tarred roads, and which enjoyed easier access to educational and medical facilities whilst the bulk of the Malays remained in their scattered attap-huts and suffered from a lack or absence of the modern amenities of life.

(14) For a discussion of the characteristics of a plural society, see J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 304.

Malaysia.⁽¹⁶⁾ Many more billion ringgits were spent by state governments and statutory bodies (e.g. Felda and Felcra)⁽¹⁷⁾ for the benefit of the predominantly Malay, Iban dan Kadazan rural inhabitants.

The late 1980s has seen Malaysian society gradually becoming less lopsided and unbalanced. Apart from the inevitable rural-to-urban migration, there has been a steady exodus of Malays and other native peoples from their rice-fields and fishing villages to the vast and elaborate land settlements developed by both Federal and State governments. The settlers plant export crops, notably rubber, palm oil and cocoa. When prices of these crops are favourable, they can enjoy monthly incomes which qualify them for the middle-income bracket in Malaysian society.

Those who choose to remain as rice-farmers are assisted by the government in the form of irrigation facilities, seeds, fertilizers, harvesting machines, price support and so on. Rice authorities set up by the

(16) Information supplied by Tan Wai Kuen of the Malaysian Central Bank's Economics Department.

(17) The Felda Land Development Authority (Felda) opens new land settlements throughout the country. It expects to settle 200,000 families or over a million inhabitants in its schemes by 1990. The Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (Felcra) concentrates on rehabilitating lands that have already been alienated but have been either un-utilized or under-utilized.

government, like MADA in Kedah and Perlis and KADA⁽¹⁸⁾ in Kelantan, pay particular attention to their requirements. With additional incomes from duck-rearing, fish-culture and fruit-growing, these rice farmers may now be able to obtain incomes which place them above the level of poverty.

The rural quality of life has been almost revolutionised. Most rural inhabitants enjoy access to piped water, electricity, metalled roads, telephones, clinics and hospitals. Government schools and colleges, including junior colleges with full boarding facilities, have been built everywhere in rural Malaysia. With the increase in local universities (from one in 1957 to seven in 1989) and the availability of government scholarships for both local and foreign universities, the number of rural Malay, Iban and Kadazan students who have obtained higher education has reached a record level.

The urban: rural ratio by race has changed. In 1957, Malays accounted for 20% of the urban population in the Malay Peninsula.⁽¹⁹⁾ By 1985, the figure had risen to 41%.⁽²⁰⁾ All indications point to a further increase in the future.

(18) The Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA) and the Kemubu Agricultural Development Agricultural Authority (KADA) are important rice agencies of the government.

(19) Source: *The 1957 Census for Malaya*.

(20) Source: *The Fifth Malaysia Plan*, Table 4.4.

Most sectors of economic life have been restructured. The imbalances have to a large extent been corrected (over-corrected in one or two instances). The Malays and other bumiputras have successfully penetrated sectors that were previously the preserve of the other races or the foreigners. They have established themselves strongly in tin-mining, plantation-agriculture, finance and banking and entered timber-exploitation, housing construction, trading (through agency houses), stockbroking, the professional services and so on.

The net result of these social changes has been the injection of fresh confidence into the hearts of the bumiputras. The present generation of young Malays, Ibans, Kadazans and other bumiputras possesses a sense of personal dignity, self-respect, self-reliance and self-confidence to a degree that is unprecedented in history!

Chapter Three

The Threat From Racial Politics

Given the favourable conditions for racial harmony and national unity described by me in the previous chapter, any critic is entitled to ask: why can't race relations in Malaysia progress and progress until some day Malaysians, like the Dutch and the Danes, are no longer conscious of their ethnic origins and react to issues of the day rationally, unlike what they did in October 1987?

It is, of course, tempting to answer this question by assigning the blame to the colonial masters, the British who ruled Malaysia for over a century or the Japanese who occupied the country for three years. Yes, the colonial masters were guilty of manipulating race relations for their ulterior motives. The Japanese did try to prop up the Malays and, to some extent, the Indians and to suppress the Chinese as much as they could. Consequently, they wrecked the rapport that

had existed, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese. The British were also ambivalent towards the races. When the Japanese armies were still occupying the country, they contacted the Chinese through Force 136⁽²¹⁾ and hinted that the Chinese community would be rewarded politically for their services. After the Japanese surrendered and Force 136's disillusioned Chinese allies revolted, they shifted to the Malays for support and backed their demands for the abolition of the Malayan Union. When Onn Jaafar, the founder-president of UMNO requested independence, the British told him that they could not accede to his request until he could demonstrate support from the other races as well. Poor Onn resigned from UMNO and formed a multi-racial Independence of Malay Party in order to prove to the Colonial Government that he had the support of all the races.

However, it is advisable to resist such temptation to blame others for the ills Malaysians now suffer. Malaysia has been independent for over a generation. Malaysians have more than enough time to right the wrongs of the past. If they have not yet done so, they have to accept responsibility for it themselves.

A major reason why race relations in this country remain precarious and unpredictable is that ordinary

(21) Britain's "007s" in South-East Asia during World War Two. See Ian Trenowden, *Malayan Operations Most Secret* — Force 136, Singapore, 1983.

Malaysians allow heaps of racial prejudice to pile up in the remote corners of their minds. They rarely bother to do spring-cleaning and to sweep out such rubbish. This is a fact that they must be frank enough to admit. In the thoughts they entertain when they are alone, the words they utter behind the backs of other races and the things they do when persons of another race are not watching, they are invariably guilty of one type of prejudice or another (though degrees of seriousness may vary from person to person).

Such racial prejudice is not confined to adults. From the disquieting studies made by scholars, it is abundantly clear that it has also spread to the youngsters, including school-going children. Young Malaysians pick up racial prejudice from many sources — from books, magazines, newspapers and friends — but it is not so uncommon for parents to interpret events in daily life racially and to make derogatory remarks about other races in front of their children or within their hearing distances. In this way, Malaysian adults are polluting the minds of their offspring. Children are born into this world without prejudice because prejudice cannot be transmitted from mother to child biologically. A child's mind is like a white sheet of paper. It can only be tainted by what it hears, sees or feels.

Another major reason why the racial problem lingers on is that ordinary rank-and-file voters of this country permit politicians to manipulate their racial

feelings for their partisan ends. By and large, Malaysian politicians, whether government or opposition, are not that wicked as to desire this nation to go up in the flames of a racial war. Deep in their hearts, they share to greater to lesser degrees the sentiments of tolerance, goodwill and friendship prevailing in our society. Unfortunately, they find themselves trapped. As party politicians in a competitive democracy, they have to compete for votes, not only for votes cast by ordinary citizens in general elections but also for votes cast by party delegates at party conventions. Hard-headed realism tells them that if their opponents use racialism as a tactical weapon to win votes, they have to do the same; otherwise, they lose out. This is why when campaigning hots up in both general and party elections, even eminent leaders noted for their statesmanlike views are forced to make uncharacteristically extremist pronouncements. Ordinary Malaysians, whether as citizen voters or party delegates, then allow themselves to be swayed by these raw, emotional appeals.

What is disturbing, perhaps even alarming, is that whilst racial prejudice amongst average Malaysians shows no sign of decreasing, communal politiking⁽²²⁾ by Malaysian politicians has been increasing by leaps and bounds.

(22) Politiking is a popular word in the vocabulary of Malaysian politics. It is used to denote excessive campaigning by party politicians.

Racial politics is, by no means, a new phenomenon in Malaysia. During the premiership of Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957-70), opposition parties, like the People's Progressive Party under the leadership of the fiery lawyer, D.R. Seenivasagam, the People's Action Party led by the eloquent Lee Kuan Yew (when Singapore was part of Malaysia), the Democratic Action Party (formed after Singapore's separation), the Labour Party of Malaya, **Parti Rakyat Malaya**, the United Democratic Party, the Sarawak United People's Party and **Parti Islam Setanah Melayu**, were frequently accused by the government of fanning the flames of racialism. The ruling multi-ethnic coalition, the Alliance, was trying to play a centrist role — to formulate policies acceptable to all races and capable of holding the nation intact. It attacked the opposition parties for exploiting the emotions of the different communities and agitating the masses against the government's middle-of-the-road policy positions on citizenship, the special position of the Malays and other bumiputras, language, education, culture and religion. Fortunately for the Alliance, these assaults by 'extremists' from both sides did not affect its hold on the reins of the federal government. Its coalition continued to secure majority support in parliamentary elections, even in the ill-fated May 1969 elections. Needless to say, the Alliance itself was not totally free of 'extremists' but these individuals (like Syed Jaafar Albar) belonged to the fringes of power.

From the premiership of Abdul Razak onwards, a

new dimension has been added to Malaysian politics, namely, racial politiking in government party elections! Election after election, the ruling coalition has proved that it is unbeatable. Moreover, Razak coopted hitherto opposition parties like Sarawak United People's Party, **Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia** and the People's Progressive Party into the governing coalition and strengthened the Alliance (renamed National Front) considerably in the process. In the 1974 General Elections, the new National Front scored a landslide victory.

As the invincibility of the National Front becomes as clear as daylight, aspiring politicians in the government parties begin to realise that party elections are as important if not more important than general elections. By winning a suitable post in a component party of the government, a politician can wield bargaining power to lobby for himself to be nominated as a candidate for a constituency; get himself elected on the strength of the government's popularity and then negotiate for a job in the state or federal government or a government statutory body.

As this realisation grows, more political hopefuls shift their attention to party elections. They have everything to gain and nothing to lose by participating in these elections. Months, even years, before the convention opens, they start their preparations to contest individually or to run on slates headed by powerful politicians. Where the party concerned is

important and has a lot of rewards to offer to the winners, e.g. UMNO or MCA, moneyed interests may be even persuaded to finance this or that slate. As a consequence, a party election can turn into a fierce battle with every side grabbing everything it can lay its hands on to throw into the fray. It is not hard to imagine why under such circumstances not only aspiring politicians but even established political leaders who have to defend their own positions succumb to the temptation of dirty, racial campaigning.

Furthermore, the Government itself has helped to raise the value of party posts by appearing to equate positions in the party with positions in the government. In the initial years of independence, a post in the party was not automatically a passport to a job in the government. Premier Abdul Rahman did consult component party leaders in appointing state and federal ministers but, in the end, the decisions were much his own. At the same time, he kept down the number of ministers in the federal government (14 in 1962). Job prospects for aspiring party activists were quite limited.

In the 1970s, the transition to the practice of basing government appointments on party positions began. Premier Abdul Razak enlarged the number of ministerships and deputy ministerships (from 19 and 6 in May 1969 to 21 and 15 in September 1974) and brought in a lot of new blood into the government. In terms of broadening the base of grassroot support for

the National Front, it was a good move. However, the National Front had to pay a big price for it, namely, intensified competition for posts of office-bearers within component parties. When political aspirants saw their contemporaries rising to the top overnight, their appetites were also whetted. Hence the big scramble for party posts.

UMNO, the largest and most powerful party in the National Front government, was the obvious target. The stakes here were very high. A post in UMNO commanded premium value. It could be a passport to a position in the federal government as a minister or in the state government as *menteri besar* or chief minister. UMNO's internal party elections, which had been rather dull and uneventful in Tunku's time, witnessed keen competitions in 1972 and 1975. In the 1972 elections, Ghazali Shafie, a bureaucrat-turned-politician and a personal confidante of Premier Razak, campaigned strenuously to get himself elected as one of the three vice-presidents but in vain. In the 1975 elections, Premier Razak in his capacity as UMNO President intervened in that year's party elections by naming (in a subtle and indirect manner) his preferences for the three vice-presidential posts, namely, Ghafar Baba, Razaleigh Hamzah and Mahathir Mohamad. He was determined to deny these posts to his ardent critics, particularly Harun Idris and Syed Jaafar Albar. All his three choices won, with the third candidate, Mahathir, beating his



Mahathir Mohamad

nearest rival, Harun, by only a close margin (474 to 427 votes).

When Hussein Onn, the son of Onn Jaafar, succeeded to the premiership after Razak died from leukemia in 1976, the practice of equating government positions with party positions was scrupulously followed. Government posts for the respective component parties were apportioned. Then the respective party presidents submitted their nominees more or less based on party positions. Although Premier Hussein enjoyed the prerogative to appoint, he did delegate this responsibility, wherever possible, to them.

In the case of UMNO, he had also, though he tried to circumvent it initially, to adhere to party hierarchy in making government appointments. This can be illustrated by the appointment of the deputy premier. Hussein's personal choice was Ghazali Shafie, an experienced administrator, a seasoned trouble-shooter and a well-known figure in the Association of South-East Asian Nations, but unfortunately he held no important post in UMNO. The party's three vice-presidents saw Hussein. They advised him to adhere to party hierarchy and appoint the vice-president of his choice to be deputy premier. In the end, he picked Mahathir, the Minister of Education, for this job. In subsequent reshuffles of the federal government (e.g. after the 1978 General Elections and the 1979 UMNO

Elections), Hussein stuck closely to party ratings, particularly in the case of UMNO. Those rated highly in party polls got key jobs. Those who obtained lower votes were given less important jobs or dropped from the government.

By the time Hussein retired after a cardiac surgery and handed over the reins of the government to Mahathir, the party had definitely taken command of the government. Henceforth, a prime minister could ignore party opinion only at his own peril. He himself might be challenged in the next party elections. Gone were the days when UMNO's presidency was unchallenged. In fact, as soon as Hussein resigned as UMNO president upon his retirement from the premiership, a big fight for the UMNO deputy presidency vacated by Mahathir took place at UMNO's convention. In the early years of UMNO, Abdul Razak bin Hussein and Ismail bin Abdul Rahman had contested against each other for the No. 2 slot but then it was a low-key, gentlemanly contest. As soon as it was over, they forgot the contest, closed ranks and worked closely with each other. In fact, Razak brought Ismail back from his retirement when the May 1969 riots broke out and appointed him into the National Operations Council. Subsequently when he assumed the premiership, Razak appointed Ismail as his Deputy Premier. The 1981 contest between Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam for the UMNO deputy presidency, which carried with it the prize of the deputy premiership of the



Musa Hitam

nation, was a full-scale party election fought with no holds barred. Supporters of both candidates campaigned amongst delegates throughout the country. In the end, Musa won. He became Deputy Premier. Those who supported him were rewarded with important jobs in both federal and state governments. From then (1981) on until the deregistration of UMNO by the High Court (1988), practically every post in UMNO at the branch, division and national level was contested.

In 1984, Razaleigh recontested the deputy presidency. Another no-holds-barred campaign took place. Even happenings elsewhere intruded into this election. Mak Foon Than, a Malaysian who was on trial for the murder of a Bumiputra Malaysia Finance official in Hong Kong, stated in a cautioned statement made public in late April that he had earlier visited the British colony to collect US\$6 million from Kuok Brothers Limited on behalf of the Malaysian Minister of Finance. On May 12th, however, he denied in court that he had so named him. "Well all know he was a good, trusted and honest minister," he said.⁽²³⁾ When the votes in the UMNO deputy presidential election were counted on May 26th, Musa won again.

Then in March 1986, Musa resigned unexpectedly from his deputy premiership, citing personal dif-

(23) See Ranjit Gill, *Razaleigh: An Unending Quest*, Petaling Jaya, 1986, pp. 177-8.

ferences with Mahathir as the reason. This was followed by an overt reconciliation between the two political adversaries, Musa and Razaleigh, and a combined challenge against the incumbents. In April 1987, an historic contest took place in UMNO. A serious challenge against an incumbent UMNO president was mounted for the first time in the history of the party. There had been challenges in the past (e.g. Sulaiman Palestin stood against Hussein in 1978) but these were not serious. Razaleigh lost to Mahathir by 718 to 761 votes, a difference of 43 votes. His runningmate, namely, his erstwhile rival, Musa also lost. He was defeated by Ghafar Baba, his successor as Deputy Premier, by 40 votes, with 41 spoilt votes (they were in fact blank). Razaleigh immediately resigned as Minister of Trade and Industry. Three ministers and five deputy ministers aligned to Razaleigh and Musa were sacked. Then 11 dissatisfied UMNO members challenged the legality of the elections in court on the grounds that *inter alia* thirty unregistered branches in four divisions had been allowed to participate in the divisional elections. Result: The High Court declared UMNO an unlawful society on 4.2.1988.⁽²⁴⁾

This phenomenal growth in politiking by the government parties has contributed enormously to

(24) See Ahmad Mokhtar Mohamad, *UMNO 1946. Siapa Belot? Thailand, 1988*. The author was the leader of the eleven plaintiffs.

the rise in the volume of inter-racial tension in the country. In general elections, candidates can campaign and some do campaign racially but they have to bear in mind that all constituencies are racially-mixed. In closely-contested elections, swings of marginal votes can be decisive. If candidates are seen, known or perceived to be racist, they may lose those few vital votes they require to win. Knowledge of such arithmetical realities often acts as a brake on the racial excesses of the candidates.

On the other hand, in party elections, the voters may be exclusively mono-racial. This is certainly the case with racial parties in the government, namely, the United Malays National Organisation, the Malaysian Chinese Association, the Malaysian Indian Congress, **Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak**, **Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu** and United Sabah National Organisation. Since the voters in these party elections, whether at branch or higher levels, share common racial identities, candidates running for office have to convince their voters that they are loyal to their respective race. Without such basic credentials of racial loyalty, they fear they may never be even considered by them. Moreover, their opponents within the parties invariably exploit racial emotions in their campaigns. For their own survival, they feel they have to do likewise. These candidates may not mean all that they say. After they are successfully elected, they may not act as racially as they have pledged. Nevertheless, a lot of utterances in

their campaigns is reported in the news media, including newspapers which report their news in translation. Radio listeners, television viewers and newspaper readers of all races read or hear what they say. Willy-nilly racial poison is injected into the body politic of this multi-racial nation.

Chapter Four

A Plea For Reason

In the preceding chapter, I have tried to argue that the existence of racialist residues in our minds, on the one hand, and the propensity of party politicians to use race for politiking, on the other hand, do hinder the process of racial integration. Assuming that this argument is right what then is to be done? What can ordinary citizens, who merely desire to live in a peaceful, prosperous and happy country, do to remove these obstacles and clear the way for the emergence of a tolerant, integrated society?

Evidently, ordinary citizens have to start by examining their own minds. They have to look inside and search for the rubbish that has been accumulating in the dark corners of their minds. Scoop it up, pile it up and set it to flames. I believe that the largest item in their garbage collection must be in the form of negative racial stereotypes, unflattering and untrue

beliefs that persons of one race hold about persons of another race. These stereotypes have to be identified and examined publicly so that everybody can see that they are baseless and ought to be discarded accordingly.

Ethnic stereotypes in Malaysia are too numerous to be enumerated one by one but by way of illustration, let me mention a few. A common stereotype of the Malays amongst the Chinese is that the Malays are a lazy people. Syed Hussain Alatas argues in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* that it was the colonialists who perpetrated this myth. Stamford Raffles, Hugh Clifford, Frank Swettenham and others wrote about the Malay "disinclination to work". Only Richard Winstedt defended the Malays against their "undeserved reputation of idleness".⁽²⁵⁾ Whoever may have invented it, the fact is that this was, and, to a lesser extent, still is a prevalent belief amongst some Chinese.

A conventional stereotype of the Chinese amongst the Malays is that the Chinese are exploiters. Chinese middlemen cheat Malay farmers and fishermen. Chinese traders cheat Malay consumers. Chinese trawler-fishermen poach on the fishing grounds of Malay inshore fishermen and cheat them of their catches. And so on. Some writers have lent credence

(25) See S.H. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, London, 1977, pp. 43-50.

to such beliefs. For example, the early publications of Ungku Abdul Aziz unwittingly conveyed the impression that the exploitation of Malay peasants by Chinese middlemen was racial.⁽²⁶⁾ Abdul Rahim Kajai's *Cerita Awang Putat* highlights the figure of Ah Kau, the Chinese towkay who prospers through cheating his Malay business-partners and protects his ill-gotten gains by bribing the Malay village-headman and other influential local leaders.⁽²⁷⁾

Another stereotype, which is popular amongst Malays and Chinese alike, attributes to the Indian race the great vice of drunkenness. Indians allegedly like to drink. After a few bottles, they will forget what they have promised you. In other words, Indians are an undependable race because they can be bought over with alcohol.

In Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah, Selangor and other rice-growing states, one can observe Malay peasants, steeped in mud, repairing bunds; ploughing fields; sowing seeds; transplanting seedlings; carrying stacks of padi on their shoulders and so on. In the village

(26) See for example, Ungku A. Aziz, *Facts and Fallacies About The Malay Economy*. Three articles from the Straits Time. Re-issued as Convention Paper, Malayan Merdeka Convention, London, 1957.

(27) See Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Malay Ideas on Development: From Feudal Lord to Capitalist*, Singapore, 1988, pp. 92-101.

open-air markets, one can see scores of Malay womenfolk bringing in farm produce on their heads, displaying them for sale in the sun and waiting patiently for customers to come by. Any people who are capable of sustaining such hard work in the hot tropical sun for the sake of very meagre returns do not deserve a reputation for laziness.

It cannot be denied that when one compares the original Chinese immigrants with the traditional Malay natives, a difference in productivity between them may be noticeable but the explanation is not found in their ethnic origins. It lies in social behaviour. Migrants everywhere tend to work harder than indigenes. The law of survival dictates that they do so. Look at the illegal Indonesian immigrants in Malaysia. In Kuala Lumpur, for example, they hawk from morn till night. They have proven to be more durable than Malay hawkers. In farming states like Pahang, they labour in oil-palm estates for longer hours and lower wages than their Malay, Indian or Chinese counterparts. For that matter, Malay migrant workers from Kelantan employed on construction sites in Singapore during the building boom of the 1970s worked much harder in the hot sun than Lee Kuan Yew's 'rugged' Chinese workers.

Amongst the Chinese themselves, there is now a perceptible difference in the work ethic practised by the old pioneer and that of his descendants. Whereas the old man slogs like a slave and lives like an ascetic,

his grandsons spend his hard-earned wealth on groovy clothes, fast cars and frequent holiday trips. They also squander their time away at the race-courses, casinos, discos and so on. Often one hears members of the elderly generation lamenting the fact that their children do not work as hard as they did when they were young.

With regard to the notorious middlemen, it cannot be denied that there were Chinese who exploited Malays. Some of them still do, even today. However, it is incorrect to impute a racial motive to it. Middlemen are middlemen. They exploit people regardless of race. Exploiters or cheats do not care which race their victims belong to.

Look at the vegetable-cultivators. Whether lowland or highland, they are predominantly Chinese. They sell their vegetables to wholesalers who are almost exclusively Chinese. According to standard practice, the wholesalers fix the prices to be paid to the farmers only after the vegetables have been sold. At the same time, they are at liberty to deduct as much as they please for damage or loss of weight whilst in transit. They do not have to refer to or consult the farmers. The average Chinese vegetable-growers will complain to you in private, and they will do so bitterly, against what they regard as exploitation by these Chinese middlemen.

As for the conflict between trawler and inshore fishermen, there is nothing racial about it. This was

the finding of a study conducted by the Government's National Unity Board.⁽²⁸⁾ The trawler-men are racially-mixed. Although most of them are Chinese, there is a significant number of Malays in Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and other states who own and operate trawlers. Likewise the inshore fishermen are multi-racial. Although a majority are Malay, there are substantial numbers of Chinese inshore fishermen in fishing villages, like Teluk Kumbar, Gertak Sanggul, Kuala Jalan Baru, Kuala Sungai Pinang and Pantai Acheh, on the Island of Penang. These Penang inshore fishermen can confirm that the Chinese trawler fishermen from Perak know that they are Chinese and yet they do not spare their fishing grounds.

Apropos cheating, the infamous Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Finance scandal⁽²⁹⁾ mentioned earlier proves, if any proof is required, that crooks do not have racial consciences. As the voluminous documents produced by the Ahmad Nordin Committee of Inquiry have shown, Malays from Malaysia did not hesitate to conspire with Chinese from Hong Kong to swindle BMF of a few billion ringgit! These Malays

(28) See Kementerian Perpaduan Negara, *A Study Of The Conflict Between The Inshore Fishermen And The Trawler Fishermen in Peninsular Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, July 1972.

and their Malay collaborators in Kuala Lumpur knew that BMF was a subsidiary of Bank Bumiputra, an important Malay trust-agency established by the government for the sole purpose of earning money for the benefits of Malays and other bumiputras. Yet they did not have any qualms about cheating it.

The stereotyped belief that Indians fall easily for the bottle is equally false. There are some Indians who drink, particularly the estate workers who enjoy

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- (29) A total of 2.5 billion ringgits was loaned by Bank Bumiputra Finance, a subsidiary of Bank Bumiputra, to the Carrian Group of Companies in Hong Kong under dubious circumstances. These loans have since gone sour. George Tan Soon Gin, a Sarawak-born Chinese, was the chairman and controlling shareholder of Carrian. Bentley Ho, another Chinese, was his key aide. Lorraine Osman, a Malay lawyer-businessman, was chairman of BMF whilst Hashim Shamsuddin and Ibrahim Jaafar were its executive director and general manager respectively. Jalil Ibrahim, an honest BMF auditor, was murdered in Hong Kong in July 1983 whilst trying to stop a fraudulent use of the company's money. Mak Foon Than, a Malaysian Chinese, was convicted in a Hong Kong court in May 1984 of murdering Jalil and sentenced to death. See Ahmad Noordin Zakaria, Ramli bin Ibrahim and Chooi Mun Sou, *Special Brief*, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, 1986 and Ranjit Gill, *George Tan: The Carrian Saga*, Kuala Lumpur, 1985.

some toddy⁽³⁰⁾ or samsu⁽³¹⁾ after a hard day's work. A few of them do drink to excess, become intoxicated and misbehave themselves in public. However, compared to the Chinese in this country, Indians drink less on a per capita consumption basis! The Chinese are the greatest drinkers. They drink everything from beer to stout to brandy and whisky and mao-tai. They must *yam seng*⁽³²⁾ at every dinner; otherwise, they are not happy. They like to go from table to table challenging friends and acquaintances to drink with them and be merry together. Some of them end up drunk. Waiters and waitresses in Chinese restaurants throughout the country frequently see their Chinese guests so drunk that they have to be helped home by friends or relatives.

The estate Indians who drink, get drunk and give their community a bad name are otherwise deeply religious persons. They can, and do, pray and fast on Hindu feast days. A few of them can even participate in fire-walking. A person has to have strong faith in his religion before he can enter into a state of trance and walk on burning charcoals with bare feet. On the whole, the Indians in Malaysia are devout believers.

(30) A drink tapped from the coconut palm. Shops selling it have to be licensed by the government authorities.

(31) A locally-brewed liquor drunk almost exclusively by the Indians.

(32) It means "Bottoms Up" in Cantonese.

They fear their deities and dare not act against their conscience, money offers notwithstanding.

After getting rid of racial prejudice from their minds, Malaysians must then cultivate the good habit of thinking and behaving rationally. They have to try hard and ignore the ethnic element. When an issue comes up for consideration, look upon the persons involved merely as human beings. Overlook their ethnic background. Weigh the matter judiciously and decide accordingly.

For example, when they read in the press that some Malay rice-farmers are reporting low yields for the season's harvest, they should not rush to indict the Malays for being an indolent race. Investigate carefully. It is a farming problem, not a Malay problem. The causes may be traced to drought, flood, pestilence or other factors. When certain Chinese villagers squat on government land and grow crops there, they should not jump into condemnation of the Chinese race for greediness. Probe into it. The squatters may be impelled by poverty and hunger, not greed. When many Indian estate children drop out from school, they should withhold judgment against the Indian race. Indians are as capable of learning as the Chinese or Malays but these children may be suffering from material deprivation at home or inadequate facilities in school. When Ibans and Kadazans living in the interior of Sarawak and Sabah are unable to read or write, this lack of literacy

should not be construed as evidence of their backwardness. Commonsense tells us that it is not the Iban or Kadazan race who is at fault. The authorities are at fault for not providing the required schooling facilities.

As soon as ordinary Malaysians have put their own minds in order, they will then be ready to face the politicians. It is the duty of ordinary Malaysians to free Malaysian politicians from their traps. There are politicians who want to be sober, balanced and rational, not racial and emotional, but they are not prepared to do so until every politician is required to do so. They do not wish to run the risk of being disadvantaged. The voters in a democracy resemble consumers in a market economy. The former have votes, votes to be cast at party or general elections whilst the latter have money, purchasing power to pay for goods bought from markets or supermarkets. Ballots, like purchasing power, can be skillfully deployed to exert pressure on the sellers, in this case, the politicians. They can be withheld from those who do no work but merely try to make a living out of racialism and be given instead to those who serve the people selflessly. If Malaysian voters of all races can exert such pressure collectively twice or thrice, the politicians will receive the message before long. They will realise that there is no premium left in racialism.

Those who aspire to be successful political leaders will have to heed the warning of the voters. They will have to cultivate the right qualities, like cleanliness, efficiency and trustworthiness and impress the voters with their virtues.

Chapter Five

Conclusion To Each According To His Need

As I stressed at the beginning of this essay, the October 1987 Episode exposed the dangers hidden in the inner recesses of Malaysian society. It revealed the ethnic emotions, latent, real and potent, lurking beneath the water's surface. A minor agitation of the river-bottom can rouse the crocodiles from their sleep and cause them to thrust their heads above the water, open their mouths and swallow up their victims. As infighting within the parties in the governing coalition intensifies and politicians of all ages busily scramble for positions in party elections, the risks of mishaps get higher and higher each day.

Concerned citizens of all ethnic origins are not at all helpless in the present situation. They can act. They

should act. They have the power in their hands to prevent Malaysia going down the Lebanese, Sri Lankan or Fijian way. They possess a powerful weapon: the right to vote. They have the right to choose office-bearers in party elections or people's representatives in general elections and prequalify them accordingly for plum jobs in the government.

Utilize the vote to pressure politicians, whether junior or senior, to abandon ethnic politics. Let the message sink in. Let them realise that ethnicity can no longer be a ladder to political power or a sanctuary for wrongdoers. It is entirely legitimate for any politician to try and reach the top of the government hierarchy but he has to do so through meritorious services to the party and the country, not by stepping on the dead bodies of innocent citizens. If a politician has committed a crime, for example, by accepting bribes, he should not be allowed to take refuge in extreme ethnic politics. Let him face censure at the polls.

There is a story about an old man in China who had numerous sons. Much to his distress, his sons quarrelled incessantly. One day he called them for a heart-to-heart talk. He picked up a stick and asked a son to break it up. The youth broke it easily. Then he picked a bundle of sticks, asked the same son to tie them up and then break the whole bundle. This time the young man failed to do so.

Concerned Malaysians may feel that they are too weak to take on powerful politicians and political

parties. Divided, of course, they are weak but if decent Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds are prepared to unite and to act as a common pressure group against ethnic politics, they shall be able to mobilise sufficient strength to purge ethnic opportunists from the political parties and legislative assemblies and pave the way for good, talented and rational Malaysians to serve God, King and Country. Like the civic-minded consumers who have managed to obtain their money's worth of goods from the merchants through coordinated consumer action, the voters can also get the kind of politicians they want from the political parties if they are conscientious and determined enough to act.

Malaysia is a tropical paradise. It lies outside the earthquake and hurricane zones. It does not have to suffer the destruction that its neighbour, the Philippines, regularly experiences. It is not flooded by rain-water or tidal waves, unlike another neighbour, Bangladesh. The monsoon in the East Coast of Malaya causes only minor flooding and damage. At the same time, Malaysia is not afflicted by drought, unlike Ethiopia, Sudan and other states bordering the Sahara Desert. It gets a balanced amount of rain and sunshine throughout the year. Seeds sown on its soil will germinate. Animals introduced into its land will breed. Fish and prawn fries cultured in its ponds lakes, rivers and seas will grow. These living things and creatures will thrive not seasonally, as in the temperate countries, but perennially! In the high-

lands, notably Cameron Highlands in Pahang, climatic conditions are temperate. Temperate flowers, fruits and vegetables can be planted there all the year round. No wonder botanists, aquaculturists and veterinarians from Europe are struck by Malaysia's apparently unlimited potential for large-scale food production.

Nature has endowed the country with abundant natural resources. The rain forests are rich in timber. Many trees have been felled but in certain states, notably Sarawak and Sabah, the timber resources are still substantial. Malaysia continues to be a top exporter of tropical hardwoods in the world. At one time, Malaysia was rich in tin-ore. It was the world's largest tin-producing country for over a century but now the tin deposits are quite depleted and mining has been scaled down accordingly. The sea-beds off the coasts of Trengganu, Sarawak and Sabah, contain significant oil and natural gas reserves. Petroleum is mined by Petronas, the national oil company, or by multi-national oil corporations which have profit-sharing agreements with the Malaysian Government. Natural gas in Sarawak is liquified at Bintulu and sold to Japan and the United States. In Paka, Trengganu, natural gas is pumped ashore and fed into a huge, gas-fired, power station. Pipelines are being constructed to transport natural gas from Paka to power stations in the West Coast of Malaya and to industries in the neighbouring state of Singapore. The rivers possess vast hydro-electric power potential. The upper

reaches of the main rivers in Peninsular Malaysia have been dammed and the Temenggor, Bersia, Kenering and Kenyir dams, for example, are generating cheap hydro-electric power. The potential in Sarawak and Sabah is staggering. When the mighty Rejang River is dammed at Bakun, the electricity generated there will be more than sufficient to cater for the power requirements of East Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore combined.

In addition, Malaysia has a rich human resource. By comparison with other developing countries, its inhabitants can be considered to be well-educated. Both old and young are eager to learn new subjects. Computer science, for example, is now the rage in the country. Happily this thirst for scientific and technological knowledge is not confined to urban dwellers. Malay, Iban, Melanau, Kadazan, Bajau and other youths from the rural areas who have attended colleges and universities at home and abroad have graduated with outstanding certificates, diplomas and degrees in the modern sciences. At the workshop level, rural youths who have found jobs in new factories like the advanced electronic factories set up by reputable multi-national firms in Petaling Jaya and Penang, have proven to the satisfaction of their European, American and Japanese employers that they are capable of skilled and sophisticated work.

For the sake of this great land of theirs, decent, sensible Malaysians should wake up now and stop the

political demagogues from taking them along dangerous roads. Be big-hearted. When the economic cake is enlarged, there will be more than adequate wealth for all to share. Let a hundred flowers bloom. Let a hundred talents flower. The task of industrialization will require all the skills that the people, especially the youths, can ever acquire. Exploit the resources that nature has endowed the country. Transform Malaysia into a Newly Industrialized Country by the year 2000 A.D. If Taiwan, a resource-poor nation, can increase its per capita income from US\$50 in 1950 to US\$2,000 by 1989, there is no reason on earth why resource-rich Malaysia cannot emerge as another dragon in the Asian horizon before this century runs out.

Learn the art of cooperation from Akira Kurosawa's classic film, *The Seven Samurais*. Each samurai excels in an aspect of Japanese martial art, be it fist-fight, sword-play or something else. Such excellence does not arouse envy or jealousy on the part of other. The seven regard each other's excellence as an asset, as the individual's contribution to the total group strength. The test comes when they are called upon by helpless villagers to defend their settlement against marauding bandits. These bandits heavily outnumber the samurais. If each samurai fights his own way, they do not have any chance against the enemies. They make a crucial decision. They decide to fight as a team, to use those martial art techniques they excel in to cover the weaknesses of fellow-

workers. In the end, they inflict a surprising defeat on bandits.

The tact of the Malays, the pragmatism of the Chinese, the ruggedness of the Indians and the courageousness of the Ibans and Kadazans are strengths, not weaknesses of the nation. Complement each other's strengths. Compensate for each other's weaknesses. Like the seven samurais, work as a team to grapple and resolve the problems of the nation, however challenging they may be, and march forward along the path of progress.

In the initial decades of independence, the rulers of Malaysia have found it necessary to identify citizens by their ethnicity and allocate the resources and opportunities of this country accordingly. One can debate the pros and cons of such policies but the fact is that they have produced results, though not to the satisfaction of everybody. Malaysian society is no longer as plural as it was. Many economic imbalances have been redressed. The identification of race with economic function or geographical location has been blurred, if not erased. The present generation of young Malays, Ibans, Kadazans and other bumiputras has successfully overcome the sense of insecurity suffered by their parents and grandparents. Young bumiputras now possess a degree of self-confidence that is sufficient to equip them to cope with the challenges of a competitive age.

By the 1990s, it should no longer be necessary for the Malaysian Government to continue with its traditional race-oriented policies. The time would be opportune for the political leaders of this country to consider a new formula for solving the problems of the nation, a formula that can ensure that the remaining inequalities faced by the Malays, Ibans, Kadazans and other bumiputras are attacked with unrelenting vigour without at the same time alienating the feelings of the Chinese, Indians and other non-bumiputras.

I propose that race-oriented policies, like the New Economic Policy, be allowed to lapse and that future economic policies be based not on ethnicity but on the needs of the citizens. Every citizen is encouraged to contribute — as much as he is able and willing to do so — to the state. No coercion is used. For example, an entrepreneur is persuaded to invest, create job opportunities, export, earn foreign exchange and pay taxes to the government. An administrator is urged to provide clean and efficient service to the private sector and facilitate the proper functioning of the economy. An employee, whether in a farm, factory or office, is exhorted to maximise the productivity of his work, thereby contributing to the maximisation of the state's productivity. In turn, the state strives — within the limits of its scarce resources — to cater for those citizens who need its assistance. In such a situation, the motto is, to borrow a phrase from the late John Kennedy, *From Each According To His Will To*

Each According To His Need. State assistance for its citizens, be it in the form of scholarships and bursaries for students, job training for job-seekers, subsidies for farmers and fishermen, loans for small-scale and medium-scale traders and industrialists, licences and permits for reserved businesses or other benefits, is then accorded to Malaysians who can demonstrate that they need it and are able to make full use of it.

Over a period of time, it shall be possible to discern that policies based on social and economic needs can help to reduce wastage and increase efficiency. By concentrating attention on those who are in need, the government can ensure that most, if not all of the state's scarce resources and limited opportunities reach the right bumiputras, thereby accelerating the process of overcoming backwardness and underdevelopment amongst have-not bumiputras.⁽³³⁾ At

(33) Ozay Mehmet argues that the Malaysian ruling elites, in assuming the role of trustees for the ordinary bumiputras, have emerged as a cartel. "In the process, they have effectively cornered economic planning and decision-making to enrich themselves while paying lip-service to poverty eradication. Inter-racial income inequality, historically a major source of conflict in multi-racial Malaysia, is now being replaced by widening intra-ethnic inequality, especially among the Malays." See Ozay Mehmet, **Development In Malaysia: Poverty, Wealth And Trusteeship**, London, 1986.

the same time, they will not give rise to feelings of frustration amongst the non-bumiputras. The limited number of Chinese, Indians and other non-bumiputras who can qualify for state assistance are allowed to obtain it. The rest who do not do so, and they are likely to constitute the great majority, cannot blame the government for it because need, a universal criterion, is the yardstick, not ethnicity.

The idea that a citizen be considered on the basis of his social and economic needs, not his ethnic identity, may encounter resistance in a society that has been used for so long to ethnically-oriented policies. I expect my proposal to receive a controversial reception but when the dust has settled down, I believe that sober, rational Malaysians of all ethnic origins will recognize that there is merit in it. The idea appeals to their innate sense of righteousness. After all, it is in harmony with the religious beliefs they have been taught. The great religions of the world to which Malaysians belong, namely, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, preach the idea of the brotherhood of men and the virtue of compassion for unfortunate human beings who dwell on this earth, regardless of who they are or where they inhabit.

In conclusion, let me emphasize once again that Malaysia is a country with abundant natural and human resources. At this moment, it should, by right, stand in front of, not behind, South Korea and Taiwan in the queue of economic progress. The best

way for Malaysians to catch up for lost time and opportunity is not to lament, complain or sulk but to act positively — to cast the remains of ethnic prejudice out of their minds, treat each other like brothers and sisters of the same national family, deprive political opportunists of the chance to use racialism as a tool for politiking and oblige every seeker of political office to earn his votes by the sweat of his brow! The net result is that politicians will have no choice but to impress their voters by what they are doing to tackle corruption in the government, commercial crime, poverty, indebtedness, unemployment, inflation, drug abuse, environmental pollution and a hundred-and-one other real and urgent problems confronting the nation.

Let me tell another story from ancient China in order to drive home my point. Once upon a time, there lived in the state of Qi a king, who loved the *yu*, an ancient wind instrument. He ordered that a great orchestra of three hundred *yu* players be formed and to perform before him regularly. A certain person known as Nanguo sought audience with the king and claimed to be a celebrated *yu* player. The king happily accepted him into the orchestra and paid him a considerable salary. After the old king died, a new ascended the throne. The new king also liked the *yu* but he preferred solo performances. He ordered that group performances be replaced by individual performances. When news of this imperial instruction reached Nanguo, he fled that very night. Only then

was it discovered that he could not play this wind instrument at all!

I hasten to predict that if racialism can be removed from Malaysian politics, and each and every politician in the land has to stand on his own ability to deliver the goods, those politicians hiding behind racial rhetoric will, like this fake musician, vanish from sight! The present clamour for political office will subside. Power struggles will scale down. Politics will return to normalcy. And the country may at long last be back on the right track towards peace, progress and prosperity.

A Postscript On UMNO

The original UMNO had its origins in the popular Malay protest against the Malayan Union. British's post-war constitutional plan to merge the states and settlements of the Malay Peninsula, excluding the Island of Singapore, into a Malayan Union; to reduce the powers of the traditional sultanates; to liberalise the conditions for citizenship applications and to accord equal rights to all inhabitants domiciled here, sparked off widespread protests and demonstrations by the Malays. On 1-4 March 1946, some 300 delegates from over 40 Malay organisations met at the Sultan Sulaiman Clubhouse, Kuala Lumpur, to deliberate on a concerted plan of action. In a show of support, thousands of ordinary Malays from all walks of life gathered outside the meeting-place.

The delegates decided unanimously to form a political party, the United Malays National Organisation, in order to provide the Malays with an effective

political vehicle to oppose the Malayan Union and to secure the rights of the Malays as the indigenous peoples of this part of the world. Onn Ja'afar from Johore was subsequently elected president of UMNO.

When the Colonial Government yielded to the pressure from the Malays, abandoned the Malayan Union and replaced it with the Federation of Malaya, UMNO felt that it had scored a major political victory. Encouraged by this success, UMNO proceeded to press the British for early independence for the Federation of Malaya. However, UMNO was told that it only represented the Malays and could not, therefore, act on behalf of the other races. Onn Ja'afar tried to persuade UMNO members to agree to open the party's doors to non-Malays so that UMNO could become a multi-racial party and speak for everybody but in vain. In frustration, he left UMNO and formed an Independence of Malaya Party with membership open to citizens of all races.

Tunku Abdul Rahman from Kedah succeeded Onn Ja'afar as the next UMNO president. Though he opposed multi-racialising the membership of UMNO, the Tunku was not against the idea of cooperating with the Chinese, Indians and other races in order to win independence from Imperial Britain. The success of an ad hoc electoral arrangement between local UMNO and MCA branches in a local council election in Kuala Lumpur in 1952 gave Malay, Chinese and Indian leaders a new idea, namely to work together

through an alliance of racial parties. The UMNO-MCA-MIC alliance won the 1955 federal elections handsomely and managed to obtain independence for Malaya as early as 1957.

Since independence, that is, for a period of more than three decades, UMNO, in coalition with other parties, has been holding the reins of power. By comparison with political parties in other newly independent countries in the Third World, UMNO's achievement is no mean feat. In fact, only the Congress Party of India and a handful of other parties in Asia, Africa and Latin America, have survived that long in power.

Power has brought enormous benefits to UMNO. It has over the years facilitated the horizontal and vertical expansion of the party. Over a million Malays, the bulk of whom inhabit rural and semi-rural districts in the country, have joined the tens of thousands of branches formed by UMNO.

At the same time, power has also brought along with it problems, the biggest of which is factionalism. As UMNO activists, especially those who harbour ambitions of high office, learn the ropes, so to speak, they become impatient to climb up the party ladder.

Factional infighting in UMNO reached a high point in April 1987 when Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam took on Mahathir Mohamed and Ghafar Baba, the incumbent president and deputy president. 88 out of 132 UMNO divisions publicly endorsed Mahathir



Ghafar Baba

for the presidency. Yet when the 1479 votes cast were counted, the incumbent president was returned by a majority of only 43 votes. The incumbent deputy president won by an equally slim majority: 40 votes.

In the aftermath of the party elections, Razaleigh Hamzah and Rais Yatim resigned as ministers. Three ministers (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Shahrir Samad and Ajib Ahmad) and four deputy ministers (Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, Rahmah Osman and Zainal Abidin Zin), who had supported the Razaleigh-Musa team, were dropped from the government.

Then eleven dissatisfied UMNO members (originally twelve but one withdraw eventually) filed a suit in June 1987, seeking to declare the April 24 elections null and void. They claimed that irregularities had occurred at a few divisional elections. Since the divisions elected the delegates to attend the General Assembly and vote in the national elections, these aberrations had allegedly affected the voting on April 24. On 4 February 1988, Justice Harun Hashim delivered his judgment. He found that 30 unregistered branches had participated in the election of 4 divisions, namely, Pasir Putih, Machang, Rantau Panjang and Nibong Tebal. He ruled that, in accordance with the appropriate provisions of the Societies Act (under which political parties are administered), he had no choice but to declare UMNO an illegal organisation and what occurred in 1987 as null and void.

In the days that ensued, there was confusion as interested parties attempted to re-register the old UMNO or to register a new UMNO. Soon it became clear that an application by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the elder statesman of the country, to register UMNO Malaysia was rejected by the Registrar of Societies. Instead, the application made by Mahathir Mohamad and others to register UMNO Baru (New UMNO) was approved.

The UMNO registered by Mahathir has been gaining ground. It has been accepted by component parties in the National Front as the successor to the UMNO deregistered following the High Court judgment. It continues to enjoy the power wielded by the original UMNO. It has managed to attract, if the statistics provided by the new Secretary-General, Mohamad Rahmat, are bone fide, a substantial majority of the original members. It has been strengthened by the re-admission of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, Ajib Ahmad, Musa Hitam, Tawfik Ismail and other leaders previously aligned to Razaleigh Hamzah.

At the same time, Razaleigh and his hard core allies like Rais Yatim, Manan Othman, Suhaimi Kamaruddin, Rahmah Osman, Harun Idris, Osman Saad, Zainal Abidin Zin, Zakaria Abdul Rahman, Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, Marina Yusoff, Ibrahim Azmi and Ibrahim Ali, persist in their determination to revive the original UMNO. They continue to refuse to



Razaleigh Hamzah

recognize the present UMNO as a continuation of the old UMNO. This Semangat 1946 (Spirit of 1946) group has negotiated an understanding with the leading Malay opposition party, Parti Islam Setanah Melayu (PAS), on a joint programme of political action. Fadzil Nor, a young leader, has replaced the ailing, elderly Yusof Rawa as president of PAS in the 1989 party congress. He and other younger leaders are enthusiastic about collaborating with Razaleigh Hamzah. They seem prepared to forget what Razaleigh did to PAS when he was Kelantan UMNO's head. Barisan Jemaah Islamiah Se Malaysia (Barjasa), a localised party formed in 1977 by the then Menteri Besar of Kelantan, Mohamad Nasir, has also joined this proposed opposition coalition. It unilaterally withdrew from the National Front in May 1989.

At this moment, the UMNO led by Mahathir appears to be in firm control of the situation. To what extent a combined assault by Semangat 1946, PAS, what Barjasa can damage its electoral base can only be known at the next general elections.

Kuala Lumpur,
June 1989.

1987 UMNO Election Results

Post	Candidate	Votes Polled	Majority Obtained	Spoilt Votes	Result
President	Mahathir Mohamad	761	43	Nil	Elected
	Razaleigh Hamzah	718			
Deputy President	Ghafar Baba	739	40	41	Elected
	Musa Hitam	699			
Three Vice-Presidents	Wan Mokhtar Ahamd	935		18	Elected
	Abdullah Ahmad Badawi	879			Elected
	Anwar Ibrahim	850			Elected
	Rais Yatim	690			
	Ramli Ngah Talib	667			
	Harun Idris	398			
Speaker	Sulaiman Ninam Shah	850		13	Elected
	Shamsuri Salleh	453			
	Mohd. Noor bin Md. Dom	106			
	R.M. Idris	32			
	Baharom Shah bin Indra	19			