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MALAYSIA'S GENERAL ELECTION 1990

Continuity, Change, and Ethnic Politics

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I INTRODUCTION

If there is one legacy for which the British can claim credit in Malaysia, it is the parliamentary and electoral system which they left behind. Though the system has been modified, and the rules of the game may have been changed, with more restraints and restrictions being added, the system still allows an element of choice. Since 1957, Malaysia has regularly conducted national elections to determine who should form the government. The 1990 general election, the eighth since independence, is of special interest because it was the first time that a credible, multi-ethnic coalition had emerged to challenge the ruling coalition that has been in office for the past thirty-three years. There were suggestions that with the election, the political system was being and would be transformed -- from the dominance of a single party, to a two-coalition system. The opposition was expected to win enough seats to play a more effective role and to become an alternative government in the future, even if it could not take over the reins of government immediately. The results, however, did not confirm the earlier expectations. The ruling coalition was returned to power with more than a two-third majority, closing another chapter to Malaysia's electoral history. This paper discusses the events and issues leading up to the 1990 elections, the political parties involved, the alignments they made, the strategies they deployed, the manifestos that were published, and the issues they raised in the campaign. There is also a detailed analysis of the results.

II BACKGROUND TO THE POLLS

Though Malaysia's general election was not due until August 1991, rumours of the impending elections had circulated since 1989. The Malaysian public had expected the elections to be called after the euphoria over the country's medal haul at the Southeast Asia games in mid-1989, and later after the successful hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, during which the Prime Minister was given a great deal of exposure in the Malaysian media, receiving the leaders of the Commonwealth and being projected as a leader of world standing. Dr Mahathir himself constantly exhorted his party members and the component parties in the ruling coalition to be ready for the polls.¹ However, 1989 went by without the elections.

Mahathir had not seen 1989 to be opportune, probably due to his assessment that his party might not have got the support that would be needed for a strong showing to take the wind out of the sail of his political rivals. This time around, he had to face an opponent of creditable standing in Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, an ex-colleague who had challenged him for the presidency of UMNO (United Malays National Organization). The acrimonious struggle for power in UMNO in 1987, from which Mahathir emerged the victor by a very slim majority of 43 votes out of the 1,479 votes cast in the UMNO elections, eventually led to a split in the party. When UMNO was declared an illegal organization under Malaysian law (in a court case mounted to challenge the validity of the 1987 UMNO elections and subsequently deregistered), Mahathir formed a new party, UMNO Baru, as a successor. Razaleigh, who was excluded, accused Mahathir of deliberately killing off the old UMNO out of political expediency to eliminate his rivals in the party.² Razaleigh subsequently formed a rival party, Semangat '46 (The Spirit of '46), harking back to the year 1946 when the old UMNO was formed to "protect the survival" of the Malay race in the face of the "threat" arising from the British proposal to liberalize citizenship requirements for the non-Malay communities under the Malayan Union. While Razaleigh might not

have been able to take the majority of the old UMNO members with him, the split in the party enabled him to gather a significant number of leaders and members, to remove the mantle from Mahathir as the absolute leader of the Malay community. Two former Prime Ministers who tried to patch up the rivalry between Mahathir and Razaleigh and their two parties eventually gave up, declaring that only a general election could decide which party would have the mandate of the Malay community at large.

It was clear to Mahathir that Razaleigh would not be an easy pushover as he had a strong base in Kelantan. Razaleigh was also able to form an alliance with Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), UMNO's old rival which has a strong following among the Malays in the northeast Malay belt. Furthermore, Razaleigh had also formed the new Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU or the United Islamic Movement) which includes two smaller Malay parties, Berjasa and Hamin. The Angkatan would now challenge him and UMNO Baru for the support of the Malays at the polls. To challenge Mahathir in the urban centres for the support of the Chinese and Indian communities, Razaleigh had also arranged for an electoral pact with the Democratic Action Party (DAP), which has the support of the majority of the Chinese community. Subsequently, the pact was extended to all the other smaller opposition parties -- Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), Malaysian Solidarity Party, and the newly registered All Malaysia Indian Progressive Front (AMIPF). What emerged was an alliance that was eventually designated as the Gagasan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Might). Within a short span of time, the political scenario in Malaysia had been transformed -- Razaleigh was able to build up a multi-ethnic coalition as an alternative to the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

Mahathir then decided that he had to hit the campaign trail first to drum up support for his party before calling for elections. The public began to expect that the elections would be held in early 1990. With foreign investments pouring in and a booming economy -- factors favourable to the incumbent -- it would have been an opportune time. However, the decision to have the elections was reported to have been postponed a few times. The year opened with a scandal involving a senior member of a coalition partner. The Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives was alleged to have "starred" in some pornographic videos, causing some embarrassment to the government.³ When the furor over that incident died down, another problem arose over the leadership struggle in the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the second largest party in the ruling coalition. MCA leaders and members publicly accused the President of corruption

involving some business companies owned by the party. Other allegations included "dictatorial administration" within the party and "indecisive leadership" when it came to crucial policy matters involving the interests of the Chinese community.⁴ The Prime Minister was concerned that these allegations would be used as issues for the opposition campaign against the government. To save his coalition from losing some crucial seats, it was expedient for the general election to be delayed until these issues could be forgotten by the Chinese electorate.

Mahathir's concerns and his lack of confidence can perhaps be measured from the fact that he eventually went round the country three times, until he was satisfied that he had made sufficient inroads into "lost" territory. On 4 October 1990, he announced that Parliament would be dissolved the next day, ushering in the final showdown between him and his personal rival and their respective parties. Nomination day was set for 11 October and polling, nine days later -- the shortest campaign period in Malaysia's electoral history.

III THE BARISAN NASIONAL'S CAMPAIGN

For the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional, the issues centred on the continuity of rule which the coalition and its predecessor, the Alliance, had provided since independence in 1957. It pointed to its own record of service, prudent policies, and management. In choosing as its theme "Peace, Stability, and Prosperity", the Barisan Nasional highlighted the fact that it had found the correct formula to form the multi-ethnic government and that it had the experience of governing, in contrast to the hastily formed opposition coalition which had got together solely for the sake of winning seats in the election. In addition, the Barisan emphasized that the like-minded leadership among its partners had ensured that inter-ethnic relations were kept on an even keel.³

At the launching of the Barisan manifesto, Mahathir, the Chairman, emphasized that the consensual style of work by the "moderate" leaders in the coalition had been largely responsible for the peace, stability, and security in the country and this in turn had made possible the rapid strides in the economy as well as the much improved standard of living of the people. Among other issues, the 14-point manifesto also pledged to:

- (i) uphold democracy in the country by continuing to allow "free and fair" elections, and freedom of expression "as long as they did not instigate racial or religious conflicts";
- (ii) uphold the independence of the judiciary;
- (iii) continue with the present policy of a liberal, open economy to encourage growth, higher wages and to create employment opportunities;
- (iv) maintain prudent financial policies to make the country an attractive investment centre;

- (v) allow the continuation of Chinese and Tamil primary schools in their present character; and
- (vi) maintain Islam as the official religion of the country and at the same time guarantee the freedom of worship of other religions as stated in the constitution.⁶

In the effort to get its message across, the Barisan repeatedly warned the electorate that they should not risk a change of government as they might put the past achievements of the country and their good life in jeopardy. On the campaign trail, the leaders constantly reminded voters that despite the electoral understanding between the opposition parties in terms of seat allocation, they would not be able to provide effective government because of policy differences. The Barisan exploited the differences between the DAP and PAS over the issue of an Islamic state. In Mahathir's words:

The opposition front is all mixed up with no clear directions... and could not be a creditable alternative. The DAP and PAS had different beliefs and they are not talking to each other. Can you imagine Tengku Razaleigh presiding at a Cabinet meeting, with PAS on one side looking the other way and the DAP on the other, looking another way. How can they do it when they cannot sit at the same table?⁷

However, mid-way through the election campaign, the Barisan changed its strategy. Immediately after the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) withdrew from the Barisan Nasional, UMNO leaders, who were taken by surprise, gave prominence to ethnic and religious issues. Given the fact that the PBS was mainly supported by the Kadazans in Sabah, the majority of whom were Christians, the UMNO leaders unleashed an issue which was very potent among the Malay voters -- the threat to their race and religion.⁸ In their campaign, the UMNO leaders, including the Prime Minister and his Deputy, suggested to the Malay voters that if they were to support the opposition led by Semangat '46, then the Malays would lose their dominant position in the country, since the Semangat '46 leaders were now working so closely with the other ethnic groups. The Christian faith of the Kadazans was emphasized and given great prominence in the media. In particular, the leader of Semangat '46, Tengku Razaleigh was projected as having "sold out" the interests of the Muslim community in his bid for power by allowing himself to be used by the Christians. A picture of him wearing Kadazan native headgear

with a design that resembled a cross was splashed over the front pages of the Malay language newspapers and shown over and over again on the television screen in the bid to discredit him.⁹ Such manipulation of ethnic issues even upset UMNO's coalition partners, and the youth wing of the Gerakan later publicly expressed regret that the country's top leaders should have seen it appropriate to indulge in such activity.¹⁰

IV THE OPPOSITION : PROBLEMS AND CAMPAIGN

In Malaysia, a wide spectrum of opposition parties exists. Their ideological orientations and membership are almost as varied as the country's population, ranging from the ideological left to the religious right. Some are mono-ethnic, while others admit people of all creed and colour. In the previous elections, these parties had gone their own way, competing with each other as much as they challenged the government. In the 1990 election, the scenario changed, under the initiative and leadership of Semangat '46. Though the opposition parties could not form a single coalition like the Barisan, they were able to forge an electoral alliance with two fronts against the ruling coalition.

Forging the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah

Semangat '46 and PAS first worked out an alliance with two other minor Malay-based parties which were localized in Kelantan -- Hamim and Berjasa. Both were members of the Barisan until they crossed over to join the new Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU). Despite the fact that Semangat '46 was secular in orientation, almost in the image of the old UMNO, and that the ideological objective of PAS was the establishment of an Islamic state, the leaders of the two parties saw the necessity to work together. On both sides, it must have been quite a change. Razaleigh had spent all his previous political life in UMNO fighting against PAS and it was he who was directly responsible for bringing down the PAS government in 1978. However, a united front of the two former adversaries was politically expedient for several reasons.

Firstly, an alliance could avoid splitting the votes of the opposition in the general election since both parties would actually be seeking support from the same sector -- the anti-establishment voters. This was quite logical as a split this time would have far greater negative effects. Both parties would be aiming for the Malay voters who would be casting their ballots against UMNO Baru. A united

front was a necessity for electoral victory. PAS had already had a bitter experience in the 1986 elections, though it was not from split votes. The party lost marginally in 14 state constituencies in Kelantan where victory would have brought them control of the state government. Avoiding an opposition split was therefore compelling. At the minimum, some help from Semangat '46 might give them the seats in quite a few of the constituencies where the party had lost marginally in the last election.

The second reason for the formation of the Angkatan was the need for both parties to bolster their images. Semangat '46 was a new party and Razaleigh saw the need to have it firmly rooted in the Malay tradition. Given the rising tide of Islam in the country, an alliance with an Islamic party that was already well-known might be helpful. For PAS, there was a need to tone down its image of an extremist, fundamentalist party. This had already cost the party some votes in the 1986 elections. The Chinese and other non-Muslims were not the only groups that were frightened by the prospect of an Iranian-type fundamentalist society. Even the more "moderate" Malays were apprehensive of the "strict" interpretation of the religion as exemplified by the Iranian example. The PAS leaders thought that a tie-up with Razaleigh and his Semangat '46 might help to soften its image and make it more acceptable to people whose understanding of the "true teachings" of Islam was not adequate.

Despite the need to work together against the common adversary, the Semangat '46-PAS alliance was not without problems, some of which the two parties were not able to solve even when the elections came. The basic problem was an "ideological" one. PAS was interested in the establishment of an Islamic state where all aspects of human life would have to be governed by a very "strict" interpretation of the religion. On the other hand, Semangat '46 was more keen to promote a decent secular government, where Islam would be promoted as an official religion of the country. It might not be wrong to suggest that Semangat '46's policy regarding the role of Islam in the country was more akin to that of the UMNO Baru than what PAS propagated. In the end, the two parties were not able to resolve this conflict and they could not come out with a common manifesto for the elections.¹¹

Another problem faced by the Angkatan concerned the allocation of seats, for ultimately, this was crucial in the elections. Both parties were looking to the rural Malay constituencies and if the Angkatan were to be successful in its quest, this would determine the power equation between them. It was only after many bargaining sessions that both parties agreed to the general formula -- that more

state seats would be given to PAS while Semangat '46 would concentrate its efforts in the parliamentary constituencies. Despite this, the actual allocation of the number of seats and the places that the parties would contest took a great deal of manoeuvring by both parties. Given the fact that an opposition victory in the elections was expected, the parties also had to decide on the formula for the sharing of executive power after the elections. The Angkatan leader stated that an implicit by-product of the seat allocation formula was that should the Angkatan gain enough seats to take over a state government, the *Mentri Besar* would come from PAS, while Semangat would provide the Prime Minister should the opposition win enough seats in the national Parliament. PAS, however, stated that while they had agreed on the formula for the selection of *Mentri Besar*, the Prime Minister's position had yet to be settled.¹²

The third problem in the Semangat '46-PAS relationship concerned the alliances and electoral arrangements the former was trying to make with the other opposition parties in the urban areas, particularly, the DAP. The Chinese-based DAP had always been campaigning against the trend of Islamization that had been implemented by the government. It had been even more opposed to the idea of an Islamic state propagated by PAS. This was the major issue that prevented the formation of an opposition electoral alliance in the 1986 elections. The Islamic party was therefore non-plussed by the refusal of the DAP to make any compromises on the question of Islam. It saw Semangat '46's strategy to ally itself with the DAP in the urban areas as self-defeating as it would dilute the campaign towards Muslim unity and the Islamic state. However, PAS could not prevent Semangat '46 from pursuing its overtures to the DAP, given Razaleigh's vision of a united opposition to challenge the *Barisan Nasional*. In the end, Razaleigh failed to bring PAS and the DAP together, but he was successful in forging another electoral alliance in the urban areas with the DAP, *Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (PRM), the newly registered *All Malaysia Indian Progressive Front* (AMIPF), and the very minor *Malaysian Solidarity Party* (MSP). This second front, the *Gagasan Rakyat Malaysia*, would challenge the *Barisan* primarily in the west coast states and the south.

Gagasan Rakyat

Unlike PAS, which regarded Semangat '46 as an equal, the partners in the *Gagasan* were willing to allow Semangat '46 to play the leadership role. This concession was perhaps inevitable for a few reasons. Firstly, there was a need for

the DAP and other Chinese-based parties to work with a Malay party. In the context of Malaysian politics, the Malays are the most salient group and unless supported by them, no party or group can come to political power. The DAP would have been aware of this fact and its own limitations -- that it would not be able to make further headway towards power if it could not get the support of the Malays. Yet, as a Chinese-based party, it must have realized the political constraints under which the party operated. The emergence of Semangat '46 therefore allowed the party the opportunity to work with and -- should the coalition take over the reins of government -- to share power with a Malay-based party. Secondly, the alliance with a Malay party might also help the party to secure more Malay votes in the mixed constituencies where previously the party's candidates had lost to their MCA opponents, who gained their margin of victory through the Malay voters. Thirdly, the party hoped that its image as an extremist, chauvinistic Chinese party -- due to its long campaign for equal rights for the Chinese and other minority communities -- would be shed in the larger coalition led by a Malay party.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the DAP would have been willing to allow Semangat '46 to play a more prominent role. PRM, MSP, and the AMIPF are relatively smaller parties. They were going to put up only a very limited number of candidates for the elections and therefore did not have problems playing a somewhat secondary position. In contrast to the Angkatan, where each party issued its own manifesto, the Gagasan Rakyat was able to come up with a common manifesto.

The opposition Gagasan began the campaign by appealing to the electorate to deny the Barisan the two-third majority in Parliament, suggesting that this concentration of power had often been abused by the ruling coalition in the past in the many amendments to the constitution, very often for political expediency at the expense of the rights of the common people. The electorate was told that this was a unique opportunity to develop a two-coalition system in the country whereby the opposition would be in a better position to check government abuses and to present itself as an alternative government with different programmes.¹³ In blaming the Barisan Nasional for the economic "malaise" in the country, neglect of the rural peasants, oppression of the workers, authoritarian rule and violation of human rights, corruption and indulgence in money politics, and finally, the manipulation of religious and ethnic differences in the country, the Gagasan Rakyat chose as its theme "Save Malaysia" and urged the electorate to vote for a change for the better. More specifically, the opposition promised to:

- (i) repeal unjust and repressive laws which infringe on the fundamental liberties in the country;
- (ii) prohibit political donations by businesses and business investments by political parties;
- (iii) restore and respect internationally recognized workers rights, including a guaranteed minimum wage;
- (iv) eliminate tolls, road tax and TV license fees;
- (v) provide for increases in civil service and pension allowances and free car and housing loans while lowering repayments for FELDA settlers;
- (vi) increase subsidies to rice farmers;
- (vii) provide for free medical services and access to education;
- (viii) guarantee to "advance Bahasa as the national and common language and to ensure that the other languages are well taught and developed"; and
- (ix) safeguard the rights of the people of Sabah and Sarawak and review federal-state relations.¹⁴

An interesting feature in the elections was the relative downplay of ethnic issues at the early stages of the campaign, which many observers had earlier expected to be the salient ones given the fact that the New Economic Policy (NEP) would come to an end in 1990 after the 20-year period. The NEP has two prongs -- to restructure society and to eliminate poverty. While nobody can object to the poverty eradication programme, the first prong had been controversial, if not for its goal, then in its implementation. A 30 per cent of the ownership quota of the modern economic sector had been set aside for the *bumiputra* (indigenous) community. The redistributive policy had been criticized not only for its discriminative nature, but also for having hindered more rapid economic growth. In addition, the attempt to put into effect the quota in every sector and institution of the modern economy had cause great unease among the non-*bumiputra* community. While some Malay organizations have asked for a continuation, if not for an expansion of the quota, some groups which represent Chinese opinion have stated that they would like to see an end to the quota system.¹⁵ That a new policy would have to be drawn up to replace the NEP was therefore expected to be hotly debated in Malaysia's political arena. In the past it was the opposition party, in particular, the DAP which had pushed issues like equal opportunities for the non-Malays and the safeguarding of Chinese and Indian languages and cultures to the forefront. Contrary to expectation, the opposition's election campaign hardly touched on this controversial or other ethnic issues.

V RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS

The results of Malaysia's elections had always been dull in one respect : the ruling coalition was so well entrenched that in the past, no observer saw a possible change of government, nor even the remote chance that the opposition could break the government's two-third majority in the national Parliament. There was the possibility of the opposition effecting a change in government only at the state level in one or two of the thirteen states. Ever since the debacle in the 1969 elections, the ruling coalition had seemed quite unshakeable. However, in 1990, the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition appeared vulnerable. The opposition had galvanized around Tengku Razaleigh and organized two fronts to take on the ruling coalition. In this election, the opposition was not only talking in terms of denying the Barisan Nasional of the two-third majority, but of forming the next government with the co-operation of some political parties in Sabah and Sarawak.¹⁶

At the state level, the opposition was confident of capturing the state government in at least two states. Kelantan was not only Tengku Razaleigh's home state, but also the stronghold of PAS which had won ten state seats and lost in fourteen other constituencies by majorities of less than 1,000 votes in the previous election. In Penang, the DAP had launched its "do or die" battle to take over the state government by moving its party stalwarts from their "safe" seats to contest against the "strongmen" from the ruling coalition. Backed by the assumption that the DAP would continue to win in its traditional strongholds anyway, this step was deemed necessary for the party to gain additional seats at the expense of the ruling coalition. The calculation was that with Semangat '46 winning in a few constituencies, an opposition takeover was not an impossible target.

For months, the opposition had been campaigning on the issue of a two-coalition system and the idea seemed to have been well received by the public. Thus when the showdown finally came, the aspirations of the opposition could

not be discarded completely in "the most closely fought election in Malaysian history".¹⁷ In the past, Malaysia's election results had been noted to have a cyclical swing, that is, in alternate elections, the opposition would win and lose ground. In the election in 1986, the opposition DAP achieved its best electoral outing, winning 24 seats to the Parliament. If the cyclical pattern was to hold true, then the swing would be against the opposition. Yet, in 1990, few people would have dared to place their bets on that. The opposition's mood seemed upbeat, and even the Barisan leaders were cautious in their assessments though they were confident of victory. As it turned out, the Malaysian voters, however, did not give either the ruling coalition or the opposition what they wanted. The results were mixed, though somewhat in favour of the ruling Barisan Nasional which won with a two-third majority to the Parliament, but lost control of two state legislatures to the opposition.

VI THE BARISAN NASIONAL COALITION

On nomination day itself, the Barisan Nasional won two Parliamentary seats in east Malaysia unopposed. However, before the polling even got started, the leaders were shocked with the loss of a state government. The unusual turn of events came about when one of the partners in the ruling coalition, the Parti Bersatu Sabah, which was in control of Sabah state, crossed over to the opposition. Since Sabah's state election had already been held a few months earlier, the loss could not even be rectified at the polls on 20-21 November. This was the first time in its electoral history that the ruling coalition started on a wrong footing. However, when the results of the elections were announced in the early hours of the morning, the Barisan found that it had beaten off the challenge of the opposition, in particular, Semangat '46. Once again it was returned to power at the national Parliament with more than a two-third majority (70.6 per cent), winning 127 out of the 180 seats contested. In terms of the popular vote, the victory was not as decisive. It secured only 51.95 per cent of the total votes cast compared to 57.4 per cent in the 1986 elections -- a decline of 5.45 per cent. It would seem that there has been a steady decline in the popular votes cast for the Barisan, which received 61 per cent in 1982.

Table 1 shows the number of parliamentary seats that were won by the various parties in the present and the past two elections in 1982 and 1986. In 1982, the Barisan made a clean sweep of all the parliamentary seats in seven states. In 1990, it achieved a 100 per cent success in five states, the same as it did in 1986. In 5 other states, the ruling coalition held the same ground as it did in 1986, winning a large majority of the seats. In the peninsula, the drastic change was in the state of Kelantan, the stronghold of Parti Islam and Tengku Razaleigh. There the results must have come as a shock to the Barisan. Though defeat would have been expected in some constituencies, based on the results of the previous elections and the split in UMNO, the Barisan did not expect to be wiped out completely.¹⁸ All its candidates, including a senior Cabinet Minister, Tengku

TABLE 1
Number of Parliamentary Seats Won by the Parties in Each State, 1982, 1986, and 1990

State	Party			Barisan			DAP			PAS			S46	PBS	In'dent			TOTAL		
	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90	'90	'90	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90			
Perlis	2	2	2																	
Kedah	12	14	14						1									2	2	2
Penang	7	5	5	2	6	6												13	14	14
Perak	21	19	19		4	4												9	11	11
Selangor	11	12	11		2	3												21	23	23
N. Sembilan	6	5	7		2													11	14	14
Malacca	3	4	4	1	1	1												6	7	7
Johor	16	18	18															4	5	5
Pahang	8	10	10															16	18	18
Terengannu	7	8	6							1	1							8	10	10
Kelantan	8	12							4	1	6	7						7	8	8
Fed. Territory	2	3	3	3	4	4												12	13	13
Sabah	10	15	6	1	4													5	7	7
Sarawak	19	21	21	2	1	2								14				16	20	20
Labuan	*		1	*					*									3	2	4
															*	1		*	1	1
Total	132	148	127	9	24	20	5	1	7	8	14	8	4	4	154	177	180			

* Did not exist in 1982

Rithauddin, were decisively defeated. In the previous election, twelve of its thirteen candidates had been returned. In Terengganu, the Barisan also lost some ground, winning only in six out of the eight constituencies, whereas in the two previous elections it had won all the seats. The results of the parliamentary elections in the peninsula indicate that though the Barisan lost ground to the Angkatan in the Malay heartland in the northeast, it very successfully held off the challenge from the Gagasan in all other parts of the peninsula as it did against the opposition in the last election.

Away from the northeast, the Barisan held on solidly to the rural Malay constituencies, the mixed constituencies, and the semi-urban areas. It was not able to make significant inroads into the urban strongholds of the opposition, except in Negeri Sembilan where it defeated the two DAP incumbants in Seremban and Rasah constituencies. In Penang, the Barisan won only five out of the eleven seats, with no improvement over the 1986 performance. In this election, the BN was also not able to recover the ground it conceded in 1986, losing in four urban seats in Perak, four in the Federal Territory, and three in Selangor. In East Malaysia, the Barisan's losses were, as pointed out earlier, not so much through electoral defeats, but through defection when the Parti Bersatu Sabah, which was to contest in fourteen out of the twenty seats in Sabah, crossed over to the opposition Gagasan soon after Nomination Day. Though the Barisan immediately supported other parties and independent candidates who were contesting against the PBS in these constituencies, the PBS candidates emerged the winners. The Barisan was only able to salvage the few remaining contests through another coalition partner, United Sabah National Organization (USNO) -- a Muslim-based party which is a rival to PBS in the domestic politics of Sabah. USNO won in all the six constituencies it contested against independent candidates (rumoured to be supported by the PBS), with very narrow majorities in three. In Sarawak, the expected crossover did not take place and the Barisan won the same number of seats as it did in 1986 -- twenty-one, losing in two constituencies to the DAP and four to independent candidates. Since the number of parliamentary constituencies has been increased by three, the BN is noted to have lost some ground. In this state, another senior Cabinet Minister lost in the Bandar Kuching constituency.

As in the parliamentary election, the Barisan candidates had mainly one-to-one contests in the state elections. The same pattern of success seen in the parliamentary election was also repeated at the state polls. By the time the votes were counted, the ruling coalition had won about 72 per cent of the seats with victories in 253 out of the 351 state constituencies. It was returned to power in ten

out of the eleven states in the peninsula. However, the percentage of seats that it won this time was much lower, 15 per cent less than the number of seats it had won in 1986 and 21 per cent less when compared to the 1982 elections. Of greater significance was the loss of control of the state government in Kelantan where the Barisan lost in all the constituencies it contested to the state legislature.

Table 2 shows the number of seats that were won by the various parties in the 1986 and 1990 elections to the various state legislatures. In Perlis, the Barisan won all the seats to the legislative assembly, as it did in the previous two elections. In four other states, the ruling coalition only conceded between one to four seats to the opposition. It was in the urban centres and the Malay heartland in the northeast that the Barisan did not have such support. In the three west coast states, most of the Barisan losses were in the urban constituencies. In Perak and Selangor, thirteen and six seats respectively were lost to the opposition, mainly to the DAP. The result was quite similar to that of the 1986 elections. In Penang, the ruling coalition lost more ground compared to the previous contests. It only managed to win 19 seats compared to 25 in 1982 and 23 in 1986, respectively. If the Barisan had lost another three seats, it would have lost control of the state government. It is in the northeast that the Barisan losses were most significant. In Terengganu, ten seats were lost compared to only two in 1986 and in Kelantan, much to its own surprise, the Barisan did not even win in a single constituency, though perhaps the loss of the state government would have been expected.

Despite the set-backs, the results must have been most gratifying to the ruling Barisan Nasional. The pre-election atmosphere, if not entirely gloomy, had been one of uncertainty. It was difficult then to pinpoint the extent to which Semangat '46 had been able to wean members away from UMNO and the exact impact this crossover was to have on the electorate. More potent was the fact that Semangat '46 had been able to ally itself to all the opposition parties in the country to mount a common offensive against the Barisan. This time around, the opposition was a multi-ethnic coalition in contrast to the previous two elections when ethnic-based parties battled against the Barisan on their own without being able to present themselves as an alternative to the ruling coalition. In this election, they formed an electoral alliance for the polls to help the opposition avoid a split-vote situation -- a problem which had cost them quite a few seats in the past. In almost all constituencies, the contest was on a one-to-one basis (Barisan vs the opposition).

Yet, despite this, the Barisan coalition came through the elections with a convincing victory by winning a two-third majority to the national Parliament and being returned in ten out of the eleven state legislatures. How did the

TABLE 2
Number of State Assembly Seats Won by the Parties in Each State, 1982, 1986, and 1990

State	Party			Barisan			DAP			PAS			S46	In'dent/Others			TOTAL		
	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90	'90	'82	'86	'90	'82	'86	'90
Perlis	11	14	14							1							12	14	14
Kedah	24	25	26			1				2	3	1					26	28	28
Penang	25	23	19	2	10	14											27	33	33
Perak	38	33	33	4	13	13											42	46	46
Selangor	31	37	35	1	5	6							1	1			33	42	42
N. Sembilan	22	24	24	2	4	4											24	28	28
Malacca	18	17	17	2	3	3											20	20	20
Johor	32	35	32		1	3							1				32	36	36
Pahang	31	32	31	1	1	1							1				32	33	33
Terengganu	23	30	22							5	2	8	2				28	32	32
Kelantan	26	29	0							10	10	24	14			1	36	39	39
Total	281	299	180	12	37	45	18	15	33	19				1			312	351	351

government convince the voters to renew their overwhelming mandate? Several reasons can perhaps be suggested to explain the victory of the Barisan Nasional.

Firstly, the country is experiencing general political stability and a booming economy -- factors which are favourable to any ruling party anywhere, and Malaysia is no exception. Despite various shortcomings in the government's performance through the years since independence, the country's economic growth and political conditions can be favourably compared with many countries in the region. In the 33 years of independence, it had experienced political turmoil and instability only once. That was in 1969 when ethnic riots threatened to tear the country asunder. Compared to the continuous strife in Indochina and the Philippines and the coups in Thailand, Malaysian politics is by far less turbulent. The political stability is reinforced by the relative economic well-being of the country. While poverty is widespread, with great disparity in income between the rich and the poor, the general standard of living is better compared to that of most neighbouring countries in the region. To avoid violent political disruption and economic deterioration, the electorate voted for continuity and gave their support to the incumbents.

The Barisan Nasional also played on the politics of fear. The voters were constantly reminded that should they vote for the opposition, there might be a recurrence of the ethnic conflagration of 1969. The ethnic riots in the capital city in May 1969 have until now remained a strong spectre in the psyche of many, invoking memories of violence and uncertainty. About 200 persons were killed, as the city was gripped in barbaric slaughter and arson for several days. Given this propaganda of fear, many voters might have found it prudent to be cautious. For the sake of continuity and stability, they opted for the status quo.

Secondly, the Barisan benefitted from many built-in advantages for being the incumbent party. These include the timing of the elections and the campaign, as well as the utilization of the instruments of the state for party politics. In all these respects, the Barisan Nasional maximized its advantage. Under Malaysia's parliamentary system, there are no fixed dates for the elections other than the maximum period of five years for a parliament or state legislature. Therefore, the ruling coalition can time the elections to its advantage, and call for the elections around certain events and activities to its own benefit. In this instance, there were suggestions that the elections were not held earlier because the Prime Minister felt that the party was not ready, and he had not been able mobilize enough support for a convincing victory. When the elections were finally called, only a minimum of nine days were allowed for the campaign. It is interesting to note that during the tenure of Dr Mahathir, the time periods provided for campaigning

between nominations and polling have always been short. In 1982, only ten days were allocated, compared to the three weeks given by his predecessor in 1978. The short campaign period was again of tremendous advantage to the ruling coalition, given the fact that the leaders had already been on the campaign trail for months, and given wide publicity in the course of their "official" duties. The Prime Minister himself had already been round the country three times before Parliament was dissolved.

In addition, through the control of the state-owned facilities such as television and radio, and the major newspapers that were owned and controlled by component parties of the Barisan, the ruling coalition was able to maintain a constant high profile, in contrast to the opposition, which were hardly featured in the media or the news. When the opposition did get some exposure, more often than not they were portrayed in a negative light. In fact, the major newspapers were so partial that they even refused to accept paid advertisements from the opposition parties.¹⁹ This shut-out of the opposition was even noted by the Commonwealth Observer Team that was invited by the government to observe the election. On the excuse that the security of the country could be jeopardized, election rallies had been banned, a rule that was applied more to the opposition than the ruling coalition. In a short campaign period, this meant that the opposition was effectively deprived of a major channel of communication with the electorate during the crucial days before the voting as these rallies could draw as many as thirty to forty thousand people at any one time. However, the leaders of the ruling coalition, in their official capacities as ministers were allowed to speak to rally-like large crowds that were organized to "welcome" them. *Ceramah* (political or religious talks in small groups) or indoor meetings were allowed, but these were poor substitutes as far as the opposition was concerned. They either had to pay large sums of money to rent commercial premises or hold their campaign meetings in small halls that were not suitable. Large community halls which were suitable were very often not available as they were usually "booked" by the ruling party. Given the fact that all municipal and local authorities were all controlled by appointees of the state governments under the control of the Barisan, the opposition parties were sometimes not allowed to make bookings for these community halls.

In addition, the ruling coalition made use of state facilities for party politics, as it did in all previous elections. State money was doled out for development projects as part of the election campaign.²⁰ Some groups were targeted for special treatment just prior to the elections. The padi growers were given extra subsidies and fishermen in certain problematic areas in the east coast were given motor-

boat engines. Civil servants in the lower categories got a raise in their allowances. All these activities and "achievements" were, of course, widely publicized in the press and on television. State money was also indirectly used to employ workers for the Barisan's campaign and many civil servants became part of the election machinery of the ruling party.²¹

Thirdly, as the incumbent, the Barisan had access to financial resources which the opposition could never hope for. Funds were easily solicited from the corporations operating in the country, and also from the companies owned by the component parties which had been given very lucrative contracts and projects by the government. With such vast financial resources, the Barisan was able to build up an effective party and election machinery and to ensure its smooth functioning. Its candidates were given resources to print propaganda materials, employ campaign workers to disseminate information, canvas for votes and ensure that party supporters turned up to vote on polling day. It should be noted that despite these advantages of incumbency, some of the coalition partners were not able to overcome other deficiencies to do well. These issues are discussed below.

UMNO Baru in Peninsular Malaysia

In the past, the Barisan Nasional had always relied on UMNO to be the backbone in the electoral campaign and UMNO had always been able to deliver the votes. However, in the 1990 election, there were some doubts as to whether the new party, UMNO Baru, which Mahathir had formed as a successor to the original party, would be able to mobilize the same level of support from the Malays, in view of the fact that Semangat '46 was also claiming to be the successor to the original UMNO. The outcome of the elections showed otherwise -- that UMNO Baru was still able to obtain the endorsement of the Malay community. The fact that the Barisan Nasional had been able to retain power with the two-third majority to the Parliament in this election could again be attributed primarily to UMNO Baru, the dominant coalition partner. As it had done in the previous elections, the party had not only held off all challenges to its dominant position from the other Malay-based parties, but had also helped to deliver the Malay votes to the candidates of its non-Malay coalition partners in constituencies where the Malay votes were crucial to the outcome of the contests.

Despite losing some ground, UMNO Baru's hold over electoral politics still remained reasonably firm as the results demonstrated. The party won 71 out of the 86 seats contested, although this was less than the 83 victories in the 84 constituencies in 1986. In terms of votes, the party managed to get 29.6 per cent

of the total valid votes cast in the parliamentary elections, a decline of 2.3 per cent from the 1986 figures. It should be noted that all the UMNO Baru candidates from nine states and the Federal Territory won their contests. It is only in two states that UMNO Baru lost ground significantly to allow for a turnover of parliamentary seats. In Kelantan, all the thirteen Barisan candidates were from UMNO Baru and they were all defeated, in contrast to the 1986 election when eleven out of the twelve UMNO candidates won. In terms of popular votes, it managed to secure only 32 per cent, in contrast to 54.1 per cent total garnered by the eleven UMNO and one Hamrin candidate who stood on the Barisan ticket in 1986. Terengganu was the only other state where UMNO Baru candidates lost in this parliamentary election. Two of the eight candidates were defeated, in contrast to the clean sweep in 1986. In terms of popular votes, there was a decline from 60.2 to 52.86 per cent.

UMNO Baru's electoral strength at the parliamentary election is also shown in the state elections. Altogether, the party contested in 246 state constituencies and 196 (80 per cent) of its candidates were successful. As in the parliamentary election, there was also a slight decline. The party had won in 228 (90 per cent) out of the 240 state constituencies in 1986. In seven of the eleven states, all the UMNO Baru candidates won. The party only conceded one seat each in Johor and Kedah. In the latter state, UMNO Baru even recovered two seats that were lost to Parti Islam in 1986. It was in the northeast coast that UMNO Baru candidates were defeated. The party lost the state when all the 38 candidates lost in Kelantan in comparison with only a 10-seat loss in the previous two state elections. In Terengganu, UMNO Baru was defeated in ten constituencies, whereas it conceded only two seats in 1986.

Other than in the northeast coast, UMNO Baru had successfully taken over the mantle of the old UMNO, and had been able to secure the support of the Malay community. UMNO Baru appears to have successfully identified itself as the old UMNO, and seems to have been endorsed as such by the electorate. That was perhaps why the Malay voters were not prepared to vote for a change to Semangat '46. Since independence in 1957, UMNO's electoral strength had ensured that it dominated the government which had adopted policies seen to be favourable to the Malay community. In the past, special preferences had been given to the Malays at all levels of the civil service. They have also been given special concessions in access to education and academic scholarships. In the New Economic Policy that was adopted under the Second Malaysia Plan in 1970, quotas have also been set for them in commerce and industry. Special preferential shares at discounted prices, attractive loan schemes, and contracts have been provided in the push to reach a 30 per cent ownership target for the *bumiputra*

community. While the better-off Malays might have been in a better position to take advantage of these privileges, the less-well-to do have not missed out on a piece of the pie either. In addition, there have been special infrastructural, land development and subsidy programmes for the rural Malays. Since 1967, the Malay language has been adopted as the sole national and official language of the country, and in more recent times, Islam has been promoted intensely as the sole official religion. All these factors, if they have not endeared UMNO and UMNO Baru to the majority of the Malay population, have at the minimum helped to enhance the party's image as the "protector" of the Malay community's interests.

In this election, UMNO Baru leaders, in particular, used the politics of fear as an election tool very effectively. Mid-way through the campaign, after the Parti Bersatu Sabah withdrew from the Barisan, they immediately identified PBS as a Christian party, and pronounced that its demand for a television channel for Sabah was a demand to promote Christianity in the state and, ultimately, the country.²² Since PBS was allied to UMNO Baru's rival, Semangat '46, UMNO Baru's leaders directed their propaganda to taint the Semangat '46 as the party that had betrayed the interests of the Malays and the Muslims in the country. They suggested that in his thirst for power Tengku Razaleigh had become a willing instrument for the Kadazan/Christians' subversion of Malay interests, and warned the Malay voters that if they were not careful, the special position of the Malays in the country as well as their religion would be threatened. Tengku Razaleigh's Kadazan headgear which had a pattern that resembled a cross was given the widest coverage possible in the media. In all plural societies, race and religion have always been explosive issues. Given the disparity in religion, culture, and way of life between the various ethnic groups in Malaysia, UMNO Baru's campaign was particularly potent. And, not surprisingly, it translated into votes for UMNO Baru.

Other contributing factors to UMNO Baru's victory can also be identified. Despite the imposition of a democratic system, the substance of Malay political culture is still very much "feudal". While modernization has brought social and economic changes, Malay society is still hierarchical and many traditional values are still adhered to. The *rakyat* (people) still have a reverence for authority which they would question only under very exceptional circumstances. To most Malays, UMNO, which had been in power ever since independence is both government and ruler. This identification has moulded a perception that the authority and leadership of UMNO should not be challenged. In the past, rivals to the ruling coalition have found it difficult to break this traditional bond between the rulers and the ruled. As in the feudal tradition where the lords "protected" and

"rewarded" the faithful and loyal, UMNO too had rewarded and protected its supporters. The party had ensured that the government adopted "pro-Malay" policies and the symbols of Malay sovereignty have been maintained in national life. This bond between UMNO and the Malay electorate has contributed to the fact that UMNO has been returned to power time and time again.

In Malaysia's political arena, UMNO (and later, UMNO Baru) is the only party that has the machinery to reach throughout the country. The party has branches in every constituency, a position that is unrivalled by any other party. On the ground, it was said that the party could cover the area very intensively -- one party member to every ten households during the election campaign. The party member was not only responsible for canvassing for the votes, but also ensured that the villagers under his charge turned up at the polling station on election day. Of all the parties, UMNO Baru's financial resources for any electoral contest cannot be rivalled by any other organization. It could afford to pay for party workers, in contrast to its rivals which in the main depended on voluntary workers.

Given the circumstances above, how then can one account for the exception among the voters in the northeast coast, particularly in Kelantan? In that state, there was a massive swing against UMNO Baru, and the people ultimately voted for a change of government. In an election post-mortem, Dr Mahathir stated that "parochialism" was the factor that made the people turn against UMNO. What seems to be suggested was that the people were "narrow-minded" in their thinking in rejecting UMNO Baru, on the basis that Tengku Razaleigh had left UMNO and was out of power. Other than what had been suggested by Mahathir, there were several factors which could have been decisive in influencing the outcome of this election. Firstly, the importance of PAS in Kelantan politics must be taken into account. Despite the fact that it had lost out in the past three elections, Kelantan could still be considered a PAS stronghold. From 1959 until 1978, PAS had ruled the state. In the 1986 parliamentary election, the party still managed to get 44.78 per cent of the total votes, almost the same as it had done in the 1982 election. In the 1986 state election, the party won ten seats and lost fourteen others by margins of less than one thousand votes. The influence of Parti Islam in the state cannot not be discounted, particularly given the rising trend of Islamic influences in the country and abroad.

Secondly, the appeal of Tengku Razaleigh must be considered. A prince from the royal household of the state, he is an uncle of the present Sultan. Since the late 1970s, UMNO politics in Kelantan had become almost synonymous with Razaleigh, and he was the one credited for delivering the state back to UMNO's

rule in 1978. Razaleigh's influence had spilled beyond UMNO and he had a very strong personal following in the state. To many of his ardent (some say fanatical) supporters he is *the* leader, with charismatic influence. That was one of the reasons why he had been kept back in the Cabinet, despite demand for him to be kept out by some opponents after his two defeats for the Deputy President's post in UMNO. Given the fact that in 1990, Razaleigh was leading the opposition against UMNO Baru, it was not surprising that many voters decided to support him. If Parti Islam's proportion of votes can be assumed to have been the same as in 1986, then the 22.1 per cent swing against UMNO Baru could be attributed to Razaleigh.

In the aftermath of the elections, an issue that has emerged concerns the "interference" of the rulers in state politics. This was put on the agenda of the annual assembly of UMNO Baru in November 1990. The fact that the party put this item up for open discussion is perhaps a reflection of the anger that the party leaders have towards the sultans, in particular, the Ruler of Kelantan. Many have attributed the fall of UMNO Baru in the state to "palace support for the combined Malay opposition".²³ The Deputy Home Minister was reported to have criticized the Sultan who "had openly involved himself in politics". Apparently, "His Majesty gave orders to civil servants to support the party which opposed the National Front", causing "confusion and uncertainty".²⁴ In fact, long before the elections, it was known that the Sultan had not been predisposed towards UMNO Baru in the state and in particular, its chief representative in the state, the Menteri Besar. In the 1986 elections, it was rumoured that he called on his subjects not to vote for UMNO then. Soon after that, he snubbed the Menteri Besar by delaying and even refusing his requests for audiences. These later turned into outright antagonisms -- the Menteri Besar was even left out of the ruler's invitation list for his birthday celebrations. In traditional feudal societies, the ruler's word is law. Of all the Malay states, Kelantan is the most traditional and the Sultan is still influential, despite the fact that he is a constitutional monarch. It is difficult to measure the exact impact of the Sultan's role in the campaign against UMNO Baru. However, in the context of Kelantan politics, it is widely held that his actions were detrimental to UMNO Baru's efforts.

It has been suggested earlier that the politics of fear had enabled UMNO Baru to rally the support of the Malays in other parts of the peninsula, but this was not enough to roll back the tide against UMNO Baru in Kelantan. In that state, UMNO Baru had to face an alliance of Parti Islam, Tengku Razaleigh and the Sultan, a formidable combination to contend with and one it could not overcome. It should also be noted that of all the states, Kelantan and Terengganu are the most

Malay in character. More than 93 per cent of the registered voters are Malays, in comparison with Perlis (82 per cent), Kedah (74 per cent), Pahang (64 per cent) and, all the other states, which have less than 55 per cent. Malay sovereignty and the Islamic religion can therefore be seen to be well entrenched and unchallengeable. The strength of PAS in the state had also ensured the absolute domination of Islam in the everyday life of the people. In view of the fact that the non-Malay presence in the state is negligible, and can perhaps even be described as well integrated into the community there, the perception of threat from the non-Malays did not exist. It is therefore not surprising to find that the voters ultimately rejected UMNO Baru's propaganda in the election -- that Malay domination and Islam would be threatened should the electorate give their votes to the opposition. The people were much more willing to change, given the encouragement from their Sultan, their leader, Tengku Razaleigh, and the religious authority (in the form of PAS).

MCA : Unable to Recover Lost Ground

The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) is the second largest party in the ruling coalition. In this election, it was allocated thirty-two parliamentary seats to contest, the same number as in the previous election. After the disappointing performance in 1986, when it won only 17 out of the 32 seats (compared to 24 out of 28 in 1982), the party had hoped that the pendulum would swing back to its favour. However, the results proved to be contrary. There was only a marginal improvement, with the addition of one seat. In terms of total votes cast in the parliamentary election, the party secured only 11.27 per cent, a decline of 1.48 per cent from 1986 and 7.14 per cent compared to the 1982 elections respectively. In the urban centres with large Chinese majorities, the party's performance had always been far from satisfactory. In the Federal Territory and Penang, all the party's seven parliamentary and nine state candidates were defeated. In Perak and Selangor, it only managed to win a minority of the seats it contested -- three out of seven and two out of five respectively. However, all the MCA candidates in Kedah (2), Pahang (3), and in Johor (5) were returned, as in the previous election. The party did best in Negeri Sembilan, where its candidates defeated the two incumbents from the DAP. It is notable that thirteen of the MCA candidates were returned in constituencies where the Chinese voters formed less than 50 per cent of the electorate.

In the state election, the party experienced a further decline from the two previous elections. It contested in 64 constituencies throughout the country and

won only in 34, compared to 43 in 1986 and a far cry from the 55 in the 1982 election (out of 62 constituencies).²⁸ The weakness of the party in the urban Chinese constituencies at the parliamentary level was also reflected at the state level. There was a very high rejection of the MCA in two states in particular. In Penang, all the nine candidates were defeated and in Perak, there were nine losses out of the twelve constituencies, a performance worse than the debacle in 1986. In the majority of the other states, the party suffered further losses where previously it had done very creditably. In Johor, it won only eight seats (previously ten) and in Selangor, the party won in six constituencies compared to eight in 1986.

The MCA's relationship with the Chinese electorate is markedly different from that between UMNO/UMNO Baru and the Malays. While the Malays feel protected by UMNO because the party had been dominant within the government, and had ensured that government policies were partial towards them, the Chinese were alienated from the MCA because they feel that the party had not been able to protect the interests of the Chinese community, despite being a member of the ruling coalition. Since independence, the Chinese have always felt that they have got the short end of the stick and that there has been discrimination against them. Special privileges had been given to the Malays in access to education, scholarships, admission to the civil service, subsidies in agriculture and land development schemes. Special preference and quotas in trade, contracts, commerce and industry have also been added under the New Economic Policy. In addition, there was the perception that their way of life had been encroached upon by the government. The Chinese felt a threat to their language, education, culture, and religion. The unwillingness on the part of the government to amend the laws relating to independent (Chinese) schools, despite repeated promises at many general elections has been a source of concern.

The Education Act of 1961 had given the power to the government to abolish any independent school where Chinese or Tamil is used as the medium of instruction, and to establish in its place a national school where Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is used as the medium of instruction. The Chinese community had always felt that the Chinese schools were the target of this law since many UMNO leaders have always viewed the existence of the Chinese schools as a hindrance to the national language policy and national unity.

A trend towards Islamization in the country has also been of concern to the Chinese and other non-Muslim communities. In 1988, the state of Selangor which has a very high proportion of Chinese and Indians, and has long been considered the most "modern", even passed a law allowing conversion of minors to Islam

without parental consent. Despite being ruled unconstitutional in a case that came before the court, the laws are still in the statute books. There was therefore a fear on the part of those of non-Muslim faith that in the long term, they might not even be allowed to practise their own religions freely. Increasingly, there was a fear that the Chinese way of life would be suppressed with the promotion of Malay culture as the national culture to the exclusion of other cultures, and by the Islamization of the country.

The Chinese have put the blame on the MCA for not being willing, or able, to articulate their concerns and protect the interests of the community, even though the party had been a partner in the ruling coalition. In fact, there were times when the party was not only seen to be ineffective, but was regarded as a tool of UMNO. It is therefore not surprising that time and again, the MCA candidates had been rejected by the Chinese voters in the elections. In frustration and in protest, the large majority had cast their votes for the opposition parties.

In this election, the MCA tried to win back the disaffected voters it lost in 1986, by tackling some of the issues that were salient to the Chinese community. While the same promises were made in the Barisan manifesto regarding the freedom of worship and the maintenance of the Chinese schools as they existed, the party was not able to get the laws repealed before the election. However, the "guarantees" were not believable, given the experience of the 1982 elections. On that occasion, the party campaigned on the issue of strong Chinese representation in the government to ensure its effectiveness. It was given an overwhelming mandate when almost all the parliamentary and state candidates were returned. Despite these victories, the MCA leadership did not succeed in effecting any change in government policy on issues which were of concern to the Chinese. Since then, the party had not been able to regain its credibility and this was detrimental to the party at the polls.

In the 1990 election, the MCA's performance was also adversely affected by the anti-Barisan atmosphere brought about by the electoral alliance of the opposition parties. The urban Chinese, who have traditionally voted for the opposition, were caught up in this upswell, thinking that a change of government was possible. The anti-establishment mood was further fuelled by the withdrawal of the Parti Bersatu Sabah from the Barisan Nasional. The PBS crossover was significant because the Kadazan-based party controlled one of the the state governments in East Malaysia. This bold step by an establishment party probably influenced many fence-sitters in the urban constituencies into voting against the MCA. After the PBS crossover, UMNO Baru's campaign along ethnic and religious lines did not help the MCA at all. The emphasis on the need for Malay

and Islamic dominance further aggravated the Chinese electorate against the ruling coalition. And since it was the MCA candidates who were contesting in the urban centres, they bore the brunt of the dissatisfaction.

The poor performance of the MCA in the elections can also be attributed to the party itself. A few months before the elections, two factions were locked in a contest for the control of the party. While the internal power struggle was not as serious as the one that took place prior to the 1986 elections, the party created a very poor image of itself among the population at large. Top party leaders, including the Deputy President, publicly accused the party leader of corruption in the disposal of the party-owned companies, weak leadership in representing the Chinese community and dictatorial tendencies in the administration of the party -- allegations which even the opposition had not put in such blunt terms.²⁶ Coming from the top echelons of the party, the accusations were taken much more seriously. This campaign against the party President was not strong enough to dislodge him from the position in the party, but it definitely did his image no good in the eyes of the public.

If the party leader lost "face", many of his MCA opponents also lost their credibility on two counts. Firstly, after making all the accusations publicly, his opponents backed off from contesting the presidency when they realized that they did not have enough support within the party. Instead, they decided to patch-up and eventually endorsed him for re-election while they tried to hold on to their positions in the party! Secondly, the top leaders of the party had demonstrated indecisiveness over this relatively small crisis. They changed their minds many times in the short course of the party combat. In the end, almost the entire top leadership came badly in their power struggle. The Chinese community, which could only watch in amazement, if not embarrassment at the action of these "leaders" at that time, probably decided that they might be better off voting for the opposition.

There was another aspect of the internal bickering within the party that also cost its candidates some votes. In many areas, the local leaders had expected to be nominated for the elections. Eventually, some of them were not selected by the national leaders. These aspirants who were left out did not co-operate in the campaign, and since they were local grass-roots members, the party's efforts were therefore hampered.²⁷

In the 1982 elections, the MCA had benefited from the endorsement given to the Barisan by the Chinese educationists, some of whom even stood on the Barisan ticket. However, in 1990, many prominent leaders in the movement, plainly dissatisfied with the government's policy, joined the DAP just prior to the

elections. The Chinese educationists were an influential group, given the fact that about 85 per cent of the Chinese primary-school age students were in Chinese-medium schools. In 1987, the movement went up in arms against the government when 54 administrators who did not have any formal Chinese education qualifications were sent to some schools as senior assistants. The Chinese educationists felt that this was the first step in an attempt to change the character of the Chinese schools, and this perception had been reinforced by the unwillingness on the part of the government to repeal Section 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act which gives the government the power to abolish any schools it deemed fit. The issue became so heated that even though the MCA refused to take a position publicly, some prominent leaders of the party join in the fray against the action of the government, concerned that their reputation might deteriorate further in the eyes of the Chinese community. The agitation eventually led to mass arrests in October 1987 with many Chinese educationists being among those incarcerated. This action further aggravated the Chinese educationists, and was perhaps the prime reason that prompted many of them to join the opposition to contest in the 1990 election. The MCA was seen to acquiesce to the slow but sure encroachment of the government on the Chinese schools, something which has never been looked upon favourably among the Chinese.

In the attempt to win back the discontented Chinese voters, the MCA got the government to agree to certain policy changes which it thought would be of some interest to the Chinese population. The announcements were timed for the elections, but unfortunately for the party, they did not have the intended impact. The first regarded travel to China. In the past, visits to China were totally prohibited, except for people above 65 years of age, for those who needed medical treatment which was not available in Malaysia, or for those going as part of an official government delegation. Subsequently, the rule was relaxed and private individuals were given permission to go for the purpose of promoting business, particularly, exports. Even then, a police officer, whose expenses had to be borne by those going, had to accompany the group. While China may not have the same emotional, chauvinistic appeal for the Malaysian Chinese as it had many decades ago, there were still substantial numbers who were keen to travel there, out of curiosity or a romantic notion regarding the land of their ancestors. The restrictions imposed by the government were therefore considered to be unfair and unnecessary. By getting the government to lift all restrictions on travel to China and expediting the process for all applications, the MCA had hoped that there would be some political gains to be reaped. Unfortunately, this concession was lost in the bigger issues of concern to the Chinese.

The second policy change involved the government's recognition of the diplomas and degrees obtained from or through the Tengku Abdul Rahman (TAR) College. TAR College was established by the party in 1969 to provide opportunities for further education to young Chinese students who could not proceed to higher education in the governmental institutions, very often for reasons which were not of an academic nature. The college started with sixth form classes, but soon moved into the preparation of students for professional examinations which were offered by professional bodies overseas. While the private sector had always given due recognition to the certificates and diplomas which the students had obtained through TAR College, the government had not accepted them for employment in the public service. Though very few students would have actually opted for public sector employment, the issue remained a sore point because similar qualifications obtained by the students through MARA College, an institution set up by the government exclusively for Malay students, were recognized by the government. Just before the elections, the government announced the recognition of the qualifications, with the proviso that the students should have also obtained a credit in the Bahasa Malaysia paper for the MCE examination at the form five level. However, since many of the students who had opted to study at TAR College had done so because they could not proceed with their education in public institutions due, in part, to their failure to obtain a credit in the language paper, the government's recognition was inconsequential. It would seem that the MCA and the Government again did not gain much in terms of political capital. The MCA was not the only party rejected by the majority of the Chinese. Its fellow Barisan member, the Gerakan which also depended on the Chinese votes, had the same problem.

The Gerakan and the MIC

Another component party of the Barisan that also suffered a further decline in the 1990 elections was the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia. The party was founded as a multi-ethnic party in 1968 but in recent elections, it had projected itself and had been perceived as a Chinese-based party. As it was an urban-based party, it also had to rely on the Chinese votes. In 1990, the party contested in nine parliamentary constituencies, as it did in the previous election, and held on to the same five seats it won in 1986 -- three in Perak and one each in Penang and the Federal Territory. In Penang, considered its stronghold, it could not recover the ground it lost in 1986. The party lost in three of the four constituencies. Its percentage of total

votes declined marginally. The party was also unhappy over the results of the state elections as it won only eleven out of the 21 seats it contested in the various states, a marginal decline from 1986, but a far cry from the 1982 elections where it won fifteen out of the eighteen seats contested. The most significant slide was in Penang, where it held on to only seven seats, half the number won by its opponent, the DAP. Even the Gerakan Chief Minister was defeated in the very constituency that he had represented for 22 years. The weak performance and the departure of the Chief Minister have raised doubts as to the capability of the party to provide leadership under the Barisan government in Penang. Though the chief executive's position still went to the Gerakan for continuity and expediency, the party knew that it would have to depend on the goodwill of UMNO Baru, which won all the ten seats it contested. Though the Gerakan did not suffer from any bruising internal power struggle or scandals like the MCA, it still suffered as a result of the same anti-government tide among the urban Chinese electorate which was unhappy over government policies considered discriminatory against them. As a member of the ruling coalition, this was perhaps something that it could not avoid.

The Indian component of the ruling coalition, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), was the only Barisan member that has held its ground over the last few elections. The fact that it only contested a small number of seats helped in this matter. In 1990, the party also won all the six parliamentary and twelve of the thirteen constituencies it contested throughout the country. Since the Indian electorate was thinly spread out, there is no Indian-majority constituency. At the most, the Indian voters constituted about 20 per cent of the electorate in the constituency. Thus, the party was very dependent on the assistance of its coalition partner, especially UMNO Baru, since all the MIC constituencies had high proportions of Malay voters.

The MIC actually entered this election with a lot of controversy behind it. A very popular Vice-President was sacked from the party for not towing the President's line. He subsequently formed the All Malaya Indian Progressive Front to oppose the party. At the beginning of 1990, the Secretary of the party who was also the Deputy Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) was forced to resign from both the House and his party position amidst the controversy that he had "starred" in some pornographic videos. The embarrassment from this incident had barely died down when the President made a very controversial decision at the time of nomination by dropping the Deputy and a Vice-President, despite the fact that they were both serving Members of Parliament and Deputy

Ministers. The party leader must have heaved a sigh of relief when it was proven that these negative developments did not have any adverse effect on the party's performance. However, since the party was not dependent on the votes of the party members, but the votes that would be delivered by UMNO Baru, this should have been expected.

The Barisan's Performance in West Malaysia

While the Barisan had been able to stem the tide of the opposition and was returned to the federal Parliament with slightly more than a two-third majority, several observations can be made. Firstly, its victory is not as decisive when compared to the last four elections. Having obtained about 70 per cent of the seats in the Dewan Rakyat, this is perhaps the worst performance since the debacle in 1969. Since the 1974 election, it had always won more than 83 per cent of the seats to the Lower House. There were 24 constituencies where the Barisan candidates obtained majorities of less than 10 per cent. The majority in these constituencies came to a total of only 38,261 votes. In another 16 constituencies where the majorities ranged from 10 to 15 per cent, the total was 59,247 votes. The Barisan therefore won in these 40 constituencies with a total majority of less than a hundred thousand votes.²⁸ Theoretically, a shift of fifty thousand votes, appropriately distributed in these 40 constituencies, would have effected a change of government. Secondly, UMNO Baru, the backbone of the Barisan, had definitely lost ground to the opposition, again a new development. It got only 82.5 per cent of the parliamentary seats it contested in contrast with about 96 per cent in the previous two elections. In the state elections, there was also a similar decline, from 95 per cent of the state seats in 1986 to about 80 per cent. Thirdly, there was a further decline in support for the MCA and the Gerakan from the Chinese voters. This is manifested both in the percentage of votes as well as the number of seats that the two component parties obtained. As the votes were counted at the polling stations, many leaders were surprised at the low level of support from the hardcore Chinese areas. If it were not for the support from the Malay voters, many more of the Chinese leaders from the MCA and the Gerakan would have been defeated. Fourthly, there are four states where the Barisan Nasional is now relatively weak -- Penang, the Federal Territory, Sabah, and Kelantan. In these states, it has a minority of the parliamentary seats, and the percentage of parliamentary votes it obtained was also less than that of the opposition.

The Barisan in East Malaysia

In East Malaysia, only the parliamentary election was held as Sabah already had its state election in July. The Sarawak legislature still has another two years of tenure. But East Malaysia provided the most dramatic episode in the campaign - the unprecedented and sudden crossover of a member of the ruling coalition into the ranks of the opposition mid-way through the campaign. The political scenario changed immediately as the Barisan lost control of a state government.

In Sabah, the Barisan originally contested all the twenty seats, fourteen through the PBS and six through USNO. With the crossover of the PBS, the fourteen seats were as good as lost since most of those areas were PBS strongholds. In the attempt to rectify that unfavourable situation, the Barisan immediately announced that it would support the independent candidates and other parties that were challenging the PBS in those constituencies. Obviously stung by what it called "a stab in the back", the Barisan leaders also stated that after the elections, UMNO Baru would spread its wings into that state, clearly a warning to the Sabah leaders and the Sabahans that they actually had no choice but to work within the context of the Barisan. However, with the serious challenge from the opposition in the peninsula itself, the Barisan leaders could not pay sufficient attention to the crisis in Sabah. In any case, they had expected the coalition partners there to take charge of the campaign in the state. The results of the election were quite predictable. The Barisan won the six seats through USNO, three of which very narrowly. It had to concede the other fourteen to the PBS. The Barisan's support did not effectively help any of the independent or AKAR (Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat) candidates.

In neighbouring Sarawak, the scenario was by far less turbulent. There was no breakaway from the Barisan, though one or two of the coalition members were also suspect. The Barisan won in 21 of the 27 constituencies it contested. Both Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu, a Muslim-based party and Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS), the Dayak party, won all the ten and four seats they contested respectively. The multi-ethnic Sarawak National Party (SNAP), which won all their seats in the last election, lost in two constituencies in 1990 to independent candidates. The component party that suffered a significant loss was the Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP). Four of its eight candidates were defeated, including the party leader who was a Federal Cabinet Member. The results of the elections, however, show that the Barisan was still relatively strong in Sarawak. If the coalition had won by a very slim majority in Peninsular Malaysia, the chances of a breakaway of some Barisan partners in Sarawak would have been highly possible.²⁹

VII THE OPPOSITION RESULTS

Since 1969, when the opposition parties won a total of 57 out of the 144 seats to the Parliament, they had never been able to prevent the Barisan from getting a two-third or higher majority. The opposition saw this election as the best opportunity it would have, not only in denying the ruling coalition the two-third majority, but in wresting power from it. In the words of the DAP leader, this was "an unprecedented historic opportunity to effect far-reaching meaningful changes to the political order in the country".³⁰ The opposition estimated that a 12 per cent swing away from the Barisan would have the effect of preventing the government from getting the two-third majority and if the swing was to be more substantial, to the amount of 20 per cent, then the opposition coalitions would have been able to get enough seats in Parliament to form a new government.³¹ The optimism of the opposition was boosted by the fact that in this election, its votes would not be split as happened in past elections. In the state elections, the opposition felt that its best chances of winning control of the state legislatures were in Penang and the east coast states. Though the opposition as a whole made substantial gains, the results of the elections did not live up to expectations. However, an examination of the parties' performance showed significant differences in their gains and losses.

The DAP : Maintaining Its Ground

In the 1990 election, the DAP fielded fewer candidates than it did in 1986, primarily to give way to its ally, Semangat '46. This was particularly so in areas where the party was weak. Only 57 candidates were put up for the parliamentary election compared with 64 previously. On the whole, the party was able to repeat its good performance of the previous election. In the parliamentary election, it won 20 seats, four less than it did in 1986. The party lost the four seats in Sabah under very unusual circumstances, a "friendly" contest against the PBS, a fellow member of the opposition front. In the 1986 election, the DAP was the major

opposition party contesting against the Barisan. It benefitted from the "anti-establishment" votes in that state. In the 1990 election, the PBS took over the mantle of the opposition after it withdrew from the Barisan. The other significant change in the party's performance was in Negeri Sembilan where it lost in the two constituencies considered relatively safe. The party chairman was one of the casualties. In all the other states, the party held on to the seats it won in 1986. In Penang, the party won six, in Perak and the Federal Territory, four each and in Malacca, it held on to the same one. An additional seat each was gained in Selangor and Sarawak. In terms of popular votes, there was a decline in percentage -- 16.87 per cent compared with 20.39 per cent in 1986. This was due primarily to the fact that the party contested in seven fewer constituencies. However, the DAP still had more votes than the two Chinese-based parties in the ruling coalition, which together could secure only 14.49 per cent of the votes.

The loss of a few parliamentary seats was compensated by an increase in the number of state seats that were won by the party. It contested a total of 87 seats throughout the country and won in 45 constituencies compared to 37 out of 118 in 1986. The distribution of the state seats that the DAP won in this election can be seen in Table 3. It should be noted that the most significant improvement was made in Penang, the frontline state for the DAP. The party added four more seats, bringing the total to fourteen. However, it was still four seats short of its target of capturing the state government, a disappointment for the leadership who had embarked on a bold strategy of moving many party stalwarts from their safe seats to pit them against some of the better known leaders of the ruling coalition.

In the parliamentary constituencies where the DAP had been able to win the support of the electorate, its candidates for the state elections were also returned. In Perak, Malacca, and Negeri Sembilan, the party won the same number of seats as it did in the last election -- thirteen, three, and four respectively. In Johor and Selangor, there was a slight improvement, with three additional seats. All the seats won by the party were in the urban areas with high concentrations of Chinese. In the Malay belt in the north and the east coast, the party's influence was hardly felt.

Many of the reasons for the poor performance of the MCA were also the reasons that could explain the DAP's success. They need not be repeated here. It should, however, be reiterated, that since its formation, the DAP had championed the rights of the Chinese and Indians to equal opportunity in Malaysia's political life. In aggressively criticizing the government for discriminating against the non-*bumiputra* communities, the party's message struck a sympathetic chord with the aspirations of large sections of the Chinese and Indian population,

TABLE 3
Number of State Seats Contested and Won by the Major Opposition Parties in the 1990 Elections

State	Total	DAP				PAS				S '46	
		Con.	Won 1990	Won '86	Won '82	Con.	Won 1990	Won '86	Won '82	Con.	Won 1990
Perak	14					7			1		6
Kedah	28	2	1			16	1	3	2		10
Penang	33	20	14	10	2	5					7
Perak	46	17	13	13	4	11					19
Selangor	42	15	6	5	1	6					23
N. Sembilan	28	10	4	4	2	4					16
Malacca	20	6	3	3	2	6					9
Johor	36	10	3	1		3					21
Terengganu	32					20	8	2	5		13
Kelantan	39					24	24	10	10		14
Pahang	33	7	1	1	1	12					14
Total	351	87	45	37	12	114	33	15	18	152	19

particularly those from the lower classes whose chances for social mobility have been stymied by government policies. The DAP was therefore in a position to reap benefits from the frustrations and "anti-establishment" mood of the people.

The DAP had been in the forefront of the campaign for clean government and public accountability. Its criticisms of the government for mismanagement over the BMF (Bumiputra Malaysia Finance) affair, malpractices over the privatization exercises, abuses of executive power, and violation of the independence of the judiciary -- all these had put the party in a favourable light among the urban population which was concerned over abuses of power among those in the ruling coalition. Just prior to the elections, when the government and a private company had worked out the arrangements to collect tolls at key road intersections around the capital city, the DAP had also been very active in the campaign to abolish the tolls. Some party leaders were even arrested under the Internal Security Act. It was therefore not surprising that the DAP's call for change was well received by the urban electorate which was unhappy over the existing order.

In recent times, the party had been in the forefront of opposition to the excesses in the government's Islamization drive, particularly when possible violations of the constitutional guarantees were noted. It had also been highly critical of the call for an Islamic state by PAS. Non-Muslims who were apprehensive of the government's intentions over the spread of Islam found it easy to rally to the DAP.

Parti Islam : The Rising Moon

Parti Islam (PAS) entered the election fray under the Angkatan umbrella, expecting to form the government in Kelantan, if not also in Terengganu. It contested only 30 parliamentary candidates and 114 state seats in 1990, compared to 98 for Parliament and 265 in the state elections in 1986. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, given the alliance with Semangat '46, which was also contesting in the Malay majority areas, PAS had to compromise. It had to give up some of the seats it had previously contested. Secondly, the party must have realized that it had pursued a wrong strategy in the last election, by stretching itself too thinly. The party's dismal performance could not have been a better indicator. Given the limited resources, it was wiser to concentrate on the constituencies where the chances of success were much better. If the results of the elections could be taken to be indicative, the new strategy seems to have worked well.

In contrast to the 1986 elections, when the party gave great emphasis to the objective of establishing an Islamic state in the country, PAS played down that issue. Instead, the party's theme "Membangun bersama Islam" (Develop with Islam) suggested that Islamic values would be the guiding principles of the party's actions. The election manifesto also emphasized that the rights of the non-Muslims would be protected, and stated that they would be free to uphold their own religion, practise their culture and participate in politics.

If there was one party that had made substantial gains in the 1990 election, it was PAS. In the 1986 elections, the party managed to win only one parliamentary seat and fifteen state constituencies. All the party's top leaders were defeated and a total of twenty-one parliamentary and forty-five state candidates lost their deposits for failing to get at least 12.5 per cent of the votes cast in their constituencies. However, the results of the 1990 election must have been very encouraging to the leadership. The party won seven parliamentary constituencies and thirty-three state seats. More important, it regained control of the Kelantan state government after twelve years. With twenty-four seats in the Legislative Assembly, the PAS government would have a comfortable majority to work with, regardless of its Angkatan partner. In the other east coast state of Terengganu, the gain was also very significant. PAS now has eight members in the Assembly where it only had two before the dissolution. In six other constituencies in the state, the party's candidates lost by less than a thousand votes.

It would seem that PAS had reasserted itself in the east coast where the Malays were most traditional, due to years of physical and economic isolation from the mainstream. In these communities where modernization had been kept at bay, religion remained a critical factor in their social life. It is therefore not surprising that when PAS campaigned on the need for an Islamic revival, the message was well received. The isolation had also moulded the perception of a different and separate identity from their kinsmen in the other parts of the country -- considered emotionally distant, if not physically far. PAS, on the other hand, was considered homegrown, with its roots in that region. Its institution and its message could easily be identified with.

In the two northern Malay states on the west coast, the influence of the party was not as deeply felt and the party did not make any headway there. This can be seen both in terms of seats and votes. PAS in fact lost two state constituencies in Kedah which it had won in 1986. The percentages of votes won by the Angkatan opposition in Kedah and Perlis in this parliamentary election were 45.28 per cent and 33.52 per cent respectively, a marginal improvement over the 38 per cent and

33 per cent which PAS secured alone in 1986. As Kedah is the homestate of two Prime Ministers, who between them had served almost two-thirds of the period since independence, the state had benefited from substantial development funding from the government. This had worked to the advantage of the ruling party. It was for this reason that PAS would have found it much harder to penetrate into this region.

Away from the Malay belt, the influence of PAS is less substantial. These are the states which in history had been most exposed to British influence, a migrant population, and economic changes. In fact, in all the seven elections since independence, PAS has won hardly any electoral contests either at the parliamentary or state level, in those states where the non-Malays form a substantial proportion of the population. To date, the total is three parliamentary seats -- two in Perak, first in 1955 and later in 1969, and one in Penang in 1978 -- and four state seats through the years in Perak and Penang. The further south into the peninsula, the weaker the party is. In Johor, PAS is the weakest. It has never secured more than 8 per cent of the votes in any election and in 1990 it only contested in three state constituencies.

Semangat '46

Semangat '46 entered into the election fray with a fury and fielded the most candidates of all the opposition parties -- 61 for the parliamentary election and 152 for the state constituencies. The party was leading the opposition parties and had expected to replace UMNO Baru as the premier political party in Malaysian politics. Its leader was expected to be the Prime Minister had this objective been realized. However, of all the opposition parties, Semangat '46 must have been the most disappointed. It won only eight parliamentary and nineteen state seats throughout the country -- a performance that was not even up to the mark of its major two coalition partners. The only state where Semangat '46 did very well was Kelantan, Razaleigh's home base. There, the party won all the seats it contested -- seven parliamentary and fourteen state constituencies.

Almost all its top leaders, many of whom were incumbents, were defeated. This included the Deputy President who had been both a Menteri Besar and a Cabinet Minister. The party had failed to win enough votes for them to be translated into seats. The results of the party's debut at the general elections have even raised questions regarding its future durability. Why had Semangat '46 failed to make the impact the party and its allies expected? The party seemed to have been well received. Large crowds had attended its *ceramah* even before the

election campaign officially started. Outside observers had expected this to be a very close election. While it might be tempting to suggest that the strength of the party might have been overestimated in the first place, this would not explain why the Prime Minister had to orchestrate his campaign for almost one and a half years prior to the election before Parliament was dissolved. Neither would it explain why he had to raise very sensitive ethnic and religious issues to salvage his own campaign and to discredit his opponents. In a post election statement, the Semangat '46 President himself acknowledged that his restraint in the utilization of these "weapons" had led to the party's poor performance.³² In the course of the campaign, Mahathir unleashed an issue that was very potent in getting the Malay voters back to his side -- the threat to their religion and their race. Along the west coast and the states where the non-Malay presence was felt and sometimes seen to be threatening, this exploitation of the fears of the Malay community had the effect of making them return to the status quo which they were already familiar with. In view of the government's control of the media and the short campaign time available, Semangat did not have the opportunity to explain its alliance with the PBS and the DAP. Its association with the "Christians" and the DAP was seen in a negative light and its call for a change of government was therefore rejected.

Semangat '46, of course, did not have the financial resources of the ruling coalition. In a political environment where issues could be sidelined by cash, this deficiency was critical. In a few constituencies where the contest was keen, vote-buying was reported to be rampant and decisive in determining the outcome of the elections, to the disadvantage of the opposition.

After the poor performance at the polls, will Semangat '46 still have a future in Malaysian politics? Some UMNO Baru leaders have suggested that Semangat '46 had no issues as the party was no different from UMNO Baru itself. The conflict boiled down to one of personality -- between Mahathir and Razaleigh. The party's defeat would therefore hasten the departure of its members back into the ranks of UMNO Baru.³³ There might be some validity in this suggestion, since the party is motivated neither by ideology nor religion. And being out of power, it could not dispense patronage to members or supporters.

However, it is perhaps too early to discount the party altogether. After all, the party secured a very respectable 14.4 per cent of the votes cast in the parliamentary election. It is in a similar position to that of PAS after the 1986 elections -- with a reasonably large amount of votes, but a shortage of seats. There would be opportunities for the next round, if the party leaders still have the stamina. And while the party may not be motivated by religion like PAS, it is motivated by Tengku Razaleigh, reputedly a very determined person who "will

never give up as long as his nemesis is around".³⁴ And by the looks of it, the nemesis will be around for quite a while. At 53, Razaleigh should still have many years of campaigning ahead of him. The party's campaign did unleash forces whose momentum might push Razaleigh along. Despite its national defeat, Semangat '46 still has a strong base in Kelantan. If the Gerakan can survive in one state, it might be possible for Semangat to do likewise.

PBS : The Surprise Opposition

In 1985, when the PBS stood against the Barisan in Sabah, then represented by the Berjaya party, very few observers gave the newly formed party much of a chance. The Prime Minister himself stated that he endorsed Berjaya "one hundred percent". Mahathir was ruffled by the victory of the PBS. His personal inability to control the PBS and subsequent events in Sabah left him with a negative view of the Kadazan-based party and its leadership. Though the PBS applied to be a member of the Barisan soon after it came to power, its application was held in abeyance for more than a year, until just before the 1986 general election. Membership in the Barisan, however, did not help in the personal relations between the PBS and the UMNO leaders, though federal-state relations did improve initially.

However, within the last few years, relations deteriorated, both at the official and the personal levels. As political consciousness increased, the state demanded more autonomy while the centre insisted on more control. Sabah asked for more than the 5 per cent royalty on oil output that it was getting while the Federal Government thought that an increase would not be fair to the other states which did not have resources. The PBS also wanted Labuan to be returned back to the state whereas the federal leaders intended to turn it into an international offshore financial centre. State leaders talked of "state rights" while the central government accused them of fanning "anti-federal" sentiments. In the election to the state legislature in July 1990, the PBS (and most parties) raised all these issues in its manifesto, much to the chagrin of the Federal Government and the Prime Minister. Mahathir warned the Sabah leaders of their "anti-federal" activities.³⁵ The re-election of the PBS to the state government aggravated the deteriorating federal-state relationship.

As the campaign of the opposition parties in Peninsular Malaysia became more intensive, there were suggestions that the PBS and a couple of Sarawak parties would cross over to the opposition should the national elections be unable to produce a clear cut winner. Razaleigh had anticipated they would be

"kingmakers", but neither he nor the Prime Minister had expected a PBS defection from the Barisan before the results of the elections were known. As it was, the PBS came up with a stunner.

A few days before polling day, the PBS made the bold step of leaving the Barisan to team up with Semangat '46. In his announcement, PBS President, Pairin, suggested that the Semangat manifesto was more in line with the aspirations of the PBS and the Sabah people. The point that was particularly attractive was the promise to review federal-state relations and to safeguard the rights of the people of Sabah and Sarawak. It should be noted that the rise of Semangat and its manifesto was perhaps only the occasion for the PBS to defect, not the cause. The PBS leadership had long been unhappy with the Barisan government over the negative response to their demands for more oil royalties, a university in Sabah, a separate television station, and generally greater autonomy for the state. In addition, they were also upset over the persistent attempts on the part of the federal leaders to force them to accept USNO as part of the government in Sabah, knowing full well that USNO and the PBS were rivals in state politics.³⁶ The last straw came when Mahathir went to campaign in Sabah. He once again refused to consider their demands, arguing that the Barisan was only a "caretaker" government since Parliament had already been dissolved. Unable to extract any promises from the Prime Minister, the PBS leaders were convinced that it was pointless for them to remain with the Barisan, and immediately after Mahathir left, decided that the interests of the state would be given greater consideration with a Semangat '46 government at the federal level. They took the decision to give the opposition campaign a further boost.

If the PBS had remained as a Barisan member, it would have faced a strong challenge from the DAP, which was contesting in nine constituencies in the 1990 election. The party had won four in 1986. However, after the crossover, the PBS was more confident that it would win in the fourteen constituencies it was contesting in the parliamentary election. As the major opposition party in Sabah, it would be able to "take over" the "anti-establishment" votes from the DAP, whose national leader had already endorsed the PBS into the ranks of the opposition. The election results confirmed the party's expectations. However, the efforts to contest against the Barisan indirectly in the remaining six constituencies by supporting the independent candidates failed, though the margins in three constituencies were narrow.

PRM, AMIPF, and the Independents

A few other smaller opposition parties took part in the elections, but none of them were successful in gaining entry either to the Parliament or any of the state legislative assemblies. Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), a Malay-based party founded in 1955, came into the elections with a change in leadership early in 1990. It also dropped its socialist label in the hope of broadening its base. The party, which had always campaigned on a populist platform that included demands for the limitation of government power, the restoration of democratic rights to the people, the provision of special facilities for the poor and the elimination of corruption and waste in government, entered the elections in a small way, as it did in 1986. As part of the Gagasan, the party contested only in three parliamentary and three state constituencies. Though unsuccessful, the candidates won a substantial number of votes in all the constituencies.

The AMIPF, formed by dissidents from the MIC, contested in thirteen constituencies -- five for Parliament and eight for the state seats. As the party was new, and its symbol was unfamiliar to the electorate, its members participated under the banner of the DAP or Semangat '46. None of the candidates was successful, though some lost by only narrow margins.

A total of 67 independent candidates took part in the parliamentary election, even though in the past elections, very few of them had been successful. The large majority of them were in Sabah and Sarawak -- twenty-four and twenty-five respectively. There were two reasons to account for this phenomenon. Firstly, many aspirants who were not selected by their parties to contest in the election found that this was the only way to participate. They could then try to demonstrate to the party that they had support in the constituency. Secondly, in view of the rivalry between the different partners in the Barisan coalition, it was not uncommon for a party to put up and to support the independent candidates covertly, in those constituencies where they were not contesting. This was one way to weaken their rivals and to expand their own influence. In Sabah, the PBS and USNO were arch rivals in state politics and they had always supported independent candidates to oppose one another in constituencies which had been allocated to the other party by the national Barisan leadership. In Sarawak, the PBDS is the opposition party in the context of state politics. Given only four parliamentary seats to contest, even though it is the largest Dayak party, it would

not have been surprising if it had channelled some of its efforts in the direction of the independent candidates. However, of the large number of independent candidates only four of them were successful in Sarawak, including Harrison Ngau, who unseated a four-term incumbent. In Sabah, three of the independent candidates supported by PBS lost by narrow margins.

In the state elections, there were 48 independents, the majority of whom contested in Kelantan (twenty-one). These were dissidents from PAS who had formed the Al-Islah group. They were unhappy with PAS for "deviating from the Islamic struggle" by not giving the highest priority to emphasis on an Islamic state and by co-operating with the DAP. None of the independent candidates was able to win a seat. This was not surprising as party identification was very important in Peninsular Malaysia.

VIII CONCLUSION

The results of the 1990 general election once again demonstrated the strength of the Barisan in the electoral arena. In fact, since independence, there have never been any doubts regarding a victory for the ruling coalition. The relative political stability and economic well-being had always favoured the incumbents. The effective utilization of the state bureaucracy and state facilities, including the control of mass media and access to financial resources, enabled the Barisan to put its message to the electorate more effectively than the opposition. Given these advantages, it was difficult for the opposition parties to make inroads into the government's mass support base. UMNO Baru, as the backbone of the coalition, once again proved that it could garner enough support from the Malay voters, whose decision would ultimately determine the outcome of the elections since there are 92 out of the 132 constituencies in Peninsular Malaysia which have Malay majorities.

However, the Barisan's return to power is not unqualified. In fact, there are ominous signs on the horizon. In the course of the elections campaign, the UMNO Baru leaders, including the Prime Minister, continuously warned the Malays that their future was at stake given the concerted efforts mounted by the "Chinese" DAP and the "Christian" PBS, which were working through Semangat '46. By exploiting the fears of the Malays about the future of their race and religion, they also aggravated the fears of the other ethnic communities regarding their future place in Malaysian society. The results clearly indicated further ethnic polarization. The Chinese partners in the ruling coalition were badly defeated by the DAP in the Chinese-dominated urban areas. Therefore, the national government can be said to be generally supported by the Malays, while the Chinese supported the opposition. Already, there are suggestions to the effect that since the Chinese did not give their support to the ruling coalition, government policies need not take their views into consideration. With the expiration of the New Economic Policy in 1990, a new policy "to correct the imbalance between

the ethnic groups" would have to be implemented. Controversies are bound to surface. If these are not handled properly, there will be greater set-backs to the nation-building process. It is rather unfortunate that politics is always seen to be a zero-sum game in which one side can only benefit at the expense of the other. This is true not only in the context of ethnic relations, but also between the state and the federal governments.

The recent elections brought the opposition parties in control of two states -- Kelantan and Sabah. In many countries with a federal system, it would not be unusual to find different parties in control at the state and national levels. Differences between the parties will continue to exist, but this would hardly affect the workings of the government. In Malaysia, however, this development -- with two state governments under the control of opposition parties -- is unprecedented. If past political developments can be used as a guide, it can be suggested that it would be difficult to confine the differences between the Barisan and the opposition parties in control of the two states, simply to party politics. The differences can be expected to lead to conflicts, with far-reaching implications on federal-state relations.

Even if the measures used by the federal government in the past to resolve the differences are not put into practice, a very rocky relationship can be expected. In fact, the squeeze on the two states has already begun, and it is likely that more pressure would be applied until a solution acceptable to the Federal Government is found. There are various means through which the centre can enforce its will. It is likely that both Kelantan and Sabah would suffer a tight financial situation as Kelantan experienced previously when it was under PAS rule. Federal leaders have already said that the two states would get their annual budgets in conformity with the minimum requirements provided for under the Constitution. For anything extra, the two states would have to depend on their ingenuity -- and they will need plenty of that, because the Federal Constitution restricts the powers of the state to raise revenue. Even their capacity to borrow money is limited by law.

The two states should also have to brace themselves for other forms of economic "warfare". The Barisan federal government is unlikely to be enthusiastic in promoting investments in those two states. The Barisan state government in Pahang has already excluded Kelantan from a joint agreement it had with Terengganu to develop tourism and industries in the east coast. Basically, the strategy would be to isolate Kelantan and Sabah in the hope that the lack of growth and economic activities would make the people look for an alternative to the parties in power in the two states.

The Kelantan government can expect a "long war of attrition". It is unlikely that the Sabah government would be able to enjoy this luxury. The federal leaders are already talking of "toppling" the PBS leaders and "recapturing" the state. The propaganda warfare against the PBS during and after the recent elections gives an indication of the onslaught UMNO Baru will mount when it expands full-scale to that state. Sabah's case is further complicated by the fact that PBS is supported by the Kadazans who are mainly Christians. The party's main opponents, USNO in the state and UMNO Baru at the federal level, are Muslim-based. It is expected that ethnic and religious factors, already raised in the recent elections, would be further politicized.

The election also brought PAS to power in one state and gave it far greater representation in the national Parliament than the party ever had. It will now have the chance to put into practice what it has so long struggled for, regarding the use of Islam as the guiding principle of government policy, at least at the state level. The Kelantan experiment will be watched by both its supporters and opponents alike. It can be the model to follow, or it can serve as the negative example. PAS will have to prove that the new Islamic order will bring greater equality, justice and a better way of life for the people. It can be expected that Islamization and the form it will take will continue to be an important issue in Malaysia's political debate. In view of the fact that the Malays are in the majority in about three-quarters of the constituencies in Peninsular Malaysia, and that the electorate tends to vote along ethnic lines, PAS and Semangat '46 are the only opposition parties that are in a position to challenge UMNO Baru. With the set-back suffered by Semangat '46, PAS can now be expected to play a much more active role. Should the leaders and party supporters of Semangat '46 lose their stamina, PAS will be the main inheritor of the "anti-establishment" votes among the Malay community. Thus, how PAS plays the game, and how well it implements its policies could very well determine the outcome of future elections in Malaysia.

NOTES

1. Interview with a Gerakan official in Penang on 19 October 90.
2. See Stephen Chee, "Malaysia in 1988 - A Fractured Polity" in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1989* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1989).
3. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 February 90, p. 21.
4. *Ibid.*, 19 July 90, pp. 10-11.
5. *New Straits Times*, 13 October 90, p. 1 & 2.
6. *Star*, 13 October 90, p. 1. See also Barisan Manifesto.
7. *New Straits Times*, 13 October 90, p. 1.
8. *Straits Times*, 19 October 90, pp. 22-23.
9. *Utusan Malaysia*, 19 October 90, p.1 and *Straits Times*, 20 October 90, pp. 22-23.
10. *Straits Times*, 30 October 90.
11. *New Straits Times*, 13 October 90, p. 2.
12. PAS stated that it was Gagasan that had agreed to allow Razaleigh to become the Prime Minister.

13. Point made at rally in Petaling Jaya in September 90. See also *Asiaweek*, 19 October 90, p. 36.
14. *Star*, 13 October 90, pp. 1 & 5.
15. Even the two members of the ruling coalition that depend on the Chinese votes, MCA and Gerakan, publicly came out against the quota system.
16. *New Straits Times*, 18 October 90, p. 2.
17. *Asiaweek*, 19 October 90, pp. 35-37.
18. *Star*, 22 October 90, p. 2.
19. The major newspapers are all owned by the coalition partners in the ruling Barisan. Information obtained at an interview.
20. *Aliran Monthly* 10, no. 9 (1990).
21. *New Straits Times*, 19 October 90, pp. 1 & 2.
22. *Straits Times*, 19 October 90, p. 23.
23. The issue of palace interference was a "hot" topic for debate at the UMNO Baru general assembly. See *Sunday Star*, 4 November 90, pp. 1-2, and *Star*, 12 December 90, p. 1.
24. *Ibid.*
25. See Khong Kim Hoong, "Results of the 1986 Malaysian General Elections" in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1986 Summer) (Sydney: University of Sydney).
26. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 July 90, p. 10.
27. *Malay Mail*, 22 & 23 October 90, p. 4.

28. I & J Sdn. Bhd., "Malaysia General Elections, 1990", p. ERS00.
29. PBDS was expected to be the party that would break away. The Sarawak Chief Minister even publicly accused the party of supporting independents against the Barisan. *Straits Times*, 13 October 90, p. 23.
30. *SUARA DAP*, Issue 1/90.
31. Lim Kit Siang's speech in the Penang Chinese Town Hall on 16 October 90.
32. *Malay Mail*, 22 October 90, p. 4.
33. *Asiaweek*, 19 October 90, p. 36.
34. *Straits Times*, 27 October 90, p. 30.
35. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 October 90, pp. 9-10.
36. Information obtained at an interview with a Sabah politician.

Parties

Al-Islah	an Islamic revival group
AMIPF	All Malaysia Indian Progressive Front
AKAR	Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah or United Islamic Movement
BN	Barisan Nasional or National Front
Berjasa	Barisan Jamaah Islam SeMalaysia
DAP	Democratic Action Party
Gagasan Rakyat Malaysia	Malaysian People's Might
Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia	Malaysian People's Movement
Hamin	Hisbul Musliman
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MSP	Malaysian Solidarity Party
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PBB	Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu
PBDS	Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia
Semangat '46	Spirit of '46
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UMNO Baru	United Malays National Organization (New)
USNO	United Sabah National Organization

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