

THE SECOND UNIVERSITY

KASSIM AHMAD



ALPHA

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Translated by Mansor Ahmad Saman

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Author's Note

The story is on the whole true. Some names
are fictitious in order to protect their persons.

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For
my wife and children

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Forward

Kassim Ahmad was detained under the Internal Security Act from 3rd November 1976 till 30th July 1981. This book, *The Second University – An Account of Detention under the I.S.A.*, narrates his personal experiences, i.e. from the time, 2.30 a.m. of 3rd November 1976, when he was taken by several plain-clothed police officers from a house in Petaling Jaya until his release on the eve of the 'Id Festival in July 1981.

"Not many people can become writers; more people can become cabinet ministers." These, are the words of Heikal, the well-known Egyptian journalist, which may suitably be applied to Kassim and his present book. Ministers may be appointed and then they fall. But the writer continues permanently because his calling is not a given post. It is true that not many people can become writers, especially if the criterion of a writer is the like of Kassim.

Kassim, in his own individual style, has produced this book as a humanistic document and a historical episode. He has also proved that an unfortunate experience can be turned into virtue. We beg the reader to remember that, whatever else it is, this book is a record of a sensitive writer from our own intellectual world.

This story-like narrative was first published in Malay in June 1983 and its first print of 10,000 copies were sold out in three months. The second print of 5,000 copies was made in the same year while demand for its translation into English was also made.

We were happy to present this English translation by Mansor Ahmad Saman to our readers. The translator has closely consulted the author who went over the whole manuscript and approved. The translator has also supplied footnotes where necessary.

Azran Abdul Rahman
Chief Editor

CHAPTER 1

POLITICAL CONFUSION

Turmoil in South-East Asia

Eventhough there is modern science and technology, man's knowledge is still limited and meagre. Several curtains veiled us from knowledge: the curtains of space, time and being. Our eyes cannot see far even with the aid of the telescope, and we cannot see something that is hidden from us. This is the curtain of space. We cannot know future events. This is the curtain of time. Also, our eyes cannot perceive incorporeal beings, such as angels and jinn. This is the curtain of being. And so it was that when I entered my bedroom to sleep at about 10:30 PM on the unlucky night of 2nd. November 1976 in a house in Petaling Jaya, it never crossed my mind that a big operation of political arrests under the Internal Security Act (ISA) would occur that very night, and I myself would be taken in. Between me and the trap of the Act was the curtain of time – only about five hours away!

Earlier during the day I had gone to the city to attend to several matters, including having a meeting with Com. Gamany at his office. Com. Gamany, a central committee member of the PSRM (Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaya), is also the party's lawyer. From his office I telephoned the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr.

Osman Cassim, to request permission to visit S. Husin Ali who was then being detained in Kuala Lumpur. S. Husin, together with Anwar Ibrahim, had been arrested under the ISA since December 1974 in connection with the demonstrations by university students in support of the big peasant demonstrations in Baling and several other places at the end of that year. I was unsuccessful in obtaining the permission for the visit. When I left the office of Com. Gamany, his clerk received a telephone call from the Ministry of Home Affairs asking from where I had made the telephone call to Mr. Osman Cassim earlier. It was obvious that the Ministry of Home Affairs was carefully following my movements that day.

At this time, newspapers and the public had been speculating that several UMNO and Government leaders, including Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid, would be arrested in connection with the charge of "communists in UMNO". The political mood in the country then was rather uncertain. In 1975, the United States had lost in Vietnam, and South Vietnam had been re-united with North Vietnam. This event created a sense of insecurity and fear among the pro-American regimes of Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines and Indonesia. The conservative group in Malaysia also suffered from the same feeling. In UMNO, the major party in the ruling National Front coalition, the "old guards" who had felt left out since Tun Razak became Prime Minister, started a campaign against the clique in power, whom they considered as pro-communist. These conservative anti-communist forces within the country and those in other ASEAN countries joined together to cause, in that year, the arrest and detention of a well-known journalist, Abdul Samad Ismail, then the Group Editor of the *New Straits Times*.

After the Second World War, many nationalist leaders who were on the left, but were not communists, joined forces with the Communist Party of Malaya to fight for

independence. A. Samad Ismail was one of them. He was then a journalist in Singapore and he helped established the P.A.P. in 1954, but after clashing and breaking off with Lee Kuan Yew in 1961, he left Singapore and moved to Kuala Lumpur to work with *Berita Harian*. When Tun Razak became Prime Minister, Samad Ismail was close to him and his advisers. But, nevertheless, it seemed that Lee Kuan Yew did not forget Samad. Lee's opportunity came when Hussein Onn replaced Tun Razak when the Tun died suddenly in January 1976. Hussein Onn became Prime Minister and his good friend, Ghazali Shafie, became the Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia. The arrest of Samad and his "confession" immediately led to other arrests on that unlucky 3rd. November.

Domestic Turmoil

Politics, wise men say, is the art of the possible. Apparently, at that time, in the confused situation in South-East Asia and within the country, it was forbidden to call for unity among nationalist, religious and socialist groups. That was what I did in a local newspaper, *Suara Rakyat*. My purpose was not only to give an important role to my party, the PSRM, but also to oppose and prevent the conservative pro-American group within UMNO from grabbing power in UMNO. This was the main reason why I was arrested, together with five other political leaders. The Internal Security Act is an extraordinary law. It can arrest and detain a person on a general charge of "endangering national security" without trial and without a time limit. I will return to this monstrous Act when I come to the charges against me later.

The conservative group in UMNO which was the backbone of this attack had joined forces with other groups, the groups of Datuk Harun Idris, Jaafar Albar and Tun Mustapha of Sabah – a combination that was not possible under other situations – in order to oppose Tun Razak and his supporters. But, unfortunately for them, they did not achieve their real aims, such as returning

Tunku Abdul Rahman to the top leadership, or returning Khir Johari and Senu Abdul Rahman to the Cabinet. Their success within the country was entirely negative: the ousting of Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid from the Cabinet and the elimination of Samad Ismail's influence in UMNO and the Government. In foreign affairs, their aim of returning Malaysian foreign policy back to a staunchly pro-American stand achieved some success. After that, there was increasing cooperation in the field of security between Malaysia and Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia.

Such was the confused situation in South-East Asia and within the country after the Vietnam War. Now, after five years, the pendulum has swung back down to the bottom, or to the left, after its swing to the right. This does not mean that the disorder does not exist anymore in South-East Asia and in the country. Disorder continues to exist throughout the world, especially in West Asia, due to several reasons. Among these reasons are the international economic crisis and the crisis of international relations. Many fear a Third World War will erupt and destroy modern civilization before the end of this century.

But life goes on. As the poet, Omar Khayyam, says: "The Moving Finger writes; and having writ, Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it." Such is life; the process is determined by God. Even a nuclear war cannot change it. This is what is called fate. Whatever happened – that is fate. Can we say that the rise of Hitler and the evils he committed, fate? Are all the evils that have happened in the world, including our arrest and detention, fated – that is, they have been determined by God? Yes, without a doubt! Everything which has occurred is fated.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that these incidents were approved by God. This is the error committed by the atheist – if a God (Who is just) is powerless to eliminate

evils, He is not God, and therefore, God does not exist. God permits evil to happen because man desires it. Hitler was the son of man born to human parents of the 20th. century. Without certain necessary conditions brought about by human beings in Europe and Germany before the rise of Hilter, he would not have risen. Our arrest was desired by those in power in UMNO. If the conservative group within UMNO had not held the top leadership in the nation at that time, the arrest would not have happened. Fate, although determined by God, is also partly the desires of man.

Omens

Earlier I said I never thought that I would be arrested. Although this is true, I already had a feeling long before the arrest that I would part with my family and friends. About four months earlier I had requested all my brother and sister to return to our parents' home for 'Id Festival and to settle matters of inheritance, as if I would part with my parents. Because my request was reasonable – our parents are getting very old – it did not seem strange. The request was fulfilled.

One day, after lunch, while lying in bed, I had called my youngest son, Ahmad Shauqi, who was then nine years old and in Standard Three.

"Shauqi, if I am not here, you must study hard and help your mother at home, understand?" I said to him, half unsure about the necessity of those words.

As I had expected, he seemed surprised to hear those words and asked where I was going. Afterwards, he told his mother about the incident and cried. He is my youngest child and is very close to me.

Sometimes, because of the pressure of too much work, and also because of weariness of body and soul, we wish to escape from the rush and din of everyday life and from

civilization, and go to a secluded place for reflection and meditation, where we can rest our body and soul and think without distraction. Such was my feeling during the confusion, and I decided to go to Taiping, because Taiping was not too far from Penang, and also because it was not too busy, and it had a beautiful and serene environment. I never thought that soon I would be forced to "rest" in a place near Taiping and obtained what my soul seemed to long for at that time.

I consider that was a period of turmoil in Malaysia. Since I was in the Opposition and represented the political group that was strongly anti-imperialist and anti-reactionary, I became an obvious target. Eventhough my mind would not accept the imminent danger for me, my heart felt it. The entry in my diary, dated 18th. October, 15 days before my arrest, says: "... the die-hard reactionary old guards are intensifying their attack on what they called 'communists' in UMNO. The chief of UMNO Youth, Albar, said yesterday that communists and socialists were the same! Before that, Mahathir had also condemned the socialists, but he did not equate them with the communists. At the end of this week, UMNO's Supreme Council will meet in Penang to consider the issue of membership of Datuk Harun and the 'confession' of A. Samad Ismail. *In this poisonous atmosphere, I feel very sad. What will happen to the people and the nation in 5-10 years' time?...*"

So, I had known earlier that I would part with my family and friends. This knowledge, though in the form of a vague formless feeling, was certain. As confirmed by events later, this knowledge proved to be true. This – intuition – is a method of human cognition, besides the methods of sensory perception and logical inference. Everyone, at one time or another, experiences intuition or inspiration. Inspiration, intuition, vision and revelation are forms of inspiration where man obtains knowledge without the aid of the senses or the mind. According to the teachings of Islam, only Prophets experienced revelation, the highest

form of inspiration, but other forms of inspiration could be experienced by all. That is how mankind knows God, through the revelations made to the Prophets. But strangely enough, modern Western epistemology does not recognise this method of cognition. This is why Western philosophy is unable to prove the existence of God. God exists, not as Descartes said because man exists (if that were so, then before the existence of man God did not exist); God exists because this is what has been proclaimed by the Prophets who had received revelations. We touch a little on the confusion in modern philosophy because, truly, this intellectual confusion is not unrelated to the present confused situation in South-East Asia and the world.

CHAPTER 2

KNOCKING AT DAWN

The ISA Snaps

Indistinctly I heard somebody knocking on my door and calling my name. The time was about 2:30 AM. I got off my bed. Halim, my friend who was my host, with a worried face told me that somebody wanted to see me. I was surprised – who could it be who wanted to see me at that late hour! In the living room, three men in civilian clothes whom I did not know were waiting.

“Mr. Kassim! Sorry. We are of the Federal Police. We have been ordered to take you under the Internal Security Act,” said one of them, identifying himself as a high-ranking police officer.

I was surprised and shocked to hear those words, but I immediately understood. I was silent for a moment. When I regained my composure, I replied: “So the time has come! Give me a few minutes to dress up,” looking at Halim and his wife, Zainab, while so saying.

At that time Halim who happened to know the officer demanded: “May I see your warrant of arrest?”

“We don’t need a warrant,” replied the officer. “This is an ISA case.”

“This is not in accordance with the practice in democratic countries,” said Halim. “I will contact a lawyer for

Com. Kassim."

"You can contact the lawyer, but this is an ISA case; there is no need for a lawyer."

Outside, a number of policemen in civilian clothes stood holding submachineguns, and a white Peugeot car waited on the road in front of the house. Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Noordin Omar and his friends requested to check my room and my belongings. They took several magazines from my bag, but not all. I left my files, passport and clothing with Halim for him to hand them over to my wife.

I took my ablution and prayed a *sunat* (supererogatory) prayer. Then I dressed. Zainab came into my room bringing a cup of coffee. Her eyes were full of tears. She asked me to call my wife. I felt reluctant to do so, but I had no choice, and then I felt that it was my duty to call her personally. I walked over to the telephone. Slowly, I lifted the phone and dialled my home number in Bukit Gelugor in Penang, half anxious that DSP Noordin might prevent me from making the call. Luckily, he only passed in front of me but did not stop me from calling. "Ef," I said into the phone. "I have been taken by the police in Halim's house. They will take me back home at 8:00 AM to search our house." I spoke these sentences without stopping, and after finishing I immediately replaced the phone on the receiver without waiting for the reaction from my wife.

My family and Halim's family have been very close. Halim and I are not only old friends, but also we have been struggling together in the party. Halim, who is younger than I, joined the party in 1968. Whenever my family and I came to Kuala Lumpur we would usually lodge at their place. Their children, Tini and Arman, are close to me since whenever I visited them I like to play with them. Both of them, then six and four years' old respectively, would cry "Long live socialism!" whenever I arrived or departed. Now I would be leaving, for God

knows how long, and they were fast asleep in the next room. I walked up to Halim and Zainab, shook hands with them, and said goodbye.

"Fate has caught up with me," I said to both of them. "Please look after my family."

"Don't worry. Everything will be taken care of," replied Halim, assuring me.

"Be patient," said Zainab with tears in her eyes.

DSP Noordin Omar and his friends were standing, waiting for me. I could not wait any longer, and I indicated to him that I was ready.

It was 5:00 AM. I walked out of the house holding my bag. They took me in the Peugeot car that was waiting outside, followed by a Jeep full of armed policemen. The neighbours were sunk in sound sleep in the dark night and little did they know that a big Malaysian police operation was taking place close to their homes!

That was how the Internal Security Act snapped on me on that unlucky morning of 3rd. November. On the same day, at the same time or a little earlier or later, five other well-known politicians, two from UMNO, one from MCA and two from DAP, were also arrested: Datuk Abdullah Ahmad, the former Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Environment; Abdullah Majid, the former Deputy Minister of Labour and Manpower; Tan Ken Seng, the Executive Secretary of MCA; Chan Heng Kai, a Member of Parliament; and Chan Kok Kit, Assistant Treasurer of the DAP. Since 1960, in fact, since after the Second World War, this Act or its predecessor, the Emergency Regulations, has snapped on tens, in fact, hundreds and thousands of political leaders and activists and labour, peasant and student leaders, including patriots who are still living or who have since died, well-known or otherwise. Among them, Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Dr. Burhanuddin, Aziz Ishak, Tan Kai Hee, V. David, C.C. Yong, Tan Hock Hin, Dr. M.K. Rajakumar, Dzulkifli Ismail, S. Sivasubramaniam,

Dr. S. Husin Ali and Anwar Ibrahim.

Is a law that punishes without trial fair? The excuse for a law with such wide powers is that it is necessary for the preservation of peace and internal security against the subversion of communists and subversive and anti-national elements. Accepting the fact that every society at all times has these elements, can a society punish one of its members without a fair trial? This is both a problem of law and philosophy. Through its laws society guarantees the rights of the individual and the community. Sometimes these rights are in conflict with one another: the freedom and justice bestowed on the individual are sometimes in conflict with the freedom and justice granted to society. The dividing line between the two has to be determined by the society. Nevertheless, the individual should not be mistreated by the state and society such as detaining him without trial, because as a rational creature of God he occupies a high and noble rank and he should be respected. This is the basis of the philosophy of human rights that forms the philosophical aspect of this problem. But clearly Malaysia at that time, as so many other countries, did not understand this philosophy!

“Guest” of the King

As already mentioned, I never thought I would be arrested and detained. Had I known that that would happen, I would surely have gone into hiding. On the 29th. October I went to Kuala Lumpur to attend to several party and personal matters. On the same evening, I went to visit the Pahang PSRM at Temerloh and stayed there until October 31st. I intended to stay at the party headquarters at Jalan Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, until the 8th. of November, after which I would visit PSRM Johore. The whole day before the unlucky day of my arrest I was in town meeting friends, members of the party central committee, my publisher and visiting my younger sister. My last activity for that day was having dinner with a number of friends and party members at Hotel Majestic. It was there that I met Abdullah Majid and heard the statement on TV by Prime Minister Hussein Onn about the resignation of two ministers. It seemed Abdullah Majid also did not know that he would be arrested that night.

From Halim's house at No. 44 SS 1/11A, Petaling Jaya I was taken to the Sungai Way police station from where DSP Noordin, apparently, reported to his headquarters

that his duty had been done. I walked around in the police station's compound breathing the fresh morning air, fighting the feeling of sorrow and sadness. We then went to Bukit Aman* where DSP Noordin and his friends were replaced by two other officers who accompanied me to airport to be flown to Bayan Lepas, Penang for the purpose of searching my house.

The flight took place at about 7:30 AM. At the waiting lounge I was just like any ordinary passenger for I was not handcuffed and the police officers accompanying me were not in uniform. A friend of mine, Encik S.M. Idris, whom I happened to meet just the previous night and who did not expect that I would be going back to Penang that morning, was surprised to see me there. Quickly, and without moving too close to him, I told him in English: "I am now an enforced guest of the Yang Dipertuan Agung!" He immediately understood.

*The site of the Federal Police Headquarters.

CHAPTER 3

OPERATION SEARCH

“The Most Dangerous Man”

I arrived at my rented house with two police cars at 110 Jalan Bunga Raya, Bukit Gelugor, at about 8:00 AM. My wife and children were waiting. They looked sombre. All my three children did not go to school that day. Even though I felt reluctant to say anything at that time, I had to explain to my wife and children that I had been detained for a while for the purpose of investigation and that they should be patient and they should not worry. Then I requested permission to take a bath and pray, for I had not yet done my *subuh* (dawn) prayer. My wife took the opportunity in her turn to tell me not to worry. She had contacted nearby friends and party members and she had carried out all my standing instructions if such a thing as this were to happen. I felt relieved, and in my heart I thanked God. After finishing my prayer I invited the accompanying officers to carry out to carry out their duty. They started a systematic search of my house which took about five hours. The search was carried out by six police officers in civilian clothes headed by ASP Jimmy Yong.

Our house has three rooms, one kitchen and a living room. Two of the rooms are used as bedrooms and the

other as my study. They started the search with my study in which there was a large writing table and four book-cases. They checked every book, every file and every letter and document in the room.

"Mr Yong," I said. "There is no need to check all my letters. Believe me, I do not have any plan to topple the Government!"

"This is my duty," was his short reply.

In a tray, I happened to see a new poem of mine regarding the demonstrations by peasants in Baling. If I were to take it quietly and hide it, it may raise suspicion. But that poem was rather harsh and I did not want it to fall into the hands of those who did not know how to read and appreciate poetry. Quietly, I asked my wife who was also standing there to take the poem and keep it in my poetry file. But ASP Yong prevented her from taking it.

"We have experts who can analyse this poem," he said, as if reading my mind. "Intellectuals like you should work with us!"

Hearing the snide remark I became rather angry. So I answered, "Do you know who the most dangerous man in Malaysia now is? Not me, but the Minister of Home Affairs. He wants to grab the crown of Government!" What I meant was the fierce power struggle that was then taking place within UMNO. The Minister of Home Affairs, Ghazali Shafie, was one of the contenders in the power struggle.

ASP Yong looked directly at me, and then said, "I am not a politician like you, Mr. Kassim. I am only a government officer. I don't know all that."

Who is Tolstoy?

They kept on ransacking. When I saw one of them taking my Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, I told him not to take it, "Don't take that book," I said. "That book is written by a well-known anti-communist Russian writer." But he did not heed my words and took the book regardless. Many more such books were taken by them, including *The Gulag Archipelago* by Solzhenitsyn, *The Rise and Fall of Stalin* by Robert Pyne and *The May Thirteenth Incident* by Goh Cheng Teik. It crossed my mind then that they did not understand literature and I should not be angry with them. A secondary school education system that does not expose the students to Tolstoy and other great classical writers of Europe – surely there is something greatly wrong with such a system. So also is our knowledge regarding Islamic civilization. I myself did not come to know Imam Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Taimiyyah and Ibn Khaldun before. I continued observing the officers seaching my study with pity for their ignorance, but I also regretted that such a system had also made us all ignorant of many things.

Seeing a locked steel cabinet, ASP Yong asked for it to be opened. The cabinet was a gift from a friend. I used it to keep important personal documents, my own manuscripts

and also my wife's jewellery, which was not much. When it was opened, ASP Yong saw nothing in it. He sighed: "All have been removed!"

"Mr. Yong, look and check of what there is. Do not look for something that does not exist!" I replied.

After they had finished searching my study, the leader of the group moved to my bedroom. He looked into my dress closet and opened the drawers. In one of them there was a bundle of letters kept by my wife. ASP Yong wanted to see them, but my wife would not allow it. "Those are my personal letters," she said to him.

"Sorry," he said. "But this is my job." He had repeated the sentence countless times during the search. When he discovered that the letters were my love letters to my wife, he smiled and put them back in their place.

In the meantime, an officer of my party who was also the legal adviser of the party, Com. T. Rajamoorthy, arrived at the house. He asked the leader of the police party what were they doing in the house of the chairman of the PSRM. The police officer showed him his police identification card and said he was carrying out a Government order under the Internal Security Act. When Rajamoorthy requested to see the search warrant, he answered that that was not required under the ISA. Outside, many newspaper reporters were waiting. When my telephone rang, I picked it up, but ASP Yong prevented me from speaking with the caller, who, it seemed, was a newspaper reporter.

It was almost 1:00 PM. ASP Jimmy Yong and his men had finished the search and they were making a list of books and documents that they have taken – 54 in all. They made three copies of the list. After I had read and signed to testify that the list was correct, a copy was given to me. I gave it to my wife for safekeeping.

My wife and children had prepared lunch for me. I asked permission to have lunch and called my family to eat together – the last lunch! But I did not have the appetite; the same was true with my wife and children. I wanted to

talk to my children while having lunch, but, like them, I was tongue-tied.

After lunch I packed my things – some clothing, a toothbrush, toothpaste, shaver, a small mirror, a comb, a pair of slippers, interpretation of the *Quran* by Muhammad Ali and a prayer mat – into a small bag and a plastic bag. When I was all set to go, I said to my wife and children: “God’s fate has caught up with me. We must be patient and ask for God’s protection.” Looking at all three of my children I added: “Sor, Aida and Shauqi, be good and look after mother. Study hard and help mother at home. Do not worry. Godwilling, I won’t be gone for long.”

I stood up, said goodbye to my wife and children and started walking out of the house, accompanied by two policemen, towards the waiting police car outside. A group of reporters were waiting by the roadside. Their cameras clicked, but I could not talk to them. I was a detainee!

CHAPTER 4

HELL I

The Journey to Hell

That night I slept in a detention room in between tens of other detention rooms in the Georgetown central police station, Penang. The room had a high ceiling, the floor measuring about 20 x 12 feet, containing within its walls a wooden couch, a flush toilet and a shower, separated from the wooden bed by a cement wall about 4 feet wide and 4 feet high. I was given a pillow and a blanket. I was placed in the room at about 2:00 PM. During the day, the room was bright without the light on, for the sun shone in through the window. I occupied my time that day by reading the *Quran*, praying and thinking about the eventualities that might happen to my family and myself.

The compound of the big police station included police barracks. My room was at the back of a building overlooking those barracks. In the evening I could hear the laughter of children at play and the voices of adults playing badminton. Because the ceiling of the room was high, the light from the lamp on the ceiling was not too bright and I was not able to read too well. So I slept early. At midnight, I heard a voice shouting and somebody screaming in pain. Later, when I was again placed in a detention room in the same police station when I came to Penang to attend a court

hearing that I will relate in due course, again I heard similar voices and screams almost every night. I suppose the screams were those of police detainees who had been arrested under suspicion and who were being tortured by the police in order to extract information from them.

At about 6:30 AM, they sent in black coffee in a plastic cup and a loaf of bread. Last night, for dinner, I had been given *nasi bungkus* (a fist-sized wrapped-up rice with a little mixture of fish, etc.) wrapped up in plastic foil, with a little *tamban* fish. I was to learn later that was the standard meal for all detainees in all prisons and detention cells: coffee and bread in the morning, and *nasi bungkus* for lunch and dinner. No tea.

I was allowed to meet my wife and children for a short spell before I was taken to Kuala Lumpur for detention and interrogation. In the plane, I had the opportunity of reading the day's newspapers and knowing about other detentions made on that 2nd. and 3rd. November. The photographs of the six detained men – two of them former (Deputy) Ministers from UMNO, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid; the Executive Secretary of the MCA, Tan Ken Seng; a D.A.P. Member of Parliament, Chian Heng Kai; National Assistant Treasurer of the D.A.P., Chan Kok Kit; and myself – were on the front pages of all the newspapers. Millions of Malaysians were then reading the hot news; some feeling happy with the news, some with regret and sorrow, some without any emotion, but most of them with a sense of shock. Nevertheless, that was God's decree on that day. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept it.

I remember in an interrogation session later, one of the officers said that my detention was willed by God. I was rather surprised to hear that, since I have never thought all things that happened are predetermined, and that all things that happened become predetermined, and that they happened with God's permission; if not, how can they happen? But fate occurring "with God's permission" is

not, and does not necessarily mean that it is desired and blessed by God. Crimes such as suicides, murders, fornication and the like, are not desired by God; in fact, they are forbidden by God. But they happen because of man's free-will. All these crimes happen with the permission of God because God has granted the freedom, or a limited freedom, to man. So our arrest and detention were the acts of man – this includes such other things as the Internal Security Act, the revolt of the Communist Party of Malaya, the unstable condition in South-East Asia following the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, the power struggle within UMNO and our participation in politics.

They took me to the police station in Jalan Bandar, Kuala Lumpur for the purpose of filling in some forms and to be photographed – all of which took about two hours. In the evening, I was taken in a closed *Black Maria* (secured police truck) to an unknown destination, about three-quarters of an hour's journey from Kuala Lumpur. On arrival, I was asked to alight from the truck and go straight to a small shed. Inside were two or three uniformed police officers, one of them having two stripes on his sleeves (a corporal). Their faces were sour. They took my belongings and noted them in a book. They asked me to undress completely, including my underwear, and to put on the dress they gave me, that is, a pair of blue trousers and a blue shirt. I felt uneasy taking off my underwear and I said to the officer, "This is harsh!" He was silent. All that took about ten minutes, in an atmosphere of deep silence, tenseness, and, to me, sorrow. Then I was taken along a small lane, turning twice or thrice, before arriving at a building block. I saw six doors with big padlocks on each one of them. I was asked to enter the room at the very end of the building.

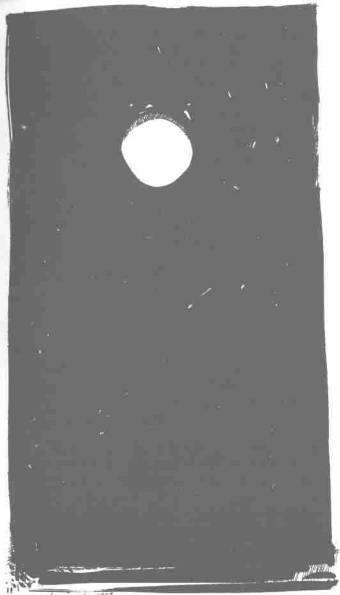
The First Cell

This way my first cell. It measured about 9 feet wide, 12 feet long and about 12 feet high. On the top of the back wall there were several airholes. In the centre of the door was a hatch, a round opening about the size of a human head, covered from the outside. The hatch was for the guards to speak with the prisoner. There were two wooden beds; one of them had a mattress but without a bedspread or pillow. I had thought that at most I would be sleeping on a wooden bed with just a mat. Now there was even a mattress! I felt better. The cell was rather clean, on the walls were written several names, dates and sentences in Chinese, which I could not read. Not long afterwards, the door of my cell was opened. The officer with two stripes on his sleeves handed me a towel, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a watch, my prayer mat and my *Quran* and also a blanket.

"Thank you," I said to him. "How do I address you?"

"There is no need for names," was the curt reply, his face glum.

It was then about 6:00 PM. I heard a door opened and closed. Then my own door was opened and I was given a multi-layered food canteen. "Eat!" said the officer. So



Zakaria Ali 1995

Detention cell from the outside. (Sketch by Zakaria Ali)

I opened the canteen. Inside, besides rice, there was chicken curry, vegetables and fried salted fish. This is good, I thought. Outside these walls, this would be the food of the lower middle class. The next day, for breakfast, I was given two half-boiled eggs besides coffee and bread. So, that was my first dinner at the detention centre in Kuala Lumpur. I ate, and then prayed.

Thinking about my children and my wife made me sad. What would happen to them? What would happen to me? How long would they detain me? What was my crime? Was it wrong for to me fight for socialism? . . . Question after question crossed my mind. My heart consoled and cheered me: "Be calm, Kassim. You are innocent. God exists. He is All-Knowing, All-Just. Be patient and surrender to Him"

I wanted to cry, but my tears would not flow. The face of my youngest child, Ahmad Shauqi, who was then nine years'old, appeared in my mind. Among my children, he is the closest to me. I thought, surely he does not understand why his father has to be arrested. My two other children were then in Form Three. The second child had "jumped" one level two or three years ago, so now both of them were in the same level. My heart was full of anxiety regarding their studies. But in the present situation there was nothing that I could do. Nobody could blame me or my children if their studies suffered.

But nevertheless, at that time nobody could share my anxiety and my grief. In such a situation, man is confronted with the true reality – his God. To whom can he ask for help except God? Imagine the atheist in such a situation. How terrible! He does not have anything to hold on to. It is as if a non-swimmer has been thrown into the sea: he will surely drown. In such a situation he will try to hold on to other powers, such as the power of man, nature or history, which, actually, have no absolute power. Thus, atheism – the belief of non-belief – is self-contradictory, an impossible situation. That is why *Al-Quran* relates that

when the Pharoah was on the verge of drowning in the Red Sea, although himself a non-believer, he started praying to God!

I observed that every hour the round hole in the door would be opened and a head would poke in to look inside. I assumed the head belonged to the officer or the guard for the block, checking to see or to ascertain the condition of the prisoner inside. That night, after the *Isyak* (the last of the five daily prayers) prayer, and after a long concentrated invocation – eventhough I was full of anguish and grief – I slept very well!

Interrogation I

The next day, at about 2:30 PM, there was a phone call to the block requesting me to go to the main office. At the detention centre you are given a number and names are not used anymore. But now I have forgotten my number. The office was about five minutes' walk from my block. A guard took me there. We walked on the paved sidewalk fenced by walls on both sides, like a tunnel, and you could not see anything on either side. There seemed to be a kind of traffic system. Your guard would give a signal to indicate that he was using the sidewalk, or asking permission to use it, in order to avoid meeting with other detainees who might be using the same lane.

I was taken into a room. Inside, there was a big writing table and several chairs. DSP Noordin Omar, in uniform, and two other officers in civilian clothes, were already waiting in the room. DSP Noordin indicated to my guard to go.

"These are people from Kedah who come to see you, Mr. Kassim," DSP Noordin said politely and with a smile. Eventhough they were my captors I shook hands with them and then sat in a chair facing the table.

"How's your cell?" asked DSP Noordin.

"Too small and not enough ventilation." I had already measured my cell.

"Its size and suitability have been certified by the International Red Cross," he defended.

I told him that I would like to give my statement in Malay, not in English. Some non-Malay officers were not too fluent in the Malay language and some Malay officers prefer to speak in English. DSP Noordin granted my request. I also requested him to write down and convey my protest to the Prime Minister regarding my arrest under the Internal Security Act, and the fact that all the statements I would make was not given freely but under protest. DSP Noordin wrote down my request and agreed to convey the protest at least to the Minister of Home Affairs.

At that time, charges were still not made against me. They interrogated me while referring to their notes. The interrogation covered everything from my readings, social intercourse, and political activities from the time of my secondary school in Alor Setar up to my studies at the University of Malaya in Singapore and also including the time when I was teaching at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and leading up to my activities in the PSRM up to then. Surely I could not remember all.

"That is why you are placed in solitary confinement in the cell," explained DSP Noordin, "so that you can recall the wrongdoings that you have committed."

"If I have done anything wrong in the eyes of the country's law, then charge me in an open court."

"This law does not require the Government to do that."

"This is not fair. How can the Government punish without first proving the crime of the accused in an open court?" I asked.

"We cannot bring these type of cases to court because of national security. But even this – this interrogation – is a sort of court. It is up to you, Mr. Kassim, to prove that

you are innocent."

"This is impossible!" I replied.

"Why impossible?" asked one of the officers who had so far remained silent.

"How can I prove my innocence to a court that itself accuses me?"

"That is up to you," retorted the officer, changing into a harsher tone. "The decision is yours. If you can convince us you are innocent, you can be free." His statement sounded so simple, and yet it was not true.

So, that was the way it went, day in and day out. You feel as if you are trying to catch a shadow. Even if you were able to catch it, you don't get anything. As a Malay proverb says, *Like the cucumber and the durian; whether you roll over it or being rolled over by it, it is you who bleed!* The situation was a lop-sided and unfair one. After that, I decided not to talk much. But they, the interrogators, are trained men; they purposely provoke you so that you lose control, such as in an incident that happened to me in one of the night interrogations.

That night I was rather tired, because the evening we had already had an interrogation session, and, after that, I jogged more than usual during the fifteen-minute exercise time that they allowed me.

"Mr. Kassim, you once urged the Government to legalize the Communist Party of Malaya," the officer started. "Isn't this wrong? Our Government has banned the CPM and the people will not accept such a request."

"Why is it wrong?" I asked. "This is compatible with democracy and fundamental human rights."

"Shut up!" he shouted. "You are stupid. Communists don't believe in democracy."

"Whether communists believe or do not believe in democracy is a different matter. But we believe in democracy and fundamental human rights, we therefore must respect those rights and grant it to all the people and all political groups," I replied in a calm and soft tone.

"Eventhough they revolt?" he pressured.

"The CPM revolt is a legacy of colonialism. We should open a new page with them. In Baling, Prime Minster Tunku Abdul Rahman rejected the offer made by Chin Peng to disarm and to continue their struggle in peace as a legal political party."

"We can't fight them. In no time at all they will conquer our country. Are you willing to have our country conquered by the communists?"

I did not respond. The question was posed in such a way that you could not answer it. Eventhough I do not agree with the CPM's ideology and do not like the country to be ruled by them, I cannot deny them the right to carry out their political activities freely. If our society and nation dare not face the communists in an open competition and defeat them in the ideological and political fields, what rights have we to say that we practise democracy, and that ours is the better system? Surely this philosophical view point will not be considered by the political power which wants to maintain itself by whatever means. So I answered briefly: "My statement is in accordance with the principles of democracy and fundamental human rights. Former Prime Minister Tun Razak himself acknowledged my and my party's right to make such a statement." Eventhough they had no answer to this argument, they kept on returning to the issue over and over again. This shows that the Special Branch (of the Police Force) acts as if it was a power unto itself, independent even of the Prime Minister.

Meetings With the Family

Sometimes they did not come for two or three days. During such times, I occupied my time reading the *Quran* and praying. As such, I finished reading the *Quran* twice. At that time I was not allowed any reading material, except the *Quran*. Only after two months was I given some magazines such as *Dewan Sastera* and *Dewan Masyarakat* and books on Islam, such as Syed Ameer Ali's *The Spirit of Islam*, etc. These reading materials were brought by my wife every fortnight when I met her and my family at the Jalan Bandar police station. According to the rules, a detainee can meet his family once a week for 15 minutes. In the initial stage of my detention, it so happened that it was during long school vacation and my family was staying in Kuala Lumpur, and we met every week. How happy I was, when after one week of detention, one morning I was told to get ready to meet my family.

At such times, you are told to shave and dress smartly. You are not allowed to take anything out except clothes for laundry and those reading materials that you want to return, if by then you have already been allowed reading materials. You then board the *Black Maria* accompanied by a guard, and in the dark you are taken to another place

where you will be transferred to a motorcar which will take you to the meeting place, usually a police station.

After waiting in a room for a few minutes, my wife and children appeared. We hugged. How happy it is for a father to meet with his children, a husband with his wife, in such a situation, even though hampered by several restrictions – the meeting is supervised by officers and you are given a limited time. In such a situation, time flies. The time allowed is really short. My wife whispered to me not to worry about them; everything had been and was being arranged. I thanked God.

"Do you know where you are being held?" my wife asked.

I glanced at the supervising officers and shook my head. "At the Jalan Gurney Police Depot," said my wife.

"Let them detain me wherever they please," I said to my children. "Wherever it is, it's all the same." Turning to the officers, who looked sour-faced because their secret was now known, I added: "The Minister of Home Affairs doesn't have to worry. The detention centre won't be stormed. Kassim Ahmad won't escape!" The two officers grimaced.

The Special Branch has many tricks. The interrogation period especially, and the entire detention generally, is the period for them to break and kill your fighting spirit. The term used is "rehabilitation". The official name for the Kemunting detention camp is the "Protective Detention Camp" – perhaps meaning that it protects the society from "subversive elements" and also protects the detainees from the wrath of society! Gentle and harsh techniques are used alternately for the purpose of "rehabilitation" and certainly there never arises the question of what is right or wrong in the use of these techniques. If it is felt that brute force is required, then brute force is used. If not, they will only cajole you. During my interrogations I did not experience any brute force. Perhaps this was because I was always patient and polite with my interrogators. Also

perhaps because I have a party and lawyers who would defend me. But if you are a worker or a peasant who do not have anybody to defend you, you will be treated harshly. There are many ways how this could be done: for example, the cold treatment, that is you would be laid down on a "bed of ice" with a fan blowing full blast; or you'd be whipped with a candle or a rubber hose – painful but no tell-tale marks; or you'd be burnt with glowing cigarettes; and many more such treatments. One of the outcomes of this "rehabilitation" process is the "confession" of your crime.

As I have mentioned, these "rehabilitation" techniques are devoid of any moralistic considerations. There is no question of right or wrong. Nothing is sacred; thus, even your family life is fair game for them. For example, you would be taken to meet your wife or family at such a time, but they are told to come at a different time, or an hour later or not told to come at all. When you come and wait and your family never turns up, you will surely be frustrated and perhaps feel angry. Then they will say to you, your wife or your family doesn't care for you anymore and instigate you to divorce your wife! Or your wife will be visited by a police officer with the aim of wooing her and instigating her to divorce you.

At one of my earlier family visits at the Jalan Bandar police station, a very sad incident happened. My mother, who was very old, came all the way from Alur Setar to visit me, but they did not allow her to see me simply on the excuse that her name was not included in the visit permit for that day.

"Please, Sir! My mother has come a long way. It is not easy for her to come. She is poor and sickly." I pleaded, even though I was angry and did not feel like pleading with those who had treated me so arrogantly and ruthlessly. My request was rejected and I went back to my cell that morning feeling dejected and sorry.

Guards

The times I liked best were mornings and evenings when I was allowed to exercise and bathe. I did all kinds of exercises to maintain my health – all that I had learnt at school before, including body pumping, jumping and jogging. Most of the warders were kind-hearted. They gave me enough time. Sometimes when I was not called to the office and not within the officers' visiting time, they would open my cell's door and ask me to come out for chit-chat. Two or three of them were still young, in their twenties and thirties, and were preparing to take their SPM and STP examinations. They like to ask me about their studies. Sometimes I would joke with them. "How can I teach you free of charge? You must bring *nasi lemak* (flavoured rice) in the morning or mee in the evening!" We would all laugh. I knew, according to the regulations of the detention centre, they could not bring anything when they came in. But nevertheless, sometimes they would smuggle something in.

On one Saturday evening, a warder by the name of Zainal who usually liked to talk with me, came in bringing a big tiffin carrier full of buttered rice from a feast. At that time I was the only occupant of my block which had six

cells. The others had been transfered to God knows where. The warder opened the door to my cell. "Come, Mr. Kassim," he said, "this is God's provision for us today!"

"God be praised!" I said. "Only God can repay your kindness, Mr. Zainal."

"I hope you won't tell the officers, Mr. Kassim. Otherwise we are finished!"

The three of us ate and talked until *magrib*(sunset prayer time). I still remember a story Zainal told me. My cell used to be occupied by a young woman, a communist element. She became insane because her boyfriend or husband, who was also a communist element, left her. She excreted in the cell and ate her own excrement! "How do you know she had lost her boyfriend or husband, Mr. Zainal?" I asked. "She told me herself," he answered. "What happened after she became mad like that?" I continued asking. "They took her to God knows where," was his answer.

Writing the First Novel

After three weeks of interrogation – usually every evening and night on weekdays – my interrogation ended. There was still five more weeks before the full 60 days when my fate would be decided by the authorities. What should I do? I had read all the reading materials that I had with me – one or two books and two or three magazines. So I requested from my officer some writing papers, a ball point pen and my typewriter. I was surprised that my request was granted. And so, everyday from after the morning bath and breakfast until very late into the night, I wrote and wrote and wrote. My wooden-bed became my table and my mattress became the chair. I wrote without stopping except to eat, bathe and pray. The warder who liked to talk with me was rather amazed to see that I did not like to talk much anymore.

“What is the story you are writing, Mr. Kassim?” he asked.

“The story of a writer,” I answered briefly, not knowing how to explain the synopsis of the story to him.

“Ah, surely it is your own story, Mr. Kassim!”

“No. My own story isn’t much. This is fiction.”

“How can you write without stopping?”

"I just write whatever comes to mind. This is one way to console my unhappy heart!" I said.

About every two days I finished writing one chapter. I met with several difficulties: the condition of places I would like to ascertain, and sometimes, its history; particular spots with their exceptional features, etc. One of the chapters in my story concerns death, and I wanted to know as much as possible about the process of death. These kinds of difficulties were hard to overcome in my cell. Sometimes I would discuss them with the warders and I learnt much from them. Thus I had to leave blank a part of one chapter to be filled later, because it tells of an incident when my character goes to the Holy Land (Mecca).

To write a novel you need a special kind of certainty. Sometimes you need to paint a landscape, tell about a custom or an incident in detail. This certainty is not only or fully of factual details, but also details concerning emotion, sentiment and thoughts relating to it. Only then would your story be true – true in all aspects – and become alive. It needs a lot of evidence: the senses, of knowledge, experience and imagination, of intuition and inspiration. Thus to seriously write a novel is a tough job, even though it is a pleasure to a writer. Among others, it needs research and observation. Most of our writers are not willing to take the trouble and the time to do research. They knock their typewriters and produce a novel in just a fortnight or a month!

After writing day and night for five weeks, I completed the first draft of my novel, entitled "Zaman Pancaroba" to indicate the present anarchic state of affairs in the world. I felt satisfied and happy. Thus, so much of my time spent in the detention centre in the Jalan Gurney Rifle Range, Kuala Lumpur was not wasted for nothing.

"Can I hand my writing over to my wife to be typewritten?" I asked one of the officers when I was called to his

office one day. "This is not for publication. I only want it to be typewritten so that it is easier for me to revise."

"Let me see it first," answered the officer, giving me hope.

This was a mistake. The manuscript was passed on from one hand to another and was read by all my interrogators. "To me, there's nothing wrong with it. It can be taken out," said DSP Noordin, their leader. "But right now it is being studied by higher authorities," he said. And finally, the manuscript landed with Datuk Amin Osman, the then Director of the Special Branch. This long journey took seven months and brought bad luck to my first novel!

When I was placed in the Kemunting detention camp about eight months later, I was greatly surprised, saddened and really angry when I read a small report in the newspaper saying that my novel entitled "Zaman Pancaroba" had been banned by the Government. The novel was still in draft form, written in long-hand and still incomplete – and they had already banned it! This is almost like the Nazi or Stalin regime! Not enough for them my physical detention; they even want to annihilate my thoughts, even my imagination!

Detention Order

I waited for the arrival of the sixtieth day with full anticipation. Everytime I prayed, I besought God's help to free me as soon as possible. Eventhough I was determined to face the possibility of a long detention, sometimes I longed to be released. One day I was brought to meet a Chinese officer whom I had never met before. He brought out two documents from his file. With a serious face he told me to read my detention order – I was to be detained for two years – and to sign the document to acknowledge that I had been informed of the order.

“What if I don't sign?” I asked bitterly.

“You have to sign. To acknowledge that you have been informed,” he replied.

“Yes, I am informed now. But I don't want to sign it. Even the Minister did not sign this. Only his deputy signed it. Even that, it is only his rubber stamp chop!”

The officer's face changed. He thought for a second, and then said: “You wait here for a while.” And he went away leaving me alone in the room. I thought, if I don't sign it, I will surely be badly tortured. Maybe they will have to release me, but they will change the law and arrest me again. I remembered several such cases that had happened.

A detainee would be released by the court because of certain technical errors in the arrest, but as soon as he step out of the court, he would be arrested again.

The officer came back with another officer. The new officer gave me a cynical look.

"So, you don't want to sign it, eh, Mr. Kassim?" was his threatening snide remark. Without looking at him in the face, I asked for the papers and signed it in duplicate. I was given one copy together with another copy containing fourteen charges against me.

Back in my cell, I felt very lonely, sad and dejected. What will happen to my wife and children? Since for a long time I had been self-employed as a teacher and a freelance writer, who will feed my family while I am in detention? What will happen to my children and their studies? Question after question crossed my mind. At such times, man faces his own reality: his desolation, his aloneness and his sheer insignificance. How terrible if, as Descartes said, man alone exists. God does not exist except as a logical inference from his own existence.

I took my ablution and prayed. My invocation to God was concentrated and long. God is the only protector. To God belongs all power in the heavens and on earth. Only God can link man with his beloved family and friends, with other men, with nature and with himself. This vast universe is meaningless except through and in God. He is the One Who created the heavens and the earth and everything in between, including I and my family. God is enough for me. There is no diety except Allah. He is God of the Almighty Throne.

My heart calmed. I took my pen and paper and started writing my defence against the fourteen charges made against me.

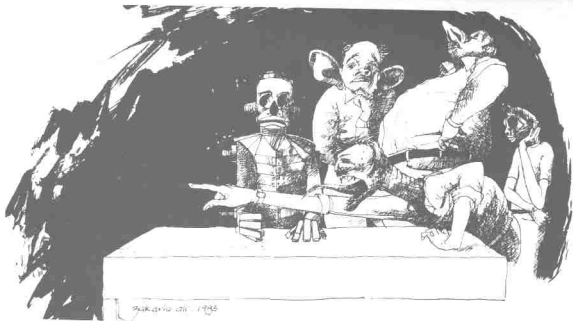
CHAPTER 5

HELL II

“You Are Not The Chairman!”

A detainee is a person who has been deprived of his freedom. You are not only detained, prevented from having contacts with your family, friends and society at large, eat only what is given to you, read only those materials that are allowed to you, but also, you are not told your schedule. If, for example, you are to meet your family on a certain day, you will be told about it and asked to prepare yourself only within five or ten minutes before the appointed time. If you are late you will be scolded. The same is true of other types of meetings: such as meetings with your lawyer, doctor, or anybody else. If the preparation needs more time, you will be told a little earlier – but no earlier than that. And so it was, that after receiving the detention order I waited from day to day for me to be sent to Kemunting. In Kemunting the situation is better, the camp having such amenities and advantages as reading, writing, socializing with fellow-detainees, entertainment, sports, etc. I waited one week, two weeks, three weeks – but still I remained locked up alone in my cell.

At last, one day I was summoned to the office. I was greatly surprised to see six officers waiting for me in the



Interrogation: "You are not the chairman!" (Sketch by Zakaria Ali)

room. They were all in civilian clothes. They were already seated when I arrived. When I asked when I would be sent to Kemunting, one of them answered:

"Let us first forget about your going to Kemunting, Mr. Kassim. The higher authorities want to give you another chance to redeem yourself."

Hearing the unexpected, I was stunned for a while. I felt some joy, but also there was a feeling of uncertainty and remorse. "Does this mean I will be interrogated once more?" I asked. "I won't have it anymore. What then is the use of all the statements I have given in all these past three weeks? My detention order has been issued. Please send me to Kemunting."

"The detention order is just a formality. It can be revoked at any time. This is a good chance for you to obtain your freedom, Mr. Kassim," answered another officer as if cajoling me.

"Ah, let us turn to other matters," interjected yet another officer suddenly, his accent heavily Indonesian. "How many children do you have, Mr. Kassim? Why don't you tell us about them? Surely this is more interesting, isn't it?"

I looked at that officer for a while without answering. What was the trick behind his question about my children? Was the aim to make me feel unhappy and repentant – and, therefore, ready to make a confession of guilt? Perhaps. Then I answered rather harshly:

"All of you, sirs, know that I was detained because of politics. Why don't you ask me about politics? Don't ask me about my children."

"Oh, you want to show your arrogance, eh?" was his immediate response, the statement addressed both to me and his friends. "We thought that since we are all Malays we can talk politely. When we ask about his family, he is angry. He thinks he is still the chairman, eh? Hey! You are not the chairman anymore! Stand up!" he shouted, banging the table.

I remained silent and stood up slowly.

"Good. That is the way. Do you know what would have happened had you refused to stand?"

I remained silent.

"You'd be slapped. Don't think you are big. Do you want to fight us? Look at your own body. Like a skeleton! How can you fight us?"

I maintained my silence. That made them a little nervous. One of them, perhaps a senior officer, looked at his friends and said to me: "You can go now." They called my guard and I was taken back to my cell.

In my cell, I noticed that my typewriter, several files and my books had been removed. I asked the guard for the block about the matter. He said he didn't know: an officer had ordered those things to be taken to the office. I was angry. This is terrible! Why don't they tell me first? Taking another's property without permission – that is stealing! I asked my guard to contact the officer and convey my request that he should record the items taken and keep them in good order in his office. The guard did what I requested.

That night I had no appetite. Trouble had been coming one after the other. I forced myself to eat, then took my ablution and prayed. At about 10:30 PM I went to sleep. The 100-watts lamp in the cell was always on. When going to sleep I would cover my eyes with my handkerchief to keep out the brightness. Suddenly the cell's door was opened and my guard told me to get ready to go to the office.

Interrogation II

That night I was interrogated by a new team of interrogators, that is, the group which I met earlier in the evening. They took turns, two or three of them every two hours. I was given a stool to sit on. Compared to the team before, this team of interrogators were very tough. They poured out obscenities, shouted, cursed, scolded, ridiculed and abused me all night long. If I were not patient I would surely have had blows with them, and certainly I would be beaten unconscious. But always I reminded myself: "Be patient, Kassim. Ask for God's protection. *Insha Allah* (Godwilling), you will be safe." And, thank God, when I returned to my cell, a little dazed from fatigue and drowsiness at 6 AM the next morning, I was still in a good mental and physical condition. I did not degrade myself by making shameful confessions, and I was not physically abused. Sometimes when their words were too harsh and painful, I would answer in one or two words. Otherwise I remained silence. When I felt really exhausted, I slumped on the desk. And so, the terrible night came to pass.

But the next day was no less terrible. I was taken to a new cell whose condition was worse. Its size was about

the same as my old cell, but both beds were of concrete, build up from the floor. The headrest for the "pillow" was slightly raised. There was no mattress or pillow. All my necessary toiletries: toothbrush, toothpaste, towel, soap, shaver had been confiscated. Even my eyeglasses, my *sarong* used during prayer, my prayer mat, and my *Quran* had all been taken away. The walls of my cell was full of blood from crushed mosquitoes, splattered all over the wall like modern art paintings. There were some writings in Chinese which I could not read. I assumed they were the names and slogans of former occupants of the cell. At one corner was written the name of my friend, Syed Husin Ali, who had preceeded me to the very same cell. Then, with a gravel, I scratched my name under his.

It was evident that they intended to torture me. Their aim was to get my "confession" eventhough that was not really clear to me then. They cajoled me saying that the higher authorities wanted to give me another chance to free myself. God's grace saved me from falling into their trap. There had been no news whatsoever from my family for more than two months and I was not allowed any meeting with my family. The food they provided me was very poor: for breakfast, black coffee and a slice of buttered bread; for lunch, *nasi bungkus* with a little fish and a banana; and for dinner, the same food as lunch but without any fruit. For more than a week I had no appetite. And all that time I was being interrogated continuously – it can be said 24 hours a day, stopping only for meals, bath and prayers in the morning, noon and evening. During all that period I managed to sleep only two hours a day: an hour in the morning and another hour in the evening. In a sense, it was fortunate that I was not in my cell during those hours because I observed that at 6:00 PM hundreds or perhaps thousands of mosquitoes would swarm into the cell through the ventilation holes at the bottom of the wall. You'd be lucky if you don't die from mosquito bites! Mosquitoes reared by the Special Branch!

"Do you think the mosquitoes are reared by us?" asked one of my interrogators. I just smiled. There was no point in showing anger. To say such an action is foolish, it certainly is not; to say that it is smart, it is not either. The best thing for you to do is laugh at it.

I was interrogated continuously for about two weeks. During that time I had to suffer the suspension of all my fundamental human rights, as I have mentioned earlier. At the office, I had to repeat the evidence I had given earlier. Some of the incidents I had already forgotten because they had taken place long ago, twenty or more years ago when I was active in the Socialist Club, University of Malaya at Singapore, between 1956-59. The interrogators showed that the Special Branch had many eyes and ears. In almost all political meetings – if you are engaged in a left-wing political organisation – the Special Branch will be represented. Sometimes their agents are the high officers of your own organisation!

"Mr. Kassim, you should cooperate with us. The evidence you gave earlier is not clear. Many things are not clear," said interrogator A.

"I don't have any more evidence other than that," I replied.

"How come?" he said. "Do you want to write down the evidence, Mr. Kassim? I can give you a typewriter."

"What other evidence?"

"We will give you a list of questions."

I thought about it for a minute and then replied: "Okay." And thus, in the interrogations in the morning, evening and night I typed one third or a quarter of my life history, including my opinions on Government policies and projects, the Communist Party of Malaya, and even regarding the theory and policy of Islamic Socialism. I do not know why they wanted to know my opinions on many things not related to security. Is the Government bankrupt of ideas and want my opinions and ideas, or do they just want me to occupy my time, not wanting to allow

me any reading material or to write my own stuff? Anyway, I felt that it was better for me to write my own statement since this would give me time to think and recall.

"Your 'novel' is already thick, Mr. Kassim," said officer D.

"When I write my autobiography later, I hope I can use these notes!"

"God-willing, you may," he answered.

I did not entertain any hope for such a thing. Even my first novel, *Zaman Pancaroba*, had been confiscated by them, what more these notes about myself. One thing they did not get from me was my "confession". These "confessions", as I came to know later, are actually written by Special Branch officers themselves, and if you fall for their promises, you will sign it and read it on TV!

"I will make my statement when I am honourably released," was my standard answer every time they asked me about my "confession".

"Why not now?"

"The statement will be suspect. People will think that it is made with a gun pointed at my head," I answered.

"What do you mean by 'an honourable release'?"

"Unconditional release."

"But how can that be? All releases must have their conditions!"

I myself did not see how my release could happen without any conditions, but every time I pray, among my supplications to God was to be unconditionally released. At last, when I was finally released on 30 July 1981, almost five years later, it was indeed an unconditional release!

The Second Cell

The cell I was in now was a third class cell, with a cement bed and reared mosquitoes. My earlier cell, with a wooden bed and food in a multi-layered food canteen, was a second class cell. The fourth class cell, it seemed, was underground and there you were tortured more. I was never put in such a cell and neither did I experience the first class cell. The first class cell had facilities such as fans, refrigerators, TV sets and also newspapers. It is for those who have given full cooperation to the Special Branch. When sleeping in my present cell during those times that I was not under interrogation, I was able to fight my 'customers' the mosquitoes by closing the ventilation holes with my towel. I stayed two weeks in that cell without any reading material. During the times when they did not call me to the office, I prayed the supererogatory prayers and read the *Quran*. As such, I was able to finish reading the *Quran* and its interpretation twice.

As I have mentioned, at that time I did not get any shaver, mirror or comb. My beard and moustache had grown long. My hair was never combed. For almost two months I was not allowed to meet my family. But suddenly one morning I was told to dress to meet my lawyer, S.T.

Gamany. They brought a clean shirt and a pair of trousers, a shaver and a mirror and told me to shave.

"I don't want to shave," I told the guard. "I am a detainee. I don't have the right to shave!"

"Eh, how come?" said the friendly guard. But I pretended to be firm. He seemed worried and reported the matter to the office. "He doesn't want to shave, sir!" I laughed when I heard him say that through the intercom.

"Don't worry, Mr. Zainal," I said. "For your sake, I will shave. Why make a fuss? I am not going to meet the Prime Minister or the Minister of Home Affairs or the Inspector General of Police. I am only going to meet a simple Socialist Party's lawyer!"

This was the first time I was allowed to meet my lawyer, Com. Gamany, one of the official lawyers of PSRM, after about four months of detention. I was extremely happy to meet him. It was as if a man who had been lost in a deep jungle meeting the first human being whom he can talk with! I told Gamany my story from beginning to end, especially the incident of the confiscation of the manuscript of my novel *Zaman Pancaroba*. He assured me that he would try to get back the manuscript. Eventhough DSP Noordin Omar who led the first team of interrogators promised to return the manuscript to me, it was finally banned as I have related earlier. Gamany's efforts to get back the manuscript and my four notebooks (which had also been banned), though not fully successful, resulted in the return of my notebooks, minus those parts considered prejudicial, and prevented the manuscript from being burnt (as usually done) and provided me with a chance to see the manuscript for three days at the office in Kamunting Camp. I took the opportunity to make some notes.

Gamany met me twice or thrice during my detention in Kuala Lumpur. In Kemunting, other party lawyers including Com. Mohideen and Com. Rajamoorthy, often visited me; they would come once every three or four

months, sometimes accompanied by my family from Penang.

After two months, because of my unceasing request, they transferred me back to the old block. But I was still not allowed any reading or writing materials. So I continued to occupy my time praying and reading the *Quran*. Reading the *Quran* gave me a special strength, happiness and peace. I started reading the English translation of the *Quran* when I was eighteen or nineteen during the last years of my secondary school. Strangely enough, nobody had asked me to read the translation, be it my father, a religious teacher or my favourite religious teacher then, Sheikh Abdul Halim. I found my present English translation of the *Quran* by Maulana Muhammad Ali in a bookstore and I immediately bought it. Whenever I go, I would carry the book in my briefcase. When I was arrested, the translation was in my briefcase and I took it along with me into detention. They had not taken it away from me, except for three days when they transferred me to my second cell. That copy of the interpretation has been my close and loyal companion for a long time, preceeding my wife and is even closer to me than my wife. Of course, there were times in my life when this friend and companion of mine, was laid aside – present but ignored. Since I bought the interpretation, I have bought many others, including the interpretations by Muhammad Yunus, A.J. Arberry, A. Yusuf Ali, H.B. Jassin and Muhammad Asad. They all have helped me have a better understanding of Islam.

Like most other Muslims, I inherit my Islam. Born into a Muslim society, I was trained and brought up as a Muslim, that is, I was circumcised since I was very young and was taught to read the *Quran*, some *shariah* law, praying and fasting. But our country then was under British rule and was administered according to the colonial and secular system of the British. I attended an English secondary school and then an English-medium university which taught modern Western values and knowledge which were

sometimes anti-Islamic. This is in total contrast with my father who was educated in the traditional Islamic education system, i.e. the *pondok* system. To my father and to me too, it was clear that the traditional Islamic system had failed. My father saw the future of his son was in the modern education system; thus he sent me to an English school. But to me, it was its rational and scientific approach that was the most attractive. And so, slowly, bit by bit, I veered away from Islam. I rebelled against the existing system. I ceased to pray or fast. I was not an atheist, as maliciously charged by my political enemies. I was still holding fast to the *kalimah syahadah** even though I rejected most of the traditional system. My verse at that time advocated an open attitude, free from traditional constraints: As can be seen from several lines from my poems: "Everything needs to be reconsidered/for today we have matured/without god without dreams/" ('Sidang Ruh', 1960); "God does not exist/if in dollar notes/and around foul-smelling lips/" ('Suratan Takdir', 1959); "Give me a tongue/I want to speak/like the ocean pounding/on the shore of freedom/" ('Pidato', 1959); "Soon it will extinguish itself/the lamp on the high minaret/because under it the people are ever drunker/and God is dead/" ('Sidang Ruh', 1960).

Strangely enough, if the English language had led me to scepticism and pessimism, it was English also that had brought me home. I read the ideas of Muslim writers in magazines such as the *Islamic Review* and books such as *The Spirit of Islam* by Ameer Ali, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* by Abdul Rahman Azzam, *The Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* by G.N. Jalbani, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought* by Muhammad Iqbal and the interpretations of the *Quran* that I have already mentioned. All these books are in English. One basic difference between the traditional method of religious

*The first principle of Islam: "I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger."

teaching and the modern method used by these books, as I have mentioned, is the rational method of the modern approach.

“No Respect For Ministers”

Back to my story: after two months of interrogation, the pace slowed down. I was allowed some reading materials such as the magazines *Dewan Sastra* and *Dewan Masyarakat* and books on religion. Usually, I finished reading these materials quickly and normally I need more reading materials one week before my family came for our fortnightly meeting. Writing was not allowed. So I occupied my time praying and reading the *Quran* and chatting with the guards for my block. The guards changed every two hours. They worked in four shifts a day. Most of them were friendly and kind to the detainees. According to the rules, they were not allowed to be friendly with the detainees, but obviously the rules were not being followed.

Usually, I slept at about 10:00 PM. And usually I woke up at about 3:00 AM to pray the superogatory *tahajjud* prayer for half an hour or an hour, and then went back to sleep before the coming of dawn. According to the *Quran* and *hadith* (saying of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), midnight, during the still of the night, is the best time for us to commune with God and make our supplications to Him. In the past I had never done this. In

fact, I didn't even know about it. I learnt many things during my detention: I learnt about God, religion, suffering, and I learnt much about men. That is why I entitled this story "The Second University".

One night I was roused up from sleep by a guard at about 12.00 midnight. The guard told me I was to go to the office. I was really surprised and could not figure out why I was being called to the office at that late hour. When I arrived at the office, Inspector Zahari, the leader of the interrogators, was already waiting.

"There is one important thing I want to ask you, Mr. Kassim," he began.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A lawyer whom you know, G. Raman, has been arrested in Singapore. He has made a confession 38 pages long."

"I don't know all that," I answered.

He then handed me two pages of the *New Straits Times* of that day. I took the newspaper and read it. He began asking me about my relations with G. Raman. Not much, I said. He asked me to type my statement. "Right now?" I asked. "Yes," he answered. "Headquarters want it." And so I typed whatever I remembered and was proper about my relationship with G. Raman.

Incidentally, that morning my lawyer, Com. S.T. Gamany had requested permission to see me. Inspector Zahari himself supervised the meeting. I told Gamany about the previous night's incident when I was questioned at midnight.

"Our Ministers are like monkeys," I said to Gamany. "Lee Kuan Yew beats the drum in Singapore and they become excited in Kuala Lumpur!" Gamany laughed. Inspector Zahari looked on with a serious face. Gamany informed me of several developments in the country: the "TV confessions" of Datuk Abdullah Ahmad, Abdullah Majid and the Executive Secretary of the MCA. Gamany asked me how they had treated me and I told him what I

could. This was the second time Gamany came to see me.

At 2:30 PM on the same day I was called to the office. Inspector Zahari and Corporal Mohammad Kinta were already waiting there. I saw that Inspector Zahari's face was rather different – sullen and serious.

"I don't like what you said this morning. Why do you say that our ministers are like monkeys? You don't respect our ministers!" he said, scolding me.

"Oh, that. That is political language. I don't mean that our ministers are monkeys. We don't have to jump whenever Lee Kuan Yew screams," I answered, laughing.

"Don't laugh! This is no laughing matter." He stood up and started pacing to and fro while continuing to scold me. I noticed that his fair-coloured face was turning red. I was anxious that he might get violent. So I remained silent. "When you were with your lawyer you dare sneer at our ministers. Now you are scared like a mouse." He stopped, but I continued to remain silent. "If you want to be safe here you must follow our wish. If not, you'll be in trouble. We will torture you. Here we have all the power. Who can help you here?"

Hearing the rude threat I became angry and lost my fear. Meanwhile he had gone back to his chair. Calmly I answered: "Mr. Zahari, I am not afraid of anybody, except God. I hope you all will not torture me, but if that is what you want, then go ahead. What I said to my lawyer this morning is true. Our ministers are like monkeys: Lee Kuan Yew beats the drum, and they start jumping! If you wish, take me to the Minister of Home Affairs or to the Prime Minister or to both of them, and I will repeat the words to them."

In his seat, Inspector Zahari looked shocked. It was apparent that he did not expect such an answer from me. The officer sitting besides him looked at the floor. After a while I said: "If I may ask, how old are you, Mr. Zahari?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, nothing. Just curious."

"How old are you?" he threw the question back at me.

I told him, and then continued: "Agewise, I think I can be an elder brother to you, Mr. Zahari. I can give you some advice!"

"Huh, what advice can you give?" His question surprised me.

"Nothing much. As the Malay proverb says: 'Do good up to a point; but never do an evil deed.' I know you have to do your duty, Mr. Zahari. Do it up to a point; don't go to extremes."

He watched me with a troubled face, then he smiled. And then he said: "Don't do this again. You can go back to your cell now."

That was my most serious quarrel with the Special Branch officers. After that incident, Inspector Zahari was good to me until I was transferred to Kemunting. After that I never saw him again.

The Trial in Penang

I waited eagerly for my trial at the Penang Session's Court, of which I have been informed only a few days earlier. The trial concerned a case of illegal procession and assembly by a group of squatters in Gelugor, Penang in 1974 which was still pending. My friends, S. Husin Ali, Mohideen Abdul Kader, Rajamoorthy, Muslimah Naim – all party (PSRM) members – and myself had been arrested and charged with illegal assembly at St. George's Girls School. This was the second trial. In the first trial the magistrate had thrown out the case, but the Deputy Public Prosecutor was successful in obtaining a re-trial at the High Court where we were requested to put up our defence.

I waited eagerly for the day of the trial since in Penang on the day of the trial I would be free to meet my family and friends. The trial would take two days and everyday I would be able to meet with my family and friends not only at the court-house but also at the Penang police head-quarter where I would be detained.

This was the first time I was involved in a court trial. The progress of the trial was very slow and boring, but at that time this was what I liked. The longer the trial took, the more chances I had to be with my family and friends.

Many members and sympathisers of the party in the north, men and women, young and old, attended the trial. Also, I was able to meet with my good neighbour, the late Mr. Pakiam and his daughter, Miss Betty Pakiam. I still remember the words Mr. Pakiam said to me in English while we were walking out of the court room after the trial. He held out his hand and said: "Don't worry. Everything is alright." As it turned out to be, those were his last words to me!

The day before, Mohideen gave his testimony and today it was his wife Muslimah's turn. The Deputy Public Prosecutor questioned them first, then it was followed by our attorney, Mr. W.K. Wong. Rajamoorthy, S. Husin Ali and I still had not testified. At 4:00 PM, Muslimah's testimony came to an end. With the court's agreement, the continuation of the trial was postponed to another date. Also, in order to save time and to speed up the trial, it was agreed the testimony of the three of us should be given in writing to be read out by us from the dock. Later, when the trial resumed – I was then at Kemunting and came up to Penang with my friend S. Husin – the court's decision was that we had been found guilty but we were freed from any sentence. This decision was not acceptable to the Deputy Public Prosecutor and he again appealed to the High Court. His appeal was successful and a new decision by the High Court was being awaited.

Interview With The "Good" Tuan

According to the Federal Constitution, a person detained under the Internal Security Act may appeal against his detention within four months to an Appeals Board. I had been informed of my right when the Detention Order was given to me and I had given notice to the Board that I would appeal against my detention. I had already sent a short written appeal a day after I received the detention order. The order had charged me with "engaging in activities detrimental to the security of Malaysia" since 1957 with "spreading and advancing communism... under the guise of socialism." Under this charge were listed 14 detailed allegations. Since my detention cannot be challenged in an open court, I did not take much time discussing the matter with my lawyer before making the appeal. The hearing for the appeal was scheduled for 6th April 1977, three months and four days after I was issued the detention order. I had requested my lawyer, Com. S.T. Gamany, to be present at that hearing.

The hearing was held in a room at the Jalan Bandar police station. Present were the Advisory Board consisting of its chairman, a former judge by the name of D.B.W. Goode, sometimes called "Tuan Baik" in the camp, and

two other Board members of Indian descent whom I did not know. They did not introduce themselves. On the appellant side, my lawyer and I. There was another person, an officer of the Ministry of Home Affairs who, I assumed, represented the Special Branch.

I gave my testimony in Malay and English for about an hour. In my appeal, I rejected all the charges as out of date, false and improper. Why were incidents happening 20 years ago, and legal in the eyes of the law, such as my activities in the Socialist Club, University of Malaya and correspondence with a Russian scholar in Malay-Indonesian literature, used as charges against me? How could my non-militant political activities be a threat to national security? I explained all these to them. When I finished, the chairman of the Board and one other member asked me several questions. I felt I answered all of them satisfactorily, except one. The question was what my stand was on revolution. I answered, that if a revolution was just, there was no choice but to support it. I gave the example of Palestine, or any other just revolution. Perhaps it was here that my case was stuck, because after waiting a few months I received the decision of the Advisory Board rejecting my appeal and approving my detention.

After undergoing the session I was certain that I would not be released immediately. I also felt certain that there was no use for me to attend other sessions of my "re-trial", which, according to law, would be held every six months. For that reason I rejected all other calls of "re-trial" of my case, except one which fell on 28th. September 1979. I forced myself to attend that session because I was strongly urged to do so by the Special Branch officer who came to interview me at Kemunting before that. The result of the session was also negative. Actually, you do not know the real decision of the Board since what is given to you is actually the decision of the Minister of Home Affairs after he had reviewed the report of the Board.

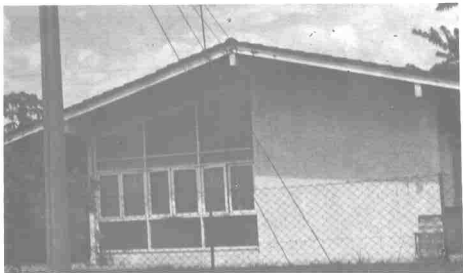
Coming Out From The Bowels of The Earth

At this time I was staying in a detention room at Jalan Bandar police station. Since renovations were being carried out at the Jalan Gurney Detention Centre, I had been transferred from there, where I had been detained for about six months. At first I was transferred to Salak South police station where I stayed for about two months. At Jalan Bandar, the condition of the detention cells in terms of health and cleanliness were really bad. The cells were located in one building and the detainees were not allowed to go out for fresh air or exercise. The toilets were normally filthy due to clogging of paper used by the detainees to clean themselves. There was no place to dry your clothing. Altogether there were eight cells in that building, three of which were originally interrogation rooms converted into detention rooms due to lack of space. At that time, at about June 1977, there were so many detainees that every cell there was occupied. In fact, I saw some detainees were simply handcuffed to the windows along the corridors!

My cell was originally an interrogation room. It had a fan and an air-conditioner. Also, there was a large table and a chair. I was also given a mattress and a pillow. My interrogation was almost over; only once in a while In-

spector Zahari would come to interview me. To occupy my time, I studied Arabic. I had studied the language before while at the University of Malaya in Singapore as one of my subsidiary subjects. Because of my desire to study Islamic philosophy, I began to re-study Arabic. At that time I had also applied to study for my Ph.D. at the National University. The title of my research was modern Islamic social theory. I was very happy to learn that my application had been accepted by the university. But unfortunately, when the university referred the matter to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry disallowed it! When this matter was raised in the House of Representatives by Lim Kit Siang, the then Minister of Home Affairs, Ghazali Shafie, answered that my application was rejected because I, as a detainee, would be unable to do my research as required! Actually, this was an academic matter that had surely been considered by the university. Some research work do not require field work. When I appealed against this decision, my appeal was also rejected. Nevertheless, since the beginning of 1978, while I was at Kemunting, I started working on it as my own research and writing project. When I was released in July 1981, three quarters of the project could be considered complete. A year later, by the end of September 1982, my manuscript was ready for publication.

One morning on 19th. August 1977, I felt very happy. The reason was that on that day I came out from the bowels of the earth – my dark detention room – and went to Kemunting! Isn't it strange? Being happy to go for further detention at Kemunting, the renown political detention camp in Malaysia. But that was how I felt. At about 10:00 AM that day our van – I and other famous political detainees, Abdullah Ahmad, Abdullah Majid and Tan Ken Seng, accompanied by four guards – left for Kemunting.



The house from which the author was taken on 3rd November, 1976.



Halim's and author's family members. From left: Ahmad Shauqi, Arman Zainab, Tini, Sh. Fawziah, Soraya and Aida.



At the Sessions Court in Penang during the Gelugor squatters' trial.
From left: Sabariah, S. Husin Ali and his son, Pak Uda, author and
Sh. Fawziah.



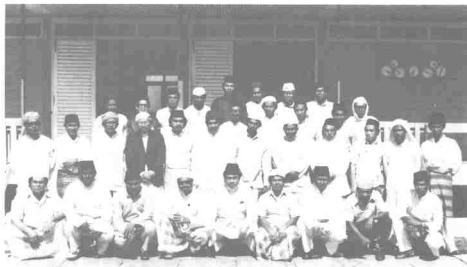
At the canteen of the Penang Court, 17th November, 1977.



From left: Author, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and Ismail Saad in Area 6 of Kemunting Camp.



Inside Block B of Area 6. From left: Ismail Saad, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad, Megat Muhammad, Haji Yusuf Yassin and author.



Muslim detainees' group photograph together with several camp officials after the 1980 Festival of Sacrifice in front of the Camp mosque.



Author welcomed home by wife and daughter Soraya.



Photographed with son Ahmad Shauqi in front of author's house
on the day of release.



Author talking to reporters in his house on the day of his release.

CHAPTER 6

AREA 10

Kemunting Hostel

That year the fasting month of Ramadhan fell in August. Thus, except for Tan Ken Seng, we did not eat anything along the journey since we were fasting. The van in which we were travelling stopped in Tanjung Malim for Tan Ken Seng to have his lunch. There was much information exchanged between us since we did not know what had happened to one another because we had been detained in separate places. It seemed that Datuk Abdullah Ahmad, Abdullah Majid and Tan Ken Seng were very dissatisfied for they had been promised an early release. That was why they had agreed to the false "confessions" on TV regarding their involvement with the communist movement. Now nine months had passed; they were not only not free but were being taken to Kamunting!

"You are very lucky, Kassim," said Abdullah Ahmad to me. "You didn't make any confession."

"It wasn't that they didn't press and persuade me. They tried many times," I replied.

"I pity Mr. Tan. He is just an ordinary journalist and getting along in age," said Abdullah Ahmad.

"Was he badly tortured?" I asked.

"Ask him, Mr. Tan, how was their treatment towards you?"

Tan Ken Seng, who was big-sized and had much white hair, shook his head. "How can you stand it?" he answered. "Eventhough there was no torture, how can you stand staying in that cell?"

"How about you, Kassim?" Abdullah Ahmad asked me.

"I didn't have a first class cell like you fellows." The first class cell was a fully furnished unit: attached bathroom and toilet, refrigerator, fan and TV and also a bell for calling the guard. Each of the three of them had been placed in such a cell after they had agreed to make their confessions.

"Better not to have all those rather than make a confession! I truely regret," Abdullah Ahmad said.

We arrived at Kemunting detention camp, officially name the "Protective Detention Centre", at 3:00 PM. On arrival we were taken to Block 10 – it was not too far, only about 200 yards away from the administrative centre. Block 10 was encircled by a high thick wall like a prison. The compound inside was not too large, only about 20 x 50 yards in size. There were eight cells in the block with three bathrooms and three toilets. The whole block was empty but was rather nice and clean. According to the officer, the block used to be an "orientation" area, that is, before new detainees were taken into detention in the camp to mix with other detainees, they would be placed there. But, he added, in our case we would be taken in straight away without having to undergo any "orientation". Our cells would not be locked and we were free to come and go within the block as we pleased during the day; the main doors would be locked at night. We felt relieved to be able to move freely in a bigger compound, free to socialise and free from interrogations!

We chose our own cells. We turned one of the cells into a prayer room; another into a dining and TV room; and another into a ping-pong room. The other empty room

was later used by the guard in charge of the block. I was happy with the condition of the place because it was rather spacious and clean, and furthermore, we had our individual rooms and we could switch the lights on and off as we pleased.

The cell was about the size of a normal room, but without any window. There were ventilation holes at the top and bottom of the wall. There was a wooden bed and each of us was given a thin *Dunlop* mattress, two pillows, a blanket and a mosquito net. On the walls there were racks for books and clothing. We were also given a small writing table and a chair. The cell was always dark and if you wanted to work inside it be it during the day or night you have to switch on the lights. A copy of Malay, English and Chinese newspapers would be given to us everyday, and if we wished, we could subscribe and pay ourselves for other newspapers and magazines. The officer in charge also promised to send in the necessary equipment for ping-pong as soon as possible. Outside, there was a non-concrete badminton court. Sufficient, I thought, for us to play and exercise.

The next day we were called to the office for a briefing by the officers regarding the rules and regulations and the rights and welfare of the detainees at the camp. We had the right of sending four letters a week, but there was no limit to the number of letters that could be received. The letter-forms, like an air-mail letter, were provided by the office but they were limited to a one-and-a-half pages only. At first, this was naturally not sufficient since everybody wanted to write many letters, and all of them long ones! Often we fell into argument with the officers on this matter. Once in a while we were allowed to write longer by enclosing our own piece of paper in the envelopes.

All letters, outgoing and incoming, were screened, and this prevented us from writing freely. To our families, relatives and friends outside, this screening became a major problem in their correspondence with us. Sometimes they

and other potential letter writers felt afraid to write to us since their letters would be read by the camp officers. But after two months I myself began to write less and less. Sometimes I wrote only one or two letters a month, so much so that after two years at the camp I collected many unused letter-forms!

We were given two visitors' cards each, one for your wife and children and the other for your relatives such as parents, brothers and sisters and so on. We were allowed to receive visitors once a week, the visiting time lasting for 15 minutes. If we did not use this right each week we accumulate the visiting time for an-hour visit a month. The issue of family visits always caused dissatisfaction among detainees due to the short visiting time allowed and the unsuitable meeting places. Sometimes I sympathised with the officer in charge of family visits. When there were many visits, especially during school holidays, he had to find the places, supervising officers and give enough time to the visitors. The detainees, including myself, all wanted a reasonably suitable meeting place, the privacy to talk and be intimate with your family and also sufficient time. But, it seemed, the duty of the officer was always to reduce all this. A Chinese lady-officer who was in charge of this matter during our time often quarrelled with the detainees and their families, and finally she requested to be relieved of the difficult task!

During the first and second weeks in the block most of our time was occupied with writing letters and exchanging information and comparing one another's experiences during the interrogations. It seemed that I experienced the worst treatment among the four of us, even though none of us was violently treated. Staying in that camp reminded me of the time when I stayed in the hostel at the secondary school in Alor Setar. I had to take care of my own self: make my own bed in the morning, sweep the dorm, wash my own clothing, and after a meal, wash my own plate. Since I am no stranger to such discipline, I did not feel it to

be a burden. But to some of my friends it was a heavy task.

Datuk Abdullah Ahmad was a former (Deputy) Minister and a rich man. His cell was always cluttered: books, magazines, papers, his letters and clothing were scattered all over the place. He was a night-owl – he would work (reading or writing) until 3:00 AM or 4 AM, and then sleep until noon, except to wake up at dawn for the *subuh* prayer. When the newspapers arrived at 11:00 AM or 12:00 noon, he would wake up to read the papers until 2:00 PM or 3:00 PM. His colleague, Abdullah Majid, was the reverse. Abdullah Majid was a tidy and hardworking person. His room was very tidy and clean. He was the one who helped sweeping Abdullah Ahmad's room everyday and helped to tidy it up somewhat. Tan Ken Seng did not bring many things to the camp like Abdullah Ahmad. Therefore, he did not have to arrange and tidy his room much. He always hoped for an early release and did not think he had to tidy his room! And truly enough, his freedom came much earlier – three years earlier than ours.

Tan Sri Datuk Murad Ahmad, the former Director of Prisons, who was then acting as adviser to the camp, call us to see him on the second day of our arrival. He and I had a slight family relationship since my wife's mother was his former wife. But eventhough I knew his name through the newspapers and knew about the relationship from my wife, I had never met him. When my turn to meet him individually came he asked me about my meeting with the Advisory Board and my daily schedule. He advised me not to write during my detention. I was rather surprised to hear this advice, but I did not ask him why. I guessed perhaps it would be difficult to take the writings out of the camp. Abdullah Ahmad also felt the same when one of his friends wrote him asking him to occupy his time by reading and writing his memoir. In my case, it was lucky that I did not bother too much about the problem. I did not think that the prison authorities would confiscate writings that were scientific in nature. Or, I could keep my manuscripts

and take them out with me on my release. Or, as the poet said:

*Stone walls do not a prison make
Nor iron bars a cage.*

I am a born optimist. I did not see this as a hindrance that could not be overcome. And furthermore, what would I do with my time if I did not write. You cannot read all the time!

It would be nice if you could read all the time, reading the masterpieces produced by the human mind up to now: all the literary classics, all the classics of science and all the classics of philosophy, including Shakespeare, Milton, Sophocles, Rumi, Firdausi, Kalidasa, Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Al-Farabi, Ibnu Sina, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Gibbon, Goethe, Darwin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Balzac, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Mann, Hemingway, Herman Melville and others. Unfortunately, nobody would be able to read all these. If I were given another chance I would read all these classics between the ages of seventeen and thirty. But the problem is, most of these classics require a mature reader before he can understand and appreciate them fully. I think a good education system must *introduce* these classics to the students at the secondary and upper secondary levels. Those who are interested can read these books later at the university or after graduating.

Getting back to my story: So, once again I was now undergoing a university student's life, except for the freedom. I would wake up at 5:30 AM everyday and we would pray together the dawn *subuh* prayer. Then I would read or write until 9:30 or 10:00 PM when I would go to bed, stopping only for baths, washing clothes, games and meal. I worked between 10–14 hours a day. Oftentimes I would wake up at 3:00 AM to pray the *tahajjud* prayer and then work continuously until dawn and then go back to sleep after the dawn *subuh* prayer. I like to work in the early hours because that is the time when you are fresh. I

remember that a number of my short stories written a long time ago, and now compiled in my anthology *Kemarau Di Lembah* ("Drought in the Valley"), were all written in the early hours of the morning. I found that I could easily analyse and solve many pressing problems during this early part of the day.

Sometimes the "rehabilitation" officers would come to visit us in our block. It seemed that their duty and aim was to "straighten" our thinking so as to be in line with Government policies. To me, these periods were periods of rest for light conversation. To those who were matured in politics the effects of these sessions were nil, if not altogether negative. You know that they have to sell Government wares, some of which you dislike or even hate. How can they influence you? Except if they use a subtle psychological approach: by not associating themselves with *all* Government policies and actions in a convincing way and using rational arguments.

Sometimes I consider these visits a waste of time. So I told the young officer who often visited me to schedule his visiting dates and times, because sometimes I myself was busy. Actually, you did not have to see these officers if you did not want to. But, it is Malay custom that if a guest drops by your house it is not polite for you not to entertain him. Nevertheless, as time went by the officers themselves understood that we did not feel comfortable with their visits and their visits to our block decreased and finally stopped altogether.

There was not much collective work to be done in that block. The compound was small and there were only four of us. The job of sweeping the block and the dining room was done by Abdullah Majid every morning since he liked to do this as a morning exercise, and furthermore, unlike me, he did not play ping-pong or badminton. Every morning for 45 minutes or an hour I played ping-pong with Tan Ken Seng. Most Chinese are trained in playing ping-pong since childhood and I myself liked to play ping-pong since my

school days. In the evening, if the weather was good, I would play badminton with Abdullah Ahmad. He was a determined player: in three months he broke three cheap *Dunlop* racquets that were supplied by the camp since in his smashes his racquets usually hit the ground!

On our request, the grass in the compound were cut by the camp workers once every two or three months. Necessary items such as brooms, toilet brushes and so on and foodstuff and other items such as sugar, butter, jam, bathing soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes were provided by the camp. As for other necessary items we could buy them through the office or our families. So, with our small quiet compound and all necessities taken care of, I could do my work. I was able to re-read Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to the end, a book I never finished reading before. As for Dostoevsky's masterpiece, *The Brothers Kamarazov*, I have read it before my detention. Also, I was able to compile and write several essays during my one-and-a-half-years confinement in Area 10, including the controversial pamphlet *Masalah Teori Sosial Moden Islam* ("The Problems of Modern Islamic Social Theory"), published in 1980.

Happiness and Sorrow

Nobody is happy to be in detention. Detention means the lost of freedom. You are separated from your family and from the society at large. You are unable to take care of your family and children who need your guidance, protection and love. You are not able to work for the sustenance of your family and you are not able to contribute to your society.

At the camp, once a month I would meet with my family under the supervision of officers. While you were very happy to be with your family you were also aware that it was only for a very short time. Then you would part again. The more unhappy you would be if there were problems within your family: not enough money for your children's education; one of your children refused to continue his studies; your wife being harassed by certain people; friends and sympathisers intimidated by certain people not to get near and assist your family, and a thousand other problems. You would go back to your block with a heavy heart. Whatever good food that was brought by your family did not seem appetising anymore. What could you do? Cry? Be angry? Or just be patient? Even a barrellful of tears would be useless. Anger was equally useless. What was left for

you to do was to be patient...and to seek God's protection.

In such a situation we come face to face with the true reality – God! Who can help you except God? Such is man's experience throughout history. The Pharoah himself, who declared that he was god, on the verge of death, cried to the true God. Sutan Jenain, one of the first Malay communists, who had once suggested that the *Quran* be made into toilet paper, kept a copy of the *Surah Yassin** under his pillow when he was lying helpless in a hospital bed. No one can run away from God. To me at that time it was not that I wanted to run away from God – that was far from my thought – I wanted to run to Him! In the final analysis, man is alone in this world. He has no friend except for God. Just as what the *Quran* teaches: "Say: Enough for me is God. He is the best of friends and the best of protectors."

But God acts through men and His other creatures – that is why anything and everything in the heavens and on earth are called His servants. Thus, even though in detention you sometimes feel you are alone without anybody to help you and your family, it is in fact not so. God is *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim*, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. His Compassion and His Love is immeasurable – even though man is ever rebellious! Just consider sunlight, the atmosphere, air and rain, day and night that He has given to *all* men – and for free! – whereas without all these man would surely die! Thus, there are all kinds of aid that will come to you, sometimes even from your enemies and sometimes in the form of difficulties and sufferings. This is the way of God that is difficult for man to understand.

During my detention I got much help and assistance: from members of PSRM, from relatives, friends and from strangers. I have no doubt that other detainees also experienced the same. This is God's compassion and mercy to us. To me, one of the mercies were the visits of members

*One of the *surahs* of the *Quran* often printed in a small booklet form.

of my party. As I have mentioned, among the happiest moments for a detainee is when he receives letters or visitors. The first delegation to arrive when I was at Kemunting was from Penang. Then there were other delegations from Trengganu, Perak, Kelantan and the central headquarters. There were then only two members of the PSRM in detention: S. Husin Ali and I. At first the authorities would not allow the party delegations to visit us both simultaneously but in later years this was allowed. Usually the party delegations' visits were supervised by two or three officers and our conversations tape-recorded.

Kemunting Camp is a very large area, about 200 acres. This included ten detention compounds totalling about 30 acres, each about half to two acres in size comprising, among others, one kitchen area for the detainees, one soccer field and one administrative block. Each detention compound was fenced by barbed wire and zinc sheets, except for Area 10 which had a concrete wall. Outside the fence were officers' barracks and camp officers houses, including the house of the superintendent of the camp, several fields, a mosque and a staff's club. At the time of our arrival at the camp, there were about 700 detainees there and this figure kept on increasing before it declined two or three years later at the time of our release when there were about 300 detainees. At the time of our arrival, the detainees included women, most of them Chinese, about 10 Malays and three or four Indians.

As commonly known, Kemunting Camp is the largest political detention camp in our country. The second largest detention camp is at Batu Gajah. This latter camp can accomodate between 200-300 detainees. During the time of our detention this was the camp where they placed the "obstinate" detainees. "Obstinate" meant that they were difficult to "rehabilitate". These detainees organised their discipline and their collective schedules themselves and they rejected any call to meet the Advisory Board and the Special Branch officers who came every six months.

Back at our camp, when you had any business with the administrative office, such as picking up parcels or registered letters or a meeting with your family or lawyer, you would be called and escorted to the office. Most of the detainees liked it since this would give them a chance to go out from their compound and on the way they might chance a meeting with friends from other compounds giving them an opportunity to chat for a while. Sometimes when the enforcement of the rules was rather lax they would even have a chance to drink coffee together at the canteen. A meeting with the doctor would take place every week, and if you wished you could get whatever medicine or simple treatments such as for small wounds, headaches or fever. For more important treatments you would be taken to the hospital. Most of us did not really like to go to the hospital since this meant that you would be handcuffed, and all political prisoners did not like to be handcuffed.

Herpes Zoster

I was seriously ill twice. The first time I was not treated in a hospital because the illness required traditional medical treatment – *kayap* or shingles, medically known as *herpes zoster*. At that time I was still staying in Area 10. According to those who know, you suffer shingles only once in your life, like smallpox. There is one type of shingles that is very dangerous, known as *kayap ular* or “snake shingles”. The “snake shingles” will encircle your body and when it completes the circle, it can kill you. Since I had never suffered from this sickness or seen it before, I did not know that at that time I was already suffering from it for two days! Water-filled skin bubbles emerged all over my back and the left side of my body. When I showed this to the doctor at Taiping Hospital – I was there since incidentally I was having a fever that evening – he did not say anything. The same thing happened when I showed it to the hospital assistant, Mr. Silver, who often visited us at the camp. “Don’t worry,” he said. “Nothing serious.” On the second day, the bubbles still remained; in fact, their number increased. When Abdullah Majid saw them, he said it was *kayap*, shingles and advised me to seek traditional medical treatment.

With the help of Encik Zainal, the Deputy Superintendent of the camp at that time, and several warders, I was given 'medicated' water to drink and to wash the shingles and traditional talcum powder (made of powdered rice), the powder of a dried rose and the powder of *bemban* plant. Shingles are very painful, like being burnt, and the pain comes in waves, sometimes you feel it, sometimes you do not. On the third night, I could not sleep at all. After rubbing on the traditional talcum powder and the powdered rose, I felt better. The medication absorbed the water in the skin bubbles. It was still painful, but at least I was able to sleep a little that night. The next day I used a mixture of the talcum powder and the powdered *bemban* sago. This mixture was really cooling and much of the pain ceased. It seemed that this illness, like a living person, had many taboos. For example, you should not allow water to touch the infected area and you should not eat oily food such as curry or fried food. In fact, you should not even be near any place where food is being fried! I observed these prohibitions, and thank God, after one week all the bubbles on my body began to subside, and on the ninth day I was able to work as usual.

For the eight days that I was bedridden, I did light reading and slept whenever I could. But during the first stage of the illness I was simply unable to lie down on my back since doing so would mean pressing down on my shingles and this was very painful. At times like this you would realise how precious health is. How blessed are those who are healthy! And how wretched are those who are sick! But most of us are forgetful; while young we forget old age; while healthy we forget sickness; while unoccupied we forget the busy time; and while alive we forget death. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) has reminded us of these five periods – a very precious reminder indeed.

While bedridden, my heart was filled with sympathy. Perhaps at that time I myself needed sympathy and help. But that is man's fate. He cannot escape from sickness,

suffering and death. Herein lies the littleness and weakness of man. Can man overcome all this – his human limits – with science and knowledge? Surely not. This truth has been taught by religion and confirmed by man's experience. The twentieth century is a period where man has achieved great progress and success in science and technology, but it has also witnessed two horrible scenes of the greatest mass murder in human history. Read Camus and Kafka and you will know that the twentieth century man is not happy. Yet there are modern scientists who claim that science will find a way to overcome death, and when death is overcome, surely sickness and suffering will be overcome. This is nothing but self-delusion, deceit and incurable arrogance!

Kullu nafsin zaiqatul maut. Everything that lives shall taste death. This a verse from the Holy *Quran*. In this material world man will certainly die. Then he will be raised up again. Perhaps in that spiritual world he would live forever. We do not know. But we are very much aware of our brief sojourn in this world. We are reminded that in this present state of existence man is not too happy – sickness, suffering, and death. Of course, there is also happiness, health, and life. So, while bedridden from my sickness in the cell in Area 10, far from family and friends, my heart was filled with sympathy. Man should help one another and forgive one another's minor and major faults. Their lot in this world is the same: they all experience difficulties, suffering, and death. And so, it is only logical that man should help and forgive one another. I was rather surprised to realise suddenly that this is what is taught by all religions. Truly, sickness is a good teacher to man.

Officers and Warders

Whenever I got bored reading or writing, oftentimes I would walk around the block or play ping-pong or talk with the guards. Most of them were friendly. I would ask them about their life history and experiences. When there was something interesting I would later write down those incidents. This is an old habit of mine, for, as a writer, I like to search for all kinds of materials for characters and incidents in my future books. Of course, a person would not tell all and everything about himself due to many reasons: perhaps he is ashamed to reveal his family's poverty or his poor school record or his secret experiences with prostitutes and so on. And here is where the imagination of a writer becomes useful. Perhaps there is no incident that could be related one hundred percent as it really happened. But this is neither required nor desired. Life, seen from one aspect, is chaotic: a jumbled mixture of many things and happenings which are important and otherwise, good and bad. The role of the writer is to sift and choose from this jumble of chaotic raw materials and arrange them into a presentation and story that makes sense. In this way, he not only selects, cuts and re-arranges, but also adds and creates. Besides thoughts and feelings, artistic creation needs imagination.

Most of the warders and officers at the camp were friendly and considerate. They always do their best to lighten the burden of the detainees. They were respectful and courteous to the detainees, mixing and jesting with them and helping in whatever way they could to make life in the camp more tolerable for the detainees. Nevertheless, that was a detention camp with the discipline and regulation of a detention camp. I still have fond memories of many warders and some officers. One of them was a high official. He was liked by all: by his colleagues, subordinates and detainees. He was not proud and haughty. He had a kind heart and liked to mix with and help those below him. He was the one who helped me in getting traditional medical treatment when I suffered from shingles earlier. He was big-sized and you would not suspect that in that big body you would find a tender heart. On one occasion, during an 'Id Festival congregational prayer – and this is a time when tears flow freely, especially for detainees – I saw him cry without reserve, and I myself could not stop my tears from gushing out. I do not know why he cried. But at such a time people do not ask why. At such a time all hearts are full of emotions: longing, loving-kindness, sympathy, self-realisation, and the seeking of God's forgiveness – all the tender feelings towards all men, towards God and towards one's own self are felt by them.

During this period of our detention we were allowed to pray the Festival's prayer at the camp's mosque, but not the Friday congregational prayer. It was only two years later that we were allowed to do this. I still remember that this was the first time during my whole detention that I met my friend and party comrade, S. Husin Ali – during the Festival's prayer.

One high official who helped to make our life in detention bearable was Mr. Kamaruddin Mohammad. During our last years at the camp he held the posts of Assistant Superintendent and later Deputy Superintendent. It was easy to request a meeting and settle matters with him.

Whatever problems or requests we brought to him, he would listen with sympathy, and most of our requests were approved by him. As will be related later, it was he himself who brought the good news of our release to our area one lucky morning on the eve of the 1981 'Id Festival. There are many more whom I still remember for their kindness. One of them is Sergeant Abdul Ghani whom we called Pak Ghani. He loved to jest with us. His wife made cakes for sale at the office canteen, and every fasting month we would place advance orders to him for the cakes for breaking the fast in the evening. During the final year of our detention I was the one who was responsible in placing the order for the cakes for the detainees of Area 6 – and I am not sure whether all the payments due for the cakes have been settled, since we disappeared before the fasting month came to its end!

Hopes and Dreams

The year 1979 was nearing its end, and it marked the completion of our two years in detention. Eventhough we never lost hope of being released, my own calculation during the times when I could think in a cool, rational and realistic manner told me that the Government would detain me for five years. This was based on the duration of detention imposed upon several PSRM leaders before. My friends in Block 10 were of course always hoping for an early release since they had been promised such. Frustrated by the broken promise made orally to them, two of them, Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid, recinded their earlier 'confession' through their lawyers' letters to the authorities. Our hopes were smashed to pieces when a day after the new year we received orders for the extension of our detention! Abdullah Ahmad and Abdullah Majid were to discover that the withdrawal of their 'confessions' was indeed expensive – two extra years in detention; for their colleague in the MCA, Mr. Tan Ken Seng, who did not request a withdrawal of the confession was released two years earlier than them.

Tan Ken Seng was a quiet man. Everyday he would usually read or write or sleep. Often he would walk to and

fro outside the block. Every morning and evening I would invite him to play ping-pong as an exercise, and always he won. Tan Ken Seng simply did not understand why he had to be detained and he always hoped for release. His freedom came two months before his two years of detention were completed. The night prior to his release, Mr. Fadzil, an officer who had never before entered our area came to our block. Mr. Tan was then preparing to go to bed, Mr. Fadzil told him to get ready to go home. At first Mr. Tan just simply did not believe it. Once convinced, he did not waste any time in getting ready since he did not have too many things with him: several pieces of clothings, two or three books and a few utensils. Within half-an-hour he was ready to go. Because he was too happy he forgot us.

"Aren't you going to say goodbye to your friends first?" said the Deputy Superintendent, Mr. Zainal, who was also present to see him go.

CHAPTER 7

AREA 6

Gardening

A week after we completed two years of detention and 18 months after being detained at Kemunting Camp, on 8th. February 1979, the three of us were transferred to Area 6, an area that was larger than the former Area 10, about half a mile from the old place. We were not even consulted regarding the transfer; in fact, we were informed about the transfer only half-an-hour before it took place. Since I was rather happy with the situation in Area 10, I was not too keen to move to another place. The same was true for my two friends. Moving to a new place meant we would need two or three days to pack. We had many odds and ends, especially books. It was clear that refusal to move was out of question since there were only three of us in Area 10 and the camp authorities had to provide equal amount of manpower to look after an area that could accomodate up to eight detainees. The camp provided a lorry and four workers to help us move our things.

Area 6 was a large area, almost three acres in size. It had two detention blocks, another block for a ping-pong hall, a kitchen, store room, one concrete outdoor badminton court and an area for gardening. The detention

blocks were like hospital wards complete with beds, clothings and book racks, bathrooms and toilets. Each block could accomodate up to 13 detainees. The area was fenced with barbed wire and zinc plates, separating it from our neighbour, Area 7. Often we would talk through the open space under the zinc sheets, a thing forbidden by camp regulations, but usually ignored by most guards on duty. Not long after our transfer to this new area, the Muslim detainees were allowed to go out to the camp's mosque for Friday prayers. So, every Friday we had the chance to meet and talk more freely with one another.

Since the land area of the new place was rather large, a new activity for us was gardening. But unfortunately the land was hilly and the earth full of gravel. At first there were not too many of us in Area 6. But a year later, with the transfer of Malay detainees, including S. Husin from Area 7 and several other new Malay detainees, the number of occupants in Area 6 increased to about 20, and later, following the detention of demonstrators in Alor Setar, it increased to about 30. Several of the new transfers to our area such as Ismail Saad, Daud and S. Husin, were diligent in clearing the area and growing all kinds of vegetables and plants. So, not long afterwards our area became green with all kind of plants such as tapioca, sweet potato, banana, papaya and three or four kinds of flowers – turning the area into a kind of orchard-garden.

Yes, a garden! Talking about gardens, this whole world has become a garden. A garden with cities. Thousands of years ago most of the world was covered with jungles, hills and moutains, prairies, deserts and oceans. There were not too many human beings and not too many centres of civilization. But now, in the later part of the twentieth century, most of the land has been utilized for agriculture, cities and towns with all kind of buildings, centres of learning, centres of art and culture, buildings belonging to government and private industries, roads and highways, palaces, mansions and houses. Actually, man has changed the face of the

earth from a lonely uninhabitable place without people into a busy and noisy global village with nearly four billions inhabitants!

There is not the slightest doubt that it was God Who created this world and the limitless universe and man among His creatures, but it is also obvious that it is man who established civilization on earth. Thinking about all the changes that have taken place, I remember a verse from the Quran: "(His promise will be fulfilled) on the day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when (all men) shall appear before God, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists." (14:48). What is the meaning of these words? It seems, this is the Doomsday or the Day of Judgement, when all human beings will be raised up again. But is this a sudden happening that will occur on a future date or has it been gradually in progress? For a day to God is a very long time for man. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the world has changed, and even though this change occurred due to man's activities, it is, in the final analysis, due to God's will.

In our camp, for every area a person or two were appointed as gardeners with a wage of 80 cents a day. Others who wished to work could be carpenters, cooks, workshop hands, barbers, shepherds and so on with the same amount of pay. Most of us work in order to occupy our time and also to help our families with the meagre income – for there were many among us who were farmers. In fact, some received financial assistance from the Social Welfare Office.

Every morning except Sunday and other public holidays, the area was rather quiet since those detainees who had jobs would go out to work. Those who did not have any jobs like Abdullah Ahmad, Abdullah Majid, Shamsul Bahari, Nasaruddin Baba, S. Husin and I, would do our own work: reading, writing letters, studying, talking, playing the guitar or just resting or sleeping. Grass cutting

for the area was mostly done by our detainee-gardener, Ismail Saad. He was hardworking and our area was always clean due to his diligent work. Besides, all of us often did collective work to clean the area. But most of the detainees were very sensitive. Often the programmes for daily chores and collective work were not carried out simply because they could not agree among themselves! Sometimes you suspected that the camp authorities themselves did not like to see too close a cooperation among detainees within a given area.

"Talking walls" was the term we coined to describe this suspicion-filled atmosphere. This was a great pressure on the detainees. Except among old friends and party comrades, perhaps no sincere relationship existed. All conversations were limited to the need to be polite and courteous. Intellectual discussions on anything, especially politics, were out of question since whatever came out of such discussions would often reach the authorities and bring about negative results. Thus most of us realised that the wisest policy was to talk as little as possible.

Every morning except Sunday, the doors in the block would be opened at 6:50 AM. On Sunday and other public holidays they would be opened 20 minutes later. If there was no strong wind we would play badminton on the open court. The regular players were myself, Omar Chin, Bakhtiar, Nasaruddin, Ismail Saad and Haji Ibrahim. Actually, I had never played this game before, be it at school or afterwards. But at Kamunting I became its ardent fan! I like the art of the game, and since then I have followed every Thomas Cup tournament, something which I never gave my attention to before. As an exercise, the game was very good in helping me maintain my health while in detention.

Arabic Classes

Like in Area 10 before, in Area 6 I continued my own research work: reading and writing. I had re-studied my Arabic even before being sent to Kemunting and now I could already read and write a little Arabic. Three or four of my friends who were interested requested me to teach them, and because of that they playfully called me *ustaz*, a term usually reserved for teachers of religion. The 'students' were Abdullah Ahmad, Nasaruddin Baba, Shukri, and Bakhtiar. For about three months we conducted Arabic classes twice a week. After that each studied by himself by using cassette-tapes. In simple conversation between us, such as "How are you?" "What are you doing?" "Have you eaten?" "Where are you going?" etc., we would use Arabic.

I also continued my research in Islamic social philosophy. My interest in this subject had been present since my secondary school days. At that time, between 1952–55, I like to read an international Islamic monthly magazine with a progressive view-point called *The Islamic Review*. Then my interest changed for a while to Western theories, especially socialism. During the detention, when they stopped interrogating me I began to consider studying for

degree. That was how I came about to doing research on Islamic theory and philosophy.

As I have related, although the National University had accepted my application and registration as a Ph.D. candidate, the Ministry of Home Affairs then headed by Minister Ghazali Shafie, refused permission, without any acceptable reason, for me to pursue my studies. But, regardless, I had decided to pursue the research as a project for my own book. I had started the research work since my stay in Area 10 before.

Perhaps to the Special Branch my interest in Arabic and Islamic social philosophy was simply a trick to use Islam as a facade for socialism and communism! In fact, they used one whole interview to question me about my controversial pamphlet, *Masalah Teori Sosial Modern Islam*.^{*} But it was obvious that their research was incomplete and their minds full of suspicion, for my interest in Islamic social philosophy emerged since my school days and continued through my university education where I had taken Arabic and philosophy as subsidiary subjects. At that time there were no courses in Islamic philosophy.

^{*}"The Problem of Islamic Modern Social Theory".

An Old Story

The concern, nay, fear of the Government for communism and the Communist Party of Malaya was evident to me from my many interrogations and my semi-annual interviews with the authorities. I really do not understand why this should be so. In one of the interview sessions with the officers, I explained to them my view on the issue. There were three aspects: firstly, communism as a theory and ideology. This should be fought or challenged with another, and a better theory and ideology. Secondly: communism as a socio-economic programme. This should be challenged with a Government socio-economic programme which could eliminate poverty and establish a minimum acceptable standard of living for the people. And thirdly: communism as an armed resistance and bloody revolution. This could easily be fought with our own armed forces and the obvious support of the people who were clearly anti-communist.

"This matter is not that simple," replied one of the officers.

"Why not?" I asked.

"What country can eliminate poverty? Even in welfare states such as the United States and England there are still

people living in poverty. For that matter, even in communist countries there is unemployment," he responded. But this is the standard argument to defend and legitimise poverty.

"The U.S. and Britain are capitalist countries, and capitalism can never solve the problem of poverty," I replied. "We should not follow the capitalist policy. Don't misunderstand me, I am not a communist and I do not agree with the communist ideology, but as far as I know, poverty and unemployment do not exist anymore in Russia and China. Is it wrong for us to take some of the good aspects of communism?" Obviously, there was no answer to this question from the Special Branch, but then, answering questions in a rational and logical way is not the job of the Special Branch.

"In communist countries the properties of the rich are confiscated. We cannot do that," answered another officer, as if suggesting that poverty could not be eliminated except by means of confiscation. I recalled an interesting incident in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* relating to this matter. A character in the book, an old prisoner, was asked by a prison inspector what should the reasonable punishment be for those who broke the law. The old man answered: "At first the Devil robbed all the people, took all their land, all their rights, killed all those who opposed him, and then he established laws forbidding robbery and killing. He should make the laws first." This incident explains the real situation. Large areas of land, all of which by right belong to God, have been grabbed by the capitalists, and the people, since they don't own land, become poor. But when the people settle on and develop these pieces of land their action is branded as illegal!

"I myself do not advocate confiscation," I said. "But we must change our economic structure so that no one needs live in poverty in our country. I have explained this many, many times before. There is no need for us to repeat something which is already obvious."

They kept on repeating the argument that the Government had been and was continuing to implement many development projects to improve the standard of living of the workers, farmers and fishermen. And they kept on repeating about the threat posed by the Communist Party of Malaya and its agents and that the Government could not afford to soften its stand and fight against the communists to prevent them from grabbing power. I just let them talk – in fact, lecture – for it was useless and boring to repeat the same old argument. Seeing that I was disinterested, one of them said: “If you do not soften your stand, Mr. Kassim, it would be difficult for you to be released.” Actually, I was ready and waiting for such a statement. “I won’t get down on my knees to beg them for my release. I have already tried my best to adapt to their needs; I can’t do more than that. If they like, they can release me; and if they so wish, they can continue to detain me. I don’t lose anything. I don’t want anything for my own self. I don’t have the least respect for people like them!” This little speech had long been prepared in my mind.

He seemed surprised with my answer and looked at me in disbelief. Then he said: “The Government is afraid that if you are released, Mr. Kassim, you would be able to influence the people to oppose the Government through your writing. This would only benefit the CPM. So far CPM has failed since it does not have the support of the Malays.”

Now it was my turn to be surprised and depressed. Politics I can forget, but not writing. Writing is my way of expressing myself, my *raison d’etre*. If I cannot write I’ll die. Without it there is no use and no meaning to life. So I said: “If so, what can I do? Let them continue to detain me. They are scared of their own shadows.”

That was one of my important sessions with the Special Branch at Kemunting. There would be one or two more before I was released. Sometimes I felt it was useless to

attend these sessions for not only was the communist issue raised again and again, but also they question your right and freedom to criticize injustice and falsehood! My last session with them took place a month before Dr. Mahathir took over the post of Prime Minister. Three officers came for the interview, one of whom had come twice before, but I had never met the other two. In almost all these half-yearly interview sessions they would ask me whether I would like to make a "confession" on TV or make a press statement. I refused every time. But this time, after I had been imprisoned and suffered the punishment for almost five years, I felt that their request was simply too much and insulting.

"Just think," I said to the officers. "Is it fair for you to request this? I have undergone this unfair punishment for four years and eight months now – almost five years! May be, I should be released by now. Do I still have to make the false confession?"

All the three officers looked at the floor in silence. That was my last session with them. At that time Dr. Mahathir had already been elected President of UMNO with Musa Hitam as Deputy President, and since I knew both of them personally, I cabled them my congratulations. Of course I entertained hopes of being released, but my attitude was not to believe in it until and unless I saw the release order.

All Types of Characters

In our detention area everything went on as usual. The number of inmates in the area had increased. Both blocks were full – almost 30 detainees altogether. S. Husin and several other Malay detainees had been transferred from the neighbouring Area 7 to our area as a preparation for the coming of the fasting month. Before that, Area 7 contained both Malay and Chinese detainees. There were five groups in Area 6 at that time: UMNO or ex-UMNO consisting of two detainees, PSRM with two detainees, PAS with eight, Rohaniah with seven, and Patani with two detainees.

Of course there were others who did not belong to any group: a sailor and sea captain, an Indonesian citizen by the name of Susun Serigar and two others, detained for falsification of passports. Why these non-political cases were not tried in the court was not known. Another, a converted Muslim by the name of Omar Wong was rather proud of his relationship with Datuk Asri, the then President of PAS. Omar always introduced himself thus: "I am Omar Wong, adopted son of Datuk Asri!" He would always come five minutes earlier for the congregational prayer in my block to arrange the prayer rugs and say the *qammat*, the second call to prayer, in his Chinese accent which made his friends

chide him in good humour. He used to tell me about his big business concerns in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. According to him, one of his business concerns handled traditional Chinese medicine. One of his wives had sent him a badminton racquet and a tube of shuttles for him and his friends, but strangely enough, his racquet and shuttles were those of the cheapest quality! He was talkative and liked to jest but sometimes his jokes could be harsh. Once he quarreled with one of the congregation. And, because of that, he stopped coming to the congregational prayer, and in fact, stopped praying! When asked why, he would answer: "On holiday!" It was the same with his fasting: he would fast for 15 days and be "on holiday" for the other 15! When we asked him how he converted to Islam, he answered: "Perkim." Most of the inmates of the area considered him to be not too sane.

As the proverb says: "Many people, many styles." That was how it was with our area. Compared to Area 10 before, Area 6 was noisy and rowdy. Before, in Area 10, there were only four of us. We had our own rooms and we could switch on and off the lights as we pleased. When somebody wanted to work, he could work without interference in his own cell. If he wanted to sleep he could switch off the light in his own cell. You could wake up at midnight to pray or work. The atmosphere was quiet and calm. I liked the arrangement we had there. But Area 6 was neither quiet nor calm. One of the reasons was that there was no cooperation and discipline. I found out that in the Chinese detention areas the discipline was strict and structured and the situation was calm: there were times for exercising and playing, working, reading and studying, eating, resting and sleeping. There were leaders and workers elected from among themselves by the detainees themselves. But in Area 6, there was no discipline and neither could it be established since such a move was opposed by certain quarters. Thus, there was only a minimum of regulations and everybody did as he please. Sometimes the bathroom

was not cleaned for days, drains were not cleaned, the TV set switched on loudly and loud talking and laughing late into the night.

This kind of atmosphere did not lead to harmony and peace. Arguments often took place: concerning the distribution of newspapers, rationed stuff, food, the general condition of the place, and many other things. Twice fist-fights broke out among the inmates, almost causing grievous harm. Because of this topsy-turvy atmosphere I finally decided to go to the office to request a transfer back to Area 10. I will come back to this incident later.

When all the detainees were in the area, such as after midday and on public holidays, the area was usually noisy and rowdy. These were the times for most of us to wash our clothes. The bathroom would be very noisy with people talking, singing, brushing and so on. After that, when there was nothing else to do, they would play or talk. There would be groups playing cards or checkers or just talking with one another. There would be small groups chatting outside the block or in the orchard-garden. Some would play ping-pong or play the guitar or sleep or do some work. Everybody according to his way. Everyone was waiting for the time of his release but not knowing when that time would come. On weekdays, when someone was called to the office to meet his family, his face would shine with happiness. The heart would be filled with the gladness of expectation to meet his beloved wife and children. The more mischievous of his friends would banter: "Hey! Don't get carried away. Don't hug your wife too long!" When he came back, there would usually be food and other things brought by his family for him to eat and share with friends. These were among the sweet moments in detention. But there were also those who were never or seldom visited by their wives and children, not for lack of love or remembrance, but because of distance and poverty!

Condemnation of the Chairman

Meanwhile, the manuscripts which I had sent out two years ago were still not published. Because it had been so long I had given up hope and forgotten about those manuscripts. Like other writers, I like to see my writing published as soon as possible, sometimes feeling impatient even when it had gone into the press. Then, after some time, the excitement would fade or disappear altogether, or you would feel bored with the whole thing. And so it was that I forgot about the manuscripts. At such a time, I suddenly received a parcel containing three of my just-published booklets. I spent the whole day reading them. Eventhough I had not read the final proofs, there were not too many mistakes in the books. The technical production of the books could be considered good. I felt satisfied.

I had expected that my booklet entitled *Masalah Teori Sosial Moden Islam* would cause a controversy among members of my party, the PSRM, due to its Islamic standpoint. Nevertheless, I had allowed its publication since I had come to the conclusion that Islam is the only true foundation for a progressive political struggle – that was why the booklet was published under my personal capacity, under my own name, not as chairman of the PSRM. Other

members of the party who might differ in opinion with me could criticize the views expressed in the booklet in their personal capacity. As I had expected, not long afterwards several high officials of the party who came to visit me raised the issue relating to the booklet. I advised them to discuss the matter *within* the party, but not publicly, except in their personal capacity, since the booklet was not written under my official capacity as chairman of the party. It seemed that they could not accept my suggestion and advice. About a month or two later, I received a copy of the party's newspaper, *Mimbar Sosialis*, with a front page editorial criticizing me openly and under the name of the party. I showed the article to S. Husin and told him I wanted to resign as chairman. So I wrote my resignation letter and showed it to him.

"In my opinion, you should not resign," he said. I was not surprised to hear his counsel, but, when asked for the reasons, he could not give any.

For three days I cancelled my daily work schedule since I needed the time to think over the strong condemnation made by the editors of *Mimbar Sosialis* on my booklet and what steps I should take. A week earlier, my family had come to visit me and my wife told me that a delegation from the party central committee would be visiting me in a week's time to request my resignation from the post of chairman, but she also conveyed the message from several members of the central committee requesting me not to resign. For more than two months prior to this there had already been speculations in several newspapers concerning my booklet and the negative reactions from several groups within the party and the rumour that I would be requested to resign by a delegation from the central committee who would be visiting me. I myself had already decided to resign since I did not want to overstay my time, and my resignation letter had already been written, just waiting for the arrival of the delegation. But when the delegation finally came, they did not request me to resign.

According to Datuk Kampo Radjo, the vice and acting chairman who led the delegation, the issue of the booklet would be discussed in the national congress of the party which would take place in the following month. They also brought a copy of *Mimbar Sosialis* containing the aforementioned condemnation.

After thinking over it for three days, I decided not to resign but to respond point by point to the charges made in *Mimbar Sosialis* and use that response as my statement to the national congress. So I sat down and began drafting my response, which I completed in two days. I felt very satisfied with the response. I showed the draft to S. Husin, who at that time was bedridden due to an accident. I knew that I was putting him in a difficult situation. It would not be fair for him to advise me against responding to the charges, for I had a right to defend myself; but, on the other hand, to approve of my response could mean putting the party in jeopardy. Nevertheless, in principle I had the right to defend myself, and my response was not outside the bounds of our political struggle. Thus he said "O.K." to my response.

Professor Plays Ping-Pong

For almost two weeks S. Husin had been bedridden with his right leg wrapped up in a plaster of Paris. This was the outcome of a professor playing ping-pong dressed only in a *sarung* and slippers!* He had fallen and banged his right knee to the concrete floor about a month ago. An X-ray screening showed a slight fracture in his right knee-cap. The morning he read the draft of my statement to the PSRM congress meant for publication in *Mimbar Sosialis* was a lucky morning for him. About 11:00 AM when I came in from my walk around the area, I saw a group of friends crowding round his bed, some of whom were helping him to pack. I immediately knew what that meant and I rushed over to him, grasping both his hands tightly and congratulating him. "But this is conditional," he said.

"That is not certain yet," I answered. Actually, under Hussein Onn's and Ghazali Shafie's regime, nobody would be unconditionally released.

After he was done with packing he shook hands and said goodbye to his blockmates and fellow-detainees – some of whom he had known for four to five years, some for four

*Even during his detention, S. Husin remained to be a professor in the employ of the University of Malaya.

to five months. Many fellow detainees knew him as a kind-hearted person who used to buy cakes for them every week, always concerned with his friends' welfare, friendly, and humourous too! So, his departure was both a very happy and sad moment, *Ustaz* Osman Marzuki who was detained in connection with the farmers' demonstration in Kedah, said the call to prayer, the *azan*, out loud, making us feel solemn and melancholy.

At the office, a Kuala Lumpur taxi was waiting for S. Husin. To many of the camp staff, his release was a relief, not because he was a difficult prisoner but because he had been detained too long and should have been released earlier. Looking at his bandaged right leg, the Camp Superintendent, Mr. Sha'ari, who had come to say goodbye to S. Husin, said: "Don't go anywhere this first month or two. Just stay at home!" S. Husin who was known for his jesting and humour did not miss the chance to jest for the last time, a joke on himself: "Sure. I'll stay in bed for these two, three months – with my wife, of course!"

CHAPTER 8

DARWIN'S THEORY

Lies and Intrigues

So far in my life I have been hospitalised three times: once when I was still in secondary school in Alur Setar due to yellow fever; once for an operation on my right ankle at the University Hospital in Petaling Jaya in 1971; and the third time when I was in detention. It never occurred to me I would be hospitalised during my detention. I came in for this last time for an operation on the side of my head wounded due to an attack by a fellow detainee. I will relate this incident later. But one Sunday morning, three months after I was discharged from the hospital, I was greatly surprised to read a strange piece of news in the newspaper. The news item was a report on a statement made by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Sanusi Junid, saying that I had been attacked by a fellow detainee during an argument on the origin of man, and supposedly, my defence of Darwin's theory of evolution had aroused his anger! This statement was false and simply a big lie. I immediately requested a meeting with the superintendent of the camp to make a protest.

Since the departure of S. Husin I had been feeling lonely. This was only natural. We have been friends since we entered the university together in 1955. We came from

the opposite ends of the country – he from the south, from Batu Pahat, Johor, and I from the north, from Alur Setar, Kedah. Since then we were not only classmates, but we were also active in the same organisations: the Malay Language Society, the editorial board of *Bahasa**, members of the first Malay Culture Congress, and after graduation, members of PENA** and PSRM. The long companionship and similarity in views made us close friends. When he was released, even though I felt happy for him, I also felt a loss. I went back to my daily schedule, but it was evident that I felt unhappy staying in Area 6. Even though I liked to mix with others, I preferred a more quiet and peaceful atmosphere.

Two months earlier I had made a request to the office asking them to transfer me and S. Husin back to Area 10. The Deputy Superintendent, Encik Kamaruddin, had agreed to the transfer, but he deferred it since S. Husin might soon be released. Now, after S. Husin had been released, I went to the office to revive my request. Encik Kamaruddin promised to transfer me as soon as possible.

Somehow my request for transfer from Area 6 back to Area 10 was known to several inmates in Area 6. One of them asked me why I wanted to move. He asked me in such a way if my transfer was a bad thing for Area 6. I answered that I wanted some privacy and peace to carry on with my work.

Meanwhile, a fellow detainee, Ismail Saad, suggested to me that the position of the beds in our block should be changed so that those who liked to watch TV did not disturb those who wanted to sleep early. As an early sleeper myself who was easily disturbed, I readily agreed with the suggestion and told him to discuss the matter with other block-mates. So that night he held the discussion. Strangely enough, the next morning one of the mates of the block spread the story that I and several others were planning to

*Organ of the Malay Language Society.

**National Writers' Association

When I first heard the story from Susun Serigar, my initial reaction was laughter, for Abdullah Ahmad did not hold any post in the camp and therefore could not, of course, be toppled! Nevertheless, I felt uneasy with the rumour and went to ask Abdullah Ahmad about it. He confirmed the story. When Daud denied the matter to me, I told him I would like to take him to Abdullah Ahmad in order to get to the truth of the matter.

It is known that Datuk Abdullah Ahmad had become a new Malay millionaire. He was a trusted aide of the late Tun Razak while the Tun was Prime Minister. Through his relationship and services to Tun Razak he had risen in politics and had been appointed as one of the Deputy Ministers under the Razak Government. That was how he came to be a millionaire. He was perhaps the richest man in detention and he had the most things in the camp: books, clothings, food, and a fan and a colour TV set. And as the proverb says: *Where there's sugar, there are ants*. So, not a few detainees in our area wanted to seek his favour by offering their services to him. Daud was one of them. Perhaps this was the reason why Daud had told Abdullah Ahmad that there supposedly was a plan to 'topple' him – Daud's means of doing 'service' to Abdullah Ahmad.

A Fistful Solution

The evening of Saturday 24th. January 1981 was an unlucky evening for me – the evening Daud threw an unexpected punch at me. At about 4:20 PM that day, feeling bored of watching my favourite TV programme called “Football Made in Germany”, I had gone back to my place and while resting on my bed I fell asleep. At that time several colleagues including Ismail Saad and Susun Serigar were playing badminton outside. Daud was also there and they asked him why had he spread the rumour saying that there was a group planning to topple Abdullah Ahmad. Daud became furious and attacked them. From there they came into Block B to see Abdullah Ahmad to confirm Daud’s story. Their loud voices woke me up. Hearing the voices of Ismail Saad, Abdullah Ahmad and Daud arguing about Daud’s charges, I got off my bed and walked over to their place. When I arrived there everybody except Daud had already gone out of the block. Seeing me in front of him Daud denied he ever made the accusation. So I asked him to come outside with me to ask Abdullah Ahmad about the matter. It was then, without warning, that Daud threw a heavy punch at my face!

I fell and lost consciousness for a moment. There was

nobody in my block then except for Abdullah Majid. Eventhough the incident occurred near his bed, he did not see it since he was busy doing what he normally liked to do – cutting old newspapers. When I fell, he immediately rushed to my side and pulled my hand, helping me to stand up. “Only a slight bump,” he said, looking at the spot on my face. I stood up and walked back to my bed and looked into the mirror. I was surprised to see a thumb-sized lump-hole on my left cheekbone. I lay down on my bed. In the meantime, several friends had come to see me. One of them, Shamsul Bahri, took a piece of cloth and some warm water and applied fomentation on cheek. “Be patient,” he said. “God-willing, this won’t come to anything.” I asked a friend to report to the office and to tell them that I wanted to go to the hospital.

Meanwhile, there was some havoc in the block. The guard had reported the matter to the office via the block’s telephone. I heard that the order had been issued for Daud to be taken to the jailhouse. The jailhouse was located in a block containing several cells near the administration block. New detainees arriving at the camp and those who broke camp regulations would be detained here while waiting for their trial which would be conducted by the camp authorities. Daud had been ordered to be transfered to this jailhouse.

After about 20 minutes I could see in the mirror that the lump on my cheek was almost gone. I felt better. After that I was taken to the Taiping General Hospital for a check-up. But it was then already about 5:30 PM and I was just given the outpatient treatment. The doctor who treated me asked what my illness was. “I was punched!” I said. He pressed the lumpish area with his fingers. “Nothing serious,” he said. “Don’t worry.” He told me to massage it with ice cubes and gave me some medicine, perhaps a painkiller.

The following day was a Sunday. The office at the camp was closed. I did not do anything that day except rest and

apply fomentation to my cheek. The lump appeared again after subsiding last night and I was beginning to feel the pain on the affected spot. Several friends came to visit me and they put forth several 'theories' to explain the incident. Some of those theories made some sense since they took into account the characters involved, the political and personal power struggles within the area. I noted this in my memory.

At about 11:00 AM that morning I was called to the officer by the officer on duty, Mr. Ponusamy, the Assistant Superintendent of the camp. He wanted to know how the incident could happen. "This is not an official investigation," he explained. "I do not know who is responsible for investigating this case, but if it were me, I would follow the camp regulations and put you in the jailhouse too, Mr. Kassim, pending the result of the investigation." Hearing his explanation, I remained silent. I was surprised to learn that the victim would be punished together with the culprit. Anyway, the next day the sergeant on duty in our block, Mr. Arshad, came to me with the order from the office to transfer me temporarily to the jailhouse!

Now I began to feel the effect of that punch. It was getting difficult for me to eat. A small lump still remained and the left side of my face began to swell. I felt sore that in such a situation I was kept in solitary confinement. I had asked to be sent to the hospital again on Monday morning, but it seemed the hospital van had gone much earlier and they could not send me to the hospital until the following day. I knew the Indian doctor who treated me, but I cannot recall his name now. He asked in English how a poet like me could be involved in a fight! I told him the story and the fact that I was put in solitary confinement and asked him to talk with the Superintendent of the camp so that I would be taken out of the cell.

In the meantime, the X-ray screening showed my left cheekbone had dropped a little from its place (and this made it difficult for me to eat) and was slightly fractured,

and, therefore, I should be hospitalised and operated upon. This was good news to me since it would mean that I did not have to go back to the prison cell. When I returned to camp to take my things at about 2:30 PM, Mr. Ponusamy came over and said: "I have good news for you, Mr. Kassim. I have investigated the case and found you to be innocent. Mr. Daud is in the wrong. You can go back to your area now. But since you will be hospitalised, you can stay there for the time being. When you come back later, we will try the case and punish Daud." I was very happy to hear the news since I had begun to suspect that there was some foul play behind the incident.

Hospitalisation

The Taiping General Hospital was a district hospital built during the colonial days. Since then there had been no addition to its buildings except a new administration block and a dental clinic. It did not have enough wards. I was placed in a third class ward that was full and rather dirty. One of the reasons I did not want to request for a second class ward was because I wanted to experience a third class ward. As I have mentioned earlier, this was the third time I was hospitalised. The first time due to yellow fever when I was still in secondary school and the second time was in when I had an operation on my badly wounded ankle. But this time I was hospitalised under guard. A young policeman was charged with guarding me. According to the regulations he should handcuff me, but I asked him not to. He agreed but made me promise to put my hands in the handcuffs when any officer appeared. I was in luck. That evening a high camp official, Mr. Charan Singh, visited me and through his good offices I was not handcuffed for the duration of my stay in the Taiping Hospital.

Time is a strange thing, causing surprises and bearing many mysteries. Who could have suspected that this thing would happen to me and that I would be hospitalised for

an operation? Within the last two or three days many things had happened to me. I need much more space and time to relate all of them. I had not even told my wife about the matter since I thought it was a small matter. There was no need for me to worry them with such a small matter. Perhaps I would be hospitalised for a week and then, God-willing, I would be better again. Earlier, when I had the shingles, I did not tell my wife and children about it. But now, when the doctor on duty at the ward told me that the operation was a major one, I requested the camp authorities to contact my wife and inform her about it. The next day my wife and children and Mohideen came to visit me at the hospital. Many others also came to visit me, including relatives, friends, party members and also camp officers. That evening I was visited by two police officers from the Taiping police station to make an official investigation on the case since the matter had been reported to them by the camp authorities.

After checking me up, the doctor decided that I was not in good enough condition to undergo the operation – we had to wait for three more days. Furthermore, the necessary equipment were not available at the Taiping Hospital. So, on the third day I was taken in an ambulance to the Ipoh General Hospital to be operated upon by a specialist there.

But to get back to the story of my stay in Taiping Hospital: when I woke up on the first day after the check-up. I was surprised to find a dog sleeping under my bed! At first I thought of making a complaint to the hospital authorities, but then I realised that the two nurses on duty in the ward were very busy caring for all the patients there. So I just forgot about the matter. I felt sad thinking about the situation in our hospitals, especially district hospitals, all over the country. This is an important public service, besides security, education and health services. It should be given priority.

One of the reasons why the rural people do not like to

be treated in the hospital is not that they do not believe in modern medicine, but because of the unsatisfactory and sometimes even rough treatment they received there. I myself have seen and heard credible reports about the harsh treatment in Government hospitals. Of course, not all doctors and nurses treat their patients badly. There are many good doctors and nurses who are responsible and conscientious in their work, but on the other hand, there are also many who are otherwise. The lack of doctors and nurses, unsatisfactory salary schemes for medical personnel and lack of responsibility among some top officials are some of the factors affecting the quality of service in Government hospitals. Lack of funds is the standard reason given why the Government cannot allocate a bigger sum for health services and increase the number of doctors and hospital beds. But as everybody can plainly see, there is a lot of wastage in Government spending. If all this wasteful spending were to be channelled to health services, certainly the people would get a better health service!

On my way to Ipoh General Hospital I was escorted by two policemen and accompanied by two or three other patients. It was a Friday, and we arrived at the hospital after 12:00 noon. My guards reported the matter to the police post and then they sent me over to my ward and left me there without waiting for their replacement to arrive from the Ipoh police station. For about an hour I was left unguarded. In the meantime, my bed had been prepared in Ward 1B. This ward was in a new building: it was a nice ward, very clean, modern and comfortable. There were not many patients in that ward; in fact, in my section there was no other patient besides me. A young nurse came over, "Mr. Kassim?" she asked.

"Mistaken identity," I said. "My name is Osman," I continued, giving her my other name.

"Sorry," she said rather shyly. "You look like Kassim Ahmad, the writer. I like his writing."

"Oh, I know him too," I said. "He is now in detention at Kemunting."

A staff nurse came along and called my name for some business. The young nurse by my side looked at me and smiled. Now it was my turn to apologise. She nodded and held out her hand to shake mine. "I am happy to meet you," she said, and then off she went. Then two policemen came along, one of them holding a pair of handcuffs. The one with the rank of sergeant was muttering under his breath, scolding my earlier guards for leaving me without waiting for their arrival. I just kept quiet. I asked him not to handcuff me. He agreed to bring the matter to the OCPD and told his friend not to handcuff me until they get the decision from the OCPD. But unfortunately the decision was negative and I had to be handcuffed. When another officer came, I appealed once again and this time my appeal was successful and I was not handcuffed until I left the hospital.

Incidentally, Ward 1B was under the care of Dr. Jaya-balan, an old friend of mine, but I did not see him until the following morning. That night I heard over the ward's radio – this was the first time I listened to the radio since being detained – the news that Samad Ismail was being released, and also, his second 'confession'. I had been expecting his release since four or five months earlier after I read the news that he had been offered a lecturer's post in one of the American universities and that two American professors were coming to see the authorities to request for his release and for him to go to the United States. I thought certainly that news item would not have been published on the front page of *Utusan Melayu* if it had not been cleared by the highest authorities. When I voiced this opinion to Abdullah Ahmad at that time, he disagreed with my speculation. Now it is clear that I was right. And that night I speculated that Abdullah Majid's release would come soon following Samad's. This also proved to be right for three weeks later Abdullah Majid was released.

The following morning I met with Dr. Jayabalan. How happy you were to meet with a friend in such a situation! He was on his rounds to see patients and could not stay long with me. I asked him about my operation, but he said he had not studied my case yet. "Just a normal operation," he said. "Don't worry." He was not in charge of my case, but he came to see me almost everyday. In fact, even his wife, whom he had just married, also came to visit me.

The specialist who was in charge of my case, Dr. P. Sinthamoney, said my operation would be carried out on Wednesday. Replying to my question regarding the operation, he said: "Don't worry. This is just a minor operation." I did not worry. But I was not fully convinced of his answer. If I were in his place and asked by a patient regarding a major operation that would be taking place, would I tell him the truth? Perhaps yes, but then again, perhaps no. So, as a patient I had to respect the opinion of my doctor and trust him. Beyond that, we have to put our trust in God. When the operation took place, I think it was a major operation. I was given a general anesthesia and operated upon in two places, one just above my left ear and the other in side my mouth. The purpose was to push my cheekbone back to its original position. If that operation was not done, I would not be able to eat properly all my life.

For four or five days thereafter I suffered severe pain. My face swelled. My head was bandaged. My head was very painful and I could not even sit up. I was given only porridge and soup, but I had no appetite. The fourth day after the operation my lawyer, Mr. Gamany, came with a friend whom I knew well, Mr. Das. He came to know of my operation through the newspapers. With an effort, I sat up and related to them the whole story how the incident occurred. Police surveillance while I was at the hospital was not too strict, and thus I was able to meet and talk with my family and friends rather freely. So I talked with Gamany and Das for about two hours eventhough my

condition prevented me from talking too much. But on the fifth day the swelling began to subside and my headache less, but I still could not take a bath since my head was still bandaged. Only after the tenth day was I able to take a bath and pray as usual. Up till then I only prayed in a sitting position.

On the whole, I was happy staying in that ward. As I mentioned earlier, the ward was brand new, modern and comfortable. The view through the window was pleasing and the air fresh. The nurses were kind. And one of the sisters, Sister Hasnah, was a cousin of mine and she often brought soup for me. When my wife and children came to visit me, they would stay in her house. She and her husband would come along with my wife and children and we would talk for a long time. After my head bandage was taken off and much of pain gone, I did much reading and resting. My wife and Gamany had brought many books and overseas magazines. But within five days I had finished reading all the books and magazines. After a full fortnight, Dr. Sinthamoney discharged me and I left the ward and went back to the camp. I wished I could stay in the ward for another week or so since eventhough I was feeling better I was still not fully recovered. They still had not taken out the bandage in my mouth and I still had to go to the clinic in Ipoh Hospital every week. But it seemed that Dr. Sinthamoney was reluctant to change his decision. I suspected that he was pressured from above to discharge me as soon as possible since at the hospital many people could easily come to see me. Every week for the next one month I went to the Ipoh or Taiping clinic to be treated by Dr. Sinthamoney. After that, God be praised, I was as healthy as ever.

“Defender of the Faith”

When I returned to Area 6, I found my block, i.e. Block B, was rather quiet with only four people left. Abdullah Majid had been taken to Kuala Lumpur by the Special Branch, Abdullah Ahmad was in hospital, and Daud had been transferred to another area. Only I, Ismail Saad, Susun Serigar and two PAS members – Haji Yusof and Ali Zaman – were left in the area. The next day Capt. Serigar, a victim of the Vietnamese refugee ship, the *Hai Hong*, was released.

The incident of the attack on me had been published in the newspapers without my knowledge, and it had become a police case. The incident had several unsavoury implications for the camp administration. How could such a thing happen? Why did it happen? The camp authorities were not too keen to go into the matter. As for me, I was now in good health and I was not interested in pursuing the matter further. I consulted my lawyer, Com. Mohideen, and talked with my wife and we agreed not to pursue the matter. So, on my behalf, Mohideen wrote to the police requesting them to close the case.

Out of the blue, about three months later, the newspapers reported a statement made by the Deputy Minister

of Home Affairs, Sanusi Junid, that the incident was supposedly caused by an argument between me and a fellow detainee regarding Darwin's theory – and that I was punched for defending Darwin! This was indeed a monstrous lie. So I requested a meeting with the Superintendent of the camp, Mr. Sha'ari, and protested against the false statement made by the Deputy Minister. Mr. Sha'ari acknowledged that it was a mistake and requested that it be solved amicably.

How did the 'mistake' happen? From my inquiries later, I got a rather clear idea as to how the false story of the Darwin theory incident came into the picture. Daud had given two reports of the incident to the camp authorities and the reports were duly submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs. One of the reports was a long one, reporting all kinds of conversations between him and other fellow detainees, including myself. In one of those conversations we had talked about the origin of man. Incidentally, about two weeks earlier the camp authorities had brought in a religion teacher from Perak, Haji Md. Saman Kati, to give a lecture to the Muslim detainees in the camp. If I am not mistaken, in his talk he touched on the creation of man and criticised Darwin's theory. I had read a book supposedly written from the Islamic stand point that makes an emotional attack on Darwin's theory entitled *Teori Evolusi – Satu Fakta Atau Asas Ideologi* by Sulaiman Hj. Noordin and Suzanah Abdullah. I did not agree with the emotionally-charged critique and in the course of our conversations I mentioned the matter to one of the warders, Sergeant Arshad. On the same day Daud happened to come to my place, and referring to my critique of Haji Md. Saman's lecture, he asked me to pose questions to Haji Md. Saman. Obviously he had had a talk with Sergeant Arshad.

I told Daud that I would not ask any question since such questions would not benefit anybody. Nevertheless, Daud had his own opinions on the origin of man which he said

he had learnt from his religion teacher. I told him that man was indeed created by God, but His creation underwent several stages, and thus Darwin's theory should not be rejected *in toto*. As far as I can remember, the conversation did not take more than 20 minutes and there was no argument between Daud and I.

This was the source of the fabricated story. I think when Daud's report reached the Deputy Minister, Sanusi Junid, he felt that he now had a good weapon against me since he might have a grudge against me. Before this he had already made one or two statements spiting me for using Islam as a facade. The reason for his grudge against me was due to the fact that I had wanted to sue him in 1975 based on reports reaching me from the kampung folks in the Merbok constituency regarding the possibility of malpractice in his business transactions with them. He was then a Member of Parliament for Jerai, Kedah, which included the Merbok area.

It seemed that the fabrication regarding my being beaten due to my defense of Darwin's theory was based on three factors: the desire of Sanusi Junid for revenge; Daud's desire to cover his own mischief; and the desire of the camp authorities to cover their own incompetence in running the camp.

The Underdog

I had to digress a little in order to clarify the fabrication of the "Darwin's theory" incident. Nevertheless, when I met Mr. Sha'ari (camp superintendent) and when he asked me to find an amicable solution, I agreed on condition that the authorities corrected their mistake. But it was obvious that the authorities, particularly the Deputy Minister who had made the statement, were reluctant to make the correction as I had requested. So I had no other way to clear my name except by taking the matter to court. This course of action was agreed to by my lawyer.

So I informed the authorities of my decision. This caused a strong reaction from the authorities. Many detainees in Area 6 were called to make written and oral statements about me – my views regarding Domsday, fate, paradise and hell and so on! The atmosphere in the area became rather tense. Eventhough I was certain that I was right, I was not too sure about the courage and ability of some of the detainees in telling the truth. In that unhappy and uncertain atmosphere I also felt the ridiculousness of the whole thing! Just look at the ways of man. What bearing does my religious views have – even if they were different from those held by the public – on this case?

None, except to support the prejudice of certain quarters that I had been using religion as a facade to spread socialism, and perhaps communism too. How this can help their case, I don't know!

Nevertheless, in my situation then, I had to consider things very carefully. I and my witnesses were detainees, and the person I would be contesting was the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, i.e. the Ministry that was detaining me and my fellow detainees. As the Malay proverb says: Like the cucumber and the durian, it would be damaged regardless of whether it rolled over the durian or it was being rolled over by the durian – i.e. it is the underdog in a no-win situation. This was the same conclusion arrived at by my party and they suggested that I withhold legal action for the time being. I agreed with their suggestion and a party statement was issued denying the statement made by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs earlier. The statement was published by one newspaper, *The Star* of May 19th, 1981. So much for our freedom of the press! When I was released two months later, the reporters asked me about the incident and I explained it to them. The monthly magazines *Nadi Insan* and *Pembina* had interviewed me and they asked about the incident and I told them the details and refuted the statement made by the Deputy Minister. Some members of the party urged me to take legal action against Sanusi Junid. But what was the use of it? I do not think too many people believed in his fabrication. I myself had denied it. Civil cases such as this would drag on for two or three years. What is the use of wasting such precious time? I am confident that had I taken him to court I would win the case and obtain damages perhaps \$50,000 or more, but it would be better for me to use the time for more positive and worthwhile purposes.

On the day I was released, July 29th, 1981, i.e. two days before 'Id Festival, Daud came to see me to ask for forgiveness and we shook hands. At that time I had no other feeling except gratitude to God and happiness. I forgave

Daud – and thus ended the bitter incident!

CHAPTER 9

LIGHT AFTER THE DARKNESS

A New Prime Minister

A supplication which I never left out in every one of my prayers, obligatory or supererogatory, was the request to God that I should be released with honour, i.e. without having to make any false 'confession', and released without conditions. Now I was in the fifth year of my detention and the Special Branch officers who came to see me still kept on asking me to make my 'confession' before I would be conditionally released. I was not too reluctant to accept a conditional release. But making a 'confession' – how can that be possible? Thus I did not see how they could release me. The road through which I was going was dark indeed and I had resigned myself to a long stay in detention.

But such is the nature of history and life – full of mysteries which can never be fathomed by man. The advent of Islam and Islamic power on the stage of history in the seventh century was a wonder to the world then. So was the fall of the British to the Japanese in Singapore during the Second World War; the fall of Hitler; the purging of Stalin by the Soviet Communist Party in 1956; the split between Russia and the People's Republic of China in 1960; and the denunciation of Mao by the Chinese Communist Party not long after his death, and many other

incidents in history. A historian could make a long list on the twists and turns of history – the wonders of history – but truly, a deeper understanding of the laws of history and life will show us that these incidents are not surprising but to be expected.

The rise of the Islamic movement in history was necessary to establish justice in the world; that was why Islam arose. British imperialism could not last long; that was why it was replaced by Japanese imperialism. Hitler could not go on terrorising Europe, thus he fell. Stalin's cruelties against the Soviet people would, in due course, be exposed; that was why Krushchev started attacking him. The unity of the two communist superpowers, Russia and China, would ruin the balance of power in the world, and thus they fell apart. And Mao, concentrating power in himself, was only repeating the history of Stalin and he experienced the same fate as Stalin. All these go to show the existence of an objective law of history – that in the end truth and justice will triumph. This is the meaning of the Quranic verse: “(For) God has thus ordained: ‘I shall most certainly prevail, I and My apostles!’” (58:21)

The events I mentioned above are historical events of world significance. As for our detention, it was only a local event. Nevertheless, injustice had been done to us and truth had been violated, and those responsible have to bear the consequences in this world and the hereafter. We ourselves may have committed mistakes and we have suffered the consequences. This does not mean that I accept our detention as just. To hold a wrong idea or opinion is not a mistake according to the natural law of justice; if we had committed a crime such as rebellion against the state, the crime had to be proven in a court of law. But the Internal Security Act uses the argument that since the ISA has been passed by Parliament, it is a valid law. But obviously the validity of a law does not *only* lie in the fact that it has been passed by a legislative body. The more important consideration is: Is the law valid from

the standpoint of the natural law of justice?

There is a reason for this digression in my story. Could the political situation in the country towards the end of Hussein Onn Ghazali Shafie's Administration continue? A Kuala Lumpur taxi driver voiced his opinion to me: "If Hussein Onn continues as Prime Minister the country will go to ruin. Corruption is practised openly. The racial tension is sharpening." That was an opinion of an ordinary citizen. How accurate his opinion was, I do not know. But history has proved that it was time for a change in the top leadership of the country. By the will of God, the poor health of the Prime Minister, Hussein Onn, forced him to relinquish his post and thereby open the way for his Deputy, Dr. Mahathir, to take over as President of UMNO and later as Prime Minister. As we know, Dr. Mahathir took over the post of Prime Minister on July 16th. 1981. On the day he became Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir made a statement regarding the detainees which I will never forget. He said: "We have not forgotten them (the detainees). We will re-study their cases."

Noticing a ray of hope for our release, I said to several friends in my block: "Believe me. At most we shall be here only for another six months."

"How's that, my friend?" asked Haji Yusof, a PAS member who had been the leader of the farmers who demonstrated earlier in Pendang, Kedah. He was among the worst tortured during the interrogations of the PAS group. He was the prayer leader for our block. "With Mahathir at the top, we are worse off. Chances are we shall stay for another two years!" he added.

I was surprised to hear him say that. "Why so?" I asked.

"Mahathir is anti-PAS. He accuses us of being Jews and more dangerous than communists."

I laughed aloud at that. "That is just political talk," I said. "PAS makes all kinds of accusations against him. He has to return the accusations."

Who Is Minister of Home Affairs?

It seemed that Haji Yusof was not too confident with my view. Nevertheless, public attention was now focussed on the post of Minister of Home Affairs which was then held by Ghazali Shafie. What would Mahathir do in the promised cabinet reshuffle? Many people believed that under Hussein Onn, Ghazali Shafie had much power. He was not only a powerful Minister of Home Affairs but also often acted as if he was also the Minister of Defence and Foreign Minister. In fact, Abdullah Ahmad described him as "the *de facto* Prime Minister". Political observers knew that Ghazali Shafie had a high ambition. He had hopes of becoming the Prime Minister. In fact, he was almost named by Hussein Onn as his Deputy when Hussein Onn all of a sudden found himself as Prime Minister after the death of Tun Razak in January 1976. But in the end Hussein Onn chose Mahathir as his Deputy.

Nevertheless, it seemed that it was not easy for Ghazali Shafie to relinquish his post or to accept the changes that were taking place. Abdullah Majid related a story that supposedly one midnight, while Ghazali Shafie was performing his *tahajjud* supererogatory prayer with an army officer, he received a sign from the unseen world – a kris!

This was interpreted by him as an omen that he would be given the highest authority in the land, i.e. the prime ministership. Four days before Mahathir became the Prime Minister, Ghazali Shafie himself announced the arrest of the Political Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mahathir), Siddiq Ghouse. I interpreted the arrest with its special timing as a political manoeuvre aimed at Mahathir himself. In fact, the weekly *Watan* implied that, due to the arrest, Mahathir should resign as Prime Minister. But Mahathir had acted quickly by warning the newspapers not to exploit the issue of Siddiq Ghouse's arrest.

The last attempt by Ghazali Shafie to maintain his post was his special interview in *Watan* in which he claimed that the Malaysian police force to be among the best in the world and the security situation of the country was intact – and who was responsible for all this? The unstated answer and its implications were obvious. But all this was ignored by Dr. Mahathir. On July 18th., two days after he took over as Prime Minister, he made a 'minor reshuffle' in the cabinet and replaced Ghazali Shafie with Musa Hitam as Minister of Home Affairs! This was the meaning of my dream three months earlier whereby a *different* Minister of Home Affairs came to see me in detention and told me that I would be released soon. How true! The person who ordered my release was not Ghazali Shafie!

The Last Fasting Month, The Far-Off 'Id Festival

The fasting month of Ramadhan had already started for half a month. Was this the last fasting month in detention for my friends and I in Area 6? Only time would tell. My family had come to see me before the start of the fasting month. Usually the families of Muslim detainees were allowed to visit them on 'Id Festival day eventhough it was a holiday. My family had done it four times in the past four years. Usually after we had finished our 'Id festival congregational prayer at the camp's mosque we would go back to our area at about 10:00 AM. For last year's 'Id Festival, the fourth for me in detention, my family arrived early. They had arrival at the camp while my fellow detainees and I were on our way back to the area after the prayer. Usually these 'Id festival family meetings were not too strictly supervised by the camp authorities. The officers in charge were also human, Muslims moreover, and they could understand our feelings at such a time. As I have mentioned, at such times, tears were beyond control and they flowed freely. But fortunately for me, such an unhappy incident never happened to me.

In our previous meeting before the fasting month, I asked my wife before she left: "Are you coming for the

'Id festival?" Somehow I felt that my question was not too important and I voiced it just as a matter of course, "Sure," said my wife. "Okay, see you on the 'Id festival then", I said. But my wife's quota of visits in the visiting card had been used up and she handed the card over to the officer in charge, saying, jokingly perhaps: "Here, take back your card. I don't want to come anymore!" The officer looked at her in surprise. But he gave her a new card, anyway, saying: "It's better for you not to come – better to celebrate the 'Id festival at home! But if you want to come, here take this card."

The happenings in the world are strange, mysterious and miraculous. Man does not know what is hidden behind the veil of time. For example, does anybody know where and when he will die? But man does have an instinctive knowledge when something is going to happen to him, especially something important. In fact, not only man can feel it but animals too can sense it. Ants, for example, 'know' about the coming of a big flood several days before hand and they would take measures to save themselves by moving to higher grounds. Chicken 'know' the coming of an earthquake and show signs of that knowledge. How do we explain these phenomena? These phenomena prove that human beings, animals and even inanimate things have some kind of links with the unseen world, the spiritual world, and also with one another. If not, how can these phenomena exist?

And so it was that I felt the fasting month then was the last for me in detention and the coming 'Id festival was a far off 'Id festival in the sense that I would not be celebrating it in Kemunting Camp. Nevertheless, I kept this secret and the dream I mentioned earlier to myself, confiding them only to Shamsul Bahri, a fellow detainee who was a member of the mystic *rohaniah* group. During that fasting month I held two feasts: one on the night of mid-Ramadhan as a thanksgiving for the amicable solution arrived at by my party relating to the issue of my booklet,

Masalah Teori Sosial Moden Islam, and for my successful operation in the hospital the previous April; and the other on the night of *tujuh likur** as a farewell dinner for the possible departures that might take place. A number of my friends jokingly teased me about it. "Good news, eh?" asked Salahuddin. He was the former PAS Executive Secretary who had been arrested together with thirteen others in the farmers' demonstration in Alur Setar in 1980. He and Shamsul were good in Arabic and I often practised my Arabic with them. He was the barber for our area. Any time he became bored with his study of English he would come over to my block to cut out photographs of the British Queen and other pictures in the old newspapers – perhaps for his small children. I do not know for sure. The three of us often joked with one another. That day I jokingly said: "What's the use of saving lots of money like Shamsul? For all we know we will die in detention! If we have a little money, it is better to spend it feeding our friends!"

"Hey, I hear my name being mentioned," Shamsul immediately responded. "Is this the list of the Special Branch or the Minister of Home Affairs? If it is the Special Branch's list, add two more years! If it is the Minister's list, we will be free this 'Id festival.

"The list of the Minister of the Kitchen!" answered Salahuddin. In the kitchen, the detainees did the cooking with a wage of 80 cents per person per day. While cooking, they would tell all kinds of stories, and those rich in imagination would list out names of those supposedly to be released that month.

The kitchen area was large – about two acres. There were four or five large kitchens, one of which was used by the Muslim detainees to cook for the Muslims. The rest were used by the Chinese detainees. Some of the detainees like to request for a job in the kitchen or simply do voluntary work in the kitchen. There they could meet fellow-detainees from other areas. Also, they liked to cook

*27th night of Ramadhan.

one on the night of *tujuh likur*, I myself went to cook with the help of two or three others. For that day Ismail Saad, Shamsul Bahri and Salahuddin helped in the cooking. We cooked chicken curry and fried chicken to feed Muslim detainees in two areas numbering about 40 people in all.

That evening was a very busy evening. Abdullah Ahmad also had a *moreh* feast after the *taraweh* prayer.* So, after the *magrib* (sunset) prayer we ate my *kenduri* feast, and after the *taraweh* prayer we ate the *moreh* feast. While eating the *moreh* feast, Abdullah Ahmad implied that he would be transferred to a different place the next day. He did not say where, and nobody asked him about it. All his things had been packed. I speculated that, like Abdullah Majid, he would be taken to Kuala Lumpur to be cajoled into making another statement before being released. I had forgotten that the Minister of Home Affairs was not Ghazali Shafie anymore!

*the congregational supererogatory night prayer during Ramadhan.

A Blessed Morning

The following day was a Wednesday. The Festival day might fall on Saturday or Sunday. I suspected that if there were to be any release before the 'Id Festival it would have to be on Friday. So, on Thursday I planned to prepare some kind of a statement for the reporters who would surely come for it. Thus I went to bed early not only because I wanted to wake up for *sahur*, the pre-dawn supper, but also because I wanted to wake up earlier to perform the supererogatory *tahajjud* prayer.

After the prayer I ate my pre-dawn supper and then did some work until it was time for the *subuh* (dawn) prayer. After the *subuh* prayer I went back to sleep. At about 7:15 AM I awoke because Abdullah Ahmad, who usually slept until 11:00 AM, had awoken and was busy packing. And when Abdullah Ahmad had awoken nobody could remain sleeping! I remembered my brief dream that night. In that dream I saw the word 'RABU' (Wednesday) as the day I would be released. But Wednesday was gone! Surely the dream could not be true. I thought. While I was making my bed, I saw through the window the Deputy Superintendent of the camp, Mr. Kamaruddin, in civilian clothes walking into our area. It was not unusual for him to come

to our area early in the morning, and that morning I thought he was coming to see Abdullah Ahmad packing his things. From afar he had given his *salam* greeting and we answered him. He walked into the block. My place was next to the front door. At Abdullah Ahmad's place further in, Ismail Saad and another person were helping him to pack. When Mr. Kamarudin passed my place, he looked at the boxes of books piled up on a long bench beside my bed. "Are you all set to go home, Mr. Kassim?" he said.

Not suspecting anything, I answered: "Oh, those boxes are always like that."

"Good! We shall go home today!" he said in the most natural voice. Hearing his words, I immediately caught hold of his hand and pulled him outside.

"Don't joke, Mr. Kamaruddin. This is not a joking matter. Is it really true?" I asked.

"It's true! I am not joking!" he answered firmly.

So I held his hand tightly and said: "God be praised! How many of us?"

"Sixteen. Unconditionally released!"

In no time at all the news spread like wild fire throughout the area. I cannot express the happiness I felt then. My heart was full of gratitude to God. Abdullah Ahmad prayed a thanksgiving supererogatory prayer. The area was full of excitement with people congratulating and hugging one another and jumping up and down like children, in sheer happiness. But when the list was brought in, there were four persons in our area not included in it: Ismail Saad, Shamsul Bahri, Megat Mohammad and Haji Yaakob. I felt really sad for them and told them to be patient. In fact, due to a mistake by the camp authorities, one of my detainee friends, Haji Yaakob, a teacher from Gurun, Kedah was at first told that he would be released, but later it was found that his name was not in the list! He was released about six months later together with Ismail Saad and Megat Mohammad. But Shamsul Bahri is still in detention.*

*He has also been released not long after that. – Author.

I took about three hours to pack my things, my books and magazines alone filling seven big boxes. Most of my friends did not have too many things – just a bag of clothings, some books and a few other items. In just over an hour they had already left for the office to reclaim their identity card, withdraw their savings, pay their debts, sign the necessary documents and have their things checked and passed.

When I went over to the office with my things at about 10:00 AM it was as busy as a beehive. The faces of those who had been granted their freedom were shining with happiness and they were all busy shaking hands with one another, with warders and officers from other areas and exchanging addresses with one another and with those not so lucky and were still in detention. When I read the release order, I was surprised to see the words 'unconditionally released!' Eventhough Mr. Kamaruddin had told me about this earlier in the morning I had not been too certain about it. My happiness was beyond expression – freedom upon freedom! A salute to the Minister of Home Affairs! I counted my release papers – there were eight copies altogether, all bearing the signature of the Minister of Home Affairs himself. In my mind, I counted all the papers he had to sign and the time taken to do it – 165 copies needing more than two hours of signing! This was a responsible Minister who took his job seriously. Most people would have just simply rubber-stamped it! According to sources at the office, the decision to release us had been made on Wednesday evening and a special officer had been dispatched from Kuala Lumpur with the release order papers on the same night and he came to the camp at 5:00 AM that morning to hand over the papers to the superintendent. So my dream was true – that we would be released on Wednesday!

“Goodbye!”

When I arrived at the office, several reporters from the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* were already waiting to take photographs and interview us. I avoided being interviewed in the camp area but did not mind being photographed. Two of our fellow detainees, DAP members Ciang Heng Kai and Chan Kok Kit and other freed PAS members had already departed by taxis, each heading for home and his family. Two taxis for Abdullah Ahmad and one for me had arrived and were waiting. We were all set to go. Suddenly Mr. Kamaruddin said to me: “Oh, I forgot to tell you, Mr. Kassim. There is a condition to your release: No guests after 9:00 PM!” Everybody present laughed. Learning from S. Husin, I answered: “That’s a good condition. At least for these first one or two weeks!”

“Goodbye. Have a safe journey home. Don’t come again!” Mr. Sha’ari, the Camp Superintendent said.

“Don’t worry,” Abdullah Ahmad replied. “Kemunting camp is like smallpox or shingles. Once is enough!”

“If PSRM takes over the Government we will close Kemunting,” I added. “But you, sir, and other friends here don’t have to worry. There will be other jobs for you!”

When the taxi drove past the camp's gate heading for our homes, it was 12:45 PM – we were free men again! My taxi could not speed too fast since the back seat was piled high with boxes containing my books. I was impatient to get home. In order to kill time, I talked with the Chinese taxi driver. He did not know much about the Internal Security Act or Kemunting Camp. When there was nothing more to talk about, I just looked out the roadsides. But there was nothing much out there except for bushes, kampung houses, paddy fields, and some new buildings. When I got bored of that, I just entertained my own thoughts thinking about what I would do and what I would say to the reporters later.

Meanwhile, my wife had received the news from Mohideen at about 9:00 AM that morning. Mohideen had been informed by Mr. Kamaruddin. On receiving the news, my wife was speechless for a while – too happy to hear the news.

The news of the release of 21 detainees on the eve of the 'Id Festival had been broadcast over the TV in the late night TV news at 12:00 midnight the night before and again reported in the radio news at 11:00 AM that morning. The announcement was made by Home Affairs Minister Musa Hitam himself. So, starting at about 11:00 AM that morning reporters began to come and wait at my house at 110, Jalan Bunga Raya, Bukit Gelugor, Pulau Pinang.

The taxi arrived in front of my house at 3:15 PM. As soon as I stepped down as a free man my youngest son, Ahmad Shauqi, rushed over and hugged me. All my family members, except for my second daughter Aida who was then at the Teachers Training College in Kota Baru, were all at home waiting for my arrival and for a reunion after nearly five years of absence. The reporters, my friends and party members were waiting in groups inside and outside the house.

After shaking hands all around, I said to the reporters: "I know all of you have been waiting for a long time. But

give me ten minutes to wash up." So I went in, took my ablution, changed my dress and prayed. In the last prostration in my prayer I stayed prostrated for a long time, saying my gratitude and praise to God, the Lord of the worlds.

END

