



# THE MUSA DILEMMA

Reflections on the decision of Datuk  
Musa Hitam to quit the government  
of Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad

**K. DAS**

# *Sumbangan*

*daripada*  
Khazanah

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Zain

Azraai bin Zainal Abidin

P  
K  
Kuala Lumpur.

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To

My friends in the Malaysian press  
who put up with the system  
and still managed to say their say

Nations get the Governments they deserve.

It is likely that future Prime Ministers will be more prone to take away what rights that remain to us as citizens. We may not have the protection of gentle, considerate people like Datuk Hussein Onn, who are capable of feeling shame.

*But if we are unwilling then as now to stand up and fight for our rights, we will deserve the tyranny that we will get.*

Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoon,  
*The Star*, 1981.

In many ways the sword of Damocles still hangs over a population that has merely been assured that it will not drop.

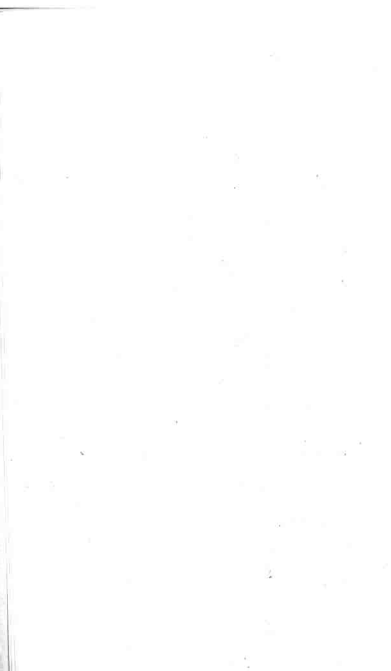
The optimists say that with a fresh mandate there will be a new liberalism.

Mahathir and Musa have, of course, tasted the bitterness of being ostracised for their non-conformist ways, but whether or not their sympathy for the new generation of non-conformists will be translated into action will become clear only when they win their own elected mandate on April 22.

K. Das, *Far Eastern Economic Review*  
9 April, 1982.

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## Introduction

*That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,  
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;  
But when he attains the upmost round,  
He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
Looks to the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend.*

— William Shakespeare.

This is an instant book.

It is also an opinionated book.

There is no great scholarship involved. There are some observations which hopefully, will be of value to the people of my country who are once again forced to wander about zombie-like as, once again the corridors of power become sacred, secret halls like the Vatican when a Pope dies.

But no Pope has died here. The truth, however, is not very well. It needs fresh air to revive and recover.

After Manila and the successful sanitization of power, there seems to be little excuse for our silence. We have no Marcos as yet, and there is no reason why we should allow one to emerge.

This book is also a challenge to the press — not all of it, because some part of it has already freed itself in sheer disgust. But the rest is disgraceful silence. The fault, dear me, is not in our star journalists, but in our proprietors that we are under pressure.

Am I taking too many chances, provoking the all-powerful establishment? No, but I am taking no chances against the humiliation we must all face if we remain frightened. It is time to look at the establish-



ment and train ourselves to say "governors" (with a small 'g') and "servants" and "paid managers" instead of "leaders." They were elected to govern, that is, to maintain order and balance, not to order citizens about and play at being bullyboys.

I am not writing about gods but about men with very human weaknesses: with their stupidities, their greed and their megalomania. If we do not see them clearly for what they are and act according to this knowledge, we should not complain about being treated like cattle.

These fellows really imagine they have the "mandate" to "warn" us and "reward" us with tidbits at their pleasure. And they think nothing of telling us what they think is "good" for us and deny us information of the most basic kind. And I am not talking about dangerous security secrets.

We had to beg and scream for the BMF report, for example, and it was released as if the country was full of village idiots. Upstanding men like Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin and Chandra Muzzafar and Tan Sri Tan Chee Khoon and Tun Hussein Onn are treated with disdain, while the poor and illiterate are manipulated to mouth the vocabulary of "popular support."

And now we are all treated like half-wits and insulted on the grounds that a legitimate demand for an open enquiry or a Royal Commission is a call for witchhunting! Incredible!

Musa Hitam, the Deputy Prime Minister offered to resign his post. Well, why did he not simply resign?

Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister, received Musa's crucial letter — and he is the man who once said that the election to the Deputy Presidency of the Party, the United Malays National Organisation, does not entitle the man to the Deputy Premiership. Excellent! But he was unable to accept the resigna-

tion of the Deputy President and Deputy Prime Minister at once.

There is violence in Kota Kinabalu. The authors of the violence are not exactly KGB goons or unknown monsters from outer space, but for reasons that must rank as some of the ugliest in politics, only half measures were taken for three weeks. Lives have been lost and still no decisive action has been taken.

These are the truths.

There are also untruths masquerading as "the demands of duty", "the need for peace and political stability," and other "reasons". But when "reasons" are only excuses, the truth must perish.

Political pimps like to parade the May 13 prostitute to seduce the population into terrified silence. Malaysians should look at May 13 closely and if they do, they will most assuredly dismiss the pimps and the prostitute. That ghastly episode was not the making of the ordinary man, the poor or the illiterate.

We are not a violent people and should not be stampeded into violence. It is happening in Sabah already.

Nor should we believe that the truth is the monopoly of those we have merely employed on five-year contracts.

Despite the abomination called the ISA.



## Chapter One

### The Two Men

*Ye gods, it doth amaze me,  
A man of such feeble temper should  
So get the start of this majestic world,  
And bear the palm alone.*

— William Shakespeare.

People at home and abroad can be excused for thinking that two great men came to power as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in 1981. Mahathir Mohamad and Musa Hitam became "famous" that year, thanks to a lot of writers and hacks churning out copy to gratify all kinds of editorial mills. I, too, played my part, in this "instant greatness" operation.

But who are these men?

I have spoken to them on more than one occasion. There is nothing truly extraordinary about either of them apart from their local political prominence, though both are intelligent and articulate. Musa is a pleasant enough man to deal with. Mahathir, on the other hand, is a testy individual who does not seem to find politeness an essential piece in his psychological furniture.

I disagreed with some of their ideas and agreed with others. I was obliged to defer to their positions and not ask some questions which I should have liked to ask. Now I regret it. The whole attitude of journalists towards politicians in this country (and many

others) is really dreadfully servile. Even some foreign journalists kow-tow for temporary advantages and stomach all kinds of insults.

The situation became worse after 1981 when Mahathir made his position clear on the subject: journalists, according to him, merely had the talent to turn a phrase, and because newspaper proprietors needed this talent, they were let loose on the market place. I suppose one could say the same of butchers, barbers, neuro-surgeons and ministers of government. So the Prime Minister was not really saying much.

By some extraordinary stretching of logic Mahathir also claimed that journalists had no right to influence public opinion because they had no "mandate" from the people.

Now, what is this "mandate" that Mahathir swears by?

To him the voter gives his power away when he votes for a candidate. Once he elects an MP, the voter has no more to say. He has a voice once in five years or so, and then he has no more say than a prisoner in Pudu gaol. That is a perception of the "mandate" which he uses against a journalist's freedom to express his opinion, or even impart information without comment.

What does Musa think of the press and its freedom? He likes to think – and say – that he is a liberal.

And just what is a liberal? To Datuk Musa, a thoughtful man who began to travel earlier and for longer periods than Mahathir, it is limited to functioning under the rule by law. He believes in law that has been enacted in parliament. At least that is the clear impression one gets. What he will do as a Prime Minister, of course, is left to be seen.

One cannot quarrel with his position as far as it goes. But as a lawmaker he seems to be unaware that laws are not good laws simply because a rubber stamp parliament has approved it. It is not a good law even after a group of fiercely independent MP's have passed it. They can all pass bad laws. It happens in the best of democracies and the evidence of it is plentiful from ancient Athenian laws which allowed slavery and the laws which made the Malaysian Universities and University Colleges Act possible. There are still laws which demand stoning adultresses and publicly cutting off hands of thieves. It all happens under rules *BY* law.

Musa's liberalism, therefore, is not liberalism at all but a bureaucratic toleration-ism, that is to say, within the framework of existing laws, including the indefensible Internal Security Act which was to have only a short "emergency" life, but goes on and on and on, he is a liberal. Certainly his toleration-ism considers public opinion more seriously than Mahathir's "mandatism", but Musa has not quite reconciled himself with the more important principle of the rule *OF* law, that is the rule by such laws as are intrinsically in harmony with the principles of natural justice.

So, by their natural philosophical dispositions, we have two men who lead a party and are wedded to the idea that UMNO has a permanent governing role in Malaysian life, sanctified by the force of such laws as already exist. Of course there can be no room for change or progress in politics if the law is a dead thing to be used alternately like a scourge and a power puff.

And there lies the problem.

Looking back at the history of the two gentlemen, the picture which emerges is disturbing. Both have

had messianic notions about their future roles without either the exciting personal intellectual equipment or the capacity to foster the intellectual environment to operate in.

Mahathir's visions are cluttered with mechanical gimmickery and Musa's visions are yet to be visible, though he does exhibit a tendency to make amends to what is amiss rather than make anew what society may dream of.

In this book, *The Malay Dilemma*, Mahathir put on display his own limits when he spelt out his perceptions in what he considered blunt terms.

"The Malay dilemma is whether they should stop trying to help themselves in order that they should be proud to be the poor citizens of a prosperous country or they should try to get at some of the riches this country boasts of, even if it blurs the economic picture of Malaysia a little."

Of course, it was not just blunt. It was simplistic and crudely polemical.

What fantasy of logic presents "Stop trying to help themselves" as an alternative to "get at some of the riches"?

In fact "to get at some of the riches" smacks too much of "smash and grab" and this is reinforced by "even if it blurs the economic picture of Malaysia a little." The suggestion of piracy is implicit in the tone of the prose, and now inevitably raises spectres of the BMF swashbucklers and their rapacious indifference to the chaos they created.

They certainly did get at some of the riches and undoubtedly blurred the respected and respectable Malaysian economic picture more than just a little.

Did Mahathir who said he would not apologise for his views when he published his book perhaps realise that an apology would not have meant much?

His polemic, in the post 1969 trauma, of course, worked, together with the kind of polemic of people like Tun Abdul Rahman Yaakub and Tun Mustapha Harun, which all said the same thing, "Give a few Malays the opportunity to become rich quick." This was supposed to "blur" the economic picture to the satisfaction of visionaries like Mahathir. Meanwhile poverty stalks Baling and the people of Kampung Memali. Not to mention a hundred other kampungs from Kangar to Sandakan.

There is in business in Malaysia today a coterie of half-educated politicians (that is, people trained in professions which gave them no time or inclination for acquaintance with civilised attitudes or even a brush with what might be called universal ethical values). These people, including many Chinese and Indians, tend to proclaim from the rooftops their concern about the disability of their own traditions. They like to scold people for being what they regard as old fashioned. Their notions of modernity are almost totally tied to fantasies about the industrial revolution: mass produce and fast, and never mind the smoke-stacks.

One Indian politician only recently criticised his community for clinging to the values encouraged by their own traditions on the grounds that it made the Indians economically backward. He thought their habits born of their traditions were at fault because they were inimical to the competitiveness required of the rat race.

Dr. Mahathir was quoted by the same gentleman to emphasise the need to pursue material wealth with single-minded energy and enthusiasm. The message was that if you work hard you will become rich. It was not received or borrowed capital as such which produced wealth, he said, but the will to work and



accumulate capital. He was talking to small Indian businessmen who were hoping to find political aid to their efforts at capital formation.

There are very few people in the world, I have always maintained, who work half as hard as my amah. She is a 35 year-old spinster. She is pleasant and she is religious. She is patient, polite, truthful and content with the good things of life available to her, and she remains poor, slogging away with an enthusiasm that would please these politicians no end. But she remains poor.

Which brings me to the extraordinary character of Mahathir's notions of wealth and the way of the world.

In 1976, the day after the then Managing Editor of the *New Straits Times*, Abdul Samad Ismail was arrested under the provisions of the Internal Security Act for suspected involvement with the Communist Party of Malaya, the foreign correspondents in Kuala Lumpur, invited the then Deputy Prime Minister for lunch.

Mahathir told us that Samad was guilty of distorting his speeches by judicious (or was it injudicious?) editing. Though it did sound rather paranoid, we let it pass.

All those present, in the course of their duties, have had to edit speeches by various politicians, largely because these speeches are often long-winded and almost invariably boring. Captive political audiences are obliged to remain attentive, and then deliver a certain minimum measure of noticeable applause.

But newspaper readers have no such obligations. They have to be captured and held, often against their will, and prevented from turning the page at least for a brief moment.

For this reason politicians have to be edited – for their own good. The reader who will read an entire political speech is so rare that no editor could possibly depend on him for his paper's circulation. But politicians will never believe any such thing. Suspiciousness is the basic ingredient which constitutes the political animal. So, as I said, we let the distortion claim pass.

Mahathir then went on to explain the security problem. He told us that in spite of the grave situation in the country, with bombings and shootings, the destruction of the National Monument and assassinations in broad daylight, people still did not understand that the government's priority was security. They kept asking for foot-bridges and telephones and medical clinics and other services. He said they did not understand that they had to wait.

Many of us who had lived through the "emergency" of 1948 – 1960 were only too aware that the fight against the communists was won precisely by giving the people the services they needed before they were seduced by the communists with wild promises of fantastic "pies in the sky."

Mahathir's "explantation", therefore, was startling for its ignorance of one of the best known Malaysian political experiences, and it was therefore frightening. I asked how his message was conveyed to the rural people. He said it was not a difficult matter. He briefed UMNO information officers who then spread the word. And what did he say to them? He said he told him that the priorities had to be listed and explained to the kampung people.

He then philosophised. "The way of the world is such that some people will always be rich and some people will always be poor. The poor people must be patient." He then called upon us to read history and

the great books of the world and books of religion to realise that what he said was true.

It was mind-boggling, especially coming from the man who wrote *The Malay Dilemma*.

Was it not reasonable, I asked myself, for some of the poor who had read his book to think it fair to join the communists to

*"try and get at some of the riches,"*

*"even if it blurs the economic picture a little?"*

*"Or should they be content to remain proud?"*

*"but poor in their own rich country?"*

Instead I asked, quite seriously, what would happen if the information officer concerned finished his speech in a jungle fringe village coffee shop, and drove off, and his seat was taken by a communist cadre from the jungle who told the villagers, "When we sieze power, there will be no rich and no poor. We will all be well off?" Who will the villagers then believe and trust?

The question was not an unrealistic one. Indeed there are jungle fringe villages which still have uncomfortable contacts with the communists even today.

Dr. Mahathir sat back, looked expansive and smiled: "Well," he said, "that communist was wrong, wasn't he?"

There was a silence. I thought, "He must have understood the question, surely!" But I could not speak.

The lunch ended on a sobering thought: Is he really going to be our next Prime Minister?

The confident "logic" of his question bothered me no end. "That communist was wrong, wasn't he?" My question was, "What would the villagers think?" Was he evading the question deliberately or was he really incapable of understanding the issue?

Was he the man who believed that the Malays must be pulled up by the bootstraps or was he some throw-back to a feudal past where "let them eat cake" – if there was no bread – was ineluctably logical? Was blurring the economic picture a little, then, unconnected with the future of the poor Malay?

I kept my peace.

The Mahathir era came five years later, and with it the decision to "clock in and out" of work, the Look East policy and the Buy British Last policy. Each of these fell upon us like bird lime upon unsuspecting travellers who thought they had reached shelter. There was no warning, not even so much as a by your leave.

It was noticeable, though, that Musa was not leaping and dancing with joy at each of these announcements. The Japanese were dancing, but it was a puzzled dance. A friend of mine who imported punch-clocks was laughing all the way to the bank, but it was a puzzled laughter. The British were not laughing.

At this time I met the former Secretary-General of UMNO, Senu Abdul Rahman, a former Information Minister and a party theoretician. He was scratching his near-hairless head in dismay. "Why?" he asked. "What is the point of making the British angry? No doubt they have lost their Empire but they are still powerful. They have influence. They can do a lot of harm, I don't understand, I don't understand at all, you know that?"

I remember a chat about this time with Musa who was also Home Minister. Musa is a man who speaks in measured tones and his sense of humour has to be kept in check at all times. There are those who think he is a vengeful man, but to me that side of his character was not important because he wreaked no

revenge on his non-political detractors. And even his political enemies don't seem to me to have become obvious victims of his political or government power.

Revenge on political opponents, I think, is virtually a *sine qua non* for the business. It is a very rare politician who does not begin his career without picking up his hatchet. And very few end without a hatchet or two buried in their necks.

But with Musa at least there was no question of locking away journalists, with the notable exception to prove the rule, of one gentleman from *Watan* who wrote some bizarre stuff based on Russian embassy handouts. The quality of his work inspired one journalist to say that he should have been given a life term or given to the Russians as a Christmas gift – for giving the “trade” a bad name. Still, his incarceration did Musa no good as far as the press went. It certainly killed the “liberal” notion quietly dead.

In my conversations with Musa he never revealed himself as an anti-Mahathir man, though goodness knows that I tried to probe him a dozen times. I always left him rather puzzled. He insisted he was a Mahathir man, through and through. They were more than just friends. Indeed, he said, at one time they were so close it was embarrassing. He went further in his description of how their closeness was perceived ... and then laughed aloud at the frailty of human thought.

On the other hand, much as I tried to draw him, he never got enthusiastic about some of the more outlandish Mahathir projects. Even the Look East policy was something to talk about but not rave about. Mahathir himself made some wry remarks about how he himself looked East while Musa looked West. Later Musa was to explain that it was a matter of division of labour, a rationalisation which spoke

more for Musa's sense of humour and perhaps diplomacy than any change of attitude.

The fact that Musa and Mahathir were once seen as extreme elements in UMNO was something Musa found amusing. He did not deny that he was a Malay politician with the need to nurse the Malay constituency and keep alive the notion of the sacredness of the totem of a Malay polity, to keep him secure in his party. That was not his language at all, but there was an eggs-must-be-broken-to-make-omelettes mood in our talk.

During a tea-time tete-a-tete at the E & O Hotel in Penang, I think it was in 1976, he told me that a young Malaysian politician had to play the race thing to the hilt even if there was not a single chauvinistic bone in his body. It had nothing to do with being a chauvinist. He said that securing that constituency was critical — and he was not talking about any narrow electoral constituency. But once that was done, the politician could then consider how to become a statesman. Again, those were not his words but that was the drift of his thinking.

Mahathir on the other hand bristled with indignation at any suggestion that race politics was part of UMNO's way of life. He tended, as a matter of personal predilection, to protest too much, and too quickly.

I asked him once — I think it was in 1982 — whether it would not be a good thing to start basing civil service promotions purely on merit, rather than on political considerations. Was it not the logical thing to do in view of his grand plans for rapid industrialisation and modernisation of the economy?

My question, quite obviously, was aimed at finding out if non-Malay civil servants should not rise to the top without having to compete against the present

built-in advantage of being a Malay. I was, of course, sailing close to the unsavoury wind of the "sensitive issues" laws.

His reply was that "merit has many components." I could not agree with him more. But he went on to say that one could not appoint as a head of a department "a person of one kind" (meaning a non-Malay) in a department consisting of "another kind of person" (meaning Malay). He also pointed out, in rather irritated tones, that many non-Malays had gone into the private sector or migrated. "Take you, for example," he said. "You quit."

The fact that he himself had resigned from government service was quite another matter.

His testiness is part of the unpleasantness which conceals, I am told, a shyness.

I don't know.

If Mahathir is indeed a shy man, he does not show it in too many revealing ways.

He once took it upon himself to attack me personally, suggesting I was in the pay of foreign masters who treated me as a "pet poodle," stroking my ego no doubt for doing their bidding.

I suppose he was a little shy when he failed to name me. I was, however, quite clearly identified by description, including the fact that I worked for a foreign journal after having left the government service in frustration. At least he got that part of it right — I did leave the service in frustration like hundreds of others including the most recent, Ahmad Nor, who left the Customs Service and the leadership of the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service (CUEPACS).

In 1969 Mahathir was not very shy when he wrote an open letter to the then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra. The old man called it a scurri-

lous letter then. It apparently blamed the old man for UMNO's electoral setbacks and the consequent riots of 1969, and accused him of selling Malay birthrights to the Chinese. The letter was banned by the then Home Minister. Mahathir who lost his seat in the election before he wrote the provocative letter, was expelled from the party. According to his close friends he lived in fear of being arrested under the ISA and imprisoned without trial. But nothing of the sort happened.

Around this time Musa was also sacked from his job as an Assistant Minister.

The two, described freely in those days as UMNO Ultras, disappeared from the scene for a while. Their sojourn in the wilderness was unremarkable. Mahathir practised medicine and did some business. Musa went to University in England and picked up an MA.

What was remarkable was that they came back, assisted by such people as Datuk Harun Idris and Tun Abdul Razak, and fought their way to the top of the power pile, Musa the one-time student activist, some ten years younger than Mahathir taking second place to the Doctor from Alor Star.

When their fortunes were finally yoked together in 1981 they were full of plans for the new millenium.

I remember meeting Musa outside the Prime Minister's office just after he had announced the release of 21 political detainees (though the fiction is maintained that they were security detainees. When men are incarcerated without trial, how can they be anything but political detainees? But the principles of Rule BY Law can explain that quite easily.) I asked him for an interview and he replied that he was extremely busy, and when I pressed him, complained that I was not his friend.



Extraordinary thing! I was not asking for friendship or invoking it. In fact the last thing I wanted from a Home Minister was his friendship. I did regard Musa as a friend, but not the Home Minister. Our association in the past did have some warmth and he certainly became more than an official contact or an acquaintance to be shown off to gullible people. So his remark was a little off-putting.

Perhaps that was and is Musa's problem. He angers easily and gets his private and public communication channels mixed. Friendship and politics, of course, do not mix. "A friend in power," someone has remarked, "is a friend lost."

Still later I did see him and spend pleasant hours talking about a great variety of things. We had discussions about the role of Royal Houses in Malaysia (long before the Constitutional Crisis of 1983) and the problems of the opposition parties. We discussed Islamisation and the Pacific Basin concept, and we discussed "money politics" long before he became Deputy Prime Minister, long before the phrase gained popular currency.

But it became clear that a journalist was only a friend if he made friendly reports, not if he was faithful to the facts as he saw them, and to his own ideas (not to say ideals) of good government. He was not to encroach, it seemed, on the politician's monopoly of the political "truth of the moment."

Musa once told me that he wanted to give time to "real" foreign correspondents only, implying that I was, somehow, not the genuine article, since I was only a Malaysian. Musa's sense of humour, as usual, had its own little cutting edge just below the surface. And it did scratch.

But for all that, one could not help liking him.

## Chapter Two

### Open Government?

*Well, honour is the subject of my story.  
I cannot tell what you and other men  
Think of this life: but, for my single self,  
I had as lief not be as live to be  
In awe of such a thing as I myself.*

— William Shakespeare.

I met Musa once in 1984, not long after I was branded the "pet poodle" by Mahathir at a journalists' gathering. Musa was not looking happy on that weird occasion though he rose to his feet, began to applaud the speech, and then did so in a perfunctory manner, and sat down. My fellow journalists followed the desultory style.

Now he looked even unhappier. I had my tape recorder and my notebook, and he told me to put them away since it was not an interview. I was very surprised, and complied with a mild protest.

Home Ministers in Malaysia are notorious for putting journalists on the carpet, an exercise they regard as one of their natural prerogatives. Malaysian journalists, for their part regard these sessions as an occupational hazard, like having their cameras knocked about by irate news subjects or over-enthusiastic policemen. So I put my equipment away and waited for the lecture.

But none came.

Musa is not a man without some style. We spoke about the problems of news coverage. It seemed I was not getting the government's viewpoint properly like

some other journalists, and he named my good friend N.V. Raman of *The Star* as an example of a good reporter. I agreed with him – Raman did write after a great deal of leg-work. But it seemed the problem was also one of selecting issues and sources and presenting a balanced picture. I had to agree it was the basis of writing for a newspaper.

But what was the point of government sources that would not talk? Some were outright rude. Some trotted out clichés and official versions which were simply unconvincing. And what of the great tendency of politicians (often quite absurdly) to conceal crucial facts from the public?

The conversation lasted more than one hour and ended on the unhappy note that while he himself would take no action against me, there were people who were angry enough to want action. I expressed my regret that such people existed. Musa was angry.

I am obliged to paraphrase the proceedings because of the request not to take any notes. I did, however, go home and recollect some of the conversation on paper.

But I could not help recalling that conversation when news broke of Musa's resignation letter to Mahathir on March 1, 1986.

*To me it was nothing less than Musa's personal vote of no confidence in his Prime Minister.*

The whole country wants to know what the letter contained but it remains, for all appearances an officially secret document.

But can a letter of resignation of one of His Majesty's Ministers be kept secret?

Indeed, can any expression of no confidence by one of the highest officials in the country in the Prime Minister, be kept a secret?

This, I think is one of the Musa dilemmas facing us.

It is *not* Musa's own dilemma but the country's dilemma in an atmosphere which makes the government tighten its secrecy laws as if some unspeakable monster has descended upon us and is threatening to destroy us all at any moment. But where is this monster?

And the reporters are saddled with a headache. If they read the document unofficially – the Malaysian political system, of course, leaks like a broken sieve – they cannot quote directly from it. If they do not report it at all, they would look and feel very foolish. If they indulge in circumlocution, the rumour mill will continue to grind "exceeding fine".

But the government should be aware that thanks to the gadget called a photocopy machine, Musa's letter is floating all over the country like so much confetti.

Secrecy in politics is nothing if not normal. UMNO, a party born in an act of defiance of the mighty British Empire, one might have thought, would be less secretive than most. Idle thought. It is not.

Even young UMNO politicians know that the way up is on a ladder of scandalous secrets, to be climbed "wrong by wrong," and at least one hopeful has asked me for "all the scandals you know about" a number of important politicians. My collection – what I was absolutely certain about – was disappointing for him since "you have no real scandal stories, lah!"

Worse, he began to retail some tales about the "greats" in Malaysia and I quickly found it was largely rubbish. But he quoted sources and named names when I expressed scepticism – and I subsequently found it was still largely rubbish.

The most fruitful time for scandalous stories is

during the Annual General Assembly of UMNO. The stories are not only born there but carefully bred in a sophisticated machine. I have heard of Tunku Razaleigh's imminent marriage and Datuk Musa's imminent divorce. I have heard of Dr. Mahathir's enormous wealth and Datuk XYZ's sex antics in the Hilton penthouse with some imported playmates. There was that story in the 1984 election assembly, that some UMNO financiers were wandering from hotel to hotel, with briefcases flush with cash, and buying votes.

Of course the ultimate explanation of the activities of this vigorous rumour mill is that the facts are not allowed to appear in the press.

Now the rumour mills are again in full swing, and day after day the stories, the theories and outright inventions proliferate. The options for Musa and Mahathir are being worked out by all kinds of "experts" and forecasts are being made by politicians and businessmen. The scenarios are often based on ignorance of even how UMNO functions. Here are some of the options that have been given currency by the "experts" before the four wise men went to talk to him:

- a. Musa will definitely not withdraw his resignation.
- b. Musa will definitely withdraw his resignation.
- c. Musa will come back and fight for the top position.
- d. Musa's men will angle for an Extraordinary General Assembly, and precipitate a power struggle.
- e. Mahathir, anticipating this, will name a successor to Musa and call a general election.

- f. Musa will withdraw the support of Johor if that happens.
- g. There will be mass defections in Johor from UMNO to PAS.
- h. Mahathir will declare a state of emergency and call off elections and rule by decree.
- i. Mahathir has been asked to resign and has refused.
- j. Mahathir offered to resign, but was discouraged.

All these theories, and there are many more, are based on pure guesswork. The points to ponder seriously, however, may be:

- aa. Musa had until March 16 to change his mind only if Mahathir officially declines to accept the resignation.
- bb. So far Mahathir has not promised to make any concessions to Musa to facilitate his change of heart.
- cc. The charges contained in Musa's letter are too strong to be forgotten easily. Musa claims he has been accused of trying to topple Mahathir. It is not known how serious Mahathir was in making such an allegation. Mahathir himself says it was a misunderstanding. But Musa obviously has burned his boats.
- dd. Mahathir and Musa have had serious differences for a long time, and that is clear despite efforts during the last UMNO assembly to present a united image. In fact it was bothersome that Mahathir was protesting far too much.
- ee. Direct confrontations in UMNO have not worked in the past. Datuk Harun Idris tried

and failed. Before that Aziz Ishak, Tunku Abdul Rahman's minister tried and failed. So a direct Musa challenge is not on, *at least not yet.*

- ff. The chances of an Extraordinary General Assembly being called are miniscule, if not nil. The reasons are basic: it goes against tradition in at least two ways. One is that it immediately implies confrontation. Another is that it will split the party badly, if only temporarily, at a time when a general election is looming.
- gg. Mahathir cannot name Musa's successor without resolving the crisis for the simple reason that it will deepen the crisis. But he cannot delay it for too long. There will be opposition from within to almost any candidate becoming Deputy Prime Minister until he is actually elected UMNO Deputy President.
- hh. Musa will not withdraw Johor support for UMNO just to spite Mahathir because Johor's defection will crack UMNO's backbone and leave the party very weak and that will be of no use to Musa in the long term. Johor also sends the largest number of delegates to the UMNO assembly every year. Destruction of that power will be self-defeating.
- ii. Massive defection into PAS is also not on. Despite the fears of sympathy for the Muslim extremists after the Memali episode, there is a stronger tradition of loyalty to a leadership that holds the reins of power. UMNO members in Johor or anywhere else

will not move massively to PAS overnight. There might be some drift, though.

jj. Emergency power is more difficult to exercise now than in the past. This is partly due to the society being far more sophisticated than before. Even with the bombing in Sabah, it has been successfully argued that a state of emergency is not necessary. And more importantly it is difficult due to the tightening of the constitution after the 1983 amendments. The King can delay any parliamentary decision to declare an "emergency" by up to sixty days if he does not believe there is an emergency. Such a "delayed" emergency move, of course, will be meaningless.

kk. The decision of the four members of the Supreme Council to postpone their trip to see Musa was thought-provoking. The official reason was that Trengganu MB, Wan Mokhtar had to first receive Mahathir in his home state, for an already fixed stated visit. The questions which arise are: (i) why did Mahathir still have to go on these explanatory visits? (ii) why did Wan Mokhtar NOT withdraw from the delegation if the matter of reconciliation was urgent? The delegation left late, after several meetings with Mahathir, but not as a team. They left two by two.

ll. Where is the most effective negotiator of them all, party vice-president Ghafar Baba, in this time of crisis? Why was he not recalled from his overseas trip urgently? He came home after the first flurry of excite-



ment, just before the MB's left on their mission. He remains silent. Whose side is he on?

- mm. Why is the Secretary General of UMNO, Datuk Sanusi Junid silent in this crisis?
- nn. What kind of support has Musa within the Supreme Council? Is the Council really full of Mahathir yes-men?
- oo. The press has virtually blacked out the whole Musa story after the Mentris Besar came home? What has happened to freeze all discussion in the papers?

The reason for all these mysteries is that Malaysian democracy, so-called, is not built on any kind of open system. Ranging from a near-castrated press to one of the most wide-ranging Official Secrets laws, basic information is kept well hidden from the public.

One of the most boring arguments against critics is that we are all better off than Country A, Country B and Country C, all three being invariably third world dictatorships or worse. The comparisons invited always makes me think I am being offered a choice of the kind of authoritarianism I would like to live under.

Even Tunku Abdul Rahman, the only politician in the country who has gained the universal respect of his countrymen, could not, as a politician, spread his understanding of the full importance of open government.

Whenever the Tunku spoke the truth, naive as it sometimes sounded to some people, political mediocrities sprang into action like vultures. His suggestion that the National Language policy be implemented at a realistic pace was exploited and he was attacked for being pro-Chinese. He could have done what was politically expedient and paid lip service to the Act

and still controlled the pace through Ministerial Orders. This is the style highly favoured today, and as a result there are some dangerous anti-democratic laws in the books. The lawmakers seem unaware of the dangers of having statutes that can be abused.

Secrecy as a way of life in politics was also sanctified by Ministers who believe in paternalistic politics. Hussein Onn who is a believer in a free press, nevertheless, once told me, "The Malays have a saying: When something is very clear, why shine a torch on it?" While appreciating his position, the suggestion that a certain amount of murkiness is sometimes a necessary evil, of course, is not the stuff of open government. But his colleagues were even rougher and far more patronising. Once power is won there is a tendency to tell the electorate, "Father knows best! Leave it to Bapa, lah!"

Bapacracy, obviously, is no substitute for democracy.

But the new crisis has come at a time when that naive attitude on the part of the electorate is on its dying legs. The time has passed when the politician could tell the scholarship student to be "grateful" for having been sent to university in England or the USA. The young man does not bow in contriteness and shame. He laughs: "It is taxpayers' money, not UMNO money. In any case it is not YOUR private money, so, go away!" Patronage, a few years ago meant not only scholarships but lucrative jobs when the young graduate came home. In the current economic climate, when even government jobs are scarce, the young man finds the government far less impressive than his father did.

Not too many politicians seem to appreciate the change even if the changes are taking place under their noses. It is going on and the new players who

have entered the political arena are not power seeking politicians but idealists seeking justness and equity for all, not material rewards for themselves. They are creatures that terrify politicians.

Consider:

The Bukit China (Chinese Hill) Affair.

The Malacca State Government was stunned when the people of the state simply refused to allow their peaceful, sacred hill to be converted into a business area bristling with concrete towers. The campaign was not run by opposition politicians alone – though they played their part – but by ordinary people and the Chinese temple authorities who were trustees of the hill. For some extraordinary reason, the Chief Minister of the State, Datuk Abdul Rahim Thamby Chik, clung to his conversion plan to the last moment, and cited laws and rules and legalisms and ignored the elementary fact that his constituents did not want to give away their fresh air and their heritage for the doubtful value of concrete and steel work stations.

The Papan Affair.

Attempts to browbeat the residents of Papan in Perak state also failed when they refused to budge on the issue of burying radioactive waste near their residential areas. The opposition politicians joined the fray but again it was the environmentalists, the reform groups and the ordinary people who shouted the government down. Even the press was forced, despite its primary loyalties, to expand on the story of Papan until the establishment woke up.

The Cuepacs Affair.

Attempts to browbeat the government trade unions over promised salary rises failed. Even if the government kitty looked woeful with the collapse of commodity prices, and later oil prices, the unions

were no longer the unions of old to be rapped on the knuckles. They made it clear that negotiations must proceed as between two groups of intelligent adults. They have postponed industrial action but not buckled under pressure. Their chief, Ahmad Nor, has now entered politics for the reason that he believes that the government cannot be relied to negotiate fairly. His support from the unions may give his Party, the Sepakat Democratic Party far more clout than the original Socialist Democratic Party.

#### The Tambunan Affair.

In Sabah, three years after the massive National Front Government's electoral victory, the state National Front government of the Party Berjaya was not merely defeated but humiliated. The party had reacted to the loss of a by-election by abrogating the district status of a place called Tambunan; and when Berjaya again went to the polls, the Sabah voter expressed his disgust.

The Chief Minister, Harris Salleh himself lost his seat, though he now claims, with amazing lack of a sense of irony that he was the best Chief Minister Malaysia ever had! His party, Berjaya, did not think enough of his services to the state to retain him for service to the party. Harris, in many ways, symbolises the breed of politician who lives in the past, steadfastly refusing to see that the world around him is changing so rapidly.

Harris's disability should have been an embarrassment to Kuala Lumpur but it was not visible as such. After the Tambunan affair, astonishingly, Mahathir himself did not hesitate to go to Sabah and campaign for Harris. Indeed several National Front stalwarts flew to the Land Below The Wind to give aid and comfort to the extremely cocky Chief Minister. At least three senior National Front politicians told me

that it was a "gone case, lah." They had been insulted by the crowds in Sabah. They knew it was a lost cause, but they had been instructed to go. Who instructed you? The answer was, "You know, lah!"

The fact that Tambunan was lost to a man called Joseph Pairin Kittingan, leading a brand new party called Party Bersatu Sabah (PBS), could not be stomached by Harris. That was understandable. It was a direct challenge to the state leader who for nine years had treated the state much like a private fiefdom, echoing the style of his much maligned predecessor, Tun Mustapha Harun. Harris could no longer tolerate challenges by anyone in the state.

But extraordinarily, there were rumblings in Kuala Lumpur. Kittingan was a Catholic. His Kadazan followers included a large number of Catholics. The line was put out that PBS was a *racial* party, and *therefore* anti-Muslim!

The logic was quite breathtaking!

A racial party! UMNO eyebrows rose to alarming levels. A racial party! they said, suggesting that something decidedly obscene had arrived on the political scene.

Of course Berjaya was a multi-racial party, and even its first president, the late, much lamented Tun Donald Aloysius Stephens a Kadazan Eurasian, had become a Muslim (Mohamad Fuad) before he became Chief Minister in 1976. So it was a multiracial party with a Muslim leadership. But UMNO's reaction would have led any stranger to believe that UMNO, too, was a multiracial party!

I remember going to Sabah with Musa in 1981, not long after he became Deputy Prime Minister. At the Kota Kinabalu airport itself it was clear that Musa was really no friend of Harris and the Chief Minister's

aides were almost certain that Musa had arrived with a message to Harris about his style and his future.

I was not popular with Harris because of an article I had written about the purchase of Grumman jet aircraft by the State government some ten years earlier when Tun Mustapha was Chief Minister. My article quoted the American Securities and Exchange Commission on bribes paid by the US aircraft industry. For reasons that are too complex to go into, my story was edited badly, and Harris demanded an apology.

I found the notion ridiculous in the extreme. His lawyers approached my editor, and then me independently, and I had to turn down their rather bizarre invitation. The legal pursuit of my editors went on and on and on. In the end the magazine published what amounted to an explanation and that satisfied the Sabah chief, but he found it quite difficult to forgive me.

When I arrived in Sabah with Musa's entourage, which included my friend Raman, I found that both of us had been singled out for special treatment. We were put in the same room in Hotels and not invited to any functions organised by Harris's office. But we were relentlessly pursued by his aides who treated us to endless cups of coffee and a few beers and wanted to know what Musa had in mind – as if we were some kind of power-brokers. But it is true that many Malaysian politicians treat newspaper columnists as if they were fifth columnists.

What Musa had in mind was plain. In half a dozen places and in as many speeches he hammered home the same message: "Bersih, licin, cekap," – clean, smooth, efficient government. That is what he wanted and he remarked, not without reason, that the

new Berjaya party building was far more impressive than the then UMNO headquarters building in Kuala Lumpur. (The new UMNO building in KL, I might say, is another story.) If the Musa visit was to shake up the Sabah administration, it didn't work.

It became clear that what Musa did in Sabah was not exactly admired in Kuala Lumpur. The view in KL seemed to be that the maverick politicians should be left alone. Harris was doing OK. Don't rock the boat. If Musa saw the problems in the state — he was, I know, dismayed at the poverty levels there — his proposed solutions were either not taken seriously or not implemented.

The end result was that the National Front ruling party was given a hiding. Berjaya came through with only six of the 48 seats it contested.

PBS won by a slim majority, having won 25 seats. The single Party Pasok winner joined PBS almost immediately, bringing the PBS total to 26. But there was a midnight drama on the day the results came in as an attempt was made to deprive Joseph Pairin Kittingan of his obvious victory. Tun Mustapha, whose party had won 16 seats, managed to get himself sworn in as Chief Minister. The argument was that together with Berjaya — Mustapha's implacable foe for nine years and sudden bedfellow now — he commanded 22 seats, and add to that six appointed members of the state assembly, he would have 28 seats, or two more than Kittingan.

That weird logic was to find approval in some high places in Kuala Lumpur. One very high UMNO official was heard to argue: "That is how the Sabah constitution works." If PBS had won only sixteen seats, could Joseph Pairin have rushed off to the Istana (Palace) with Harris in tow and demanded that he be sworn in? Would the UMNO political pundit

then have said, "That is the way the Sabah Constitution works"?

At that moment of drama, Musa was acting Prime Minister of Malaysia. Mahathir was in England, having just delivered a speech in Oxford berating the dons for their alleged deficiencies in logic. Musa was called upon to make a decision on the legitimacy of Pairin's victory.

Musa did not agree with the preposterous logician of UMNO. He disagreed with the UMNO eyebrow raisers, too, and said the majority party must govern. Joseph Pairin Kittingan was then sworn in as Chief Minister. There now appeared to be two Chief Ministers.

The courts are still deliberating on who the legitimate Chief Minister is, after a long trial, and in the midst of growing political tension in the state.

When Mahathir came home he did not congratulate Datuk Joseph Pairin on his victory. It was difficult. He had told Harris Salleh that his National Front would sink or swim with Berjaya. Now Berjaya was barely afloat, most of the crew had sunk, the captain dismissed and the vessel leaking badly.

For ten months after its victory PBS was tortured with legal suits and defections and by-elections. Mahathir did not intervene even when the stability of the state became seriously threatened. Nor was the PBS request for entry into the National front entertained seriously.

To intelligent Malaysians the situation was absurd to the point of being obscene. Joseph Pairin then called for the dissolution of the assembly and fresh elections. There was no reaction from Mahathir.

Pairin's enemies again dived for their law books and claimed that he had no right to dissolve the house. The courts, they said, had not decided who



the Chief Minister was – Pairin or Tun Mustapha. Musa had backed Pairin when he was Acting Prime Minister in April 1985.

Four days later Musa gave notice of his intention to quit his posts, and left the country.

## Chapter Three

### Security Act

*"Security is man's chiefest enemy."*

— William Shakespeare.

One of the most serious open critics of Malaysia's notorious Internal Security Act was one man who had been detained without trial under its provisions. He objected to it on several grounds including the rather promising one that it was un-Islamic.

And he should have known.

He was once one of the leading proponents of the Islamic way of life, a teacher and the charisma-conscious, rather than charismatic (he was a shade too calculating for that, lacking the sex appeal of the true megalomaniac) leader of the Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM).

It was perhaps a very strange coincidence that ABIM is also the acronym for his name, Anwar bin Ibrahim, and as his enemies liked to point out: "M, of course, stood for Malaysia." Not surprisingly, for a long time he was Mr. Abim himself, and he spoke with considerable authority when he discussed things Islamic.

As a non-Muslim of course I was no judge at all of either his scholarship or his piety but it would be fair to say that his reputation among the non-Muslims in the early 1970's was disturbing. He was seen as a threat to racial and religious peace until the late 70's when his image underwent change, but I found it

comforting that at least he had no wild notions about wild laws.

I may say here I could be the only journalist who has offered any defence at all for the Internal Security Act, in print, and I was defending it in 1975 when Anwar was barely out of detention. My defence won me no friends among my colleagues or the legal profession.

The communists were then on the rampage again in Malaysia, making another bid for power in the mid-seventies. I regarded the ISA critics as slightly demented because the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) placed itself beyond the law and was dedicated to first pulling down the edifices of the law itself before proceeding with whatever its larger aims were.

I argued that to handle lawbreakers was one thing, but to handle those who simply refused to recognise the existence of the law as such, extraordinary devices were necessary. It was, I have to admit now, a naive thought but the situation was promising to be deadly. And I was being less of a journalist than a pamphleteer.

Anwar, like many others at the time, argued that a bad law was a bad law, and of course he was right. I admired what I thought was his toughness and his integrity. He was for all intents and purposes uncompromising on the subject – or so I thought.

So it was more than a slight surprise that he joined UMNO one day in late March, 1982, following the day on which a handful of religious fanatics who called themselves Crypto, were arrested and detained under the ISA.

The “liberal” government of Mahathir and Musa had been in business only for a few months. There was a certain euphoria in the air. My good friend Sidney Woodhull, who himself has tasted the flavour

of the ISA more than once, was advising me over his fifth beer that Mahathir and Musa must be given a chance to prove themselves.

Sidney never tired of berating me after his third beer for being a stooge of the previous Home Minister, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie for having written what I had written in a number of articles in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

Sidney did not think much of Ghazali and while that was only too obvious, he did have a very high opinion of Musa from whose home state, Johor, he hails. But it was curious that he pleaded – in his highly colourful cliché and quote laden arguments – for a chance for Musa. It was even more surprising that a man with his political education felt that I could do Musa any favours at all.

But he really astounded me as well as everyone else when he suddenly appeared in a newspaper story and was quoted as saying, in effect, that the ISA was only a necessary evil. I have not bothered to check his exact words because the modification to his original stance was enough to stun me. He was once implacable in his opposition to the ISA. Now he had become quite, quite placable.

I think the wonderful talent of Mahathir and Musa (or was it both of them together?) have is that they managed to persuade people like Anwar and Sidney that men could be more dependable than clear, binding and acceptable laws; that dangerous laws were fine as long as there were fine men to administer them.

Now another ex-ISA detainee, Kassim Ahmad, who was as uncompromising as any, has decided to join up – just as the Mahathir-Musa break-up has the political system in confusion. He was once the Chairman of Party Rakyat Sosialis Malaysia (PSRM) and

was saying only a few months ago that he had no intention of joining UMNO. In fact Anwar, too, for a long time kept saying that he was not interested in politics until he actually plunged in.

I remember sending a telex message to Rodney Tasker of the *Review* who had met the ABIM chief quite a few times, with the Anwar news because he was about to visit KL, and wanted to see him again. Tasker's response to my cable was, "ARE YOU SURE IT IS THE SAME "ANWAR-WHAT-ME-POLITICIAN?-IBRAHIM?" I replied, "I AM SURE. THAT'S THE JOKE, AND THAT'S NO JEST."

It is one of the absurd problems peculiar to the democracies that elected officials devote a huge part of their energies, (if not actually all of it) securing enough political capital to ensure their re-election. And the sacrifices they make in the process range from the pathetic to the tragic, passing all too often through that humiliation of a special bathos fate seems to reserve mainly for power seekers.

Both Mahathir and Musa, having lived under the unhappy shadow of the ISA, first appeared to have every intention of scrapping the law, but then proceeded to embellish it with fresh and fearsome details, for no conceivable reason than to help perpetuate their own hold on power. They then rationalised: the ISA is a necessary evil. But there were also implied assurances that the law would be implemented wisely. Wisely? But how wisely, with mandatory death sentences?

In 1975, when Ghazali Shafie was Home Minister, the ISA was embellished with what is now known as ESCAR, the acronym for Essential Security Cases (Amendments) Regulations.

Those regulations have been damned by thousands of people, including prominent jurists, around the

world. Some fifty people have been hanged under those provisions, and as I write, one more, Sim Kie Chon was hanged after prolonged public debate during which a prominent lawyer and human rights battler, Param Cumaraswamy, was charged with sedition. Cumaraswamy won his case but Sim's life was terminated in Pudu Gaol.

The tragic irony in Pudu is that a politician convicted of murder and sentenced to death, also under the ISA, lives and breathes within its walls, while others who had merely possessed weapons have hanged, and still others wait there for their date with the hangman. I don't suppose there is much irony in that the politician was a member of the cabinet which was responsible for the law, if not its creation, at least its continued good health.

The man who presented these amendments to the public was the then Attorney-General, Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Yusof. The regulations were frightening in their scope and severity. Not only did they drastically alter rules of evidence by admitting hearsay but also allowed masked witnesses and made the death sentence mandatory. Even juveniles became liable to trial in ordinary courts and to the death sentence.

Kadir, a mere skeleton of a man, looked anything but intimidating. I asked him if it was not dangerous to have a law which placed a man in jeopardy of his life as soon as he was arrested because the ordinary protection against the abuse of the law had been removed. A policeman could produce any number of masked witnesses and vendetta trials would become common. (It has not happened, but the danger remains.) There was also the danger of a child getting hold of a gun and shooting someone dead and becoming liable to the death sentence.

His classic reply – calm and avuncular – was, "We

are reasonable men, of good conscience. Kadir also assured all of us reporters that he would handle every case himself and make sure there were no abuses.

The problem, clearly, was that there were not enough reasonable men of good conscience to go round. And Kadir was abroad when a fourteen-year-old boy was charged under the Act.

After a great deal of fuss and bother, after a long trial and opposition politicking, the public outcry was taken seriously. The boy's mandatory (?) death sentence was reduced to detention during the pleasure of the Yang di-Pertuan Agung. But the absurdity of the legislation was not acknowledged. Mere possession of firearms is still punishable by death. Children are not immune to prosecution.

These thoughts preoccupied many people's minds as the 2-M team moved into position.

But one of the very first things Musa did was to release detainees. The effect of this action was jubilation, moving even the often sarcastic opposition Democratic Action Party leader (DAP), Lim Kit Siang to express his approval. Lim himself had been a prisoner of the ISA in 1969. So he was not exactly cheering. He told me, "Let us wait for five years and talk again if we are both outside jail, and then it will be time enough to cheer." (The five years, incidentally, are almost up.)

More prisoners began to leave detention camps and by the time the general election came in 1982, the word liberal was quite liberally applied to the two mavericks turned political establishment heroes. Everyone, including the opposition was calling it the 2-M administration.

But liberalism, of course, is as liberalism does.

After the 1982 election, it was clear that the administration was getting impatient with all kinds of

obstacles, not the least of which was that members of Party Islam who were continuing their litany of woe against the "ungodly" UMNO. The popular PAS word was "Kafir" or unbeliever. PAS was extremely provocative, and the government kept rising to their bait.

One of the earliest responses by Mahathir to PAS's carping criticisms was to co-opt Anwar into the party, Anwar the symbol of Islamic liberalism, Anwar the symbol of Islamic Youth, Anwar the man who was thought of as far back as 1969 as a potential Prime Minister.

When Anwar joined UMNO he shocked PAS; and leaders of important non-political societies such as Aliran, Insan, the Consumer Association of Penang and the Environmental Protection Society were flabbergasted. A champion of civil rights who had the support of people across the board including those in PAS, the DAP and the other opposition groups, and even non-Muslim religious organisations could not believe that Anwar could be seduced by money or power. I found it hard to believe it, too. If it wasn't money or power, what was it?

His former allies and friends in the various interest groups were not so polite: Anwar, they said, was just another politician who had ridden on their backs. He did not need them any more.

If Anwar was going to solve Mahathir's Islamic problem, it was clear that he must have some power. I asked Mahathir at the press conference in which he presented Anwar to an unbelieving public, whether Anwar was going to be made a minister. The UMNO chief and Prime Minister smiled his usual cryptic smile and answered that there were many ways a man could serve the party. And that was read by those present as meaning precisely that Anwar was indeed headed for big things.



But there was a problem. Anwar was a newcomer to UMNO and had actively opposed UMNO for years. Just seven years earlier he staged a protest march against alleged starvation conditions in the villages around Baling. That was when he was locked up for his pains under the ISA.

And while Anwar was campaigning against UMNO's policies, demanding more Islamic attitudes and more of equitable sharing of the common wealth, other young men were working at building the party and making their sacrifices at the party altar. And ministerial positions, of course, were rewards for the party faithfuls.

At this point it might be useful to look at Mahathir's own views of cabinet formation and cabinet responsibility:

"... independent Malaya chose to treat membership of the cabinet as a reward for loyalty to party chiefs and acceptability to the Prime Minister. Once appointed, no amount of dereliction of duty could affect the position of the Minister. On the other hand, even if the Minister performed well, failure to remain on good terms with the Prime Minister meant removal from the Ministry."

Anwar's elevation could of course be justified by his obvious talent and skills. There was also no doubt that he still wielded considerable influence on powerful interest groups and lobbies. But what about the party support for him?

In 1982, the golden 2-M image was still shining brightly, and allowed the Prime Minister the widest possible latitude in action. He did not have to argue any case closely either with the public or with his party boys. He turned the clock forward by half an hour overnight to bring Peninsular time into line with Sabah and Sarawak time, with scarcely any warning,

and people jumped to adjust their watches and their lives. He said Look East! and lo! everybody (well, almost everybody) bowed towards the sons of the Samurai.

But bringing an outsider into the power lobby was another matter. It made a lot of people feel insecure and/or let down. And it also happened at a very insecure time for a lot of politicians, including Musa.

In 1981 Musa had fought a royal battle with Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah – and won the Deputy Presidency of UMNO. Most people thought Razaleigh would be dropped from the Cabinet. But Razaleigh was the hero of Kelantan and UMNO needed him to hold on to that state which had been in opposition hands for almost 20 years. Musa's supporters – including one UMNO minister – told me that the man should go. "In fact," the gentleman declared, "the Ministry of Finance must be cleaned out. The Kelantan Mafia must be purged." It was a moment of great emotions and speech was loose and careless. So I don't think it fair or reasonable to name the Minister.

Mahathir did nothing of the kind expected by Musa's enthusiastic men (or boys). Razaleigh remained Finance Minister. It was, without doubt, very galling for Musa. Razaleigh who was a good friend once was not playing the game. And the fresh question was whether *Mahathir* was playing the game? Because far from being secure as Deputy President, Mahathir's decision would oblige Musa to keep looking over his shoulder at Razaleigh. It was hardly calculated to make Musa function efficiently as a minister.

The general election which followed in 1982 consolidated Musa's position as a man with party and electoral mandates. At this stage, however, there was

Anwar, already the darling of the party chief and being discussed as a man marked for great things.

I talked to Anwar before the party election. He was modest and uncertain about the future. I asked him on whose side he was on – Musa or Tunku Razaleigh? He laughed. "I am," he said, "on Dr. Mahathir's side."

After the general election I tried to see Musa several times and failed. He was busy. But one day I received an invitation to go to Johor with him. He was going to thank the people of one constituency for supporting UMNO. I flew with him and a colleague from the *Review*. But before we left there was a mix-up.

The Royal Malaysian Air Force VIP jet was on the tarmac at the base in Sungei Besi at noon for immediate departure, but Musa was not there. When I made enquiries, it turned out that he was with Mahathir who was announcing the new cabinet line-up. I thought it very strange that Musa was not aware of this event several days earlier, or even *one* day earlier than the very morning of the announcement, at least to be able to warn people like me not to turn up at the airport until 3 p.m.

It seemed to me therefore that Musa was deliberately *not* informed of the plans until the 11th hour.

There could have been a hundred innocent reasons why Musa was not told of the imminent reshuffle, including the simple one that Mahathir forgot and the clumsy one that a note was mislaid. But when Musa arrived at the base he looked grim. Anwar had been made Culture, Youth and Sports Minister, replacing Datuk Mokhtar Hashim who had been charged with murder under the ISA. The murder had taken place during the hectic days before the general election.

It did not occur to me on that afternoon to ask Musa why he was unaware of the coming appointment. But I did ask what he thought of the appointment. He replied, "Now let us see what Anwar makes of the dances."

The dances referred to the performances by the Culture Ministry's permanent dance troupe for entertaining at official functions. Anwar had been a critic of this aspect of the use of "culture" and had apparently told a lot of people that the whole business was quite absurd and un-Islamic. Of course he was speaking as an Islamic leader and a champion of Islamic purity in the social life of women. Now he was in a dilemma.

In an earlier conversation Anwar told me he had been sounded out for the Education portfolio. He had not been too keen because it would have been too much too fast. I told him I could appreciate his attitude. As a newcomer, already much envied by long serving rivals, he would be exposed to more problems if he was promoted to such a prestigious post.

The last three Prime Ministers had served in Education before moving smoothly to the top. (Musa had also served as Education Minister and was poised to take over from Mahathir until the present crisis muddled the picture.)

What was clear from Musa's reaction to Anwar's appointment was that there were differences of opinion on serious policy matters between him and Mahathir. It was also clear that Musa did not see Anwar as the man to groom for the top post. Many people, on the other hand, did see Anwar as a potential Prime Minister.

But before these complex succession problems could be worked out satisfactorily, a whole series of

crises developed, distracting UMNO and the government.

There was the murder of the Malaysian bank official in Hongkong raising serious questions about the nature of the cover-up of the US\$1,000 million loan scandal involving the UMNO inspired Bank Bumiputra.

The murdered man, Jalil Ibrahim, was an auditor sent to the British colony to investigate the Bank's subsidiary, Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF).

And on top of the crises, basic social changes were brewing, changes that party politicians as a class were not capable of noticing.

For one thing the security problem suddenly seemed a minor matter compared to the massive drug problem facing the country. Indeed Musa declared quite categorically that the Number One Problem was no longer Communism but "*Dadah*" or Narcotics. International customs and narcotics officers were giving Malaysian travellers a bad time and the number of Malaysians arrested for drug trafficking was rising.

By the time UMNO's Annual General Assembly began in 1983, it was clear that the Prime Minister was in trouble, and that there were differences between him and his deputy. I wrote at that time:

"Musa made it implicitly clear that while he was grateful [for Mahathir's unconventional open support for him] he was in no way subscribing to Mahathir's style. Of Mahathir's support he said, 'I do not know what to say. I have not even thanked him for it.' He added, however, that criticisms of Mahathir 'also involve me.' "

I was hard put to understand for a moment why he had to say he had not thanked Mahathir for his support, when it was so obviously possible to express his thanks in front of the delegates. Then, like

hundreds of other people, I wondered if it was the first crack in the highly touted 2-M monolith.

It was also obvious that Mahathir was hard put to understand why Musa's unequivocal support for him was not forthcoming. It showed in his speech.

Anwar sat at the UMNO Supreme Council's high table, looking on quietly. He was already a Vice-President by virtue of having been elected President of Pemuda UMNO, the youth wing of the party.

There was a sense of insecurity in the air.

## Chapter Four

### Signs and Portents

*You yourself  
Are much condemned to have an itching palm.*

— William Shakespeare.

When I expressed surprise to Musa during the 1981 Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, that both he and Mahathir were setting a burning pace in their work while everyone else was pacing himself to suit the effects of day-long abstinence from food and drink, he laughed: "Wait and see what happens when we end the fast."

It was *not* an idle joke. There was no question that the 2-M team charged into action, initiating a series of changes that was almost tiring to watch. Mahathir himself told me and the editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* during an interview, that his ambition was to be remembered for a stewardship during which the "people" were "a little more productive." A little more productive? I don't know about productivity, but there was movement. He himself seemed to be in an almost manic rush.

The first six month record included:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| July 16. | Mahathir becomes Prime Minister.  |
| July 18. | New Cabinet formed with Musa as Deputy P.M.   |
| July 23. | Revival of long moribund National Action Council to monitor work of ministries and government agencies. |

- July 30. Musa announces release of 21 ISA detainees.
- August 1. Datuk Harun Idris, former Mentri Besar (Chief Minister) of Selangor, released from jail 13 months before his 6-year jail term is over, to coincide with the end of the fasting month.
- August 3. Mahathir warns civil servants to shape up or else. Punch-clock system introduced for all civil servants, including Ministry heads.
- August 8. Musa directs two subsidiaries of Johor Development Authority to close down and gives two others six months to shape up or close down.
- August 9. Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang visits Malaysia and is told that Mahathir does not accept the Chinese formula of government-to-government relations being unrelated to party-to-party relations.
- August 13. Mahathir visits Jakarta and declares that Vietnam is no immediate threat to the region.
- August 13. Musa announces that public officials must declare all their assets.
- August 24. Musa orders closure of two loss-making subsidiaries of the Perlis Economic Development Corporation.
- August 25. Musa announces implementation in early 1982 of new laws on



- non-Muslim marriages and divorces (which had been delayed for years).
- September 2. Mahathir announces that the government will introduce legislation to check manipulation of the stock exchange.
- September 2. Mahathir announces he will not attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Melbourne as he has more important things to do.
- September 7. Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Corporation) takes over Guthrie Corporation.
- September 15. Musa says government guarantees the freedom of the press but will not compromise on the media exploiting communalism.
- October 10. Mahathir announces his Buy British Last policy. Tenders and awards to British firms must thenceforth be cleared by his department and the government would only buy British if it had no other choice.
- October 26. Mahathir says the government plans to set up a special department to combat corruption.
- November 12. The government confirms moves to amend the controversial and restrictive Universities and University Colleges Act.
- November 20. The government announces that civil servants opting to retire early must declare all their assets six

- months before their last day of work.
- November 28. Visa restrictions on foreign wives of Malaysians relaxed.
- December 4. Standardisation of Malaysian time and that of Sabah and Sarawak announced.
- December 4. Musa announces that Sabahans and Sarawakians can travel to Peninsular Malaysia without passport as of January 1.
- December 15. Mahathir announces his "Look East" policy, meaning closer relations with Japan and Korea.

Whether these changes were useful or even whether they were actually followed up to their logical conclusion was besides the point at that time. The fact was the new team was not only talking action but were seen to be taking action. It was not clear then how much of it was concerted action and how much of it was one man's policy with the mere acquiescence of the other. There was some slight evidence of disagreement but that only seemed natural.

On one question I had some slight insight. I asked Anwar one day, teasing him more than interviewing him, what happened to the ISA question he was going to resolve from "inside" which he could not from "outside" the party. He looked somewhat sorrowful. He had raised it so often, he said, and was told by the Home Minister that he found Anwar quite boring. Would he kindly change the subject? The same went for the Universities and University Colleges Act — the message was, in effect, "Give it a rest, Anwar, give it a rest."

It is difficult for me to say who objected to

changing these old controversial, not to say un-savoury, laws – Musa or Mahathir. Or did they both really object? Both had intellectual pretensions and both were certainly intelligent enough to be aware of the disgust in which the intelligentsia held these laws.

But then they were both also prisoners of the civil service experts in the Police Special Branch who advised them of the value and validity of keeping the laws on the books, and they were also, no doubt, eloquent on the subject of real power which resided in the form and substance of these laws. This last guess, incidentally, is quite unlikely to be contradicted.

Of course Musa could not have contradicted Mahathir on the question. Indeed on February 4, 1982, Musa startled the country and the world with an extraordinary proposal: he called on all those foreign sympathisers who opposed to the provisions of the ISA which held detainees without trial to adopt the detainees, give them foreign citizenship. They could in effect, take these people, and keep them. They would, in fact, lose their citizenship of Malaysia. "Good riddance," as Mahathir once remarked at a diplomatic function, about Malaysians migrating abroad, "to bad rubbish."

Now, on the following point I may be challenged, but this is a very opinionated book and I have to risk intelligent challenges: I found the Musa formula out of character.

It sounded more like a Mahathir rhetorical position. It smacked of the time Mahathir (as Deputy Prime Minister) told the world that it might be necessary to modify the laws of the land to enable the Malaysian armed forces to shoot at Vietnamese refugees to prevent them from landing on our shores.

It created a sensation. It was even reported in a

provincial paper in Tyrol in Austria that the Malaysian navy was going to use the Vietnamese boat people for target practice. The news brought TV crews from Japan and Hongkong and Europe and the US, cameras cocked, to film the sitting-duck shoots in the South China Sea. There was, of course, no shooting. The Home Minister of the time, Ghazali Shafie, jocularly told the newsmen that Mahathir meant "shoo" not "shoot" and further muddied the picture. Mahathir did not say shoo or shoot, only that changes in the law might be needed, in *order to* shoot.

UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim himself turned up soon after. And the world busied itself to "save the refugees", and thousands were taken out of Pulau Bidong where they were beginning to mill about like cattle. But the remnants of the refugees are still around.

The Musa challenge on the ISA victims had a similar effect. There was a lot of anger and indignation and philosophical questions about the morality of depriving people of their citizenship rights. Human rights organisations fulminated – and the remnants of the detainees not released by Musa are still in detention.

Whose formula was it, Mahathir's or Musa's? As I said, it seemed to be out of character for Musa. But he carries the burden of the blame alone, still. It is not remembered as a 2-M formula.

Normally such a question would not arise because normally no Prime Minister would tolerate such a thing as a 2-M image. No Churchill or Nehru or Tanaka can be imagined allowing anything remotely like a 2-C or 2-N or 2-T. So, not very surprisingly, as the government began to gear up for the 1982 general election, signs of Mahathir's testiness on the subject slowly began to make itself visible.

One, possibly apocryphal story goes that when Mahathir was asked something about the 2-M image, snapped, "What 2-M? You mean 'MM for Mahathir Mohamad?'"

At the old Mahathir residence in 1982, when he announced the general election date he declared that the party slogan for the campaign would be, "Bersih, Cekap, Amanah," meaning, "Clean, Efficient, Trustworthy." When a journalist asked what happened to "Clean, *Smooth*, Efficient" he dismissed it with a laugh, saying it was only something coined by the press, "Maybe the *Far Eastern Economic Review*." And when he saw me rising to my feet, he added, quite casually, "Or maybe it was someone else." I sat down.

The someone else was a slogan maker in Johor who had made a huge sign to welcome Musa after he had won the Deputy Presidency to the party. Whether the phrase was Musa's own or not I was unable to discover.

It is significant however, that Musa picked it up at once and kept using it, and stressing that the government has to be clean, and run smoothly and efficiently. The question of *trustworthiness*, apparently, did not arise for Musa.

Over the years since he became Prime Minister it has become obvious that Mahathir keeps asking people to trust him. In fact he is doing it now by touring the countryside as he prepares for the coming General Election. But there are disturbing signs that he needs public acclamations of that trust more than anybody else.

Philip Bowring, the Deputy Editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* wrote in April 1982:

"... some Mahathir enthusiasts suggest ... that the Prime Ministers has few highly competent advisers

who can be placed in key positions in the bureaucracy to keep the momentum of change going. Although he works well with his deputy, Datuk Musa Hitam ... is more of a grassroots politician of liberal and gregarious instincts and more given to flexibility and compromise than his loner-idealist superior."

Mahathir, the loner, of course, is not a patient man. Nor is he the visionary of the 20th century as Bowring and others have suggested he might be. Again and again he has shown himself to be anxious to achieve what are really little goals which he himself decided must be writ large without benefit of any thorough-going assessments of their value. And when the "vision" proved defective, he has reacted angrily and appealed for faith in his vision.

The Look East policy has proliferated vast and unresolvable problems as the marauding Samurai still stalk lucrative government contracts with needlessly unfair advantages. The Daya Bumi Complex in the city is a symbol of gimmickery as far as transfer of technology goes, and it cost a packet. And it has brought to Kuala Lumpur not some touch of any Eastern aura but merely added to the veneer of the city's Western lifestyle, aided by the growing atmospheric pollution generated by that other marvellous product of Western civilisation, the motor car.

The Buy British Last policy died in convulsions of laughter.

Loyal as Musa was expected to be (and was, I venture to add) the signs of strain were difficult to conceal even as early as 1983. For reasons that were not clear then, Musa was not seen holding forth on the alleged merits of the Look East policy. Unlike Mahathir he did not go flying off to Japan every now and then. When I asked Mahathir what Japanese

companies I should look at in Japan if I was to assess Japanese industrial successes and explain the Look East policy, he said, quite airily, "Any company. They are all good examples." His laborious explanation of what the policy was about confused more than enlightened me.

I asked Musa what he thought of the policy. His reply was not exactly enlightening, or reassuring. He told me that Mahathir was a little unhappy about his own silence on the subject. In fact, he said, Mahathir was concerned that the Japanese were disturbed by Musa's silence, too, and wondered what would happen to the policy when Musa took over the premiership. Musa said that he made one speech on the policy soon after, and he had told Mahathir that he thought he would be responsible for some areas of policy while Mahathir was responsible for others. He did not think they both had to make speeches about "Look East."

Mahathir confirmed the effect of this conversation in one of his public speeches when he remarked, everyone thought rather lightheartedly, "I look East, Musa Looks West." The underlying need for such a remark was not completely lost upon his audience. It is not entirely unknown that he likes to make cryptic remarks.

I remember a conversation with Mahathir as Deputy Prime Minister and he was lashing out at the foreign press. As a correspondent with a foreign news magazine I was, I thought, being given the treatment. When he paused for breath I asked, "Does that include the *Far Eastern Economic Review*?' The editor of the *Review* was sitting next to me.

"No," said the Deputy Prime Minister.

I asked at once, "What about my writing? Is my reporting fair?"

Pause.

"Fair," he said.

Pause.

"More than fair," he added.

The editor was as puzzled as I was. One moment earlier we thought we were the subject of the angry tirade. I asked, "More than fair, sir? What does that mean?"

The cryptic Mahathir came to the fore. He smiled. "You like to analyse things. You work it out."

We left the interview feeling somewhat depressed. An interview (or even a courtesy call on a senior minister) is designed to help enlighten the readership, not to present it with puzzles.

I remembered then another conversation of three or four years earlier. He was barely back in the party after his time in the wilderness where Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had sent him in 1969.

It was in the Jaya Supermarket in Petaling Jaya. He was in the bookshop and I introduced myself and recalled that we had met in Melbourne not long after the May 1969 riots. I was then Press Attaché to the Malaysian High Commissioner in Canberra.

He asked me what I was doing with myself "these days". I said I wrote for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. "I don't read it," he said. "Why?" I asked, surprised and very curious. "It was always full of rubbish about May 13," he said and seemed to be angry with me personally! It was depressing.

Becoming Deputy Prime Minister did not mellow him.

Becoming Prime Minister did not mellow him either.

Mahathir is not pleased with the critics of the product of one of his pet projects, the Proton Saga, an unremarkable motor car, admirable, like James



Thurber's ordinary domestic burgundy, only for its presumption.

Instead of listening to his critics, he saw fit not just to proceed with his plan to build it but to virtually market what is practically a Japanese product personally. His bureaucratic advisers on the project, like the Japanese, seem content to bow – deep and low – their acquiescence to Mahathir's wishes. A number of his Ministers have jumped on the Proton Saga band-wagon and even begun to drive them – but not, as far as I know, Musa.

Philip Bowring's assessment that Mahathir worked well with Musa was, of course, a 1982 assessment, some 250 days after the team was yoked together. I myself wrote at that time:

“Another remarkable difference between the present administration and the earlier ones is the way in which the Deputy Prime Minister is working in tandem with the Prime Minister. Previous Prime Ministers – including Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn, and even Mahathir – despite their good relationships with the Prime Ministers they served tended to remain in the background. Succession plans in the past took a long time to mature. But Musa is now very much Mahathir's annointed successor, playing roles that his predecessors were rarely allowed to play. Both men are aware of the need to pull together.”

By 1983, the yoking of the pair seemed even more secure. It was necessary to stick together. It was a year of great insecurity for the 2-M administration, with disaster bursting upon it from abroad and exploding from inside the country.

It was the year the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal broke, with allegations that 2,500 million Malaysian dollars had been siphoned away by

nimble-fingered Hongkong businessmen. Considering that Bank Bumiputra was founded to build a financial fortress that would secure and protect the future of the Malays, it was galling in the extreme that some Chinese – and foreign Chinese at that! – had made off with the goodies in a gigantic confidence operation in collusion with an unscrupulous group of Malays.

And for a couple of Malays who had suffered the indignity of being labelled Ultras – extreme Malay chauvinists – it was even worse that it all happened during their leadership.

I recall the day when Musa attended parliament having newly returned from England where he had been conferred a doctorate by the University of Sussex. As usual the press approached him as a group, and before any question could be asked, he raised his hands, flashed the famous Musa smile, and said, "Ask me anything, anything at all, but not about BMF."

A groan went up.

"But Datuk, that is exactly what we want to ask." He shook his head. "You know I have been away. Come on, be fair."

But parliament had other things brewing. The country's worst constitutional crisis was about to erupt.

## Chapter Five

### Second Thoughts? Third Rate? Fourth Estate? Fifth Coloumn?

*You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!*

– William Shakespeare.

Less than two years after Musa's September 15, 1981 announcement of the government guarantee on the freedom of the press, the local press received an extraordinary government briefing.

The original "guarantee" was subject to that proviso so obvious to Malaysian journalists: there will be no compromise on the media exploiting communalism. It was almost a verbatim copy of what Tun (then Datuk) Hussein Onn told me in December 1978.

Hussein had added: "If the press does not keep watch, we politicians will forget ourselves."

The 1983 press briefing was another matter.

It informed the journalists that they should not cover those aspects of forthcoming constitutional amendments dealing with amendments to the constitution itself. These dealt with what was, in effect, the notorious matter of forcing the Sultans and the Yang di-Pertuan Agung (King) to give Royal Assent to Parliamentary Bills.

The trappings of legality were there, but if Royal Assent was not forthcoming within 15 days, the amendments provided for it to be *presumed* that the bill had been assented to.

But there were even more dangerous seeds of disaster in the amendments: it would concentrate ultimate emergency powers in the hands of the Prime Minister.

To say that local journalists were stunned would be insulting. They were in turn flabbergasted and disgusted. At least that was the case with journalists who knew their business and understood something about what a written constitution was for.

Now it was clear that serious second thoughts had taken place about the promised "Press Freedom." There was not much of that going around in the first place, but this briefing was delineating the ever-decreasing parameters of that freedom.

To go back a little, I remember the crowd of journalists in the lobby of Parliament House asking Musa what the new amendments were going to be about. This was before the infamous briefing took place. Musa did not seem keen to discuss it, which of course was very strange. Musa has always had an excellent relationship with the press, even if he was sensitive to criticism.

I know Musa well enough to say that if he was responsible for a development, he always prepared himself thoroughly before launching himself into it. He was never known for precipitate action. There was no question of a spur of the moment decision. I had to assume therefore that he was not involved in the exercise at hand. It was hard to believe he was the author of the decision. The press briefing was in fact conducted in the Prime Minister's department.

Musa always spoke to the press with a seriousness without becoming solemn. Indeed, whenever he became solemn I knew his heart was not in it. He enunciated his words carefully, sprinkling his comments with a few jokes without hurting the

feelings of the reporters. Without meaning to be absurd I can say that he regretted any sarcasm on his part very quickly. When he was provoked too far, he became angry but the anger was always well under control. On this occasion, however, he was more coy than angry.

Musa has "forgiven" me more than once for what he obviously considered as trespassing against him. In an angry mood he once told me that I did not have a single friend in the Cabinet (that thought again! journalists whose friends were ministers! But as Philip Bowring observed, his instinct was one of gregariousness). When I told him that I had at least one, he said, "Hah! Ghazali Shafie, of course!"

It was an old joke about my being the blue-eyed boy of my old head of department, Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie. (But now Ghazali was the Home Minister.) I used to be on his Foreign Office staff and therefore had better access to him than most journalists. I regarded him as one of the most articulate of government Ministers, and he was dealing with security. I have always said to journalists that Ghazali thought and spoke in headlines, and it was true. Even if the news was nothing Ghazali knew how to package it. Sometimes the package looked quite strange, but invariably it was good copy.

In the years 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978, security was the big story. I saw him perhaps more often than I absolutely had to. Ghazali's own reaction to any comment that I was his "boy" was, "Huh! After the stuff you have written about me?" And I thought I had been fair to the point of being generous with him. And yet my critics thought I was sucking up to him! It was even hinted that I escaped the ISA net because I had some kind of arrangement with him!

Such is life! Politicians as a breed, I must confess, do not belong to my favourite segment of the human race.

So I had to disabuse Musa: "No, Datuk," I explained, "I was thinking of *Musa* as my friend in the Cabinet. Not the Home Minister." He softened momentarily, sniffed sarcasm, and then gave me a sceptical look. "Why don't you go and speak to Mahathir. Look! There he is!" He already knew that Mahathir did not care too much about me or my work. And that was Musa's sarcasm, not heavy and not insistent. And he walked away, shaking his head and chuckling.

In spite of all that, as I said before, I like Musa. He is a man of liberal instincts, vitiated though they may be by the terrible and demeaning demands of politics. But now here was this briefing, and the press was definitely Home Ministry business.

And his department had kept out of it!

Was it because the Constitutional matters were entirely the Prime Minister's Department business?

As a foreign correspondent I found it extremely difficult to believe that I was going to be told not to write about this or that issue. Provoking communal feelings was something only an idiot would indulge in, and the sacred cows of the sensitive issues laws I could ignore because there was no ban on reporting on the issues as such, only on questioning the legitimacy of the provisions. But ignore a very basic constitutional amendment? It was hardly thinkable.

But before I even thought of it, the local press chiefs had raised the question with the briefing officer. They told him that they were going to look very foolish if they were banned and the foreign press was not banned from reporting on the subject.

The officer, according to my friends, assured them that the foreign press, too, would be "briefed."

Not to put too fine a point on it — that was a lie. We were neither invited for a briefing nor given any hint on the subject. I did not press my luck by making enquiries, in case some bureaucrat told me officially that I was advised not to write about it. It had happened before.

In fact about five years earlier, in December 1978 when I interviewed Prime Minister Datuk (as he was then) Hussein Onn, I complained to him that access to some ministers was sometimes very difficult and the consequence was often unsatisfactory reporting. He told me that if there was anything of great public importance I should contact him directly. I expressed my gratitude but said that it would be a great burden on him. Hussein brushed that aside and said I should contact him.

A couple of years later I received an early copy of the Amnesty International Report on Malaysia. I immediately sought an interview with the Home Minister, one of whose senior aides told me he had not received a copy of the report himself. I then had a photocopy of the report made and passed it on to the Home Minister. Within a day I got the message from the Home Minister's office: the report had been banned in Malaysia.

It was a shock. I tried to contact Hussein's staff to appeal to the Prime Minister. Not receiving much help, I wrote a letter to him, and got no reply. Eventually I received a telephone message, confirming that the Home Ministry decision was indeed a cabinet decision. There was nothing more to be said.

Remembering the episode in 1983, I decided not to ask for guidelines. In my judgement the Amnesty report had been full of holes. Certainly there were

damning passages, but the rest was flawed in several areas. It would have been far more honest and far more useful to comment on its usefulness and its deficiencies than to bury it inefficiently in mere bureaucratic mumbo jumbo.

So in 1983 I followed the constitutional debate and wrote on the subject of the amendments at length.

What I wrote was not only unpopular with the authorities but even seemed to get my editor in a bother as the crisis deepened. I could not blame him or my colleagues on the sub-editorial desk. It was after all a commercial journal and Malaysia accounted for a crucial share of the papers's circulation.

Their fears were justified because in the end the magazine was hog-tied for a year by the censoring authorities, not by banning it but by maintaining the extraordinary fiction that it was being "studied" before release. It took the officers concerned up to six weeks to examine each issue of the magazine which sometimes did not even carry a Malaysian story. Past censors had for years managed to do their jobs in a day or two, thought it did take four or five days occasionally. These remarkable new delays made street sales extremely difficult.

My coverage of the affair was not mere reportage and analysis but, admittedly, heavily opinionated; but given the nature of the political situation I felt obliged to say that there was something rotten in the state of Malaysia which had to be exposed and argued against. Even some of my purist critics thought I was going too far. But many local journalists felt I was doing something urgent and worthwhile.

I tried to see Musa – and failed. I spoke to such people as the MCA Deputy Minister, Dr. Tan Tiong Hong and the Minister for Trade and Industry, Tunku



Ahmad Rithauddeen. Dr. Tan was not very illuminating and the Tunku, a lawyer, and a man of great personal charm, was not ready to discuss the matter quite yet.

I met several MP's and political personalities, including opposition politicians. I spoke to non-UMNO Ministers and found them guarded and non-committal. I spent a lot of time with interest group leaders like Aliran's Chandra Muzaffar and the Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia's Gurmit Singh. I also met several members of royal households though I did not discuss the matter of the amendments with any Sultan. I managed to speak to Information Minister Adib Adam who lectured me on constitutional niceties – not, I must say, very persuasively.

I tried to see Dr. Mahathir – and failed. UMNO Ministers generally suddenly seemed to be inordinately busy.

In parliament Opposition Leader, Lim Kit Siang lashed out in his usual vitriolic style, pouring his acid over the ostentatiously bored treasury benches. He described the debate on the amendments as a "Wayang Kulit" or Puppet Play, with more shadow than substance in the performance. He quoted Mahathir's book, *The Malay Dilemma*:

"The manner, the frequency, the trivial reasons for altering the constitution, reduced this supreme law of the land into a useless scrap of paper."

The Mahathir "manner", of course, was represented by Lim as unprecedented. He quoted the comment of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, the first Prime Minister, from his remarks in an interview with *Asiaweek*:

"When we framed the constitution in 1957, we consulted people from all walks of life – business-

men, politicians, Chinese, Indians, everybody. This time when they amended the constitution, they never gave enough notice, did not give people enough time to consider the implications of the amendment."

Ironically, Mahathir's complaint had been precisely that in the Tunku's time the government had ridden roughshod, changing the constitution not only frequently but also for quite trivial reasons.

Mahathir, it must be admitted, was right.

Yet, what he was now doing was to repeat the sins of his predecessors. Tunku may have backed the idea of getting full public participation to write the constitutional document, but as Prime Minister, no doubt on the grounds of urgent national interest, public welfare, security, sacred duty and so on and so forth, the constitution was altered without so much as a public whisper to make possible the deposing of the Sarawak State Chief Minister, Stephen Kalong Ningkan in 1966, and a year earlier to facilitate the expulsion of Singapore from the Malaysian federation. There was hardly anything remotely like public participation in these decisions.

Of course it can be argued that they were grave situations demanding urgent, undelayable actions. But even if that was the rationale, and I don't believe for a moment there was much weight to it, there was the danger of precedents being created.

However, in spite of the similarities there was one glaring difference. The press in Tunku's day was not gagged as blatantly as it was in 1983. The press was not exactly pleased with the sudden 1965 or 1966 decisions; but on the other hand it was not told "not" to cover the events. And because there was no coercion, the press was generous, perhaps too generous. There were no stories pointing but that the

actions were undemocratic, not to say authoritarian, when they so patently were.

So while Lim Kit Siang's attack quoting the Tunku was not as telling as it could have been, his point was nevertheless highly relevant.

Now if the second thoughts of the government on Press freedom were cloaked in respectability, it was obviously because it was based on the assumption that the media was full of third raters. I found this not only distasteful but also quite foolish. The effect of all this was that local reporters were fuming quietly while foreign journals were describing the proceedings in Parliament in detail.

In their own way media men are capable of revenge — though few of them think in such terms. Governments seldom realise that it is not editorial policy that determines the total and long term effect of a newspaper. It is the day to day input of hundreds of journalists with their pride and their prejudices, their own hopes and dreams for better ways, and their capacity to choose how they will cover a story, the language they use and the details they ignore. The character of the coverage is not infrequently moulded unconsciously.

And so inevitably the story came out — first in small bits and then in larger chunks and finally as leading stories.

The whole saga of the Constitutional Crisis will take far more space than this present volume will allow. And so it is enough to say that despite the gagging efforts, the story slowly became public. Quite obviously it was of great interest not only to politicians.

Though the controversial bill was passed by both houses of parliament in August 1983, despite the hue and cry by the opposition and despite obvious public

disapprobation, when Parliament sat again in October, there had been no change of heart.

*And more important, it became clear that Royal Assent had not been obtained to translate the legislation into binding law.*

In fact a constitutional crisis of the most serious kind had arisen. Put plainly, since bills could not become law and showed no signs of becoming law, the Prime Minister was unable to govern. The budget debate was already on, and if Royal Assent was not received for the money bill, government would indeed come to a standstill.

But by some extraordinary logic, this fact was not openly acknowledged. Opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang in a pamphlet published in December 1983, said:

“When I asked a supplementary question as to what action was being taken to resolve the Constitutional Crisis that had arisen, to the extent all eight Bills passed by Parliament in July and August had not received the Royal Assent, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad made the classic statement:

“Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of any such crisis.”

The “third raters” in the fourth estate took the cue. According to the newspapers, then, there was no crisis. There was only an “issue” that had to be considered, the *constitutional issue*. One journalist wept over her beer in a local pub. “Where got meaning?” she asked as she wiped the foam from her mouth and the tear on her nose. There was some bitter laughter as her colleagues downed their beer.

The majority of the literate public also rubbed their eyes – in disbelief. What was this issue? If there was no crisis why was the Prime Minister suddenly

embarking on a high-powered tour of the nation, explaining the "situation" to the people?

And there was a situation.

I did not see all the events that comprised the tour, but I saw enough. Musa spoke in Batu Pahat and he spoke about the Magnificent Seven who were the UMNO heroes in the campaign, to persuade the people that by changing the constitution the position of the rulers was actually being strengthened.

The Seven were:

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, now Education;

Adib Adam, Information and Broadcasting Minister, now Land and Regional Development;

Rais Yatim, and Regional Development, now Information and Broadcasting;

Anwar Ibrahim, Culture, Youth and Sport Minister, now Agriculture;

Rafidah Aziz, Public Enterprises Minister, and still Public Enterprises;

Sanusi Junid, National and Rural Development, and still National and Rural Development.

Sharir Samad, Federal Territory Minister and still Federal Territory.

It is perhaps significant that "The Magnificent Seven" was an American western based on the Japanese film, "The Seven Samurai." And how did the western end? With a shootout, of course, and only two of the seven riding away into the sunset leaving the other five in the dust.

Mahathir, obviously, was not the only one who who liked his conundrums and suggested that people who like to analyse things should work out puzzles. Musa's riddle was complicated and laced with some humour, and the double entendre with the lady

Minister for cowboy (cowgirl?) caused not a few chuckles.

It was obvious during the campaign that UMNO hardliners regarded logic as an unnecessary encumbrance when there was work to be done and goals to be reached.

The fourth estate which was obviously regarded as third rate after some serious second thoughts, however, was still treated like a dangerous fifth column, not to be trusted with any information.

Still, when the time came to kick the pet poodles, Mahathir was full of praise for local journalists for not imitating foreign pressmen. All the same, some of them have been sacked for not playing the game properly, not by their apologetic editors but on the instruction of "powers with much more say in these matters than mere editors and proprietors."

## Chapter Six

### The Power And The Glory

*For my own part, it was Greek to me.*

— William Shakespeare.

While it is normal for UMNO politicians, from time to time, to forecast the oncoming doom of political parties in the opposition, there is a great alacrity which informs declarations that a crisis within UMNO is strictly a family matter, not to be interfered with by “outsiders”, on pain of some vague, unspeakable consequence.

Generous UMNO spirits have also declared, from time to time, that a run-of-the-mill MCA crisis or one of those frequent MIC crises, or for that matter a full-blown USNO or Berjaya or SNAP crisis was an internal matter, and not the proper concern of “outsiders.”

Occasionally, however, this complex “philosophy” suffers from temporary amnesia. And then odd things do happen.

During the 1984 – 1985 Phantom Member crisis in the MCA, when the party leadership consisted of troupes of Acting Leaders since permanent leaders could not be elected until the phantoms were exorcised, Datuk Musa proposed a solution. It raised howls of indignation in the already embattled ranks of the Chinese party. In the end the old schoolboy shout, “Outsiders smoke cigars!” was the tone, and value, of the protests.

The MCA is not exactly a match for UMNO, but the loudness of the indignation and the difficult economic climate of the time did make UMNO pause.

Musa had suggested, not without substantial reason, that the MCA should leave the ruling National Front coalition, put its own house in order and then return to the coalition's bosom. Government credibility was at a low ebb and with the troubled world economy and its impact on commodity prices there was no question that an early election must be held. But with the MCA in another of its high sado-masochistic moods, it was only sensible to send it out for treatment. Musa's suggestion was reasonably blunt, but still, it was only a hint.

The Chinese were immediately convinced that there was a Machiavellian plot in the making. Extreme interpretations included the suggestion that UMNO wanted to rule alone and that UMNO wanted to ditch the MCA in favour of the smaller, less powerful Gerakan. There were Chinese pundits who were sure that UMNO was glad the Chinese community had been weakened by the affair. Other variations of hysteria also surfaced, and Musa was even seen as an "ultra" again.

The suggestion having been howled down, the MCA went on squabbling until Mahathir himself summoned the sulking Mandarins and gave them a barely modified Musa formula in the form of an ultimatum. This time it was official. The Chinese party, now teetering on the edge of chaos, quickly promised to set their house in order soon. They were given a deadline. They kept it.

Now why Musa's idea was not presented to the Chinese leaders quietly in the first place I have no idea. It may well be, however, that the Deputy Prime Minister was obliged to fly the trial balloon first to



facilitate the publication of the formal ultimatum, with him playing the cat's paw – a role Musa could not have devoutly wished for. Other Deputy Prime Ministers have been obliged to play similar roles, notably Mahathir when he talked about shooting the Vietnamese refugees in the high seas, if necessary by changing the laws of the land.

UMNO Deputy Presidents are usually shadowy figures, doing the President's bidding without any argument. But they are nothing like the sad irrelevancies so many American Vice-Presidents were. At least one American V.P., John Nance Garner (1933 – 1941) has said that "The vice-presidency ain't worth a pitcher of warm spit." An UMNO deputy presidency is worth considerably more.

With Musa, however, there was an even greater difference. Having been made part of the 2-M image, he also enjoyed for a time the umbrella of Mahathir's own approbation – if not open admiration. Indeed in August 1983, with the Constitutional crisis in full spate, Mahathir really infuriated the UMNO general assembly by his style of backing Musa. I wrote at that time:

"The Annual General Assembly of the United Malays National Organisation – arguably the only democratic institution of real significance in Malaysia – has witnessed for the first time in the party's 37-year history a concerted attack on the incumbent president, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad. At the Assembly which convened here on August 19, Mahathir was accused of being autocratic and not understanding the meaning of democracy. Opponents also asserted that he was opportunistic for upholding tradition only for the convenience of the party leadership.

"These vehement attacks, without parallel in past

assemblies, were touched off when Mahathir made what UMNO veterans say was an unprecedented declaration: he told the 1,200 delegates to the 34th general assembly that his deputy Datuk Musa Hitam, must not be challenged at the party election next year and declared that any challenger would be giving in to personal ambition and setting aside what he called team spirit.

"The message to Finance Minister Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah, who lost the battle for the Deputy Presidency to Musa in 1981 and critically split the party, stunned the delegates, who hail from 11 of Malaysia's 13 states and represent some 960,000 members. No UMNO president, according to a former UMNO Secretary-General, has directed delegates so bluntly as to who they should nominate or elect.

"It is an open secret that Razaleigh is preparing to challenge Musa next year, and that new alignments are now being forged, old quarrels patched up and new policies formulated to accommodate critics. However while both Musa and Razaleigh know it is going to be a rough battle, both clearly accept the ground rules."

The quintessential Malay political philosophy consists in the recognition and acceptance of a leadership born in the womb of tradition. It is not so much that a Sultan is sacred because of his person but because he is the fruit of tradition. (Indeed, the sacredness of a Malay Sultan's person — which gives him immunity from all laws — is quite British. Loyalty was demanded by the sultans of old, but they neither expected nor enjoyed this modern protection of immunity.)

His death or disposal must be attended by the right ritual. Anyone who departs from the ritual — however mighty he may be, loses his mandate very

suddenly. The rather clumsy British attempt to deprive the nine Sultans of their powers through the constitutional device of forming a unitary state, the Malayan Union, in 1946 saw the beginning of the end of British rule.

Tradition demanded that the form to be observed be not separated from the substance of any change. The Conference of Rulers today functions as the guardian of the forms, and the guide to any change of substance. The rulers who sit in conference today guard their forms more jealously than ever before.

These attitudes, these old traditions of governance, of course permeate and inform the political culture. Many of the "instant democrats" without the background of these ancient mores have always merely blundered along mouthing platitudes about "democracy." The result has been a continuing conflict between felt values and new-fangled, untested ideas.

Thus in 1976, when the former Selangor Chief Minister, Datuk Harun Idris was on trial on charges of corruption, I was told in all seriousness by Kadir Sheikh Fadzil, now Deputy Foreign Minister, that a great leader cannot be "dragged through the mud". When I pointed out that Datuk Harun had been officially investigated and legally charged with committing a serious crime, he became impatient: "You don't understand," he said. "Datuk Harun is a great leader."

As patiently as I could, I asked, "What about the law?" Kadir shook his head in exasperation. "The law is the law. But a great leader is a great leader and he cannot be humiliated. You understand?"

A great leader? Was Hitler a great leader? Was Nguyen Cao Ky? Was Syngman Rhee? And Ferdinand Marcos? Nixon? What about Chun Doo Hwan? Is Zia al-Haq a great leader?

At that time I could not understand at all. A Western liberal education and a brush with the notion of the rule of law and ideas of equality before the law, made nonsense of his argument. I could not help thinking that he himself was a lawyer trained in the Western tradition, and yet he could think not only comfortably but quite vehemently in quite supra-legal terms. Ten years later I find I can finally begin to comprehend, without sympathising, with what he had in mind.

Harun was a man with a mandate which went beyond the mere calculations of the Western head counting traditions of one-man-one-vote. He was a leader widely accepted, having been annointed by acclaim. The acclaim which, moreover, obviously continued to be heard, and even seemed to grow. In other words, "Vox populi, vox Dei," – The voice of the people is the voice of God.

I do not know whether Kadir thinks in the same way today. Perhaps he does, perhaps not. I hope not. My own doubts continue, more particularly when elected officials, quite airily read a democratic "mandate" to mean a gift of unbridled power. My doubts continue, helped along by lines such as those of Alexander Pope:

"The people's voice is odd,  
It is, and it is not, the voice of God,"

and John Dryden:

'Nor is the people's judgement always true;  
The most may err as grossly as the few.'

The forty-year young UMNO's traditions say that the party is democratic. As a democracy, the rights of members to exercise their equal and individual rights cannot be challenged. The understanding of this democracy at ground level is simplistic, and many a charlatan has insisted that Malaysia is a democracy

because there are elections every five years or less. Not every illiterate villager, however, believes it.

I remember attending a village wedding several years ago when the late Tun Razak was Rural Development Minister and stomping the countryside, getting the civil servants at district office levels to get off their seats and put their shoulders to the wheel. It was no easy task given the size of the job and the habits of rural sinecure.

At the wedding, I sat with the guests on rough leaf mats on the ground in a makeshift marquee while a great pot of coffee was being ladled into cups. Looking at the guests and realising that they still lived barely above the poverty line, I asked my neighbour on my left, a cheerful old man, what he thought of the government's rural development programme.

The wrinkled gentleman who had been in a good mood suddenly looked baleful. He turned to his neighbour and gravely repeated my question. His neighbour craned his neck to look at me for a moment and then slowly turned to his neighbour. This pass-the-puzzle game went round the marquee and until it reached the neighbour on my right.

My neighbour nodded sagely, put his finger on his nose, closed his eyes and puffed at his pipe. Then he turned to his neighbour on his right and gave him his answer, in an elaborate whisper which I could not hear. The answer travelled along the same route the puzzle had come and finally reached the neighbour on my left who looked at me with great seriousness, laid his hand gently on my shoulder and said,

"Rural Development is wonderful thing. Tun Abdul Razak is always talking about it. So it is obvious Rural Development is a good thing for Tun Razak."

There was a silence, and then the whole crowd

burst into laughter. At that time the village of Pondok Tanjong was still untouched by development programmes. A once-rich rice bowl area which in its heyday had a Siamese consul, was largely swamp because of the river silting – as the wonder crop producing rubber plantations eroded hillsides.

I found out later that the village voted for UMNO because they had been told that UMNO was a “democratic party.” Again there were gales of laughter. There were also several Party Islam supporters in Pondok Tanjong, and even a small number of Democratic Action Party voters.

It is of course foolish to imagine that because the poor villagers were illiterate in party politics they were ignorant or led by the nose so easily. Far from that, they were acutely interested and were quite sophisticated in old political traditions. They may not have known the law in the books but they did know quite well what justice – adil and adat – meant.

UMNO's traditions also follow the Malay belief in the sacredness of hierarchies and pecking orders. Formal contests, like the formalised and stylised martial art of silat are highly regarded and in many ways the contest at the General Assembly of UMNO are formalised and ritualistic.

It is clearly understood that the contestants are serious in their ambitions, but as Hussein Onn pointed out to me, when something is very clear, the Malays do not shine a torch on it. For Mahathir to tell the delegates that they must vote for Musa and no one else simply went against the grain. Instead of being a spellbinder, he suddenly became a spell-breaker. And crowds in their transports of enthusiasm – which is what party conventions are really for in Moscow, Blackpool or Kuala Lumpur – want their hallucinations preserved intact.

In 1975, the late Tun Abdul Razak's last assembly, the delegates had to choose three vice presidents, and among the contestants were Harun Idris and Ghazali Shafie, at that time Chief Minister of Selangor and Home Minister respectively.

Harun was under investigation for corruption. Not long after the assembly – 18 weeks later, to be exact – he was charged. Two days later I asked him, in his living room in Jalan Duta, "Are you corrupt?"

He replied, "You tell me. When I was Chief Minister and we were allocating land in a new housing estate. The wife of the Minister for \_\_\_ came to see me and asked for three lots. I told her there was plenty of land and she was welcome to apply for any number of lots. But she wanted three 'corner' lots. I said, why not, there were several corner lots available? She told me the ones she wanted were already booked and could I secure them for her?"

"I said it would be rather unfair. She insisted that she wanted those particular lots. I told her, 'I'll see what I can do.' She was still insistent.

"Now tell me, who was corrupt? And you know how close her husband is to Tun Razak. So what was the right thing for me to do? And who was corrupt if I did as I was asked?"

I don't think I should mention the minister's name since I could not check the Harun story with him. And I have no idea how many delegates knew about this dilemma of Harun's but he did not win the election. But one thing was certain, he was not then the Razak favourite he once was.

Another Razak favourite was Ghazali who was plucked out of the foreign service during the terrible riot-filled days of May 1969. He was made a Senator and then a minister with special functions. He appeared set for great things. He stood for one of

the three vice-presidencies, and appeared to be certain of being picked.

The country was then in the throes of renewed communist terrorism. The national monument was blown up and several policemen were killed in the streets and even in broad daylight. Ghazali's ministry was in the front pages but not looking good in July 1975.

Much later he told me, rather bitterly, when I suggested that the delegates as a breed were better educated in 1975 than in 1965, "What education? I was accused by these chaps of employing too many *mata cepek* [weak eyes or slanted eyes, meaning Chinese.] Can you believe that? What did they expect? Malay detectives to hunt down Chinese communists in Chinese New Villages and squatter areas? What education are you talking about?"

Ghazali was never a very diplomatic politician and his habit of telling off journalists for not doing their "homework" did not endear him to many, even when he was absolutely right.

The other candidates were Ghafar Baba, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development; Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah, then Chairman of the National Petroleum Corporation, Petronas; and Mahathir, Minister of Education.

Razak the master political acrobat and juggler, did not name names. He did, however, go for some extravagant praise of the last three *portfolios* without saying anything about the personalities. Nor did he begin this campaign a year early. He merely made it part of his Presidential address just before voting began. And the assembly got the message.

But the power of the UMNO President is an extremely delicate thing. One false move and it is gone.



The first president, Datuk Sir Onn Jaafar, made the miscalculation of asking his members to open the party to the non-Malays, and the party rejected him. The fact that he had once mobilised the Malay masses to successfully oppose the British attempt to create a unitary state and undermine the positions of the Sultans, did not give him any *permanent* immunity against carelessness or miscalculations. For his services they honoured him after his death; for failing to appreciate their deepest attachments and concerns, they rejected him.

The second President, Tunku Abdul Rahman, also fell victim to the argument that he was no longer capable of defending Malay rights and Malay culture. He was accused of poker-playing, horse-racing and similar irrelevant sins. But more seriously, he was accused also of selling Singapore to the Chinese. And he was attacked for his alleged lukewarm Malay language policy. Mahathir himself once accused him of being pro-Chinese.

UMNO, as a Malay party, was always conscious that its strength lay in its Malayness. While the idea of power-sharing was a practical one in the delicately balanced racial situation, it must be remembered that the party's first slogan was "Hidup Melayu" or "Long Live The Malays." As Musa put it, there was an absolute need for Malay leaders to first secure their Malay constituency and hold it.

Even a gentle, reluctant President like Hussein Onn knew that only too well. He told me once, to my great amazement, that while there were ten thousand people better suited than himself to be Prime Minister, he had got the job. So he had to do it as best he could. I cannot think of anyone else in power who has expressed himself in that way. Indeed, the opposite is true. Power invariably goes to the head

and the powerholder begins to think there must have been some divine intercession that raised him above the rest of us and endowed him with extraordinary qualities.

But as I said even Hussein knew that he must make secure his Malay base. Being somewhat biased towards him, I suspect he did not look at it that way when I asked him about the proliferating Malay-owned buildings in Kuala Lumpur. He said that the Malays felt insecure. All the big buildings which dominated the cityscape were Chinese and this made the Malays feel alien and insecure. It was necessary to give the Malays confidence in the environment they inhabited.

Well, it was the same thing. Security was a powerful bait and even a reluctant Prime Minister had to consider its strength and use. Hussein was not cynical in his approach but that made no difference. In politics appearances are often much, much more significant than what lie behind the facades.

But Mahathir has a far more serious security problem to solve as far the population is concerned, and not only the Malay population. It is not the communists, or Party Islam and the religious extremists running wild – though they are a nuisance. It is not even the racial polarisation that has grown over the years thanks to bureaucratic bungling with the implementation of education and economic policies. It is the feeling of insecurity that has arrived for Malaysians grown used to a burgeoning economy.

For the first time since independence there is a feeling that perhaps the golden days are over. For the first time there is a Prime Minister who seems to expend so much time, energy and money to concern himself with building monuments in the name of national pride.

And the symbols of the Mahathir era, whatever the argument in favour of them may be, are symbols of non-productive extravagance: the Penang Bridge in the North, the Daya Bumi complex in the capital, the Proton Saga running around in one of the cleaner cities in the region and merely contributing its bit towards competing for the worst air pollution record in Asia.

These things may be symbols of power of one kind and glory of another kind, but there is not much security in having them when primary commodity prices are floundering and the manufacturing sector is yet to be properly anchored in the national economy.

And it is no comfort to realise that more monuments are contemplated, with trains to run overhead in Kuala Lumpur before inexpensive, sensible bus services are carefully considered, and a massive under-sea power cable from Sarawak to the peninsula is in blueprint that might cost \$15 billion dollars or more while the government is already obliged to plan to demand heavy tolls from motor vehicle owners to service the loans for the grandiose Penang Bridge. And people have made it clear they prefer the quite serviceable – and cheap – ferry service to go to Penang.

To the man in the street – or the village – the glory symbols have always been unimportant, whether they were the Great Pyramid of Cheops or the Eiffel Tower. The visionaries who built them were never known for any inspiration that included popular aspirations – let alone the basic needs of the ordinary people. Walking on the Great Wall of China today of course, should properly inspire only sadness, but we cannot tell that to the Chinese, even if they call themselves socialists, any more than we can

commiserate with the building workmen who chipped away at the marble for the Taj Mahal.

It is a depressing thing that when Malaysia reached the highpoint of its economic life and there was every chance to translate the massive funds generated by high oil prices into widespread prosperity, it was diverted into gratifying the unimaginative whims of a powerful few.

The tragedy, of course, was that while they were dreaming of the power and the glory, they failed to understand the language of the economic needs of the rakyat they woo so irregularly and assiduously every five years. It was obviously all Greek to them.

Musa, I think, was one of those who found the situation untenable. Did he not keep saying rather plaintively before he left, "We must return to our village values?"

And it must be noted that he was speaking of this need for revaluation to UMNO politicians, not to a crowd of academics or newspapermen.

## Chapter Seven

### Power Without Glory

Julius Caesar:

*"The Ides of March are come."*

Soothsayer:

*"But not gone."*

— William Shakespeare.

In the first century BC a Roman named Marcus Tullius Cicero remarked: "Persistence in one opinion has never been considered a merit in political leaders."

Two thousand years later, an American gentleman named Walter Lippmann wrote: "The man who raises new issues has always been distasteful to politicians. He musses up what has been so tidily arranged."

For politicians, consistency is the problem. Indeed, it will be accurate to say that the ability to convince the electorate that their own inconsistency is a superior breed of consistency is an essential qualification to enter the political arena and stay there.

There are men, like Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoo, who simply could not, and had to change parties regularly before conceding that he was in the wrong game. It was no surprise that a man like Hussein Onn felt he must honour a man like Dr. Tan, not merely by recommending him for a title, but by being one of the first to visit his sick bed when the then Mr. Opposition was felled by a stroke.

The other Parliamentary Opposition "problem" in the early days were the two Seenivasagam brothers from Ipoh. If Tan Chee Khoon the doctor was severe in his prescriptions for political ills, preferring some rather bitter pills to Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, the terrible twins of Ipoh, armed with legal sabres and daggers, cheerfully tried to torture the Prime Minister in the legislative chamber. The old man soon learned, and once when one of the brothers needled him about development programmes which got nowhere and forced young kampung boys into town where they annoyed and threatened motorists who did not tip them for "jaga kereta" services, the Tunku said something to this effect:

"I feel very sad and disappointed. The honourable gentleman, one of the wealthiest lawyers in this country cannot stand the sight of poor kampung boys trying their best to make an honest living. It is very sad."

The brothers had to salute the old man's neat skewering of their red herring, because that was what it was. For his part the old man held no grudges. He told me in 1975 that he sometimes stopped at the Seenivasagam family home in Ipoh for tea on his drive back to Kedah from Kuala Lumpur.

One important Malay politician who could not make it was Mohamad Khir Johari because he tried to be consistent, not only in his publicly stated beliefs but also in his private life. He believed in multi-racialism, and was foolish (or human?) enough to have himself and his wife photographed in Imperial Mandarin costumes while on a visit to Aberdeen in Hongkong.

It was one of those tourist indulgences that seemed to be a good idea at the time. His enemies siezed the greeting cards in which he featured the

photograph, and played on the gullibility of village voters, portraying him as a pork-eating Sinophile. And so, in time, aided by other problems, Khir bit the political dust.

Another man who could not control his liberal urges was Mohamad Sopiie Sheikh Ibrahim, and he once took his own party UMNO, to task in parliament for the lop-sided way staff was recruited in the government Family Planning Department, with Malays dominating. He argued, not without a sense of fun, that if the government carried on in that manner, the Malay population growth would indeed be controlled while the Chinese population explosion would sooner or later swamp the Malays. There was no laughter in Parliament. It was clear that Sopiie was making his point about bureaucratic skullduggery aided by poor policy planning and thoughtless directives.

I asked him after the speech whether he had calculated what harm that speech would do to his chances of rising in the government. He laughed his huge laughter and said it would postpone his chance of a Cabinet post by at least five years. In fact he was dropped altogether from the National Front slate at the next election. But the irrepressible Sopiie decided to go on saying his say anyway, in the next available forum, a newspaper column.

What has all this to do with the Musa Dilemma? A great deal indeed, and they go back to the character of the Malaysian population.

The Khir Joharis, the Seenivasagams, the Tan Chee Khoons, the Mohamad Sopiies and the rest were the voices of reasonableness and fairplay of the Merdeka era that cannot be stilled except, finally, by death. (Khir still has his say in that irascible, and often absurd, newspaper, *Watan*.) They are no revolution-

ary heroes in the violent mould of the times, but they have firm personal commitments to what they believe the society in which they live should be like. And they tend to "muss up what has been tidily arranged" by ambitious, and not particularly wise politicians.

And they saw the harsh laws continue to proliferate. The ISA and its outgrowths, the Societies Act and its amendments, the Official Secrets Act being transformed into the official information act, the Printing Presses Act being tightened further, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. They suffered severe inconveniences, but not severe enough to make them despair.

And however harsh the laws, there are now the Osman Awangs, the Cecil Rajendras, the Chandra Muzzafars, the Gurmit Singhs, the Tan Sri Ahmad Nordins, the Lim Kit Siangs, the Razak Ahmads, the Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoons, the Zainab Yangs, the Joseph Pairin Kittingans, the Fan Yew Tengs, the Ahmad Nors, the Param Cumaraswamys, the Jomo K. Sundrams ...

The frightened middle class, the majority of which is made up of civil servants and professionals, shudder at the "antics" of these people whose following is not "political" or organised in loud-mouthed pressure groups parading their patriotism. Their demands are clothed, not in uniform, but in the mufti of rather tough reasonableness. Their voices do become harsh and even hysterical sometimes, and then it is always the high pitch of frustration, but there is never the hint of violence.

Most important of all, they remain rather consistent, even if the political party leaders among them are clearly less so than the others.

I will, I think, be accused of carrying the DAP banner and the PSRM flag for including Lim Kit



Siang and Razak Ahmad in my list. I am not a DAP apologist, (I was once accused of being a secret PAP supporter, heaven forbid!) and I certainly do not agree with everything my friend Kit stands for. Nor am I a follower of the Party Socialis Rakyat Malaysia, even if I like Razak and enjoy his glittering-eyed polemic which he laces happily with heavy sarcasm. No, I am not an SDP or PBS man either.

Why not include Haji Awang Hadi then? Very simply, Party Islam suffers from the same disease as the violent gentlemen with red flags in the jungle, and so, and even more importantly, Hadi does not appeal to me, or, I imagine, to Malaysians across the racial-cultural board.

To me, he is not even trying to communicate, insisting as he does on esoteric modes of dialogue that make no sense to more than half the population. And of the half who understand him, only a small portion seems to listen. But because his desired constituency is Malay the media gives him more space than he is worth, on the assumption that he already has a constituency, and because of this myopia their reports tend to become self-fulfilling prophesies. This is not a criticism of the press: only a party newspaper or a bigot can ignore a colourful character like Hadi.

But despite all that PAS certainly does have a role. It reminds the government that there are clear areas of real discontent and these are not being examined or dealt with, with the seriousness they deserve. Of course this is not saying much because, it might be argued by our sophistry merchants, that one could say the same thing about the Communist Party of Malaya in the jungle. But it is not true. The government has for years reacted to the communists, and dealt with the discontent *they* generated.

One might say that these groups — PAS and CPM — make up the unfashionable rebels.

There were, of course, the fashionable rebels who stopped rebelling and were swallowed by the establishment. The most prominent of these, Anwar Ibrahim, was the most promising for a time. Others, including Sidney Woodhull, James Puthucheary, and former New Straits Managing Editor Abdul Samad Ismail and the rest, seemed to lose their fire and their crusading mood, after a spell or two in detention. Without similar experiences, of course, it is difficult for me to say how the human spirit can be crushed so badly — not that I am anticipating or looking forward to any such exercise and education — as to take them totally out of the mainstream of dissent. I am aware of course that with our laws, and its enthusiastic implementers it would be foolish even now to feel safe, or smug.

But with all the differences enjoyed by the various reformers, doubting Thomases and opinion makers, and the gradual capacity they are developing to make their views known, there is no doubt that a form of something akin to democracy is growing. It has nothing to do with regular elections. It is a recognition of Adlai Stevenson's remark about the democratic form of government: "In a democracy it is safe to be unpopular."

In many ways the harsh laws were helpful in making the young democratic plant hardy, to seek roots in the hostile soil and put out branches in an atmosphere already polluted with poisonous ideas.

The politicians, of course cannot like their nice tidiness "mussed up" like this. They had to watch the discontent being slowly transformed into self confidence, and the voice of the ordinary men and

women asking for an accounting in all spheres of daily living. People were no longer interested in the law simply because it had been enacted. It became clear that the laws were being made without the consent of the governed purely and simply on the inane premise that there had been a "mandate".

In this atmosphere of growing confidence in the rectitude and justness of the rule of law there came, undoubtedly, a great boost by the history-shaping events that booted a very familiar tyrant, President Ferdinand E. Marcos, out of the Philippines and into the American wilderness. There was now a new expression in the political vocabulary of the region.

But the popular phrase "People Power," is misleading in that it does not emphasise the deceit which Marcos and his ilk get away with.

Perhaps it should be repeated *ad nauseam* that Marcos was bent on perpetuating his rule by martial law, which he tried hard to confuse with the rule of law.

He, too, liked the myth that an election every so many years equalled democracy.

He too, shrewdly guessed that elections tickled the democratic fancies of the Western democracies enough to justify their backing his continued and cynical abridgment of human liberties.

He almost succeeded as a confused, distant democracy, saddled with its own sad gerontocracy, fumbled.

What the Filipino people had learned the hard way in the decade and half of martial law was that "rule *BY* law" was only glorified tyranny and had nothing to do with the rule *OF* law.

They discovered that parliament could and did cheat, as long as they accepted the arguments offered by "guns, goons and gold," to use Corazon Aquino's

phrase. The Phillipines parliament, for example, happily declared Marcos the winner when there was overwhelming evidence that he was not.

As 1986 dawned, there emerged a mountain of official evidence that in Malaysia the politics of gold was an established fact of life. By March 11, despite the bold and brassy denials, the vast and detailed report of the Ahmad Nordin Committee on the BMF affair, showed that politicians were everywhere in the scandal. Their denials came *because* they got unsavourily close enough to the cash, and *had* to be questioned. Their fingers may or may not have been inside the till, but so many of them seemed to have hovered busily, if not hungrily, very near it.

The politics of gold in the Philippines was blatant and the "goons" were not merely bold but quite wild. The goons in Malaysia are perhaps less wild in appearance because of their legal garments, and people only have to be intimidated by turning the screws in Parliament.

It was astounding, for example, that while the public was still in a daze over the thousands of pages detailing the greed of personalities obviously accountable to the public, and the elaborate attempts they had made to cover their tracks, parliament introduced laws to further intimidate those who would be most likely to expose future wrongdoing.

The new amendments, it must be noted, were aimed not so much at thieves of secret knowledge, but at the nations's judges.

The new amendments to the Official Secrets Act are designed to tie the hands of judges and force them to impose jail terms where there were already severe fines. Unlike Manila, it seems the law tries to make the judges do the work of goons. And that was possible because the government had a "mandate"!

Because that was how government MP's read the "rule of law."

Of course not all judges are intimidated. Indeed most Malaysian judges have resisted government blandishments and threats admirably. One judge, Tun Suffian Hashim, when he was Lord President, had to sit in judgement over Datuk Harun Idris and there were threatening telephone calls which virtually told him how he should decide the case. He regarded these calls simply as a nuisance. His wife, Toh Puan Bunny, a small Englishwoman with a marvellous *joie de vivre*, received one of these phone calls. Her reaction when told that her husband would be murdered if he did not play ball, was, "Have fun!" as she dropped the receiver back in its cradle.

The gold and goons apart, there are the guns.

The Philippines political system somehow allowed the growth of private armies, thanks, I think, to the influence of the American gun ethic which teaches that every man should have the right to defend himself with whatever means at his disposal.

It is an easy step from the Saturday Night Special ethos to a Saturday Night Army prerogative. And sooner or later the highest levels of philosophy develops into deciding exactly what kind of sophistication a private army should be allowed to reach, not whether or not private citizens should wield military power at all.

People should be forgiven if they think that this has nothing to do with the Musa Dilemma. There are no private armies here, and even possessing one gun is no easy matter.

But consider the relationship between the army and Malaysian political chiefs over the years:

PRIME MINISTER	OFFICER/SERVICE POST	RELATIONSHIP
Tunku Abdul Rahman	Tunku Osman Jiwa/ Armed Forces Chief	Nephew
Tun Razak	Ghazali Seth/General Official Commanding, Peninsular Malaysia	Wife's Cousin
Hussein Onn	Ghazali Seth/Armed Forces Chief	Cousin
	Jaafar Onn/Deputy Chief of Army	Brother
Mahathir Mohamad	Hashim Ali/Chief of Army	Brother-in-law

Of course there is in Malaysia nothing like the private armies of the past in the Philippines, but the link between the Prime Minister and the key positions in the armed forces is revealing and must make Malaysians wonder.

One of the strengths of the Malaysian system, at least as far as the structure of command goes, is that the army cannot act independently. In the end it is administered by a civilian, the Defence Minister, who is responsible for promotions, transfers, and even dismissals.

But when the link is persistently coloured by nepotistic associations, it has to be assumed that extraordinary things can happen. Even if nothing reprehensible actually takes place, it invests the incumbent in the highest office with a false aura of power that can obviously be intimidating. It also gives the military

commanders a false sense of power if the meaning of the structure of command is softened by family links to a superior power source.

Thus it is no secret – though the Official Secrets Act and its amendments would like to pretend it is – that there is a high level of corruption in the armed forces. According to arms manufacturers in Germany, Britain, France and Belgium there are thousands of unserviceable rifles in the army stores. Having invested millions of dollars in guns that cannot be used, the army is about to buy new ones. There are brand new armoured vehicles that cannot be used because greedy officers ordered guns that were too big for the vehicle, and for a vehicle that no one else in the world wants to touch.

In case the Attorney-General and his men are already reaching for their warrant books, let me say that when I was returning from Belgium last July, I sat next to a gentleman whose son was being flown to Kuala Lumpur to take some of the bugs out of the vehicles. I spoke to the technician, who told me there were problems with the Sibmas Armoured Fighting Vehicle, which, he said, he was trying to solve. It was his third visit to Malaysia for the same purpose. He was flying First Class while his father in Economy with me was coming to Malaysia on a holiday. It was ironic that I was paying for the nice old gentleman's holidays, but I wanted to know when the vehicles would be serviceable. The technician did not know, because he only knew one aspect of the vehicle's myriad problems.

It needs no expert to ask "Where were these vehicles during the last Armed Forces Day celebrations?" Why were they not all paraded when it was an established fact that they had been the subject of serious controversy?

Again, the army brass must not think the country is full of half-wits. It appears they do because otherwise a general could not possibly tell the press that an armoured cavalry regiment will be ready only by 1990. Why 1990? It is a fact that enough Sibmas vehicles were bought to form a unit at once. They have been here for a couple of years now. No one can believe that it is going to take five years more to train a few hundred crew for these vehicles. The logical answer is that these Sibmas vehicles will be totally junked and the army will have another requisition exercise – so that the new unit can be formed in 1990. It will cost another few hundred million dollars.

And that is what I mean by a private army – when public funds are used according to private fancy, and, need one say, profit?

It is also no secret that when questions are asked about the need to buy more weapons when there is already a stock of these same weapons, or when there is no clear justification for getting new ones, officials bursting with righteous indignation try to

- a) dazzle the public with scientific jargon (an absurd trick nowadays when thousands of schoolboys know more about guns than many soldiers);
- b) make convoluted arguments about defence tactics and strategy (again a silly trick at a time when so many civilians like Dr. Tan Chee Khoo, are themselves experts); and/or
- c) invoke the Official Secrets Act.

But these tactics not only are childish but also obviously look childish.

I remember talking to Musa – a man who is not much given to encourage weapons expenditure –



once when he was in a sentimental mood. He said he would like to be Prime Minister for at least one day in his life. I was a little surprised, and asked, "Just one day? You have been acting Prime Minister more than once."

He laughed.

"No, I mean, Prime Minister, not *Acting* Prime Minister." Musa, as I have said before, likes the real thing, like "real" foreign correspondents.

"Well, that is inevitable, isn't it?"

I don't remember the exact reply, but he said something to the effect that life was unpredictable.

That was in 1982. At that time his doubts sounded strange. It reminded me of a conversation I had had with Datuk Sanusi Junid some time after Mahathir, his fellow Kedahan, became Deputy Prime Minister. I saw a lot of Sanusi in those days. He told me that Mahathir had advised him to cultivate Musa and Tunku Razaleigh. Sanusi said he was surprised when Mahathir told him that though he was already Deputy Prime Minister, there was no guarantee he would in fact become Prime Minister.

I thought it was a modest statement of a personal philosophy, a comfortable cliché to make Sanusi uncomfortable. It reminded me of Golda Meir saying to some sycophant, "Don't be so humble. You are not all that great."

Now Musa, within two years of his doubting statement has vacated a post that was within an ace of a lifelong target. Did he want power as such? Or was it simply the glory?

One thing was certain: by 1986 Malaysians began to see only too clearly that it was possible to have power without glory.

Musa himself has no gold and no guns. If he did have his goons when he was Home Minister, he has

quite deliberately divested himself of that encumbrance, too.

Would it make me sound like a sycophant if I said that far from seeking power without glory, he was looking for glory without power? Like so many of our reformist thinkers?

But I can't be a sycophant! After all Datuk Musa Hitam has discarded his power.

But then again, has he?

## Chapter Eight

### Truth Without Politeness, Politeness Without Truth

*'There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.'*

— William Shakespeare.

By the time I reached this page, there was news that Datuk Musa had decided to return as Deputy President of UMNO, but that he will be giving up all his government posts as planned. Whether his decision is accepted by Mahathir or not was another matter. His resignation letter was only to come into effect on Sunday 16, and this was Thursday 13.

But I had already written the chapter title based on the Confucian thought that truthfulness without politeness being only rudeness. But what is politeness without truthfulness?

I thought of Julius Caesar refusing the crown three times, and the fact that his act has had many imitators. Even Edward Kennedy, with no outside chance of getting elected did most graciously decline to stand for office. Like Caesar, there was much politeness in his gesture but there was not much truth in him. (I am not, of course, attributing other Caesarean qualities to the Kennedy of Chappaquiddick.)

It would be foolish to believe that Musa does not want the crown. What he wants it *for* is another

matter, but how he intends to secure it is of immediate concern for everybody. It is also obvious to the power brokers and contenders for power that he wants the ordinary UMNO members to *believe* that he is not "power crazy"

It is a matter of style.

March 13 was also the ghastly day on which news broke in Kuala Lumpur that the wild men of Borneo were on the rampage in Sabah again. On March 12 while Malaysians were agonising over the massive BMF scandal Official Report, seven explosions went off in Kota Kinabalu. The Chief Minister, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kittingan declared that the police would be able to handle the situation.

I don't believe that he is that naive.

He was however being rather polite. He would have also been more truthful if he had said that he *preferred* the police to handle the matter because the alternative was to invite Federal intervention. The opposition in Sabah was quick to ask for intervention — there was not much politeness there, nor was there a great display of sincerity of intent, that is, truthfulness. It reminded me of the arsonist setting fire to the house and then running about screaming, "Fire!"

In fact it was astounding to read that when the explosions took place the 3,000 demonstrating *patriots* began to clap and cheer. Both Berjaya and USNO reportedly denied it was their demonstration, not that anybody believed it.

The *patriots* then marched six kilometres to the home of USNO chieftain, Tun Mustapha, defying the police and damaging property on the way. The police handling the crowd showed "admirable" restraint. "Admirable?" Malaysian police are always that, if official comments are to be believed. I myself could find little to admire in an action that came rather

late. They also arrested more than 700 people, all foreigners. (More were to be arrested – and released – later.)

The man in that High Court seeking an injunction against the dissolution of the Sabah state assembly was Ghapur Salleh who had stood on the Berjaya ticket and has since become an independent. But he had joined PBS first, having jumped on the bandwagon as soon as Berjaya was beaten. Then he became “disillusioned” again. He has obviously made a career of being disillusioned. His chances of trying to join PBS again appear high but his chances of being accepted must be rated pretty low.

USNO and Berjaya have claimed that Kittingan cannot govern – let alone dissolve the house – until the court decides on who the legitimate Chief Minister is. Meanwhile everything has been done by legal means to throttle the administration. And now the explosions – by mysterious authors I do not have to name – are meant to say, “Vox populi, non vox Kittingan,” never mind the election results.

The way USNO and Berjaya have clung to the legal fiction that because Mustapha was sworn in he must be Chief Minister is close to the Filipino dictator Marcos’s position that he must be president because his obviously flawed parliament proclaimed him president.

The legal niceties being observed while Sabah burned seemed to matter a little too little to those who control events in Kuala Lumpur.

And how history repeats itself!

In the wake of the 1976 USNO disaster, too, explosions had rocked Kota Kinabalu.

I was in Sabah in May 1976, shortly after Tun Mustapha’s USNO was crushed by Berjaya. I don’t think he believed what had happened, any more

than Berjaya's Harris Salleh believes what happened exactly nine years later in 1985 when Party Bersatu Sabah crushed and displaced Berjaya.

Incidentally, the prize for the quote of the year must surely go to Harris Salleh who said on February 27:

*"I was the best Chief Minister in the country for the past nine years. Nobody can dare deny that."*

Obviously the people of Sabah did not notice this "undeniable" fact, and denied it by throwing him out together with all his Ministers.

I asked the late Tun Fuad just after he appointed his first cabinet why he chose a man of Harris's temperament to be Deputy Chief Minister. His reply was, "I know he has rough edges. [Putting it rather mildly, I said, and he nodded agreement.] But don't worry, I will whip him into shape in five years." Unfortunately he did not live to carry out the whipping.

Soon after that the bombs exploded. In 1976 I wrote:

"Few people here are prepared to believe that the bombers were communists, Filipino refugees or any other 'irresponsible' elements. Instead, most people, without any solid evidence, appear to have concluded that the blame lies on the ex-Chief Minister's Party, USNO.

"... the average man is convinced that the bombings are part of desperate campaign to regain power lost at the polls. [USNO won 16 of the 48 seats contested in 1985. Mustapha had confidently forecast a comfortable majority against the fledgling PBS.] Police sources on the other hand are far more categorical: 'there is mounting evidence, they say, that the bombings were planned in the state capital by USNO supporters.

"... More than 500 people have been questioned by the police, with about 300 being detained. The Police Field Force units which came from Peninsular Malaysia for the elections are likely to stay on for some considerable time.

"One man arrested was the brother-in-law of Tun Mustapha, living in one of Tun Mustapha's own houses and next door to the ex-Chief Minister's residence. The arrest took place following the bombings. Police claimed that 11 Armalite rifles were seized in the house together with 3,000 rounds of ammunition. Other close relatives of Tun Mustapha have also been arrested.

"Police also revealed that a boatload of people were apprehended a week before the explosions, and the *kumpit* (small boat) carried firearms. Police would not reveal the identity of the captured men except to say they were not Filipino refugees."

Hussein Onn was Prime Minister. The Federal Reserve Unit and other policemen moved into the state swiftly. The telephone lines ran hot and the bombings stopped as mysteriously as they started. Tun Fuad had made just one trip to Kuala Lumpur.

The police have proved again and again that they are quite equal to the task of handling thugs and thieves anywhere in Malaysia if they are given the order to move.

And despite the 3,000-man demonstration (one estimate was nearer to 1,000) before the Kota Kinabalu High court, only total ignorance will conclude that there was a groundswell of popular feeling against Kittingan's government. And the 1976 experience must also give the police some idea about how to approach the present problem.

In 1976 Chief Minister Tun Fuad Stephens told me as we rode to his constituency of Kiulu to partici-

pate in the Kadazan Harvest Festival, that he was taking no chances after the bombings. We were accompanied by his personal body-guard, an armed motor-cycle outrider and a jeep-load of heavily armed federal Police Field Force officers. I wrote then:

"Tun Fuad said that assassination threats 'of the banana republic type' could not be ignored."

A month later he was dead, killed in an air crash which also claimed his son and three or four of his state cabinet ministers.

The investigation of the crash was a strange affair and the finding was that it was caused by "human error," a conclusion that covered vast numbers of possibilities and all the sins men are capable of. Negligence, after all, is the father of many sins.

It was also rumoured that one of the investigators died in Australia in a crash in a similar aircraft, a Nomad, soon after he finished his investigations.

In spite of this uncomfortable history involving several old players, Kittingan's position that the police could handle the situation meant he did not want direct Federal intervention. It also meant he did not trust Kuala Lumpur to play fair.

It is obvious he prefers to go to the voter and make sure that the opposition is crushed once and for all so that Kuala Lumpur can make no mistake about who has the mandate to govern Sabah. The distrust must deepen as the Berjaya and USNO leaders clamour for Federal interference and Kuala Lumpur demurs. I cannot remember USNO clamouring for such interference in 1976. The Prime Minister then of course was the law-oriented Hussein. I wrote then:

"The Chief Minister [Tun Fuad said] ... it was a pity that Federal troops had to be stationed in Sabah while they were more obviously and urgently needed



in Peninsular Malaysia where the communist insurgents were becoming 'a great problem' "

Thus even Berjaya (for different reasons) did not particularly want any Federal nose-poking in 1976.

In spite of all that, clearly the federal authorities must consider the dangerous tensions building in the state.

Yet the Prime Minister, as acting Home Minister during Musa's absence, simply said the police could handle the matter. "The police have been given the instructions. There is no comment to make on this."

Mahathir's main critic, Lim Kit Siang was not so polite. *The Star* reported on March 13:

"Opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang urged Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad today to give 'a clear signal' to Sabah to prevent the unrest there from deteriorating.

" 'Otherwise it will be seen in the eyes of the world that Kuala Lumpur is behind it,' he said in Parliament today.

"He also urged the Inspector General of Police to take all necessary measures to deal with the irresponsible people who have conspired and plotted to topple the PBS government.

"He said the bombings in Kota Kinabalu today were aimed at creating a tense situation in Sabah.

"The demonstrations today were aimed at creating a situation of unrest and fear so that the Federal Government could intervene by an emergency take-over of power, he claimed.

"Mr. Lim said that in the last 11 months, many political legal, constitutional and extra-constitutional means had been used to create turmoil and confusion in Sabah.

"The situation would not have reached the present

state if the Federal Government had 'extended a hand of friendship' to the PBS government, he added.

"He noted that Dr. Mahathir had paid visits to many states but still not found time to visit Sabah.

"Mr. Lim said what was happening in Sbah was a 'test of our committment to democracy'. The government must show that it was committed to democracy not only when it won elections but also when it lost."

Even in Parliament Lim did not go further than that - not that he had to.

He did not recall, for example, that when the election results came in on the night of April 21, 1985, the losers got together and plotted to wrest power from PBS. It was a night which Scheherazade herself might have dreamed up and discarded as too unreal to pass off even as a fairy tale.

With USNO's 16 seats and Berjaya's 6, the hate-filled misalliance could muster 22 seats. (The bitterness of the hatred was almost tangible, and gives a new dimension to the old thought that politics makes strange bedfellows). Still, with a logic that makes Catch-22 sound pompous and solemn, they proceeded to argue that with 6 nominated seats, they could garner 28, just two more than the 26 PBS had gathered. This mind-boggling logic was apparently presented to Kuala Lumpur in the middle of the night. None of the political hijackers conceded for a moment, even to themselves, that the six had to be nominated by the majority party.

The Prime Minister was away. Musa, as acting Prime Minister, I understand, was flabbergasted, and reacted as only a man of considerable presence of mind could have. He wanted to know if all the votes had been counted, and advised the caller that until all counting had been completed, nothing should be done.

Now here I am treading on tricky ground, but tricky ground that has been treaded before me. I must ask Mahathir to forebear and remember that rumour and hearsay is perpetrated only because the truth is not allowed its proper place.

In England where Mahathir was at that time, a Malaysian pressman asked him, so I am told, if it was a reasonable thing for Mustapha to do. The answer was, yes, that it was the way the Sabah constitution was made. I am not sure what that meant exactly, but the implication was obvious: in Sabah an election-loser could make up for his shortage by nominating six people.

I do not know what kind of communication took place between the 2 M's that night, between Kuala Lumpur and London, or even if there was any communication at all. But in the morning Musa made it clear that the will of the majority must prevail. Joseph Pairin Kittingan was then duly sworn in. Tun Mustapha who had been sworn in earlier was dismissed by the Head of State, Tun Adnan Robert.

*In the ten months since the fatal election, Musa said nothing to indicate that he had misjudged the issue. He has still not changed his mind.*

*On the other hand Mahathir has done nothing to indicate that he had endorsed Musa's action.*

Indeed, as far as policy on Sabah is concerned, there has been no official statement on the legitimacy or otherwise of Kittingan's position, from the Federal Government. If anything, all the indications are that the Sabah Chief Minister was virtually left to stew in his own juice.

While it may not be central to the argument, it is worth noting that Kittingan's government and his personal conduct has received approval and admiration from across the country. Opposition leaders and

even government men have expressed their approval, some privately and many publicly.

The most revealing quality of the man has been the way he acted under pressure, neither losing his temper nor taking precipitate action. And he has been extremely polite to National Front leaders in Kuala Lumpur as he applied again and again to join the coalition. His rejection has never been explained satisfactorily though the bland clichés of coalition principles which bind the partners have been bandied about.

After Musa left for Saudi Arabia on March 1, Mahathir who is on a countrywide tour to visit all the states, cancelled his Sabah visit without giving any reasons. Given the events of March 12, it could have been a security consideration. If it was, then obviously the police were aware that trouble was brewing in the state.

Cancelling an official visit normally would have roused no suspicions. In the context of the situation, however, there were very serious questions about his motives. Then came the Lim Kit Siang remark in parliament, and the visit was quite suddenly "on" again.

The truth about the original cancellation is not known. And even if the truth was known, there is danger in revealing them for fear of being caught in the Official Secrets net from which not even the wisest judge in the land can save a man.

Indeed we live in a country where the wisdom of our judges is being slowly but surely circumscribed and contracted by the limits of the wisdom of our legislators.

For the moment Musa's decision to come back as Deputy President only, and not as either Home Minister or Deputy Prime Minister cannot give much

comfort to Kittingan. But after that April 22 action of Musa, there must be relief that Musa is not out of business altogether.

It has been argued that Musa timed his departure for the very ordinary reason that he could not stomach the situation any longer. The reason he gave his close aides for dating his resignation to be effective on March 16 was that the next meeting of UMNO's Supreme Council was March 15.

According to the popular theory, he wanted all members to know before he quit. This has subsequently been confirmed. It seemed there was concern that if it was not known that he had indeed resigned, his resignation letter might have disappeared into limbo!

It is one of the sad facts of politics that such crass kneading of the plain truth is universally accepted in the name of expediency. The question is, "Expedient for whom?" The fact is that the truth is often pommelled into the shape desired by the politician and then baked and served as bread for popular consumption. And let us face it, a lot of us gag on it, and some choke on it. And the ordinary man swallows this dangerously unbalanced diet and lives a very unhealthy political life.

Whatever Musa had in mind, I can say that I knew of the letter on the day he was leaving Kuala Lumpur. The contents of it were revealed to me by a friend of a friend of a friend. Obviously there were hundreds of friends of friends of friends of Musa in the country. And equally obviously some of these "friends" were Mahathir's friends. So it was equally absurd for Mahathir to claim he knew nothing about the letter until he received it a day later.

The fiction has always been maintained that the truth is the monopoly of election winners. No doubt

it is true that history is written by victors in war, but election victories usually have not only very short term history-writing benefits but the period is well defined by constitutional constraints. Still, new victors write new histories. Yet in Sabah the losers now cling to the myth of their monopoly to write history by telling the most hoary of fairy tales.

I think the time for fooling all of the people all of the time is long past in Malaysia. Even fooling some of the people all of the time has fallen on evil times. And while government controlled television tries to fool all of the people some of the time, the video industry has made even that puerile game foolish. Thousands of people, for example, simply ignore the "news" and government "specials" and watch "The Smurfs" if they are on or they switch on their videos to see English cricket or Japanese Ninjas shows, or even more salacious fare available from video shops.

Indeed the only TV programmes that do find ready sponsors now are foreign fairy tales in cans – like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* – and sports programmes where telling untruths can mean angry people holding immediate and uncontrollable demonstrations against referees.

I quoted Shakespeare at the beginning of this chapter, not to hint to Musa that he must grab the opportunity to seize power when Mahathir is at his most vulnerable. Far from it.

It is true that Mahathir is now in a very weakened position. But at the end of the day it does not matter too much which individual is in "charge" as long as he is under the voter's control.

Let us admit it: great men are hard to find and we have to put up with the tolerable servants available to us until such time as the great ones emerge. It is no use hoping another Tunku Abdul Rahman will come

along somehow and save us all. He himself has done enough already and it is incumbent upon the rest of us to hold on to at least some of his values of moderation. And Hussein Onns, unfortunately, also do not grow on trees.

Meanwhile, the tide, as far as I am concerned, now favours the ordinary men and women. And when we exercise the real power which it is in our hands, it is necessary not only to be polite but also truthful to ourselves.

## Chapter Nine

### Old Friendships

*When love begins to sicken and decay  
It useth an enforced ceremony!  
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith.*

— William Shakespeare.

One popular theory about the Musa riddle is that he wanted Mahathir to dismiss Tunku Razaleigh from the cabinet after the battle for the Deputy Presidency in 1981.

Mahathir not only retained Razaleigh but also kept him in the prestigious Finance Ministry. Even after he lost the second time in 1984, Razaleigh was retained in the cabinet as Trade and Industry Minister, a post with more direct influence on the fortunes of party supporters than even the Finance Ministry. (The Trade Ministry is the authority in charge of issuing import licences, among other things.)

Razaleigh, on the other hand, was deprived of all his party posts. Musa, it is said, was still furious.

I don't believe that Razaleigh's position was at the heart of the final Mahathir-Musa quarrel, but certainly it must have been one of the major irritations.

After all, having fought two bitter battles to eliminate a rival and still find the rival in the arena and under protection of the impresario, is not easy to take. While Razaleigh survives, he looms as an obvious threat in 1987 when the next party election



taken place. But Musa put up with it for a very long time.

When a reporter asked Mahathir if this story, which was reported in rather authoritative terms in Indonesia, was true, he replied, quite typically, that the Indonesian journalist obviously knew more than the local reporter who should therefore ask the Indonesian, not him. He denied that Musa had written to him demanding that Razaleigh be dropped from the cabinet. "I am not aware of any such letter," he said.

Despite that flippant treatment, the theory persists as the key to the Musa riddle.

Other personalities who are named as anathema to Musa include Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin, Rural and National Development Minister, Sanusi Junid and Agriculture Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Another name mentioned is that of Megat Junid, a Deputy Minister. Key UMNO functionaries at party headquarters, like Executive-Secretary Kamarulzaman (Kip) Bahadun have also been named as obstacles to Musa's power and progress.

Musa and Razaleigh were friendly rivals for a very, very long time, and ten years ago there seemed to be even a tacit understanding that Razaleigh would lead the Razaleigh-Musa team some day.

Musa himself told me during that long ago tea-time chat in Penang that they were good friends. Razaleigh, he said, was in a hurry and thought he would make it to the top within two years, replacing Hussein Onn who had just taken the job. Musa laughed: "I told him, 'I always thought you were a bit mad. Now I know you *are* mad.'" There was no sarcasm or rancour. It was simply a huge joke.

We both thought it very funny. I have not told this story to Razaleigh only because I never thought

of it on the occasions I met him. Now I wish I had. I have no idea how serious Razaleigh was when he made that remark to Musa but I *do* know that Razaleigh does like a bit of leg-pulling.

Musa also told me once that he would not mind working on Razaleigh's team, implying that he would not mind playing number two. But that was before the fatal clash in 1978 when he was Education Minister.

1978 was the year of Merdeka University. It was also the year of the end of Party Islam power in Kelantan and the year of the Vietnamese refugee flood. But these things paled into insignificance besides the Chinese language university issue as far as the UMNO power struggle went. Kelantan was Razaleigh's trump, but it was already an old victory when the Assembly met.

A license for a Chinese language university which was virtually approved ten years earlier and then kept in cold storage because of the 1969 race riots, was being debated again. Eventually the matter was to go to court, after the government gave every sign of being opposed to it. First, however, it had to explode at the Annual General Assembly in September.

That year, for the first time Musa threw in his glove to fight for one of the three vice-presidencies. The incumbents included Ghafar Baba and Tunku Razaleigh. According to my information Musa was confident that he would win impressively, partly because he and Tunku Razaleigh had agreed to deliver their state (Johor and Kelantan respectively) votes as blocks to each other. Calculating that their support was fairly equal in the other states, if they kept their promises, they would win about 750 votes each.

I watched the two rivals as the results were announced. Razaleigh was smiling broadly as his 763

votes were declared. The second was Ghafar who came in with 706 votes. And Musa's face turned black as his victory — 699 votes — was announced.

Most reporters (like me) were unaware of what had transpired before the election. They were now keen to get reactions from the new vice-President as he came down from the high-table platform and through the milling delegates into the lower lobby of the Kuala Lumpur Hilton. Razaleigh who walked with him, looked cheerful and playfully jabbed Musa in the chest and said in front of the crowd of reporters, "Musa, next time don't challenge me. You will lose."

Musa's smile was grim. He then summoned the reporters. "Take out your notebooks," he said, "and write this down. 'In future all posts will be challenged. All posts. President, Deputy President, Vice Presidents — all posts.' Did you write that down?" And he marched away, leaving no doubt that he meant exactly what he said.

Razaleigh, surprisingly I thought, looked stunned. He did not say anything.

But more was to come.

At the end of the assembly, when Government Ministers in the Supreme Council made their obligatory policy statements and their promises for the future, Musa delivered his blow to the *solar plexus*. Or was it below the belt? If it was, it was too bad, because, as his aides remarked later, Razaleigh had clearly asked for it.

Musa told the Malay assembly that the application for the charter for the Chinese Language Merdeka University had been rejected. The 1,000-odd delegates who had been sitting for four days by then, cheered.

It had been an exciting assembly, with even the Prime Minister being challenged for the presidency,

albeit by a lame horse, Sulaiman Palestin. Now the new Malay champion, Musa, was justifying their confidence by saying "No!" in ringing tones, to what was seen as Chinese encroachment in the education arena. He was instantly their hero. Immediately he stood not only apart from his rival but clearly head and shoulders above him.

I saw Home Minister Ghazali soon after that because the angry Chinese community was planning to hold a 10,000 man demonstration against the government decision. Ghazali was one of the candidates who had stood for a vice presidency and lost. He said, "These people are playing with fire. Like little children. Do you know what can happen if these demonstrators get out of hand? What do you mean, 'Can't the police handle it?'" Of course the police can handle it, but I have to refuse the Chinese a license to hold a meeting. And where does that leave us? Eh? Irresponsible, man. Childish behaviour!" And so on and so forth.

The demonstration did not take place. Musa himself was not in Kuala Lumpur to answer questions. He had made his speech and caught a plane to Jamaica, I think to attend a UNESCO meeting. But a month later Hussein Onn was obliged to act to stop the rapidly deteriorating race situation. I wrote in October that year:

"The debate on October 10, which one National Front deputy minister, K. Pathmanaban, told me was the most "political" he had experienced, was notable for its length and seriousness. During the caucus discussion – five hours on Sunday October 3 and almost three hours on the following day – National Front members were encouraged to have their say without fear or favour.

"It was obvious that Hussein wanted the country

to realise that he would not play fast and loose with an issue that would encourage further polarisation among the races. This became more apparent during the debate, a well-planned National Front attack on the DAP proposal in which only one Malay spoke – Musa himself.”

Musa’s speech – unlike his Assembly speech which was atypical – was calm and analytical. He argued about the cost and mechanics of enlarging the education system, and did as much as was possible under the circumstances to cool the issue. But I felt that he had already disillusioned very badly the man who mattered most for his future – Hussein Onn. I also felt that it would take a long time for Hussein to see Musa as a mature, sensible and reliable man again.

Tunku Razaleigh who had already become chairman of both Bank Bumiputra and Petronas when he was in his thirties, had been a vice-president for a term when Musa first contested for that senior position. Razaleigh’s standing with the Chinese, unlike Musa’s was always good, and with the Merdeka issue dominating, the Chinese were almost openly cheering him along – not, it must be noted, to his advantage within UMNO.

Indeed in that election there were Chinese bets on him amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. There are claims that the figure was in millions. I was at the Johor Civil Service Club a few days before the vote, and there were large private bets being taken at the bar, especially by visiting Singapore businessmen. My advice to bet on Musa was not seriously (or kindly) taken by the visitors, and even the local Chinese were betting on the Finance Minister and his chances.

I took a modest bet and was quickly swamped by offers of more. But knowing something about the nature of politics, I declined and thus passed up a chance of becoming very rich. If I had lost, of course, I would not have become merely poor. I would have become bankrupt.

If there was one factor which stood against Razaleigh it was his state of bachelorhood. A man in his thirties with a reasonable income, as Jane Austen might have said, ought to marry. The Malay community generally would go along with the lady novelist, not so much because bachelorhood implied philandering and dissoluteness as because in the village mind it implied impotence or some even worse aberration.

I think in the election some of Musa's supporters played this story up and it may have cost Razaleigh a few votes. I don't think, however, that it cost him his career prospects.

That reminds me of a remark Hussein Onn made in December 1978 when I asked him why he chose Mahathir as his deputy, which he did in 1976. Hussein gave a long, indirect answer. "I had to choose one of the [three directly elected] vice-Presidents of UMNO," he said. I interrupted with the remark that neither the Federal Constitution nor the UMNO constitution made any such stipulation. He smiled rather wanly, I thought, and said, "But UMNO would like it."

Still, why Mahathir?

"I had to choose a man with a good education." This eliminated Ghafar Baba, who has no tertiary education, at once.

"I had to choose a man who was mature and had settled down." That eliminated Tunku Razaleigh, the gay young blade of UMNO politics. If Razaleigh had

been married with a family, would the course of Malaysian history have been different? I wonder!

Anyway, Mahathir was arrived at through a process of elimination. Hussein had said to his press conference then:

"I have made my choice and can only pray and hope that the choice is a correct one and that he will be accepted and supported by the country generally."

It was obvious at that time that people like Razaleigh did not regard Mahathir as a viable choice to run the country. As I have remarked earlier, Mahathir's own view as expressed to Sanusi was also full of doubts.

So, even though Mahathir had been appointed, the struggle for succession intensified in the background.

If Razaleigh's marital status was a problem, so was Musa's. He and his wife Maria, a handsome lady of South American origin and temperament, were separated at that time and she lived abroad.

For the benefit of morality-mongers bred in Western traditions, I had better point out that a man's private life — while a clean record had its merits — was never a great inhibiting factor to Malay politicians. In the present mood of praising Islam and the morality it stands for, many an opportunist has blazed forth in praise of chastity belts, metaphorically speaking of course, but there is still not much political clout in it.

*Malay culture does not swim in hypocrisy, even if politeness is very much the badge of the tribe.*

Thus while men like Tan Chee Khoon who lead exemplary lives are not sneered at, no one stands in awe of his example. Once when Tunku Abdul Rahman challenged Parliament and invited anyone who was without blame to stand up and be counted, Tan alone stood up. All the Tunku could say was,

"I feel sorry for you," implying, in his own peculiar way that virtue somehow carried its own punishment.

Both Musa and Razaleigh display no hypocrisy or phony inhibitions about the good life. They like to sing popular songs and dance at discos with friends. Musa hardly drinks but does not moralise about it and Razaleigh has given up his youthful drinking habits. Neither of them is a sportsman, though Musa has been known to swing his golf clubs with some friends. Razaleigh has a health problem – arthritis – affecting his legs, but he seems to treat that with a certain levity in his public appearances.

And though there were taunts about their single state by political rivals and desperadoes clutching at straws, they have both refused to be flustered. Musa did call the press once and tell journalists that it was true he and his wife were separated. He was frank in his admission that there were differences that could not be reconciled. I was not at the press meeting, but he told me about it in Penang. He admitted he had a temper and his wife had her Latin temperament. It was difficult. The rumours and speculations about Musa's marriage faded away for a while after that.

Razaleigh did not bother to dignify the rumours in any way because there was nothing to apologise about. So the rumours went on, and there were several stories of an imminent marriage and these stories still persist.

Musa's marriage, however, became a problem as soon as he became Deputy Prime Minister. It seems (and I seriously doubt the truth of it) there was pressure put on him by Mahathir to "clean up his act" and a reconciliation, or at least a reunion took place. It is tempting to believe that Musa complied because it was a condition upon which he was offered



the No. 2 job in the country. Of course I have no confirmation of this from either Mahathir or Musa, and I tend not to believe it.

In any case, recalling what Musa told me in Penang, I was not persuaded that his heart was in what he was doing. I know what a "breakdown" in marriage means and any talk about the weaker sex or the man's responsibility is so much sentimental trash. A separation of minds is something for which there is no remedial surgery — no one can reattach the severed parts with anything like efficiency. Of course a false front *is* possible, and a lot of miserable people I know settle for it and then indulge in more paeans of sentimental garbage to justify their life-long miseries.

But for a couple condemned to live under the constant glare of publicity, or for anyone with a modicum of self-respect, it means meaningless torture. There are, of course, many such masochists around who do it for "the children's sake" and the children grow up thinking the tensions and tantrums at home are an integral, not to say natural part of "life", as one particular martyr to marriage put to me. "Life is like that, you know!" I don't.

Musa, I think, is too fond of life to play such idiotic games.

As personalities, both Musa and Razaleigh are attractive in their own ways, and not the least of their common traits is their capacity to listen patiently to views directly opposed to their own, and try to understand them. In their own ways they are modest in spite of professional demands that call for solemn self praise. And unlike Mahathir, they both have an active and easy sense of humour, meaning they can laugh with junior reporters as easily as with the rich and powerful.

It was not surprising therefore that Musa's departure caused such a profound shock. Even the normally "150% pro-establishment" New Straits Times ran the story of his departure without indulging in the usual banal propaganda.

Less than two weeks later the NST's Group Editor, Dr. Munir Majid lost his job, but that is another story. It might be useful to remember in this context that Razaleigh's defeat at Musa's hands also saddened many people and the newspapers also showed their sympathy for him.

In a conversation with Deputy Foreign Minister, Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, just before the 1984 UMNO election, I expressed the opinion that a defeat for Razaleigh would mean the end of his political career. Kadir, became very excited and his response was unexpected:

"Don't speak like that, lah! If you really have any influence on him, try and persuade him not to contest. We need him and we need Musa. We cannot afford to lose either of them."

Of course I have no influence over Razaleigh or any other politician for that matter. And even if I did, I don't think I have the temerity to play politics so blatantly and in such an *ad hoc* manner. If Musa and Razaleigh had not been such friends in the past, it might have been easier to approach them and at least discuss the thought. But I said nothing even when I met Razaleigh the next day. This was in spite of the fact that I thought then and still think it was a good idea.

Indeed, if it had happened, and Razaleigh had aimed only for the post of party vice-President, the present crisis might not have erupted. When he became a man without any office in the Supreme Council, I was reminded of a conversation we had

had in 1981. We were discussing the coming party election, and various names cropped up, including that of Ghazali Shafie. Razaleigh raised his hand and said, "My dear Das, King Guz is not a factor in this game."

I cannot help wondering how many people are now saying, "Tunku Li (as old friends like Musa refer to him) is not a factor in the game any more."

But the Game, of course, is not over.

In fact, outlandish as it may sound to many analysts, I believe that if it came to an open fight between Mahathir and Musa for the Presidency in 1987, Mahathir could well throw Razaleigh into the ring to challenge Musa. It must be remembered that even with Mahathir backing Musa openly in 1984, Razaleigh still managed to pull in more than 500 of the assembly's 1,200-odd votes. Of the 700-odd votes Musa gathered, his own may have been about 500, and the rest due to Mahathir's support. If Mahathir is obliged to withdraw next year under Musa's pressure, no one should be surprised if Mahathir decides to back Razaleigh. Indeed it could be the one central reason for Mahathir keeping Razaleigh in the cabinet after two clear and convincing defeats at Musa's hands.

The other factor is Razaleigh's old friend Ghafar Baba. In spite of all the problems which kept the top job from Ghafar, he could still be Mahathir's trump card. As a stop-gap deputy Prime Minister, Ghafar will have no opponents in UMNO. And if Ghafar decided to back Razaleigh, then even Mahathir will face a formidable problem in the 1987 UMNO election.

In 1975, in my conversation with Datuk Harun Idris he made a remark that had nothing to do with the problem he faced after corruption charges were

brought against him. He said, "When it comes to elections, whether it is a state by-election, a crisis election, a federal election or an UMNO election, that man Ghafar always wins. I don't how. For that I take off my hat to him."

Ghafar has remained silent on the Musa issue, though he is a senior vice-President of the party. Is he silent because he is a candidate for Musa's job? Is he bargaining for more than a mere stop-gap job? Is he making other conditions including some concerning the future of Musa?

Who will he back when the crunch finally comes?

As I said, the Game is far from over.

## Chapter Ten

### The Musa Dilemma

*Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a Colossus; and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about  
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.  
Men at times are masters of their fates;  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars  
But in ourselves that we are underlings.*

— William Shakespeare.

When Musa went away, the story goes, Lat drew a cartoon which failed to see printer's ink. It was killed by his editors, allegedly because it was too provocative.

He drew four men on camels crossing the desert, following a lonely pair of footprints, and calling out, through their cupped hands, (plaintively, I imagine), "Musa! Musa!"

The four wise men, the Mentris Besar (Chief Ministers) of Johore, Pahang, Perak and Trengganu were not seeking a man so much as an answer to the new Malay dilemma. After all who was this Musa who was so great that he must be pursued across the sea and desert and half way across the world and asked to return? And by the Supreme Council of UMNO, no less? Obviously he had some answers which were not available at home.

Obviously!

In fact if it was Musa the *man* who was the critical factor, and was urgently needed at home, then

UMNO was in trouble. Because Musa has not returned. Yet.

By the time the four Chief Ministers could actually take off on their quest, Musa had reached London, presumably having finished his brief pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Of what transpired in London, I have only a very slight idea. Musa was staying alone in a private house, and he was in that city incognito. The BBC got wind of his presence but he managed to avoid all reporters. He did not want to expose himself to being misunderstood even by saying he had nothing to say.

We do know, however, that he has been firm about giving up his Deputy Premiership and the post of Home Minister as I write this last chapter late in the evening of March 16, 1986. It is also clear that he does not want those jobs if it means working under Mahathir's leadership.

He made it clear again in a letter that he cannot work with Mahathir. His withdrawal was made with all the elaborate feints and bows and politenesses of a Tok Dalang, of a master puppeteer at a wayang kulit performance, and so there are no doubts left.

I know that Musa does not like the Wayang Kulit image.

But I think the point must be made for the elementary reason that if he wants to be a liberal he must understand that other people's perceptions of him must be accepted as their right. It may be uncomfortable, but every truth is seen differently from different angles.

No one must deny the right of citizens to see things as they appear, especially when there are attempts at projections by politicians. That is one reason why Lat is important, and that is why it is a nuisance that he gets spiked so often.

Musa must understand that manipulation of other people's thinking is the worst sign of an anti-liberal. I think that he and every other politician must be made aware that they are not sacred cows and they must not be expected to be treated like little gods.

I also think that all politicians in Malaysia (or anywhere else) must be made to realise as soon as possible that this is *not* a Western idea as I fully expect they are going to insist it is.

If they want a democracy they have to accept the fact they are merely citizens *equal* to all the other citizens in the country and must expect to be laughed at when they behave foolishly.

They must also expect to go to jail if they steal and they must hang like the rest if they commit murder. They will certainly be laughed at if they behave clownishly, if not in their faces, then behind their backs. If they don't accept that they should stop talking about liberalism and democracy and the rest of those ideals.

I think this is the time to consider these problems because Musa has opened the door to some serious discussions – and actions.

He has said, in effect, that you don't have to follow the leader (how I detest that word!) regardless of the price. If you cannot agree with him, you must tell him so. If he cannot justify his actions by word and deed, you must either try to persuade him to change his mind or go your own way. But it would be undignified in the extreme if you sit in his shadow and accept the responsibility for all his actions.

It seems to me that Musa has tried to do his best with Mahathir, to persuade him that his actions have been wrong. And being persuaded that Mahathir was not prepared to listen, he decided to part company.

It follows, of course that ordinary citizens who do

not show their disapproval of what they think and feel is wrong are equally irresponsible and immoral.

Perhaps I should also say that indulging in wayang kulit methods is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a matter of style of communication. Musa had to do what he did the way he did because of the dreadful habits we have acquired in this country of playing at politics and manipulating the illiterate and half-educated people in the countryside. For despite all the lip-service to the rakyat it is obvious that politicians use them for their own benefit, and use them as stepping stones to power. To make the rakyat understand that all this foolishness must change would be risky unless a language they understand is used. It is going to be slow unless *their* language is used. And let us face it: thirty years of shadow boxing and circumlocution cannot be simply discarded overnight.

I hope Musa realises what a horrendous price we have to pay for this habit and style now.

I also hope I am right about him when I say I think that Musa made this clear when he spoke of going back to kampung values, meaning basic values of simplicity and integrity. Wayang kulit is not simply a simple man's pleasure and that alone. Its traditional repertoire also salutes universal values and uses a style that reflects the complexity of man's relations with his total environment.

To get back to the issue preoccupying us, there is no doubt in anyone's mind any more that Musa wants to be Prime Minister. For the purpose of securing the support of the mass of people, Musa cannot express himself in this way. It is necessary, by a slow and sustained release of evidence, to let them realise that he is a better alternative for their welfare than Mahathir.

This leads to the obvious question: why did he



give up the post that was a single step away from his ambition?

I don't think even he can argue against the proposition that it was a tactical move. If he had stayed in his post he would be associated with all the policy and practical errors of the Mahathir administration. He himself says that he accepts collective responsibility for what has happened in the past. But it is very clear that he does *not* want to be associated with any further indulgences of the administration.

He could not say all this bluntly for the very practical reason that he would become the immediate target of mudslinging and the attacks of a manipulated mass media. And he would quickly be "discredited".

For example the whole of the blame on the Memali affair would be placed at his feet. Indeed I have already heard he is being blamed for it, as if the cabinet did not back his plan. As far as I am concerned, the action on Memali was quite uncharacteristic of Musa. The Musa I know would have preferred a dialogue with the mad mullahs than to shoot at them. But the media being what it is, the next Home Minister could leak the story that it was Musa's idea from start to end — and the kampung folk would be hard put not to believe it.

At this point it might be useful to ask the former Home Minister to ponder on the real value of the media in a democracy.

If the media were half as free as his "liberal" attitude represented it — without being at all licentious — he need not have rushed off to London.

If politics were conducted in a half rational way, with the media discussing issues intelligently, he could have stayed in KL and changed the situation to suit people like himself — by honest persuasion.

As things stand the media is a blind ally of the establishment however foolish, greedy and obstinate that establishment might be, and whoever that establishment might be. The same media which slavishly printed everything he ever said will suddenly and equally slavishly say everything said against him. The media personnel generally are now on an (admittedly) unhappy standby for the signal to attack. Musa knows that and so do all his allies. But I have yet to meet one of his allies who thinks that all this must change.

Perhaps they should look at what happened to the press in Manila after Marcos fled?

Fortunately, because of his personality Musa does have many friends in the media. As I have made it clear, without actually carrying a torch for him, I like him for his practical qualities and his reasonableness. It is possible to have a serious, intelligent two-sided conversation with him. There are many others like me in the media.

But I must rub this in: with the ISA and its corollaries he has helped to keep in place, and other legislations like the Official Secrets Act and the Printing Presses Act, we have very limited ways of explaining his cause or any other reasonable cause.

Without an active and unfettered press, if Musa wants to become Prime Minister, what must he do to unseat Mahathir? I think it will be futile to think that Mahathir will step down because he is unpopular. I think that Mahathir still seriously believes that he *is* popular.

So what are Musa's practical options? I am not saying that the following is by any means an exhaustive list, but it is a guideline.

But before the list is considered it must be clearly understood that a direct, "open confrontation is not

on." It never works in Malay politics. Those who tried and failed include Datuk Harun when he refused to resign his Selangor Chief Ministership and go to New York as ambassador, and Tun Mustapha Harun who refused to quit as Chief Minister of Sabah and come to Kuala Lumpur as Defence Minister. Other failed confrontationists include Rahman Yaakub of Sarawak and, in Tunku Abdul Rahman's day, Azis Ishak. Even the present Energy, Posts and Telecommunications Minister, Leo Moggie told me, when I asked him why his party, the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) decided to join the National Front when it was clearly not happy with all Front policies "In Malaysia, the politics of confrontation is not on." In fact that phrase is his phrase.

Leaving out a direct clash as an option, there are several others for Musa:

1. He must win the party Presidency. Assuming he has a chance now, he must calculate that it is not good enough. This is because he must still wait till the middle of next year for the Annual General Assembly when elections take place. Such a long wait can mean his power being eroded completely. By then all his supporters can be co-opted by Mahathir through his powers of patronage.
2. He can call for an extraordinary General Meeting of UMNO to challenge Mahathir. This is a legitimate Constitutional option but he cannot call it himself. He must have the vote of two thirds of the UMNO delegates to ask for such an assembly. This is not possible because he cannot muster that number now. His man Ajib Ahmad has already ruled out that possibility for the

additional reason that it will split the Malay community and bring on a new problem: Musa might win and have a split party on his hands.

3. He must control UMNO through the Deputy Presidency which he now holds. This will be extremely difficult because there is still a Secretary-General, Sanusi Junid, who is hostile to him, and Mahathir is still President. Also UMNO headquarters is already packed with Mahathir's men and it is a fair bet that what Musa men there are in the headquarters are being moved right now.
4. He can begin a tour of the countryside, and canvass support direct from the various divisions and branches. This will test his ingenuity to the limit because the media can black him out. The pressure on the media has already begun, and Dr. Munir Majid was dismissed from his post as the paper's chief after the NST covered Musa's departure very normally. It is clear that a hatchet job was expected.

These are some of Musa's options. But before Musa can start anything Mahathir may pre-empt him in several ways. These include the decision to call a snap general election.

If he does this he can pre-select candidates who are very much pro-Mahathir men. This will cut away Musa's base. In anticipation of such moves I expect Musa to come home very early. Then,

1. he can insist, as Deputy President, on making his contribution to the list of candidates. It may not be easy but it will be difficult to deny him his right to choose his own people. It will be dangerous for

Mahathir if there is open disagreement on this;

2. he can begin to insist that government policy-making be discussed within the Supreme Council and demonstrate that he opposes some of the more outlandish policies, like the Look East policy, for example, or the 70-million population target. Or he might object to the way Petronas is being run by the Finance Ministry or to the massive government contracts being awarded to unqualified consortiums;
3. he can speak to the press more openly as a non-government personality and so prevent any action designed to weaken his position;
4. he can take an active part in deciding how the coming election will be conducted — including decisions on holding rallies, using public funds and public information machinery for party purposes during elections;
5. he can find more time to campaign for his cause.

Mahathir as the incumbent, of course, will still have the advantages. He can

1. appoint a deputy Prime Minister and build him up rapidly, and go so far as to name him as his successor. The deputy can then immediately begin to distribute patronage and consolidate his position;
2. reshuffle his entire cabinet and reduce, if not remove all traces of, Musa's support;
3. remove difficult (that is, pro-Musa) Chief Ministers and replace them with his own men;

4. assign party jobs to Musa that will be time-consuming and distracting. (But Musa is adroit enough a politician not to fall into that trap).

Who are the possible Deputy Prime Ministerial candidates Mahathir can consider?

One man who might accept the post at this stage is Anwar Ibrahim, but this will not be easily pulled off. Undoubtedly he qualifies since he is one of the current UMNO vice-Presidents and it has become an unwritten rule that a vice-President should fill the vacancy left by a deputy president.

But in the current situation there is no vacancy for Deputy President. The vacancy is for Deputy Premier. If anyone argues that Anwar is only ex-officio V-P, the answer will be that there is no firm rule about it. At this point bluster rather than logic or tradition is quite likely to be made to do.

But the disadvantage of Anwar is that several other Supreme Council members are contenders for the post, including Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. They will inevitably be forced to re-examine their options if they are by-passed, a gamble Mahathir will not want to take. If they switch their loyalties to Musa it would obviously weaken Mahathir.

It must be remembered that the appointment of Daim Zainuddin as Finance Minister was one of the most serious mistakes Mahathir made, upsetting a great many long-serving UMNO stalwarts.

Of course Mahathir can postpone the appointment of a Deputy PM. But the longer he postpones that, the weaker he will be seen to be, and support will swing towards Musa in any case.

The other options of a Deputy Prime Minister are the three current directly elected Vice-Presidents,

Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Ghafar Baba and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Moving Mokhtar from his Chief Ministership in Trengganu when a general election is in the offing would be quite short-sighted, not to say stupid. But he is very senior, having polled more votes than either Ghafar or Abdullah in the 1984 UMNO election, and cannot be by-passed casually.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's loyalty to Mahathir may not be strong enough for him to gamble his future on. There is good reason to believe that Abdullah, a sensible and middle-of-the-road gentleman, may not see eye to eye with Mahathir's "visionary" ways. But he must also consider that his strongest rival for the top is Anwar, a fellow Penangite. UMNO does not like to see two from the same state to ever take the top two posts. So, if one makes it to the top, the other must wait until he leaves the scene altogether. Thus Musa could not aspire to be the Johor man, Hussein Onn's No. 2. Daim from Kedah cannot be Mahathir's deputy. If Abdullah does not accept the offered post now, he may have to fight Anwar sometime in the future.

Ghafar Baba is a likely candidate in spite of practical private problems. His business empire would suffer if he were engaged in government business all day. His age is also not in his favour, particularly if there is a chance of Mahathir going for another term. But Ghafar can be a stop-gap simply because he has been seen for the last ten years as a trouble-shooter for the party, solving innumerable problems and still staying out of the cabinet. He is also respected by the non-Malay communities. His taking the job will mean giving a new respectability to Mahathir's image. It will also make a Musa comeback more complicated.

All things considered, for the moment Musa will probably find it better, tactically, to mark time and try and build up allies. And he has the time because there is no more pressure on him after all government functions were taken out of his diary.

Much as I dislike this wayang kulit approach, it is clear that Musa has little choice.

Mahathir himself has shown no inclination to quit. It has been rumoured that he was asked to step down and flatly refused. At a public function, opening an art exhibition, he even declared jocularly that he will be in business for another 30 years, but no one thought it was a good joke in the present situation.

The general feeling among commentators is that no Prime Minister of Malaysia has ever been as unpopular as Mahathir is now. On his tour of the country, the "massive" turnouts he is experiencing, they say is an illusion comparable to the "massive" illusion of the turnouts during the constitutional crisis of 1983. Only the organisers of these turnouts can tell what the crowd-sizes actually were and where they came from. And they are unwilling to comment, and that in itself is a telling sign.

With the BMF scandal being officially exposed after Musa left on his trip, the credibility of the government itself reached its lowest ebb. The handling of the Sabah affair has also made the government look very suspicious. On these two issues, two observations can be made.

a. according to sources close to Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin there is no question that Musa is "clean" of any involvement in the BMF affair, and

b. Musa's action on April 22 on the Sabah affair is still regarded as one of the most statesman-like acts of a Malaysian politician in recent times. There is already a whispering campaign that he did



not act in favour of the Muslims in Sabah, but that narrow view is balanced by the fact what he did was in fact very much in the spirit of Islam.

As I have said before, I am not carrying a torch for Musa. But he is a dilemma for us all, not excluding Mahathir himself.

We all know Musa is not a "saviour" for whom we will run about with guns and spears and regard him like a Corazon Aquino. After all Mahathir is not quite a Marcos, yet. But if Musa does seek power it is obvious there will support for him, and it is equally obvious Mahathir will fight back fiercely.

There is already talk that Mahathir might consider emergency rule if there are disturbances in Peninsular Malaysia as there are in Sabah. This is a serious worry.

There is some evidence that the Kota Kinabalu troubles were politically motivated to invite emergency rule. But such things are not unknown in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Still, it was comforting that the idea of an emergency administration was rejected publicly by Kittingan in Sabah. An attempt to impose emergency rule, in the present climate will be resisted by a large section of the population, certainly by all the active public interest groups. The attempt in Sabah to stampede the authorities failed.

In Peninsular Malaysia such open provocations will be a novelty, though there is reason to believe that the traumatic events of May 1969 were in fact set in motion by politicians who were convinced that they were losing their grip on power.

In any case, the real dilemma facing Malaysians today is rooted in a crisis of confidence.

It is not a question of choosing between two great men.

The two were once considered extremist Malay-

Firsters – that is, everything for the Malays first, and for non-Malays later. That is what Mahathir's *Malay Dilemma* was all about when he argued that Malays in their own country deserved more, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

That is no longer the problem. The dilemma is whether to put up with a situation where we are governed by a secretive man who impulsively converts his private fancies (like targeting Malaysia for a 70-million population!) into public policy *or* support a man who was also once seen an extremist but has proved to be more prone to openness in government and has a sense of balance. Musa is not yet a liberal by any means, but his instincts and his sensibilities as demonstrated in the Sabah crisis were democratic, and his action was based on the need to "respect the people's wishes."

The answer as to what we want in government is obvious. The question is whether we will boldly make this choice when it is given to us.

That is not Musa Hitam's personal dilemma. It is not even his public dilemma. It is in fact the dilemma we, as Malaysians, all face.

That is why I call it the Musa Dilemma, the dilemma Musa has forced on us by abandoning Mahathir.

## Post Script

*For Brutus is an honourable man;  
So are they all, all honourable men.*

— William Shakespeare.

In case some enthusiastic, extra-sensitive expert from the Police Special Branch jumps to the conclusion that I am fomenting or recommending revolution, and then proposes that I be locked away, let me say this: "Don't be stupid."

I detest revolutionary action. More than party politicians as a breed, I abhor revolutionaries, that other nasty lot who talk blandly and speak the obscene language of sacrifice — of *other* people's blood and wealth.

I happen to think that a good football player or an expert *roti canai* maker, or one good watch repairer is worth twenty politicians and a hundred Che Gueveras. Revolutionaries are quite revolting.

All this does not mean I don't give a hoot about who serves as Prime Minister. But the word is "serve."

I think that the climate has been developing that makes open government in Malaysia possible.

Malaysia's folk heroes like Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin and Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoo and Dr. Chandra Muzaffar and the rest have finally arrived, to become quite satisfactory role models.

We also have our Lats, our Datuk Shakes, the corner kway teow sellers and clever cocktail waiters who give more lasting pleasure and meaning to life than forty solemn politicians making grim warnings. Warners Brothers making pure entertainment movies

have given us more truth than all our self-appointed "Warner Botherationers" for ever "warning" us about drugs and disasters and destinies with death row. And worse, they are invariably boring.

The truth has been a casualty on our political battle scene for far too long. It is not even so much the shameless lies that hurt so much (at least they can be funny – like the one about the constitutional amendments making the positions of the sultans stronger!) as the constant and really maladroit evasion of the truth; and perhaps worse, the assumption that a bland and meaningless bunch of clichés will satisfy the hunger for facts and figures.

Typically when people are clamouring for the prosecution of the BMF culprits, the official answer is that there is insufficient evidence to prosecute!

Insufficient evidence? If there is no evidence at all, you may say you can do nothing. But does not the very assessment that there is *insufficient* evidence imply that some very serious wrongdoing is already suspected?

And then, if over a period of 3 years, it has been found that \$2,500 million dollars have been systematically stolen, would it be unreasonable to expect our elected and permanent public servants to do less than leap into action, expand their investigating forces, as a matter of the highest priority, to nail down the predators quickly – before they set out to rob another crucial but vulnerable organisation? Where have these lawmakers and lawkeepers been these last few years?

Would it not be very reasonable to expect prosecutions based on fresh (if temporary) anti-corruption enactments designed to demand that any extraordinary wealth be satisfactorily explained? Some of

the wealth of these suspects is so obvious that it must take a special talent indeed *not* to see it.

We, who are so used to hasty, frequent and totally unjustified constitutional amendments, cannot be told with any seriousness that the existing laws against rapacious gangs cannot be quickly tightened. How can anyone forget the speed with which ESCAR was formulated and made into law despite the great public outcry, and how frequently mere possessors of firearms have been hanged?

Instead, now that the BMF report is finally out, a new fiction is being spread to the effect that the government has done its duty and that the critics should shut up!

But the critics are not, and should not be, at the beck and call of anyone at all in parliament.

They certainly should not shut up, or *be* shut up.

I might also say that the kind of critics now functioning in Malaysia cannot be easily intimidated.

Or bought.

They know that their *mandate* in a democratic system is far more deep-rooted than that of any temporary elected official.

They have the moral mandate every citizen is born with, to oppose public wrongdoing.

*On the other hand the elected servant undertakes, BEFORE he gets the job, to limit his mandate to only those areas he undertakes to be responsible for.*

*He promises not to exceed the temporary authority given to him without securing express permission from the electorate to do so.*

*That is the politician's mandate, and not one bit more.*

The government, it must be observed, is only an instrument or "servant" of the King, and as loyal citizens, we were responsible for assisting His

Majesty to select these servants during the general election. His Majesty in his wisdom, graciously approved our choice.

We may easily make mistakes in our choice of servants sometimes, and that is our privilege. The King accepts that and does not question us, let alone interfere with our choice, because he himself represents our ultimate will. So any misjudgements on our part give the servants no excuse, let alone the right to become rude or arrogant. Indeed the time has come to make rules to sack such servants without too much ceremony.

And another thing: the secrets the servant keeps from us, he keeps with our explicit permission. Where did he get the idea that they are his? They are the unpleasant facts we do not want to know day after day as masters of the house. But if we do want to know them for any reason, he cannot deny them to us.

That is why we invented Royal Commissions, to make sure the servants do not steal our treasures, or get into fights with our neighbours and friends without sound reasons. Servants who are allowed to keep house secrets to themselves without being unaccountable at all can help themselves to anything in the house. Obviously then the servants are only useful if they are properly accountable to the masters.

The accountability of the servant begins the day he walks in through the kitchen door. If he makes a mess of the soup, obviously he has to explain. It is not enough for him to tell the Agung, or us, that he can produce the list of soup ingredients he bought at the market.

He cannot tell the King that beef cost seventy-five dollars a kati or kilo because somebody robbed the

national cattle farm and ran away with 2,500 cows. He has to admit he was in charge of the cattle farm, too. He must then name that "somebody" and prove the allegation, or quit his job in shame. And then he must still explain why the soup looks dreadful and tastes ghastly.

He certainly must not be allowed to shout and insult and give "warnings" to the people who picked him out of a motley crowd in the first place as a likely useful fellow.

Because they owe him nothing.

Because he owes them everything.

Like many really bad servants, governments slowly tend to assume that the house they serve in belongs to them. Remember Ferdinand Marcos? And Baby Doc Duvalier? We don't need one of those here.

And they even become very rude to house guests, on the extraordinary assumption that because they were living in the house before the guests came, they have more rights! Remember Idi Amin and the Uganda Indians?

That it is why it is important to renew the contracts of such labourers with severe chastisements for past transgressions. Otherwise the servants will move into the master bedroom and expect the employers — and their guests — to serve them.

Of course, it is wise to give a servant the best tools for his job. He must eat well, exercise well and sleep well, so as to perform his job well. He must also be rewarded well. But I think the time has come to tell the servant that he is only a servant and must behave as such, even if in our hearts we think our lowest servant must be treated with courtesy and kindness.

So, we must stop calling these fellows "leaders". We are not a nation of sheep. These servants are not supposed to lead us anywhere. They are supposed to

