ETHNIC CHAMELEON

MULTIRACIAL POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

Oo Yu Hock

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IN MALAYSIA

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Pelanduk
Publications
MALAYSIA ● AUSTRALIA

This is a gift for my parents,
Mr Oo Kar Chye
Madam Ch'ng Gin Cheok
who celebrated their golden anniversary
on April 28, 1990

In loving Memory of our
Grandparents
who pioneered the way for us to become Malaysians

paternal
Mr Oo Poey Chit (1940)
Madam Tan Kin Tee (1972)

maternal
Mr Ch'ng Boon Wooi (1950)
Madam Kung Gaik Tooi (1975)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE	Associations, Clanship Organizations and Elite Groups
Akar	Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (Force of People's Unity); a coalition of PAS and Semangat 46; a coalition formed to contest in the 1990 General Election
BBMB	Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Bhd.
BSKL	Bursar Saham Kuala Lumpur; see **KLSE**
DAP	Democratic Action Party
D & C	Dilatation and Curettage
DEB	*Dasar Ekonomi Baru* (New Economic Policy)
DEP	*Dasar Ekonomi Perwakilan* or *Dasar Ekonomi Penyertaan*; see **PEP**
DMIP	Democratic Malaysian Indian Party
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity in the United States as a result of the affirmative action policies
ERA	Equal Rights Amendments
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
FI	Foreign Investment

Gagasan Rakyat	People's Might; an opposition coalition consisting of Semangat 46, DAP, IPF and PRM, formed to contest in the 1990 General Election
GREED	Gender, Racial, Ethnic, Employment and Doctrinal stereotypes
IPF	All-Malaysian Indian Progressive Front; an Indian-based party led by ex-MIC leader, Pandithan
ISA	Independence, Self-reliance and Affluence
ISIS	Institute of Strategic and International Studies
KBSM	*Kurrikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah*, the new integrated secondary school curriculum
KBSR	*Kurrikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah*, the new primary school curriculum
KLSE	Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange
LLN	Lembaga Letrik Negara; the *Bahasa Malaysia* equivalent for National Electricity Board
LSE	Lower Secondary Evaluation or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) tests which will replace the *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (*SRP) examinations in 1993 for lower secondary students
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCS	Malaysian Civil Service
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MIER	Malaysian Institute of Economic Research
NEB	National Electricity Board; now known as TEN
NECC	National Economic Consultative Council
NEP	New Economic Policy
NICs	Newly Industrialized Countries
NOC	National Operations Council
ONE	Old, New and Emerging problems
OPS	"ONE"-Problem Syndrome
PAA	Policy of affirmative action as practised in the United States
PAL	Political Alliance Leadership

PALACE	a term denoting the close relationship between the Political Alliance Leadership (PAL) and Associations, Clanship organizations and Elite groups (ACE)
PAS	Parti Angkatan Islam; also known as Pan Malaysian Islamic Party
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah
PEP	Representative Economic Policy or Participative Economic Policy; see **DEP**
Petronas	Petroliam Nasional Bhd.
PLUS	Perusahaan Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan, a giant construction corporation
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia; formerly known as Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (PSRM)
ROE	Racial, Occupation and Ethnic stereotypes
SEDCs	State Economic Development Corporations
Semangat 46	a Malay-based party formed by dissident members of UMNO; also known as UMNO *Lama*
STM	Syarikat Telekom Malaysia
TEN	Tenaga Nasional Bhd; the new acronym for the privatized National Electricity Board
UEM	United Engineers Malaysia
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
YTL	Yeoh Tiong Lay Corporation

PREFACE

The belief that problems of national unity in Malaysia may be likened to the chameleon provided the impetus for writing this book. But the observation that these problems, in different guises, are often expressed in racial terms despite thirty-three years of independence gave expression to the *The Ethnic Chameleon*. Given these circumstances, it is difficult to continue to restrain an urge to portray the Malaysian legacy whose future seems to depend very much on what its political custodians continue to do. And past trends have indicated a penchant for perpetuating ethnocentric demands, especially when the stability and sometimes even the survival of partisan interests is at stake.

Given the *status quo* today, the issues beyond the New Economic Policy (NEP) should not be "Who is getting enough?" or "Who has gained more?" The answers to these questions are as varied as the sets of statistics that are available to justify them. This situation is inevitable because "enough" and "more" are relative terms, just like the terms "poorer" and "richer" when they are measured against individual racial and ethnic sensitivities. This is because there seems to be a lag between achievement-targets and performance-results almost every time an evaluation exercise is conducted to review the performances (or non-performances) of the NEP.

The public is given the impression, rightly or wrongly, that this lag is compounded by the use of competitive data by different interest groups for different reasons. Basically, however, they are being used

to highlight the "more" or "less" aspects of gains and losses that are experienced by particular ethnic groups during the NEP era. The NEP has also generated unintended consequences which may threaten national unity and political stability. And these consequences are compounded by the problems confronting a youthful population whose values of "IM-ism" reflect an introverted concern for "self" ("I") and material ("M") pursuits. Such values transcend the narrow confines of race, religion, colour or creed. So, too, the values of "WE-ship" (worship and eldership) which many young people tend to neglect today.

Inevitably, in a multi-racial and multi-religious country, old inter-racial problems co-exist with new problems of intra-racial dimension. But they will be compounded by emerging problems of class, interest-groups, and the young. The latter, however, tend to remain unobtrusive as long as communal interests are highlighted, especially during actual or perceived crisis situations. Like the proverbial red herring, sometimes these communal overtures tend to divert attention away from common problems which confront all racial groups in the society. These include education-employment mismatch, residential segregation, law enforcement, mass-media influences, and changing values, morality and lifestyles.

The events used to illustrate the basic ideas in this book may come and go. But the root causes remain; they may even evolve in different forms and guises as society changes. The reality is that the sensitivities of ethnicity and the rich legacies of diverse racial heritage, like humanity itself, cannot be subdued and manipulated for long to fit a grand design. In the long run, the natural forces of humanity will become apparent. Like the chameleon, ever ready to display its adaptive capacity, the final decade of this century may compel our society to be more proactive, innovative and future-oriented. And unless such future-orientation is also peppered with a sense of morality, our citizens might find it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands, and overcome the problems, of an information-technology society in which impersonal relationships are paramount and they are often exploited for selfish ends. In Malaysia, the richness of inter-racial and inter-religious relationships should not fall prey to individual or vested interests at the expense of political stability and economic growth.

ONE
CRISIS ORIENTATION

There is no denying the evils of poverty, particularly in a prosperous, industrial society. To be poor is perhaps always painful, but to be poor when most of one's neighbours are well-to-do, and are calling attention to one's poverty, may threaten one's integrity. To be poor in a society where success, prestige and worth are estimated largely in terms of financial status put a serious strain on character.

Earl V. Pullias (1965)

Human beings are usually crisis-oriented. And most of them are also basically reactive. So, too, are the institutions and organizations that constitute their environments of interaction. People tend to react to any crisis when it threatens to upset or destroy the *status quo*. And, quite often, they only react after the process of destruction has already begun. If they are fortunate, in terms of being prepared to cope with a crisis situation, they will be able to arrest the decay and adapt to changing circumstances. But, if they are unfortunate, in terms of being unprepared to deal with a crisis situation, they will become victims of traumatic experiences that will destroy their personality, confidence, and even their ability to cope with the demands of daily living.

In this respect, governments are no different. Most of them are also crisis-oriented. A government usually reacts when it is confronted with the threat of political unrest, civil disobedience, economic slowdown, social protests, and foreign interference. This threat may be real or imagined. In any case, a government will act immediately against what it perceives to be a threat to the *status quo* and the general stability of the country. The severity of such action, however, depends on how sensitive the situation is. And the spontaneity of such action depends on how prepared or unprepared the government is in confronting the situation. Regardless of the action the government may choose to take, the reactive behaviour is a norm rather than an exception.

Some crises are slow to develop while others are readily inflammable. But when set alight, they leave behind indelible scars on individuals and groups, especially the victims. Generally, these scars remain to remind a community or society of the consequences of such crisis. Although the scars may heal, the traumas remain vulnerable. The Vietnam War is a good example. The aftermath of the War extends beyond the trauma of human sufferings into the realm of ancestry. On the one hand, brutality, mutilation, and death continue to haunt those whose lives have been affected by the War. On the other hand, the issue of progeny remains poignant in the lives of dislocated families in refugee camps or in countries of placement, and of a bred of Amerasian children who are abandoned in a quagmire of identity crisis.

Other examples that are unrelated to the catastrophe of war are found in the history and current affairs of countries such as the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, and South Africa. In the Philippines, the saga of an exiled President extends beyond the threshold of his motherland. On the one hand, until his death on September 20, 1989, Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, Imelda, are facing racketeering charges in the United States; and in Hawaii, where they live, they cherish the hope of returning to the Philippines, dead or alive. On the other hand, Mrs. Corazon Aquino remains adamant in her refusal to grant the Marcos' plea to return home, while she strives to reform the country and reunite the forces that had been instrumental to her installation as President. Meanwhile, the quiet uneasiness in the

Tagalog-speaking nation, including recent abortive coups against Mrs. Aquino, attests to a legacy of personal tragedies and national crises that are far from over. Given the *status quo*, President Aquino seems to react to her nation's problems as and when these problems crop up.

The Tiananmen Square massacre in China, some time in mid-1989, sent shock waves that reverberated in protest actions throughout the world. An unparalleled peaceful mass-student demonstration for more democratic liberties ended in a gruesome and bloody mess that has placed a cloud over China in international affairs. The Chinese Government was preoccupied with its leadership-succession problems and it had underestimated the potency of the social protest. The rest of the world, especially the United States of America, was preoccupied with carving niches in China's liberal trade policy. For now, as China reflects on the contradictions of its political ideology and its economic practice, its overseas citizens continue to bear the conscience of their compatriots who sacrificed their lives unwittingly so that their country might change. As the world watches China's next move, her new leaders seem unwilling to publicize its policies at home and abroad.

The impending political changes in Hong Kong pose a serious problem for the colony beyond the issues of resettlement and acclimatization for its emigrant citizens who prefer to seek their fortunes abroad. Compounded by the Tiananmen Square massacre, its citizens are fearful of their future under China at the close of the century. The British Government is prepared to fulfill its obligations in a historical treaty, particularly, the cession of Hong Kong to China; but it is unprepared to allow its subjects of Chinese origin to flood the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, the citizens of Hong Kong have had enough time to ponder over their options, and they must now decide on these options. The choice may not be easy, but the reality is imminent. The fact, however, remains that a vibrant cosmopolitan society, encapsulated by a historical decision that had underwritten its prosperity and international prominence, is about to lose its own identity forever. And since China has not revealed what it intends to do with Hong Kong, the people in this British Colony face much uncertainty about

their future and future domestic investments. Many are emigrating to countries like the United States of America, Canada, etc.

In South Africa, the issue of apartheid seems unending. Rooted in uncompromising race relations characterized by white minority rule, bloody violence has somewhat diminished, although tension, and sometimes open hostility, continue to flourish admist proposed Commonwealth sanctions. On the one hand, the tenacity of the Pretoria Regime and its somewhat camouflaged concessions have remained unmoved by waves of reform agitations that are directed at demolishing racial segregation and claiming native independence. On the other hand, the Blacks and anti-apartheid loyalists, who have borne the brunt of a long-drawn indignation to their race, continue to struggle for human dignity, rights, and freedom. Despite the popular release of Nelson Mandela, the reality of apartheid persists to reinforce a segregationist policy which alienates the people whose forefathers had little choice but to succumb to the rape of colonial aggression. While Nelson Mandela travels around the world to seek allies for his cause, the Pretoria Regime continues to react to the mounting social unrest at home and the economic sanctions from European and Commonwealth countries.

The violence of May 13, 1969 in Malaysia, is reminiscent of a nation which was caught in a frenzy of racial riots that rocked the foundation of its multi-racial and multi-religious population. Basking in the glory of *Merdeka* (independence) on August 31, 1957, and the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963, the Government was unprepared to deal with the problems of cultural pluralism and racial hostility. The fragile harmony of its different races and their multi-ethnic cultures, which had been instrumental in securing its independence from Great Britain cracked under the pressure of rising ethnocentric arrogance. The *hauteur* of communalistic chauvinism, especially in the events following the general election of 1969, became a catalyst for igniting the national tragedy. Malaysia paid a very high price for underestimating, and even disregarding, the potency of racial and ethnic sensitivities among its citizens.

While the Government's reactive behaviour since then might have arrested a major racial holocaust it has yet to find a permanent

or long-term solution to the nation's racial sensitivities. Malaysians display a pot-pourri of cultural diversity which, in itself, is a microcosm of *Nusantara*, Asian, and European lineages. There are incidences of some assimilation among different racial groups, either by choice or circumstance, over the passage of history. But, generally, these groups have remained characteristically distinct, in terms of their original heritage. Despite efforts at national integration through policy instruments, Malaysians have remained Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, Sarawakians and Sabahans — the latter two with more indigenous differentiation (see Appendix I). All of them have continued to practice their respective religions quite liberally, although Islam is the official religion of the country (see Appendix II). They are also portrayed as generous, caring and peace-loving people who, despite their racial and ethnic differences, are capable of living together harmoniously. And, generally, they have reacted well to this image. But their own reactions to the issue of national unity seem to be as diverse as their racial and ethnic identities.

On the whole, the examples above suggest that reactive behaviour is typical. And such behaviour tends to elicit problem-solving situations only as and when they occur. Unless human beings and their organizations are proactive, they might continue to suffer from the consequences of being unprepared in dealing with unanticipated events or crises. Thus, while crisis-orientation is habitual, even natural, it is not enough to tackle serious personal and societal problems effectively. Malaysia represents a good case study.

TWO

CULTURAL PLURALISM

The racial riots in 1969 exposed the weaknesses of a post-independent society whose joy for gaining independence was replaced by the stark realities of self-reliant development and unequal distribution of economic wealth. These weaknesses were identified as problems arising from economic disparity and social inequality between Malays and non-Malays, especially the Chinese. The problems were compounded by a geographical distribution which aggravated the differences in incomes and life-styles between rural Malays and urban Chinese, even though there were pockets of Malays and Chinese in urban and rural areas respectively.

Furthermore, until the declaration of Bahasa Malaysia or Malay Language as the National Language in 1967, the emphasis on national development, particularly on higher per capita income and on improving the export-earning capacity of primary commodities, favoured the spread of cultural pluralism. The English Language, as the *lingua franca* for economic transactions and socio-cultural communications, was used liberally. It also facilitated the maintenance of a plural society. The school systems, providing English-medium and vernacular-medium education, produced a generation of Malaysians who are conversant in English and/or the vernacular languages. But the National Language, especially in its oral form, was (and still is) the *lingua franca* of Malaysians of all races and from all walks of life and religious beliefs.

Under the charismatic leadership of the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, cultural pluralism flourished. Anchored to a philosophy of unity in diversity, cultural pluralism provided the impetus for the growth of a multi-racial and multi-lingual society where racial sentiments and ethnic differences were sublimated in the interest of decolonization. The process of decolonization was aimed at initiating administrative reforms which promoted a policy of "Malayanization". This policy initiated and regulated the replacement of expatriate staff with local officers in the Malaysian Civil Service (MCS). It was not directed, however, at altering the structure of urban-biassed development, although due attention was given to the improvement of basic infrastructures that supported urban growth and neglected rural development. Inevitably, the gaps between ethnic groups, and between rural and urban dwellers widened as, ironically, the process of decolonization also perpetuated the colonial structure of economic transactions and social interactions that favoured an unbalanced sectoral and demographic growth.

The philosophy of unity in diversity acknowledged the contributions of different races and ethnic idiosyncrasies to the post-independent development. The practice of this philosophy, however, assumed the harmonious co-existence of the various ethnic groups. It also encouraged the realization of communal aspirations, especially through the propagation of vernacular languages in the education system, as well as the preservation of prevailing diverse socio-cultural practices.

At the same time, communal aspirations for a share of political power and the economic pie were expressed through a representative government. This government was formed initially by an alliance of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). The relationships between the communal leaders in this alliance, as manifested in the Alliance Party, were based on mutual respect. They reflected a unity of intimate friendship and obligatory fidelity, especially among the leaders, which generated a conducive climate for amicable political interactions. Consequently, an environment of consultative politics and mutual exchanges was fostered. This casual and

informal environment, to a large extent, also characterized the larger society at the time.

The wider society was characterized as constituting a hierarchy of four distinct strata:

1. The Royalty, consisting of the traditional Malay Sultanate who functioned chiefly as constitutional heads.
2. The Political Alliance Leadership ("PAL") forged by the political leadership representing the main ethnic groups – essentially the ruling coalition called the Alliance party.
3. The "ACE" network, comprising linkages between Associations (eg. trade and commerce), Clanship Organizations (eg. surname and "homeland" affiliations), and Elite groups (eg. the traditional titled people, and the connected wealthy).
4. The *rakyat* or common people.

This "Royal PALACE" (see Glossary) culture of the society of post-independent Malaysia (see Figure 1) was distinguished by several features. Firstly, there was an intricate network of close and cordial relationships between and among members of "ACE". "ACE"'s patronage, and the active participation of community leaders who represented "ACE" and its linkages, in all facets of life were common. In fact, they continued to dominate economic transactions and socio-cultural activities despite the process of decolonization. Furthermore, there was a reinforcing nexus between the "ACE" network and Foreign Investors ("FI") who were ubiquitous in all economic ventures of foreign-owned and foreign-operated multinational companies.

The *rakyat* or common people were ingenuous, cooperative, unassuming and trustful, often exuding a sense of loyalty that was *causa sui*. The *rakyat* continued to grapple with the reality of improving their standard of living, regardless of race, creed, or religion. At the same time, they seemed to exhibit a profound sense of commitment to, and a proud sentiment for, the propagation of their socio-cultural

heritage. This heritage transcended the artificial barriers of communal politics. In addition

Meanwhile, the impact of post-*Merdeka* development continued to reinforce the Racial, Occupational, and Ethnic ("ROE") stereotypes among the *rakyat*. For example, such racial images were common: Malays were dark brown-skin descendants of aborigines; Chinese were yellow-skin descendants of *Nanyang* (overseas) immigrants; Indians were dark-skin descendants from the Continent of India; Others were mixed colour-skin descendants of foreign and local unions. Occupational stereotypes were also made along racial lines: Malays were farmers; Chinese were towkays (rich businessmen); Indians were labourers and *chettiars* (money-lenders); Others, like the Eurasians, were marginal men who vacillated between the fortunes of their historical ancestry, rooted in the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. And such ethnic images were also widespread: Malays were fatalistic and easy-going; Chinese were exploitative and industrious; Indians were mercenary and fickle; Others were apathetic and opportunistic.

The pyramid of "Royal PALACE" culture (see Figure 1) reflected a hierarchy of plural interactions that was reminiscent of a colonial legacy of British "divide and rule" policy. There were, however, two major differences. Firstly, the control of political power was in the hands of local nationals who constituted the tripartite Alliance Party. Secondly, the political leadership subscribed, somewhat unwittingly, to a national development policy which aggravated urban-rural differences and reinforced "ACE" and "FI" interests.

Thus, on the one hand, the *Merdeka* regime, who had no intention to divide and rule, ruled and divided instead. On the other hand, the British, who had surrendered their political power, continued to wield economic power through its multinational companies and their linkages with traditional "ACE" distributors and retailers. Under both regimes, however, the *rakyat* were only marginal participants, and sometimes token beneficiaries of trickle-down development which propelled some of them into the limelight as show-cases of success-achievements following independence.

The Traditional Sultanate

Political Pluralism
(The Alliance Party)

Economic Pluralism
("ACE" & "FI" Interests)

Socio-cultural Pluralism
("ROE" Stereotypes)

The Royalty

Political
Alliance
Leadership

Associations,
Clanship
Organisations,
Elite Groups

Common
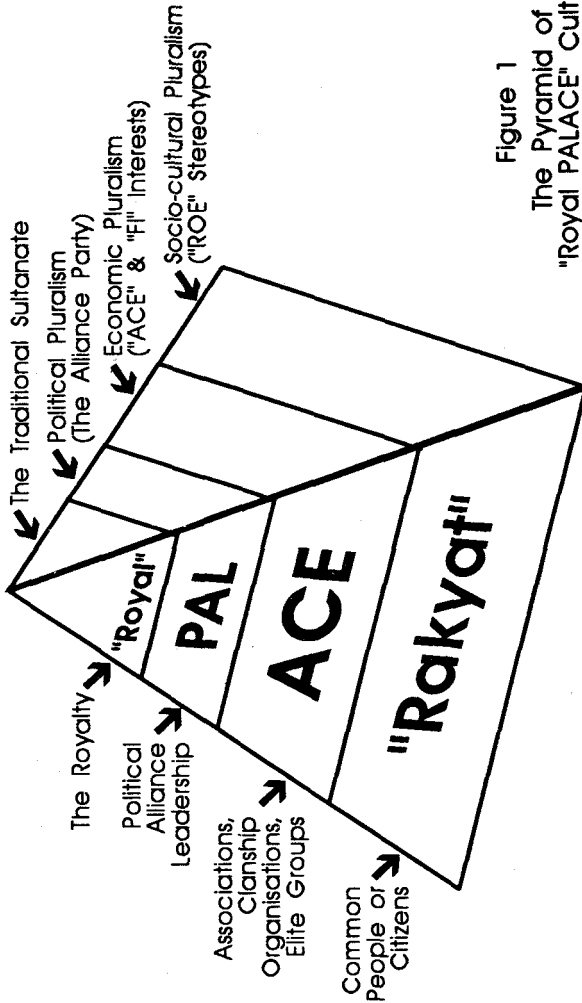People or
Citizens

"Royal"

PAL

ACE

"Rakyat"

Figure 1
The Pyramid of
"Royal PALACE" Culture:
A Hierarchy of
Plural Interactions

Ironically, the spirit of independence, particularly the spirit of mutual co-operation, that was harnessed to modernizing the Malaysian economy was also responsible for preserving the *status quo* of economic and socio-cultural pluralism. Also, pluralism, which had been the unifying force for securing independence, became a destructive force for national unity. This was most evident when political pluralism was exploited along communal lines following the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963, and the subsequent withdrawal of Singapore from this territorial unification on August 9, 1965. The demands of communal politics began to corrupt, distort, and corrode the *esprit de corp* and altruistic motives of a simple post-independent society. In this society, unadulterated ethnic stereotypes were often dismissed as *jeu d'esprit* or satirical humours; and, generally, they were accepted in good spirit.

The spirit of nationhood was characterized by a sense of goodwill and racial tolerance, despite the existence of racial and geographical polarization. Unfortunately, as the spirit of communalism gathered momentum, it gradually undermined and displaced the spirit of nationhood. Manifested in the orchestration of a "Malaysian Malaysia" concept, initiated by the Peoples Action Party (PAP) of Singapore in the 1964 General Election, and then propagated by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) of Malaysia in the 1969 federal and state elections, the spirit of communal politics began to sow seeds of contempt for goodwill and racial tolerance. Inter-ethnic relations became embroiled in a series of hostile and open confrontations which challenged the wisdom of a power equation that had been the hallmark of the Alliance Government. This equation, which encapsulated the idea that "Malays hold political power, Chinese and Indians hold economic power", became the target of communal politics. In turn, political diatribes created suspicion, distrust, disenchantment, and pent-up emotions among the multi-racial population. As communal lenses further distorted anything that was racial, the cauldron of inter-ethnic conflict started to boil. Racial sentiments were incensed to a feverish pitch. Human arrogance and partisan political ambitions disparaged the pride of human dignity and the might of ethnocentric retribution. The

struggle for equality and justice finally succumbed to the human frailty of excessive indulgences in egoistical partisan interests.

Partisan interests displaced national interests. The Barisan Nasional Government was rather complacent with the successful amalgamation of North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak into Malaysia. It ignored the changing needs of an expanded plural society whose antecedents of colonial and independence forces did little to remove "ROE" stereotypes and to ameliorate negative racial sentiments. The Opposition enjoyed growing popular support from the masses who were roughly divided in their loyalty as follows: urban-Chinese support for the DAP, the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), and the Gerakan (now a partner of the Barisan National); and rural-Malay support for the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP) – now Parti Angkatan Islam (PAS) – in the east-coast states of Peninsular Malaysia. The opposition parties ignored the need to respect the sanctity of individual ethnicity and ethnic rights within the provisions of the Constitution. Instead, they chose to fuel the rising paroxysm of racial insolence and aggression between different ethnic groups for their own ends.

Finally, the stage was set for an inter-ethnic conflict to unlease its fury onto a multi-racial and multi-religious society that was least prepared to confront a bloody racial crisis. The catalyst came in the form of a mammoth victory procession to celebrate the gains of the Chinese-based opposition in the May 10, 1969, parliamentary election. The rally triggered off violent rioting in the federal capital. Other incidents of lesser magnitude were also recorded in Penang. The frenzied bloodbath that ensued, and the state of emergency that was declared, had made May 13, 1969, the darkest day in the history of Malaysia.

The horror of this day is a national tragedy which many would like to forget. Lives were lost. Brutalities were committed. Buildings were destroyed. People were arrested. Rumour-mongering became a household word. Chaos reigned and the country came to a standstill. The nation was in a state of profound shock. Parliamentary democracy was suspended as leadership searched for a quick end to the drama of national tragedy. The National Operations Council (NOC) was established as the caretaker government to restore the country to normalcy.

The Tunku resigned and was succeeded by his deputy, the late Tun Abdul Razak, who became the country's second Prime Minister in September 1970. This change-over in leadership marked the beginning of an era of reconstruction that was to change the character and spirit of the country at least until 1990, when the New Economic Policy ends.

THREE
ETHNOCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT

The leadership of Tun Abdul Razak and the efforts of the NOC ushered in a new era of ethnocentric development. This era was marked by the promulgation of a *Rukunegara* (National Ideology) and the implementation of a national development policy known as the *Dasar Ekonomi Baru* (DEB) or the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The National Ideology, comprising five basic tenets for building national unity, was promulgated on the thirteenth anniversary of independence, on August 31, 1970. Conceived as a guideline for national ethical behaviour, and in the spirit of creating a new national *esprit de corps*, it was promoted with much enthusiasm, especially in schools and government offices. The public was encouraged to develop a sense of pride for and a commitment to the National Ideology. It states:

>Our Nation, Malaysia, is dedicated –
>>To achieving a greater unity for all her peoples;
>>To maintaining a democratic way of life;
>>To creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably distributed;
>>To ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions;

> To building a progressive society which shall be
>   orientated to modern science and technology;
>
> We, her peoples, pledge our unified efforts to attain these
>   ends guided by these principles:-
>   Belief in God;
>   Loyalty to King and Country ;
>   Upholding the Constitution ;
>   Rule of the Law;
>   Good Behaviour and Morality;

Until the formulation of the National Ideology, the *modus operandi* was a tacit understanding and a long-held assumption that the provisions of the Constitution, the rule of law, and the tenacity of racial tolerance would prevail to underwrite the success of Malaysia. But, alas, the *modus operandi* could not be taken for granted. Thus, following the declaration of the National Ideology, efforts were intensified to explain the meanings of the five tenets. Campaigns conducted were directed at reiterating the following:

1. Islam is the official religion of the Federation. Other religions and beliefs may be practised in peace and harmony and there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground of religion.
2. The loyalty that is expected of every citizen is that he must be faithful and bear true allegiance to his Majesty, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King).
3. It is the duty of a citizen to respect and appreciate the letter, the spirit and the historical background of the Constitution. This historical background led to such provisions as those regarding the position of ... the Rulers, the position of Islam as the official religion, the position of Malays and other Natives, the legitimate interests of other communities, and conferment of citizenship. It is the sacred duty of a citizen to defend and uphold the Constitution.

4. Justice is founded upon the rule of law. Every citizen is equal before the law. Fundamental liberties are guaranteed to all citizens. These include liberty of the person, equal protection of the law, freedom of religion, rights of property and protection against banishment. The Constitution confers on a citizen the right of free speech, assembly and association and this right may be enjoyed freely subject only to limitations imposed by law.

5. Individuals and groups shall conduct their affairs in such a manner as not to violate any of the accepted canon of behaviour which is arrogant or offensive to the sensitivities of any group. No citizen should question the loyalty of another citizen on the ground that he belongs to a particular community.

As the campaigns to inculcate the spirit and letter of the National Ideology became pervasive, remedial measures were proposed to redress economic and social inequalities, particularly the unequal participation of Malays in business and industry, and the eradication of poverty among the rural Malay community. Consequently, the NEP was introduced, following the restoration of parliamentary democracy on February 23, 1971, with a two-fold objective: to eradicate poverty pull up by the and to restructure society. Underlying these objectives, of course, was the ultimate aim of fostering national unity among the diverse races in the country.

Covering the duration of the Second (1971-1975), Third (1976-1980), Fourth (1981-1985), and Fifth (1986-1990) Malaysia Plans, 1990 was set as the target year for realizing the objectives of the NEP. The late Tun Abdul Razak, assisted by the late Tun Dr. Ismail, set about the tasks of achieving the goals and targets in various programmes that were designed to eradicate poverty and reduce disparities in income and capital ownership. The back-up role of the National Security Council (which had replaced the NOC), the supportive roles of the National Consultative Council and the National Goodwill Council (which were merged into an advisory entity called the National Unity Council), and the new provisions of the Constitu-

tion (Amendment) Bill (particularly pertaining to Acts of Sedition) provided the background for the development decades of the NEP.

In implementing the NEP, the Government had reiterated that it "will spare no efforts to promote national unity and develop a just and progressive Malaysian society in a rapidly expanding economy so that no one will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity". Implementation, however, was not easy. It was fraught with administrative problems such as those associated with a lack of trained management resources and public accountability.

Although an uneasy political calm existed, racial tensions remained dormant as the government did what it could to accelerate rural development and to increase active Malay participation in the private sector. This was done through more active involvement of quasi-government organizations in economic transactions as well as the provision of more scholarships and opportunities for higher education for rural Malay students. The former, conducted within the constraining framework of bureaucratic procedures and regulations, has had its share of problems despite some notable successes. For example, the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) schemes throughout the country have raised a generation of cultivators and their contributions to the palm oil and cocoa industries. But the issues of tenancy-ownership and questionable financial management remained unresolved. More effective periphery-centre linkages between the new settlements and urban centres beyond mere infrastructure facilities also remain an unfulfilled dream.

In terms of sponsored mobility within the education system, the quota system of reserved access and preferential financial aid for Malay students in local institutions of higher learning raised provocative but muted protests from non-Malay students who perceive themselves to be victims of such discrimination. This system has remained a sensitive issue, particularly since its implementation has involved an emphasis on numbers to meet the quota. Inevitably, a spinoff from this issue suggests an aspect of the "quantity versus quality" dilemma in higher education. Part of this dilemma consists of problems related to lower entry requirements in favour of a larger number of students

for higher institutions of learning. Another part of the dilemma involves the maintenance of high performance-achievement standards to ensure that the graduates of these institutions can match the employment opportunities available to them. This dilemma, in turn, underlines the serious problems of human resources planning and management for the country as a whole (see the 1987 paper listed in the Selected Bibliography).

The prevailing atmosphere in the country seems to be one of apathetic spectatorship and caution. The Sedition Act has produced a variety of cases of political detention and release from time to time. Under these conditions, concessionary exchanges between members of the new, expanded ruling Barisan Nasional coalition are shrouded in sworn secrecy. Major parties of the coalition, especially the Chinese-based MCA, have protested rather weakly (and at strategic moments such as annual general assemblies and public seminars) their imprisonment in the politics of compromise and loyalty to the leadership of Barisan Nasional. The general public is often led to believe that it is not the individual parties that have lost their potency to act effectively but it is the collective will of the coalition that has enervated its ability to act independently.

Over the years, even in Parliament, the bridled sentiments of communal politics have done little to enliven its otherwise routine proceedings. Some of the lively debates over issues on the implementation of the NEP have been over-shadowed by a persistent chorus of agreement by pro-government back-benchers and occasional *en bloc* boycotts by members of the opposition, especially those in the DAP. In fact, the proceedings sometimes seem to lack the character of mature statesmanship and constructive discourse as some Members of Parliament exhibit fits of infantile behaviour while others speak only occasionally to register their presence. There seems to be a notable increase in absenteeism, and representative replies on behalf of absent Ministers are fairly common.

At the same time, the incremental orientation of the bureaucracy, whereby policy decisions are made on an *ad hoc* basis and the retarded take-off of some of its agencies did little to allay public apprehension of its muddling through the implementation of a sig-

nificant public policy. Weighed down by a culture of bureaucratic red-tape (with some exceptions in cases of national exigency or political contingency) and public censures of inefficiency, the achievements of the bureaucracy are eclipsed by controversies that revolve around suspended or aborted projects, misuse of funds, preferential tender awards, and even political interference. However, some critics have remarked that the bureaucracy is very much alive as it has replaced the processes of decolonization with re-orientation and "Malayanization" with Bumiputeraization.

The stage, enacted for an ethnocentric development, was to become the hallmark of the NEP era in Malaysia. The fervour, with which the NEP was executed, betrayed an almost absolute pre-occupation with achieving the targets of 30-per cent *bumiputera*, 30-per cent foreign, and 40-per cent non-*bumiputera* equity participation in the nation's economic pie. The emphasis was, and still is, on the *bumiputera* portion of the equation. Another pre-occupation seems to be with quantitative rather than qualitative aspects. In this respect, public opinion, and sometimes even public sentiments, on the shortfalls of the NEP are divided and controversial.

Despite the introduction of the Mid-Term Review Reports to monitor the progress of the NEP, the third Prime Minister, the late Tun Hussein Onn, did not have an easy passage. On the contrary, he tried to maintain an even keel as inputs from numerous public seminars on the *status quo* of the NEP churned up unprecedented criticisms against the public policy.

Quasi-government organizations and State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs) constituted the major targets of public criticisms. Some of these organizations fell short of expectations. Often, the reported failures of the SEDCs were dismissed as teething problems which would be resolved eventually. As these organizations and corporations were designed by the government to accelerate the accumulation of *bumiputera* assets in different economic activities and to redistribute them to the rest of the *bumiputera* community, there was much consternation among those in government in general, and among the Malay leaders in particular, with regards to their performances. The extent of the damage done, insofar as it involves

monetary and capital losses as well as the erosion of public confidence, has remained somewhat vague and inexplicable. But more funds are channelled into these organizations and corporations to rejuvenate and revive them respectively. Although some of them have gained a second lease of life, they seem to be plagued by all sorts of problems, including poor directional-growth orientation and management-related issues.

In the private sector, commercial banks were directed to give loans to *bumiputeras* who aspired to be businessmen, with minimum red-tape. Secure with such loans and government assistance, aspiring businessmen assailed the economic enclaves earmarked for *bumiputera* participation. Many of them indulged in small-scale and medium-sized businesses. A few of them entered the world of big finance and industry. And a privileged few were spread across the Board of Directors of numerous companies with domestic and foreign interests. Interestingly, the latter phenomenon seems to have created a sort of reward system for retired public figures, including top-ranking civil servants, as well as a catchment area for them to extend their invaluable experiences and expertise to the private sector.

Initially, many bumiputeras were employed in positions that were connected with personnel functions. This phenomenon is attested by employment advertisements which specify "*bumiputera* candidates only", or more recently, "*bumiputera* candidates are encouraged to apply" for personnel or human resource executives or managers. Today, however, more *bumiputeras* are found in positions of financial and marketing functions, too. A few are highly visible in the financial and banking systems of the country, including the money markets.

But affirmative action, in the Malaysian mode is not devoid of its share of critics who choose to highlight the failures and the philanderers of sponsored mobility in the area of business activity. They are quick to point out that the NEP has been designed to make a few millionaire Malays at the expense of the many still poor Malays. Although much publicity has been given to this racial overture, many have abstained from partaking in the fray of ethnocentric rhetorics.

Moreover, the present government led by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad since 1981 has not succumbed to the pressures of anti-NEP sentiments and the insidious, often incendiary, allegations of racial discrimination. As he guides the NEP into the final lap, much has been achieved for the *bumiputera* community although some claim that much more can still be done. In this respect, there is a tendency for human weakness to declare that enough is never enough. The issue, therefore, is "When is enough enough?" This issue of relativity seems to permeate the exhortations of both the champions of NEP and its critics.

Despite sporadic bouts of criticism against his leadership, Dr. Mahathir seems to have weathered the storm of controversies quite well. But these controversies have not disappeared completely. They continue to be manifested in new terminologies that have encapsulated the spirit and corpus of achievements and non-achievements of the NEP era. Such nomenclatures include: Ali-Baba operations, subsidy mentality, *nouveau riche* Malays, monopolistic contracts, connected manipulation, political networking, godfather patronage, wheeler-dealers, and the widespread phenomenon of *bumiputeraism*. Of course, some of the controversies that surround the meanings and implications of these nomenclatures are cumulative legacies of previous administrations which unwittingly or otherwise, have been sheltered from the brunt of public and partisan censures due to death or retirement.

Until the October 1990 election resolved matters in his favour, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was engulfed in a new set of controversies that could have undermined his leadership, especially in UMNO, the backbone of the Barisan Nasional government. To a large extent, these controversies were manifested in the formation of Semangat 46 (Spirit of 46), a splinter group of dissident ex-UMNO leaders, led by the former Minister of Finance, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Meanwhile, vocabularies like "ultras" and "chauvinists" that once described the hostility of Sino-Malay relations have taken a backseat. Instead, expressions such as "separatists" and "saboteurs" have permeated the interactions of intra-ethnic relations. This is evi-

dent, although in somewhat less vocal terms than Semangat 46, in the revamped PPP whose leadership comprises mainly ex-MCA figures such as Mak Hon Kam. The Party, however, suffers from legal encumbrances (and perhaps financial woes, too) that have stunted its take-off from the onset. The political scene in East Malaysia, especially in Sabah, is no different. The Mark Koding saga terminated in his resignation from the ruling Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) and resulted in the open confirmation of his membership in a newly-formed party called the Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (Akar – the Force of People's Justice). Despite rumbles of subversive incantations and pockets of political turbulences, somewhat akin to the hiccups experienced during a plane's flight through turbulent weather, the focus is shunted from the proceedings of individual party General Assembly and the Annual Budget Debate to the speculation of a victorious general election. But the real focus will certainly be on the contributions of the newly established National Economic Consultative Committee (NECC) as 1990 is now in focus and the Barisan Nasional has just been returned to power.

The formation of the NECC has, momentarily, shackled the polemics of communal demands behind the closed doors of representative discourse. This discourse, under the Chairmanship of an ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ghazali bin Shafie, is expected to generate the bases for the enactment of a new public policy beyond the NEP. Perhaps, the final outcome of this discourse could be a Representative Economic Policy (REP) or *Dasar Ekonomi Perwakilan* (DEP), or a Participative Economic Policy (PEP) or *Dasar Ekonomi Penyertaan* (DEP)?

It would seem that the future of Malaysia in the post-NEP era may well rest in the objectivity of the NECC – subject, of course, to the discretion of the Government. Regardless, the stage is set whereby the rhetoric of a racially-biassed NEP will be more difficult to accept. Similarly, the claims that a major public policy is enacted without representative or participative input from a myraid of sources may no longer be tenable. The fact remains that a public mechanism has been created to initiate recommendations for socio-economic changes beyond the year 2000. For the time being, a younger genera-

tion of Malaysians can only hope for the best for every one, regard-less of race, colour, creed, or religion, especially in their country where national unity has become a favourite catch-word among the politicians.

FOUR

NATIONAL UNITY

❀

Any national policy which succeeds the NEP will be a renewed effort·
to foster national unity through social engineering. The emphasis on
national unity in the NEP, however, has been over-shadowed by the
attention given to redressing inequities, especially in the private sec-
tor. But national unity, even in its most distorted form after May 13,
1969, has continued to exist, especially among Malaysians who share
common problems such as poverty in the rural areas and squatter-like
living conditions in the urban areas. The issue of national unity has al-
ways been so embroiled in communal politics and partisan hedging
that it is deemed to be non-existent. Perhaps the missing link is na-
tional integration. The latter presumes the existence of national unity
among the different races in the country. But the elements of unifica-
tion must be promoted and reinforced from time to time so that racial
differences can be minimized.

It is unrealistic to think that racial differences can be obliterated
in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. Like flogging the dead
horse, returning to the issue of national unity merely continues to
shroud the real issues of a united Malaysian society whose citizens,
when abroad, almost never fail to identify themselves as Malaysians
first. These issues include the "what" (nature or form), "how much"
(degree or extent), and "where to" (directional growth) of unity that is
needed to reinforce common or shared values of commitment, sacri-
fice, co-existence, co-operation, and *esprit de corps*, apart from those

that are enumerated in the five tenets of the National Ideology. These values have basically a non-ethnic bias; but they have only received lip-service so far.

In fact, the main thrust of fostering national unity so far has been the emphasis on differences rather than similarities. An alternative approach would be to reverse the emphasis. In this respect, the prospect of national integration is quite encouraging. Common or shared values, and other neutral values, would be ideal elements of unification. But these values must be inculcated among the young, especially through the sources of childhood and adolescent socialization. Even television commercials, if well-conceived, can play a constructive role. For example, the unity theme among a bunch of kids erecting ·their playhouse deserves citation. Sponsored by the YTL Construction Group, apart from the commercial value (and costs) for the company and a fulfillment of its social responsibility role, the commercial is short and very effective.

National unity is an elusive concept. Its elusiveness is compounded by varying foci which political and policy lenses adopt to highlight different facets of a multi-racial and multi-religious society, at different times and for different contingencies. Racial and ethnic problems provide the breeding ground for communal politics and protagonists of change. One such problem is that any form of political management along ethnic allegiance is inherently divisive. This divisiveness may be shrouded behind a facade of alliances, ranging from expediency to convenience or from tradition to fad. But such proclivity is seldom free from the politics of confrontation and manipulation.

Hence, any artificial barrier that is constructed to stifle the expresssions of confrontational politics is superficial. Its effects may be temporary. This is because the roots of any problem often remain unresolved. Similarly, any public policy that is characterized by preferential treatment and tokenism, implemented in the name of affirmative action, is likely to remain controversial. And, this controversy is often compounded by different perceptions and interpretations of preferential treatment and tokenism. Consequently, they provide the fuel for igniting racial sentiments and ethnic sensitivities.

The United States of America is a good example. Its population is a potpourri of many races and diverse ethnicity. Progressing through the melting-pot into cultural pluralism, its affirmative action policies were designed to redress the outcomes of years of discrimination against the minorities, especially the Blacks. But today, thirteen years after affirmative action was enforced, the impact of reverse discrimination is refueling negative racial sentiments as reported abuses of affirmative action are exposed. More importantly, however, is the fact that a generation of younger White Americans are competing with increasing numbers of their minority counterparts, especially of Mexican-American and Asian origins, for equal opportunities in education and employment.

Another problem in Malaysia is that any change in the power equation cannot ignore the reality of the market-place. The former operates in a political environment, and its power and authority may be limited only by the hands that wield control. But the latter operates in an economic environment whose fortunes vacillate as market forces change. As the discrepancy between the promise of political delivery and the reality of the economic pie limits redistribution among different races, the gap between expectation and actualization widens. Moreover, this problem is compounded by changes in racial demands and ethnic aspirations over time. Among the factors responsible for these changes are a more youthful population, new occupational categories, preference for urban living, a more literate and informed community with a broader spectrum of career and consumption choices, and a new value orientation that is peppered with "IM-ism", that is, a penchant for individualism and materialism. Inevitably, as the needs and wants of different ethnic groups expand, the government can only deliver what it has to deliver. Beyond this ability, any promise tends to encourage rising expectations and to increase the level of intolerance in society.

Yet another problem, inherited from the aftermath of May 13, 1969, suggests that racial sensitivities and ethnic idiosyncrasies cannot be taken for granted. Constitutional guarantees and privileges have already set the basic rules for communal interaction and racial decorum. Mandatory policy allocations and statutory provisions have

provided the broad guidelines for achieving the objectives, goals, and targets of the NEP. Legislative amendments and regulatory changes have been made to update procedures for, and to reduce ambiguity in, policy implementation. Gradually, these efforts have lessened past "ROE" stereotypes among the *rakyat.*

But, in the process of development, new categories of Gender, Racial, Ethnic, Employment, Doctrinal ("GREED") stereotypes have been generated. While racial, ethnic, and employment stereotypes may still comprise the conventional species that are identified with race and location, they also encompass new species that are conceived along dimensions of drug addiction and trafficking as well as other criminal offences. The gender and doctrinal stereotypes are new species that transcend the parameters of race and ethnicity, even location. For example, Malaysian women in general are fast becoming a strong social force in asserting their claims for equal rights and equal opportunities, regardless of race, colour, creed or religion. Juxtaposed with men, their combined forces in the near future might generate common ideological beliefs, such as better quality of life for the family and more ethical conduct in personal and social intercourse that are free from the prejudices of race and ethnicity.

On the whole, the government seems to be aware of these issues. Although it has been quite successful in quelling several outbursts of racial sentiments, especially in the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) and in some interest-group articulations, it has been unable to deal effectively with the exploitation of ethnic sensitivities by vested interests. Political parties, including those in the Barisan Nasional, use these sensitivities to peddle their campaign rhetoric at every available opportunity. For example, it is common, even strategic, for vested interests to articulate prejudices and discriminatory practices during partisan political assemblies, inter-party dialogues, by-election campaigns, and the build-up for a general election. Sometimes, even the disclosures of personal skeletons in the closet and character assassination are acceptable practices, as long as the desired outcome is achieved.

Under these circumstances, and in other crisis-oriented situations like candidacy selection and constituency poaching, so-called cham-

pions of plural interests emerge to vituperate the shortcomings of ethnocentric representations. Ironically, they may choose to wear the myopic lenses of ethnocentricism themselves in less critical circumstances. In this respect, *bumiputera*-based parties usually invoke the rights and privileges guaranteed in the Constitution as well as other statutory provisions to justify their ethnocentric outbursts. Non-*bumiputera*-based parties, especially those outside the Barisan Nasional, often challenge the indiscriminate interpretation and use of these constitutional and statutory shelters, without necessarily defiling the spirit of these shelters. Other non-*bumiputera*-based parties, within the Barisan Nasional, often contradict themselves as they shuttle from the closed-door negotiations of Barisan threshold to the closed-door discussions at party headquarters. In between these shuttles, they often issue statements and conduct public seminars that are choreographed to sustain and gain support for communal representation.

The fact, however, remains that both *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* parties throughout Malaysia thrive on communal representation. Invariably, for survival and growth, they will continue to orchestrate the popular sentiments of race and ethnicity for their own ends. Like the chameleon, which changes its colour to match its environment, the exploitation of ethnic sensitivities, in varying guises, is promoted by political parties and other vested interests as they deem necessary. And, like the chameleon itself, these sensitivities have assumed new dimensions over the years in alignment with changing circumstances in an ethnically diverse environment.

CHANGING MILIEU

The Political Environment

Many aspects of Malaysian life have changed in the thirty-two years since independence. For example, in the political environment, the domestic crises of the component parties of the Barisan Nasional have resulted in numerous purges, reshuffles, cover-ups, intrigues, splinter groups, and new coalitions.

The MCA underwent major surgery before it settled down to recuperate under its avowed collective leadership. In the first instance, the regime of Dr. Neo Yee Pan was removed, following a bitter struggle. In the second instance, the pioneer-leader of the present collective leadership, Tan Koon Swan, was ignominiously removed from the presidency as a result of his problems in the business world. Whether there is any cancerous growth, and to what extent is this growth manifested in the current leadership of Dr. Ling Liong Sik – for whom the responsibility of collective leadership has been a major theme even throughout Tan Koon Swan's predicament and the party's financial woes – remain an interesting speculation (see Postscript).

Today, the MCA appears to be sailing into calmer waters, fluctuating between concerted efforts to save the MCA building and to put to rest its financial scandals and its individual efforts to avoid undue controversy and to drift with popular sentiments. Perhaps, behind the closed-doors of MCA, the recuperative period is far from

over as the present regime searches for more substantive communal issues to reassert its leadership on the Chinese community – the corner-stone of its existence! But, entrapped in a dilemma of party credibility and coalition responsibility, the MCA has resorted to a jaded mechanism – the public seminar – to peddle its political wares. Two recent examples are illustrative of this point. Firstly, the religious issue of minimum-age consent that was passed in the Selangor State Legislative Assembly and on which MCA assemblymen acquiesced passively. The eight assemblymen resigned conditionally. And in the ensuing controversy in which UMNO displayed extreme displeasure, the MCA decided to withdraw its conditional resignations in favour of a closed-door remedial patchwork. Secondly, the MCA in-house seminar proposal for a grand design to replace the NEP after 1990 seems couched in racial overtures which did not escape the attention of other component parties in the Barisan Nasional.

Nevertheless, the bait has been set and, according to a very brief report in the local press, the UMNO Youth leader, Najib Tun Abdul Razak, had already recorded the first rebuttal with no less racial overtures. But the bite was suspended momentarily as more important national issues such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the Annual Budget Proposal claimed their share of media attention. Meanwhile, the public's attention towards the fiasco of the MCA assemblymen was diverted as the wrath of UMNO over the said Assemblymen's conditional resignation shifted to the Mahathir-Razaleigh encounter.

UMNO, the spearhead of the Barisan Nasional, also underwent an identity crisis as the Malaysian High Court decision ruled on a legal technicality which made it an unlawful society and, hence, officially non-existent. The crisis not only created judicial history, but it also resulted in a judicial backlash which saw some major changes in personnel in the judiciary. The present leadership, however, was swift to act as it staved off a wave of "subversions", mainly in the forms of legal suits, character assassinations, shifting allegiances, and a spate of rumour-mongering and contradictory press reports.

But Dr. Mahathir and his allies were not inclined to allow legal impediments to remove them from office and to obliterate the

foremost political party in the country. As the best legal and political brains in the country agonized over the most appropriate way to revive UMNO, the leadership continued to rule with a firm hand. When attempts to reconcile the differences between old and new UMNO leaders failed, the birth of the Semangat 46 party aggravated the rift between the UMNO leadership and the protagonists of change. In both instances, hard-core members have remained loyal to their cause although there were fence-sitters and political chameleons who deftly concealed their hands.

Although UMNO contained the crisis, its leadership seemed apprehensive about the cracks which surfaced in various states where, at the height of the crisis, the loyalty of party branches was questionable. It may have been unsure of the strength of Semangat 46, but it was not predisposed to under-estimate the latter's influence. The Barisan's victory in the October 1990 general election was preceded by a number of by-elections victories. The by-elections involved the constituency of Sungai Besar in Selangor on November 1, 1989, the Ranau constituency in Sabah on November 25, 1989, and the Pantai Merdeka constituency in Kedah on March 24, 1990. The first was retained by the Barisan Nasional candidate, against a PAS candidate who was supported by Semangat 46, by a reduced majority vote. The second saw the victory of the reigning party the PBS, over the dissident Akar. The third witnessed the victory of the Barisan Nasional candidate over the PAS-Semangat 46 candidate. In this instance, the Kijai by-election in Terengganu – an east-coast state in West Malaysia – saw the first direct confrontation between UMNO and Semangat 46. The ground was tested in July 1990 but the Semangat 46 candidate lost.

As the 1990 general election approached, various parties indicated that they had compiled lists of candidates, amidst a couple of reports on some disagreements between the MCA and the Gerakan on seat and constituency allocations. But the centre stage was occupied by UMNO and Semangat 46 as they prepared for a "High Noon" encounter. More significantly, however, was the reality that Malaysians had another option available to them when they decided to cast their votes. In fact, they had more than one option, considering the coali-

tion between PAS, Semangat 46, Berjasa, and Hamim in the form of
Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU) in West Malaysia and the newly
formed Akar in East Malaysia. More threatening to the incumbents
was the electoral pact that Semangat 46 leader Tengku Razaleigh
Hamzah also arranged with DAP, PRM and IPF in the form of
Gagasan Rakyat (People's Might).

The MIC had its share of internal problems. Despite the results of
its 1989 party election which reinstalled Samy Vellu as the President
for a third term, his challenger Deputy President Subramaniam had a
strong showing. As the latter tried to seek legal recourse against al-
leged misconduct during the party election, the former seemed will-
ing to reconsider working with his deputy if the latter's election agent
and close ally, K. Pathmanaban was sacrificed. Of course, the thorn
on the side – Pandithan, an ex-Parliamentary Secretary and an ap-
parent power broker in the MIC conflict, was momentarily neglected.
But he was not inclined to be relegated into political oblivion. He an-
nounced the formation of his breakaway party the All-Malaysian In-
dian Progressive Front (IPF). And the IPF indicated that it would join
forces with Semangat 46 and DAP in the elections.

Much heated words were exchanged and many threats and chal-
lenges were issued between the contending MIC factions before and
during the party election. The saving grace, came in the form of the
Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which followed al-
most immediately after the results were announced. The nation's
press focussed instead on Malaysia's performance as an international
host of one of the world's most exclusive clubs for Britain and her
former colonies. Thus, the MIC leadership was left to reflect on its
boisterous arrogance while its contenders wondered if their challenge
was not premature.

But before the dust could settle, the Vijandran-videotape fiasco
shook the MIC again and also implicated the credibility of the Attor-
ney-General and the police. A very close ally of Samy Vellu,
Vijandran, who was also the Deputy Speaker of the Senate, was ac-
cused of pornographic involvement that was recorded on videotapes
which had been part of his stolen personal documents. The Attorney
General and the police were implicated in the destruction of these

videotapes. Although the accused has resigned as the Deputy Speaker of the Senate and the Party's Secretary-General as well as other official posts in the MIC and its Holding Companies, his leave of absence has left a lot of questions unanswered. But, Samy Vellu showed that he was not inclined to let the ignominious affair affect his authority as he moved swiftly to appoint new allies, dismiss defunct branches, and install new pro-Samy branches to counter the forces of his Deputy. The bottom-line was a "D & C" procedure for flushing out pro-Subramaniam elements and their associates, despite reported conciliatory gestures. Recently, Subramanian and Pathmanaban were not selected to stand in the general election. And the President remained adamant in his refusal to agree with the Prime Minister's suggestion that Subramaniam be appointed as a Deputy Minister in the present cabinet.

The heat on the Vijandran affair may have abated. And the "Subramaniam affair" may have reached a stalemate. But the internal dissensions in the MIC, although muted, are far from being resolved. The fact remains that the party itself is changing. And, like its UMNO and MCA partners, it must concede that not all changes are necessarily negative, and not all criticisms are necessarily destructive. What is negative, and which is destructive, are personal vindictiveness, self-righteousness and arrogance. These personal elements run contrary to party interests, public-spiritedness, and national commitment.

In East Malaysia, the reported rift between the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Sarawak has been dismissed as mischievous and unfounded, despite rumbles of discontent among the political parties within the Barisan Nasional coalition. As the "Sarawak Affair" receded momentarily into the background, a last hurrah during the last Parliamentary session publicized the frequent absenteeism of the Chief Minister from the Dewan Rakyat. For a while, the "Sabah Affair" held the limelight. The Mark Koding saga was reminiscent of the early days when the present Chief Minister, Joseph Pairin Kitingan survived the tumultuous formation of his coalition government. The difference, however, is that Mark Koding, once noted for his unequivocal outburst of racial politics in Parliament, resigned as Deputy Chief Minister of Sabah, left the PBS, and

joined a new Opposition party. Although shaken by these developments, and the dramatic incidents of his brother's alleged corrupt practices, Pairin played his cards carefully until his dramatic realignment with Semangat 46 in the October 1990 general election.

During the last Sabah state elections, held on June 16 and 17, 1990, PBS recorded an impressive victory. It retained the seat of government, obtaining two-thirds majority with 36 seats. The political comeback of a former Chief Minister – Harris Salleh and his party (Berjaya) did not materialize. They failed to win any seat. Recently, Harris Salleh announced that Berjaya would be dissolved. Mark Koding also lost in the Ranau constituency for the second time. His Akar party made no headway in the elections. The DAP and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) failed to win any seat. USNO, (a component party of Barisan Nasional) under the leadership of Datu Mustapha Datu Harun, won 12 of the remaining seats in the Sabah State Assembly.

For the moment, Joseph Pairin Kitingan and his PBS had gained a reprieve to consolidate its power in the state and to settle issues of conflicting interests which had made Sabah politics rather unsettling in the past. One of the issues raised in its Election Manifesto, i.e., the status of Labuan as a Federal Territory had created a strain in the relationship between the Federal government and the State government. In fact, this was also a popular issue among the Opposition parties during the election.

On October 15, 1990, Joseph Pairin Kitingan shocked the Barisan Nasional leaders by withdrawing his party from the coalition and aligning the PBS with Gagasan Rakyat. This event, five days before the general election was held did not prevent PBS from winning 14 parliamentary seats. The Prime Minister and his Deputy reacted immediately; they announced that UMNO would set up branches in Sabah. Meanwhile, USNO had reaffirmed its support for UMNO and Barisan Nasional. And Akar was reported to have shown an interest in becoming a member of the Barisan Nasional.

Regardless of future developments, the reality is that all is not well in Sabah. It would seem that the tendency to develop splinter group-opposition alliances is quite infectious. The question is how ef-

fective is this alliance in representing constituency-interests rather than in registering a personal influence. Another more interesting issue is centred around the question of ethnicity. In this respect, the drama of politics *a la* East Malaysia seems to reveal an ethnocentric bias that borders between indigenous affinity and national identity, in which the persuasion of nascent tribal societies is often critical in deciding the political and economic future in East Malaysia.

The Business Environment

In the business environment, financial scandals, bankruptcies, and white-collar crimes have revealed huge misappropriations of funds in party-owned finance companies and co-operatives. As thousands of depositors lamented their losses, property development, especially housing schemes, came to a standstill. At the same time, the rise and fall of a new-generation of so-called self-made business tycoons followed the fortunes and misfortunes of their corporate empires respectively. The foundations of several commercial banks and finance companies were threatened as they found themselves landed with collaterals of clients who struggled to keep their heads above water. The concentration of huge loans and other generous facilities in a few hands, especially those given to big business and the well-connected, is indeed a risk which challenges even the basics of banking prudence. But banking prudence almost always falls victim to good times when the lure of enormous profits and a fairly long list of potential clients are too attractive to resist.

Bank Negara (Central Bank) has never been busier, apart from its normal functions. It is overseeing the salvage jobs of fraudulent co-operatives and finance companies. It has reviewed, revised, and amended relevant statutes to better monitor financial and banking transactions in the country. It is in the process of finalizing approvals for commercial banks to raise their sundry service charges and to impose these charges where none had existed before. Despite public opinion, the commercial banks claimed that such an increase is justified as they are reported to incur higher operating costs, more social

responsibility commitments, and bigger losses during the years of recession. The point, however, is that there is still a lag between better customer services and higher service charges, especially for the average clientele.

Petronas (Petroleum Nasional Bhd.) was reported to be bailing Bank Bumiputera Malaysia Berhad (BBMB) out of its financial straits for a second time. The latter was reported to incur a loss of MYR$1,059 billion for the financial year ending March 1989 although it is envisaged to make a profit of about MYR$168 million for the next financial year. Meanwhile, as Bank Negara introduced new coins of one-cent, five-cent, ten-cent, twenty-cent, fifty-cent, and one-dollar denominations to replace old coins in circulation, the general public is reminded of a similar exercise several years ago, under almost identical economic conditions, viz., the post-recession recovery period. The difference, however, was the replacement of old notes of one-dollar denomination and above with new ones. The similarity is "until all old monies in circulation are retrieved". Such an exercise suggests that the real value of money tends to be adversely affected by an increased volume of new money in circulation. This, among others, affects the purchasing power of the consumers.

The reported economic recovery, and the release of new housing loans for government servants following the 1989 Budget proposal, have injected much enthusiasm into an otherwise sluggish property market. Like the good old days, the real estate sector is poised for a buyers market. Meanwhile, incomplete and new housing projects are receiving new leases of life. Even a gradual escalating price-hike is envisaged as justification of the conventional types, for example, increase in the price of materials and handling costs are passed around the construction industry. The prices of low-cost houses, however, seem more controllable.

Of course, commercial banks with a reserve of property collaterals from the recession days are enthused by the prospects of recovering a huge chunk of their losses from these idle assets. As ailing companies are reported to be turning around, successful companies are on the trail of acquisitions. Mergers and take-overs are quite common, and these new companies seek diversification in their business

interests. Joint-venture investments between state governments and foreign investors are becoming a common means of ensuring progressive economic development. And pioneer status continues to be a standard attraction. Meanwhile, the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE), in trying to resolve the issue of missing scrip by May 15, 1990, has reported a total of 8,474 share certificates as lost. Their estimated value is MYR$18 million after weeding out the false claims for 30,984 scrip and deducting a further 2,019 doubtful claims. This exercise may improve accountability and check abuses in the stock-broking business. But the missing scrip incident leaves a trail of transactions which perhaps tells a tale of indiscreet, even unethical practices that have been neglected for a long time in the local bourse. Nevertheless, the separation of the local bourse from that of Singapore is an achievement. And KLSE's planned expansion augurs well for the stockbroking business and the local money market.

Recently, as incarcerated public personalities who were involved in white-collar crimes were set free after a brief imprisonment, the prison system has become the focus of negative publicity. It is bombarded with charges and photographic evidence of favouritism, corruption, and mismanagement. Exemplified by the Abdullah Ang fiasco and the reported personalized prison-abode conditions of privileged prisoners, the government was initially reluctant to release the findings of all pertinent investigations. Recent prison breakouts and public criticisms may have contributed to a change of mind. Unless the findings of such deviations are made public, speculative conjectures will continue to fuel the imagination of a more conscious population about cover-ups for more serious problems than those which meet the eye. More importantly, the use of the secrecy veil can only render the call for public accountability as an exercise in futility. The appointment of a new head for the prison system, however, is a positive step towards reformation. But expediency and efficiency cannot be sacrificed again for complacent behaviour in bureaucracy and government. Such behaviour tends to undermine the confidence of those in business and public administration.

With the Barisan Nasional in power again after the October 1990 general election, there is a continuity in major policy undertakings.

Such continuity tends to generate a more favourable climate for investments and new economic activities.

The Socio-Cultural Environment

In the socio-cultural environment, the racial character of drug addiction, trafficking, and rehabilitation is being played down in favour of displaying statistical numbers and percentages to highlight the drug menace in the country. Tighter laws to confiscate the properties of drug traffickers at home and abroad, and the death sentence for guilty offenders, are commendable and positive measures which have put the country in the world map as a leading practising advocate of what it preaches in the drug war. During the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Prime Minister reiterated the need for Commonwealth nations to make a concerted effort to combat the invasion of drug barons and their henchmen throughout the world. The crusade against drug abuse, and also against the rape of natural environments, are noble and praise-worthy ventures.

Similarly, the racial identity of imported contract estate workers and illegal immigrants are also shielded by statistics which alert the country to its plight and shortage of local labour in agriculture and in the construction industry. The infiltration of illegal immigrants into the various coastal and border residential areas of Malaysia, and the thriving business of immigrant management, are serious problems that have their parallels in the wet-backs of United States of America and the fugitives of the Niagara Falls in the United States of America-Canadian border. Although these illegal immigrants have been the target of sporadic raids and prosecution, the recurrences, including more pronounced smuggling activities sometimes, seem to cast a long shadow of doubt over the efficacy of these actions. Generally, stop-gap measures only provide short-term relief for serious problems. Unless directional planning, regular enforcement, and long-term remedies are executed, these problems might degenerate beyond effective control.

A significant issue for the future lies in the area of education. The educated exiles, comprising young Malaysians who have elected to study abroad on their own, seem to be entrapped in a web of two uncertainties. On the one hand, they face the prospects of unsecured employment and a changed environment when they return home after graduation. They also add to the corps of growing educated employables. On the other hand, they test the potentials of temporary employment overseas, with the hope that they might be able to convert their job experiences into long-term employment and permanent residency status. In both instances they differ from those pioneer exiles who had formed the brain drain of the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, the similarity is the opportunity cost for the country, particularly, when trained human resources are neglected.

More importantly, however, is the issue of casting new shadows over the old problems of equal education opportunity and scholarship, and especially of education-employment mismatch. The latter issue becomes more critical as the expansion of private schools and colleges offer academic and professional options, in their local and twinning programmes, that will increase their market-share of educated employables. While privatized education is increasingly being corporatized, the chasm between future manpower needs and human resources development and present employment opportunities in government and industry is serious. The phenomenon of a developing system of private education is indeed a far cry from the early days of cautionary remarks about privatizing education, following the dissemination of the concepts of Privatisation and Malaysia Incorporated. It seems, even in education today, the market forces would triumph.

Recently, in the housing sector, market demand is favourable to investors. And attempts to provide housing and basic amenities to all Malaysians have been successful. The government has encouraged the construction of low-cost and medium-cost houses to enable more low-income earners to own houses. Some of these houses have successfully created new urban and suburban housing estates. With the exception of some abandoned housing projects as a result of the

recession, new housing schemes are flourishing and the property market is encouraging.

Despite the optimistic situation in the housing and property sector, the *status quo* of the 452 "New Villages" which have about 1.7 million people still remains unresolved. Apart from unsightly modes of residence, over-crowding and unsanitary living conditions are hazardous to health. So far, the efforts to solve these problems have only provided temporary relief. Often, politically-motivated solutions to these problems tend to hide the seriousness of such problems.

The current exercise of redesignating the "New Villages" as merely ordinary villages is a positive step towards integrating essentially Chinese settlements into the mainstream of Malaysian life. These villages, a colonial legacy created between 1948 and 1952 to combat the Chinese support for the communists, have been neglected. Most of them face socio-economic problems which have been perpetuated over the years. But these problems are surmountable. In this matter, local government authorities and Ministries concerned are ineffective due to several reasons such as red-tape faced during the implementation of projects, lack of high calibre councillors, lack of innovative and future-oriented ideas, influence of partisan interests and questionable enforcement practices.

Unless local government administration is improved, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the Ministry of National and Rural Development are innovative, serious efforts to resolve existing problems will be impeded. This is compounded especially when issues of housing (and also health) are identified in terms of race and ethnicity.

The sensitivities of the various races and ethnic groups are also seen in the communal objections to partisan-bias inputs into the creation of a national culture several years ago. Such objections have been silenced as efforts to promote "Visit Malaysia Year 1990" have given a new lease of life to a plural national culture. The issue of national culture, however, is far from dead. Like the issue of national unity, national culture exists and it has existed in the soul and spirit of Malaysia. The diversity of cultural heritage attests to a natural Malaysian culture, one which reflects the true character of a multi-ra-

cial and multi-religious country. Any corrective or cosmetic surgery, especially performed by the dexterity of political manoeuvres, might create a hideous concoction beyond its natural state which is already a world-renowned birthmark. However, any cosmetic surgery that transcends selfish political and partisan interests can enhance the charisma of cultural diversity.

The recent ban on Pan Malaysian-look models in media advertising, especially on television, is more than a flesh wound. Competitive job assignments and agency tiffs aside, Pan-Malaysian models raise a new dimension in race relations which transcends the conventional notion of an existing racial category known as the Eurasians. Indeed, the issue is more than just looks!

The Pan-Malaysian heritage also represents a transnational value-orientation that is quite pervasive among younger Malaysians. Betraying a racial origin of mixed parentage between Malaysians and foreigners (beyond the tripartite spectrum of Portuguese, Dutch, and British ancestry), and between Malaysians and Malaysians of mixed parentage themselves, Pan-Malaysian children are the embodiment of cultural transfusions and new in-generation values. In cases where religion is the distinguishing feature in the mixed parentage, issues of morality and religious piety are raised to cast aspersions on the children of mixed marriages. But these issues are already symptomatic of a society that has placed a high premium on individualism and materialism ("IM-ism").

The crusade before us is not what Malaysians should look like to be qualified to represent the country, or even representing a consumer product, but how Malaysians on the whole put on their best behaviour for the country. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting provided a good example. After all, the charm of Malaysians resides in the rich legacy which their forebears had inherited before them. What is pertinent, however, is the need to curtail the excessive exploitation of Malaysian images before they are contaminated with projected life-styles which only the mass media can support, if its sponsors pick up the tab! Moreover, the tendency to over-expose these images for quick returns in the short-run is an unhealthy habit

which tends to ignore the long-term consequences of portraying Malaysians as what they ought to be rather than what they are.

NATIONAL FUNDAMENTALS

Changes in the political, business, and socio-cultural environments are signs of a society in transition. Indeed, Malaysian society is again in transition as it pauses at the beginning of the post-NEP era. When the wheel of the NEP turns for a final revolution in 1990, the government is expected to announce a replacement, based on the deliberations of the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC). In this respect, the task of the NECC is tremendous and significant. It must account for a diversity of inputs whose political, organizational, and individual ideologies are as varied as the people who represent them. Despite occasional protests and withdrawals by disaffected groups, the NECC is sworn to secrecy until it is ready to divulge the results of the deliberations of its various committees and sub-committees. Meanwhile, the NECC continues to forge a consensus behind closed doors, minus the fanfare of media publicity.

Political Stability and Parliamentary Democracy

Inevitably, the NECC must adopt a *ceteris paribus* assumption similar to that in economic theory. It must assume that, all things being equal, political stability will prevail and continue to be the cornerstone of progress in the country. The importance of political stability cannot be understated. It has been the foundation stone for national development in the last twenty years which have witnessed

the achievements and pitfalls of the five Five-Year Malaysia Plans. Without political stability, economic progress will be derailed, and socio-cultural development will be curtailed. The consequences of economic derailment, and the incidence of civil disorder, have been revealed in earlier developments both at home and in neighbouring countries.

But political stability does not exist in isolation. It is the cumulative result of positive interactions between the basic elements of a political system and their custodial agents in a multi-racial and multi-religious country. In the context of Malaysia, these elements can be distinguished as: parliamentary democracy, national ideology, cultural identity, and political parties. They are the foundation stones for Malaysia's existence. Their custodial agents can be identified as the constitution, the bureaucracy, public policies, and the people's mandate or choice.

The interactive relationships of political stability and these national fundamentals are illustrated in Figure 2. These relationships form a square-mat pattern of interlocking interfaces or overlaps bordered by a circle. The circle represents the society and the parameters of its environment. The overlaps or interfaces are the synergistic influences that affect *status quo*. The core of the system is political stability itself.

Of course, unless a catastrophe happens, such as another Vietnam War or a major political change like the impending return of Hong Kong to China in 1996, it is unlikely that the synergistic configuration of political stability will change significantly. Given the geographical attributes and economic potentials of present-day Malaysia, it is unlikely that the basic elements and their custodial agents will disappear.

Even if its geographical attributes should change in future, for whatever reasons, the mainstay of political stability will always be the central government in West Malaysia. Political maturation in East Malaysia has witnessed several internal disturbances and the birth of new political parties and new coalitions in Sabah and Sarawak. But, for the moment, these disturbances, and the increasing frequency of their occurrence, are unlikely to destroy the political foundations of
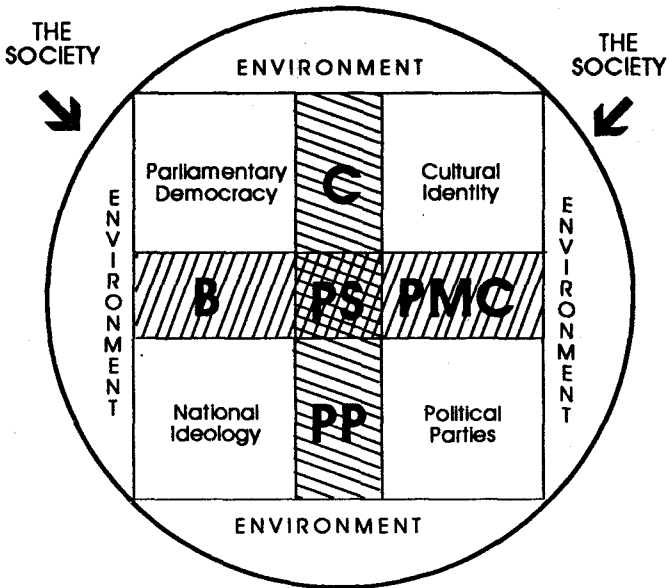
Figure 2
Interactive Elements
and
Agents of Political Stability

West Malaysia, despite initial possible shock waves and a severe dent to national pride.

The Constitution and Cultural Identity

Since August 31, 1957, when Peninsular Malaysia secured its independence from Great Britain, parliamentary democracy has been its *modus operandi*. Guided by the constitution, which guarantees a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy has been practised successfully, except immediately after the May 13, 1969 racial riots. Members of Parliament, especially the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives), are elected every five years, except when the government dissolves Parliament and calls for a snap general election before the stipulated period expires. The three-year tenure of senators in the *Dewan Negara* (the Senate) is less subject to the vagaries of politics. The senators are normally nominated by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King) and the Heads of the thirteen states which constitute Malaysia. In practice, however, political nominees, especially those in the ruling coalition, are recommended by their respective parties and, in some states, they are subjected to a rotation pact between the Barisan Nasional partners.

While the *Dewan Rakyat* has been the venue for much heated debate, *en bloc* walk-out, political cross-overs, seating reshuffles, and even juvenile fits of unintelligent discourse peppered with arrogance and apathy, the *Dewan Negara* has witnessed some spirited debate, although its general business is usually routine approval. Lately, however, it has been subjected to a couple of "transplants" who represent people with academic qualifications and a contemporary orientation, in an effort to balance the otherwise negative image of the *Dewan Negara* as a means of rewarding long-term service and loyalty to partisan interests. The change is directed at rectifying the rubber-stamp image of the *Dewan Negara*. On the whole, the dignity of the *Dewan Rakyat* may be suspect, and the efficacy of the *Dewan Negara* may be questioned. But, Parliament remains the most visible symbol of democracy in the country, second only to its constitutional monarchy.

The constitutional monarchy is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the King of Malaysia. Addressed as the Duli Yang Maha Mulia Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong, His Majesty is an elected monarch from among the rulers of the nine traditional sultanates. These sultanates consist of the states of Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johore, Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan (see Figure 3). The election of the King is conducted by His peers. His term of office is five years. He is assisted by a Deputy, the Timbalan Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who is usually the next in-line for succession to the throne.

The present King is Sultan Azlan Shah. His Majesty is from the state of Perak known for its rich tin-ore deposits. His appointment is significant because he represents the last of the nine sultanates to ascend the throne before a new cycle of succession begins. Moreover, he is academically and professionally the most qualified Head of State and ruler of the country in this century. Also, His Majesty ascended the throne of Perak only a few years ago, following the traditional succession law in the state which shifted the previous line of succession (whose ruler had died) to the present line of succession.

The unique system of constitutional monarchy has always preserved the rich cultural heritage of Malaysian society. It has also provided the symbol of unity and an aura of respectability. Lately, however, the assertiveness of some of the Rulers (*sultans*) in the political affairs in their own states is a new development which many watched with mixed feelings (see Postscript). The involvement of Rulers and heirs to state thrones, especially in sports, is a commendable gesture which places them in close touch with the pulse of the youth in Malaysia. So, too, social commitments that are graced by the presence and patronage of the Rulers and their heirs are still constructive avenues for *sultan-rakyat* interactions. Meanwhile, a nation watches, and the rest of the world which knows Malaysia focuses its attention on, the success and progress of a unique system of kingship whose royalty and regalia are themselves an embodiment of cultural diversity and religious tolerance for a long time.
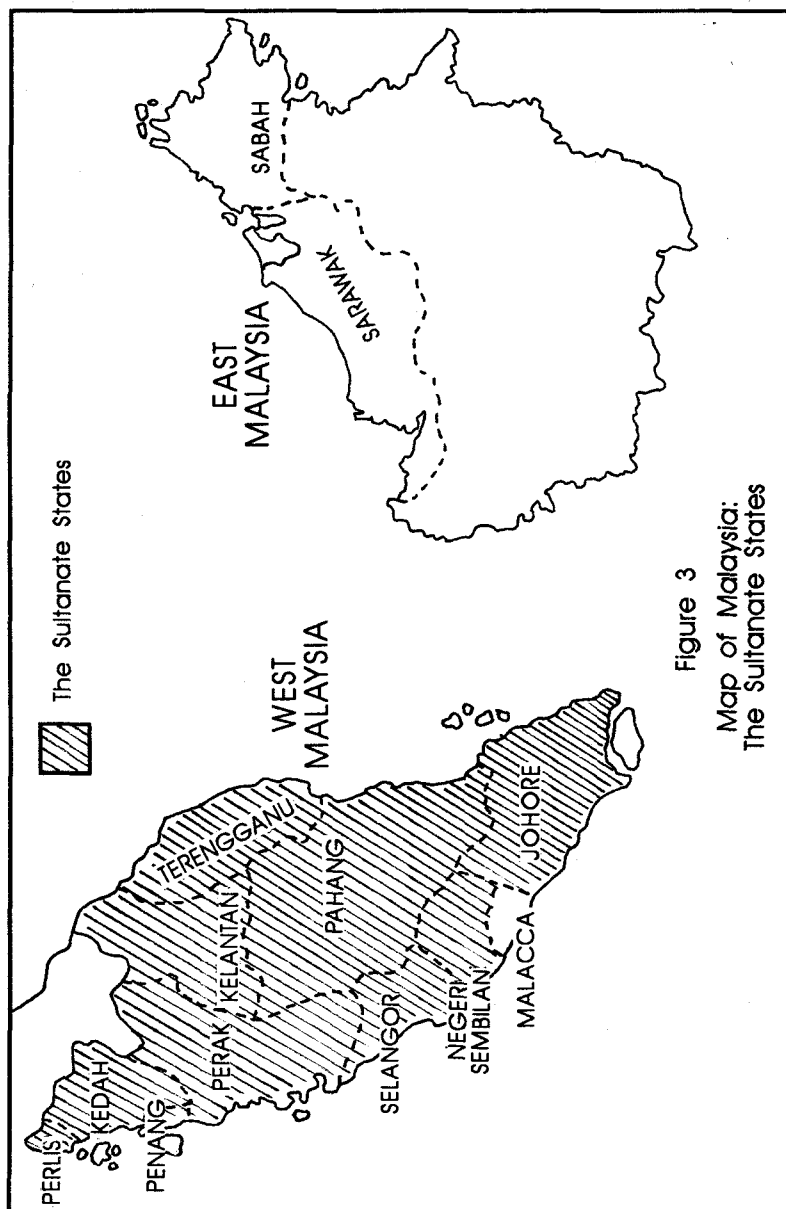
Figure 3

Map of Malaysia:
The Sultanate States

The Constitution does not only guarantee a constitutional monarchy. It also provides, among other things, for the preservation of race and ethnicity, especially pertaining to the rights and privileges of different racial groups and ethnic practices. Although Islam is the official religion, the practices of other religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism are common. Over the years, the cultural expressions of these religions, including Islam, have been relaxed as ceremonious processions, resplendent with ethnocentric biases, paraded the streets under the watchful eyes of the law. Also, the grandeur of places of worship, especially in and around the Federal Capital, attests to the liberty of such cultural expressions, apart from their artistry and architectural values.

The Constitution acknowledges *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay) as the *Bahasa Kebangsaan* (National Language) in the country. Over the years, English has also been widely used. This is more evident today than in the years following the emphatic insistence of *Bahasa Malaysia* signboards for commercial houses and business enterprises. Although the vernacular languages have taken a backseat, their advocates are still vocal about their possible extinction. Many of these advocates are often trilingual Malaysians who seem to harbour the hope of a vernacular renaissance, which is as insensitive to national aspirations as those who insist on nationalizing the *Jawi* (Arabic) script in education and administration.

The language issue has always been a very interesting aspect of development in the Malaysian society. Even *Bahasa Malaysia* itself provides an interesting insight into the Malay community in general and Malay nationalism in particular. It has undergone three phases of name-change, and it is labouring under a fourth one. They are *Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Kebangsaan, Bahasa Malaysia*, and *Bahasa Baku* respectively. Apart from the linguistic and semantic developments, the language also provides an insight into the development of Malay nationalism over the years. The spirit of Malay nationalism, as reflected in *Bahasa Melayu*, was rooted in the pre-independence and early post-independence years. It was consolidated with the promulgation of *Bahasa Kebangsaan* in the post-independence and the pre-NEP years. However, it seems to have tapered off with *Bahasa*

Malaysia during the NEP era, when the concern was with other dominant values of poverty eradication and socio-economic restructuring. Recently, *Bahasa Baku* (Standard Malay) was introduced. It will be fully operational in schools by 1992. The target date set, while the debate on the National Language (Amendment) Bill 1967 is conducted in Parliament to insure the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* in the judiciary system soon, seems to reflect a serious search for a new direction in reviving the spirit of Malay nationalism.

Another interesting aspect in the development of *Bahasa Malaysia* is its impact on education. Previously, a generation of English-educated Malaysians had replaced a similarly educated group of individuals in public service and in business. Now, they are themselves the next target for replacement by a new generation of *Bahasa Malaysia*-educated Malaysians, especially the pioneers of the Malay-medium schools. Many of these Malaysians, including their counterparts from the present education system, have improved themselves by complementing their national language-based education with further education in English abroad. In short, they have reduced, what they had once perceived as, a deficiency in their mental make-up due to a poor command of the English language.

Moreover, university academic staff aside, these Malaysians are now caught up in a competitive paper chase for professional and academic higher degrees, both locally and overseas. Apart from their intrinsic value, these degrees are manifestations of personal achievements, self-actualization, job prerequisites, professional necessity, career enhancement prospects, a more literate society, and even a market potential for job hopping. Whatever the reasons for pursuing higher qualifications, the controversy which centred around the efficacy of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of instruction and effective communication has somewhat abated. But today it seems to be in abeyance as a parallel system of primary, secondary, and tertiary education in English manifests itself under market conditions.

With the development of privatized education and a somewhat condescending attitude towards the liberal use of English, regardless of the rationale, the next development decades are likely to witness more discriminating features in government and private systems of

education. Quality education will remain a debatable issue. Student enrolments will provide interesting inputs for sociological discourse. So will the teaching staff, especially at college and university levels. The curriculum, especially at higher levels of education, will invite more attention as the invisible hand of the market-oriented, privatized institutions exert pressure for a return on investments based on popular and profitable packages.

The basic issue, however, is one of directional planning for human resources development in general, and of education-employment match in particular. Granted that privatized education today does relieve the government of some of its burdens in providing free education, especially in primary and secondary schools. Such planning, beyond *ad hoc* patchwork, is imperative to reconcile a major dilemma which a younger generation of Malaysians are facing, *viz*, the prospects of being educated exiles in foreign countries (for those who want to return home and work) and educated unemployables in their own country (for those who are keen to work upon graduation but cannot find suitable employment). The latter has a hidden dimension. It extends beyond the abeyant issue of sponsored scholarship and employment into the realm of relevance of local education. The issue of relevance involves, among other things, bridging the gap between education-employment mismatch and new demands. The former is aggravated by societal changes. The latter follows the impact of new and fast-changing technologies as well as Malaysia's international role as an advocate-leader of anti-drug campaigns, environmental protection and preservation issues, Third World countries debts settlements, and freedom and justice for the oppressed.

Anywhere in the world, religion is a sensitive issue. It is personal, and its worship is personalized. Malaysia is no different. In fact, it is unique because the Constitution guarantees freedom of worship despite Islam being declared the official religion. Over the years, in response to a growing partisan demand for more evidence of this commitment, the government has embarked on numerous projects. These projects extend beyond the construction of mosques throughout the country into active management of pilgrim affairs and the promotion of religious festivities, some of which, like the annual

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Quran (Holy Book) Recitation Competition, are internationally popular. At the same time, (allocations for building temples and churches have not been neglected) although some quarters believe that more can be done. Also, non-Islamic religious festivities have been given their fair shares of expression in public.

It is interesting to observe the difference between the dominant ruling party UMNO and the opposition Islamic-based PAS insofar as the issue of the propagation of Islam is concerned. The blatant support of PAS for an Islamic state provides a provocative contrast to UMNO whose subtle dissemination of Islam is quite effective but less extreme. Of course, there are other ideological and tactical differences between the two which have estranged their one-time political marriage of convenience under a past leadership. The spectre of this estrangement is now raised by the recent marriage of new venture between PAS and Semangat 46 for a concerted assault on UMNO and the Barisan Nasional during the October 1990 general election.

Despite UMNO-PAS differences regarding the correct route to promoting Islam, the general public has already accepted the fact that Islam is the official religion of the country as long as the non-Muslims enjoy their religious rights and freedom of worship according to their ancestral heritage. And despite the recent debate in the *Dewan Rakyat* about the efficacy of the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* in the courts, the fact remains that it is the National Language of the country and the medium of instruction in all government schools, colleges, and universities. And the use of vernacular languages, especially Mandarin, has survived the lack of exposure, partly because small-scale and medium-scale businessmen have continued to use their mother tongue quite freely in their transactions. Many trilingual professionals and their political counterparts are also generous in their use of vernacular languages in their interactions.

While religion and language may be issues for controversy, the more important aspect lies in the psyche behind these issues. The mental make-up of a community is as complex as the psyche of the people who make up the community. An encroachment on the sensitivities of a community is akin to an invasion of privacy into its mental make-up or its people's psyche. The initial hostile reaction to

the formation of a National Culture is a case in point. When the concept was conceived, there was a bias for Malay cultural elements. This initiative tested the resilience of the constitutional guarantees on the free expression of non-Malay cultural peculiarities. It also provided a good round of ammunition for the opposition, and also non-Malay partners of the Barisan Nasional, to criticize the government. Subsequently, however, the heat of the controversy dissipated as a compromising stance provided no definitive concept. And the issue tapered off into a potpourri of outward manifestations of almost non-controversial items that promoted attire, food, and patriotic songs.

Today, the proverbial phoenix seems to have risen from the ashes. (The cultural identity of different racial groups is promoted with imaginative splendour) The portrayal of different races on huge billboards at strategic locations, especially in the Federal Territory, is indeed a highly visible promotion of a real Malaysian image. Of course, the high costs of such promotion, and the real impact of some of the media employed, are momentarily secondary to the obsession of promoting tourism, whose climax in the "Visit Malaysia Year 1990" (VMY) may not see the long-term results for a while yet. The immediate impact of such promotion, however, is its contribution to the growing mass media industry whose better-known agencies underwent "cosmetic surgery" to stay in the scramble for the estimated MYR$200 million windfall and more to come, as the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism embarks on its proposed research and projects over the next decade. *but*

Of course, another immediate impact (is the revival of cultural pluralism) which seems to characterize the present face-lift which the country is undergoing, especially as Malaysia is projecting a high visibility in international affairs at home and abroad. As a national multi-cultural image is projected nationwide and overseas, individual cultural identity is highlighted through ethnic peculiarities such as traditional dances, dresses, hobbies and ceremonies, as well as an exhaustive list of cultural revival items like antiques, jewellery, and traditional medicines. *It also*

Other impacts of such promotion, however, (remain pure conjectures) at the moment. Their reality will depend on the durability of this

loosely packaged Malaysian culture, and the earnestness of those who are in the position to command its widespread dissemination. Apparently, younger Malaysians are often enthused by the prospects of participating in any event which allows them the liberty to express their cultural identity. The National Day Parade, opening ceremony events for sports and international conferences, Malaysia Fest, and fashion shows are some examples. This kind of spirit is reminiscent of the public spiritedness which their parents had before them. Unless this spirit is nurtured carefully, the imagination of a Malaysian united nation will remain an unfulfilled dream, fragmented by hostile but subdued sentiments that are expressed along racial lines.

The National Ideology, Bureaucracy and Public Policy

The inculcation of the National Ideology or *Rukunegara* (see also Chapter Three) is too important to be subjected to intermittent shots in the arm. A meticulous, long-term plan of translating ideals into practice is lacking as a generation of Malaysians mature into adulthood, many of whom are probably incapable of reciting the five tenets of the National Ideology or even remember why the latter was ever promulgated. The point is that variances like goal displacement and programme mutation are common features of some organized endeavours to promote national aspirations.

The Board of National Unity is a case in point. Down-graded to its present status after its *prima donna* role following the transition years after May 13, the Board seems castrated as it embarks again on revamping the *Rukun Tetangga* (Neighbourhood Watch) programmes while belabouring its research undertakings on peripheral issues of national unity. Perhaps an organizational revival or a turnaround beyond mere window-dressings is timely. This should avoid the tendency to create new organizations on race relations or national pluralism which invariably pursue similar and over-lapping interests.

Ironically, many younger Malaysians seem very adept at reciting television commercial jingles and patriotic songs that are well presented on the small screen. Perhaps they are also more familiar

with signature tunes of popular television series than they are with the tenets of the National Ideology, and maybe the national anthem itself. The point is that a National Ideology is very important for inculcating a spirit of nationhood, civic consciousness, and public spiritedness among Malaysians. But, despite the early attention it had received, there seems to be a lack of well-coordinated and sustained effort to propagate the National Ideology. This weakness is partly due to problems that are related to organization set itself, such as poor management-teamwork, inadequate financial support, lethargic organization culture, and organization variances.

Another weakness which seems to hamper a concerted and sustained effort to propagate the National Ideology as well as other aspirations of national interests is the interplay of political chicanery and corrupt abuses in the public sector. This interplay of twin forces, in different guises and with varying impact, threatens bureaucratic neutrality. It also undermines the objectivity and efficacy of Government organizations and their agencies. Invariably, these organizations and their agencies tend to lapse into organizational lethargy and apathy as they find themselves trapped by the dilemma of extricating themselves from the bureaucratic cobweb of past policies and the pressure of current political urgencies.

Under these circumstances, the bureaucratic will seems to be sandwiched between a deadwood show-piece syndrome and a habitual politicized behaviour. Its survival seems to depend on life-support injections of financial aids and political clout, while organization euthanasia may offer a controversial option. In the long run, without a corresponding reform of major public policies, innovative and future-oriented programmes are doomed to suffer negative consequences. Even creative but politically neutral administration tends to be affected adversely.

It is not easy to single out any government bureaucracy or its agency for mention. Generally speaking, the erosion of bureaucratic neutrality is quite pervasive in the public sector. However, it is timely to recall that the last major administrative reforms were made more then twenty years ago, following the Esman-Montgomery Report. Since then, much has changed even though piece-meal reforms have

been enacted in response to the incremental demands of the NEP. Privatisation and Malaysia Incorporated concepts have since been introduced to change the character of public administration. This is most evident in the third sector economy that was once dominated by Public Enterprises and State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs). At the same time, these concepts have also changed the orientation of public service itself.

With the introduction of Privatisation and Malaysia Incorporated, the concept of social responsibility in government services, manifested in the conventional value of service orientation, comes with a higher price tag today. In this respect, the Government seesaws to maintain a precarious balance between consumer affordability and corporate profitability. This phenomenon is usually observed during its annual Budget presentation when the Minister of Finance juggles with the two aspects to announce a painless Budget that is subject to, and sometimes despite, the prevailing economic climate. Inevitably, the opposition is often led to remark that a painless Budget emerges almost every time an election is imminent. Alternatively, a painless Budget seems to be a dominant feature of Malaysian life, usually before the end of the five-year term of office for the Government. The exception is 1990 when the Budget is postponed till after the October 1990 election and the meeting of the new Parliament. Nevertheless, a recurring pattern has emerged in which a call for the dissolution of Parliament occurs before the complete term expires.

As the character and orientation of public service change, the outlook of some government bureaucracies and their agencies also change. However, their bureaucratic culture may remain largely unaffected. Although some of these bureaucracies and their agencies may not be responsive to the ideas of Privatisation and Malaysia Incorporated, the choice of implementing these ideas may be at the discretion of the political will. The bureaucracy seems to have little say in what, when, and how much to privatize or corporatize, although the government servants of privatized or corporatized bureaucracies and agencies are given the choice of determining matters pertaining to their services, within prescribed and recommended rules of operation.

for example,
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The telecommunications business was a government service before it was privatized under the newly incorporated organization known as Syarikat Telekoms Malaysia or STM. There was much ado about the opportunity costs involved for government servants who had worked for this service. The employees were reported to be apprehensive about matters pertaining to their services and service-records like pension and other compensatory packages. At the same time, the general public – the consumers – were reported to be fearful of paying more for their monthly bills. The crux of the matter, however, went beyond the academics of privatization or corporatization. It lay in the alleged malpractices in the process of implementing privatisation or corporatization. These accusations included discriminatory practices in the award of privatized projects, unfair advantage gained from insider information on critical investment opportunities, monopolistic contracts, and favouritism like preferential treatment and clique affinity. Despite public criticisms, STM was recently listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) and its shareholders, including its employees, have made some profits from the listing.

The proposed privatization of the International Airport, and the corporatization of the National Electricity Board (NEB) or Lembaga Letrik Negara (LLN) into Tenaga Nasional Bhd. (TEN) will again become the centre of public interest. Their on-off love-affair with privatization and corporatization is confirmed. And attention is now shifted to the relationships and inter-relationships that follow. Meanwhile, the fact remains that privatized or corporatized projects are often controversial. And their modes of execution, usually seen along racial lines and within the context of the NEP imperatives, are sensitive. The news of the proposed site for the Second International Airport disappeared as quickly as it had appeared in the press. The Deputy Prime Minister stepped in to discourage land and property speculations, and to stave off suggestions of preferential treatment and partisan interests.

The construction and management of the Malaysian-Highway projects by United Engineers of Malaysia (UEM) and Perusahaan Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan (PLUS) have weathered several controver-

sial storms. Despite vehement protests from the opposition and a spate of negative publicity, stretches of new highways have been completed and those in progress are reported to be on schedule. As more controversies are unearthed, and the blitz of publicity is somewhat curtailed, the issue of public accountability becomes crucial again.

A recent example is the alleged over-payment of MYR$30 million to private contractors for repair bills for a stretch of the North-South Highway in Kedah. The ex-Minister who was responsible to his Ministry for this controversy, has dismissed the allegation as false and unfounded. Meanwhile, having registered his rebuttal in public, a high-ranking civil servant is left to defend his honour, personal integrity, and professional credibility. For the time being, investigations are being conducted to resolve the alleged malpractice.

Apart from the actual fact in a case like this, and also the aspersions cast, the issue remains a question of how can public accountability be conducted to a successful conclusion swiftly, following allegations of mal-practices involving public funds, civil service integrity, and political wiles. This question seems to have eluded pertinent government bureaucracies, even the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in Parliament. Moreover, the findings of investigative reports on malpractices, when conducted, have been shrouded in a veil of security reasons so much so that issues of public interest seem to be suspended indefinitely. Consequently, the public is left to wonder about the efficacy, and even the futility, of exercises in public accountability.

Even education is not spared the controversy of privatization. The Ministry of Education has recently emerged from the bureaucratic maze of curriculum development for primary and secondary schools. This has culminated in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah* (KBSR) for primary schools and the *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (KBSM) at the secondary level. But it is not out of the woods yet as the impact of the KBSR suggests remedial review and revision, and the outcomes of the KBSM will only be known a few years from now. The Ministry of Education had recently announced that the *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran*

(SRP) examination will be replaced by the Lower Secondary Evaluation (LSE) or *Penilian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) tests in 1993. These tests represent a "summative evaluation of students' progress at the end of lower secondary schooling" conducted centrally and at school level, to enable upper secondary students to pursue studies that they have the aptitude for. At the same time, amidst a host of organizational problems of size and responsibilities, the Ministry of Education is confronting issues of higher education, particularly those that are related to the liberal use of English as a medium of instruction which has characterized the development of privatized education.

Meanwhile, a parallel system of corporatized education is evident as private primary and secondary schools develop side by side with private tertiary education, in the name of twinning programmes and substantial savings to affordable parents. The latter has overshadowed the original rationale of substantial Government savings when twinning programmes were first introduced to reduce the burden of government expenditure on its sponsored students abroad, and as a move to improve the maturity of its students before they are sent abroad.

The point is, sooner or later, the Ministry of Education must reconcile the differences between its original stand on a cautious approach to privatizing education and the tendency to succumb to a corporate desire for prospecting hitherto untapped wealth of private education system. Inevitably, this must be done before the integrative feature of mixed racial enrolment in the national system of education, which is conspicuously lacking in the private system of education, becomes a bone of contention for political agitation. More importantly, it should be done before allegations of racial polarization in the national system of education reaches serious proportions. Perhaps, a third system of joint-venture education might provide an ameliorating influence between national and privatized education systems. In this respect, the horse must be put before the cart. There is also a need to study the phenomenon of racial polarization in the education system.

Any public policy whose outcomes breed a potential mine-field for comparative racial differences, especially along the dimensions which the NEP has tried to eradicate, is worrying. While affordability

becomes a new comparative value in privatized education, it does not blanket the issue of accessibility to higher education in local institutions of higher learning. In fact, affordability and accessibility are also contemporary nomenclatures which belie a generation of Malaysians, especially teenagers, who are faced with escalating costs of basic and conspicuous consumption patterns, and a more competitive and fluctuating job-market. In this respect, they also experience a host of problems beyond the bonds of racial affinity.

Political Parties and People's Mandate or Choice

Inspite of their problems, particularly those that are related to drug culture, rural-urban drift, and lack of moral education at home and in schools, and the problems imposed on them by a transitional society, youths form an integral part of the voting population who will decide the political direction of their country. Like their elders before them, they constitute an important part of the people's mandate or choice that will influence the results of a general election or a by-election. Unless they choose to exercise their right to vote, they are unlikely to influence the democratic process of the country. But, generally, a more literate youthful population tends to be more conscious of its rights to vote and in other areas as well. And they tend to exercise their rights, given the chance to do so.

In a democracy, the significance of people's mandate or choice cannot be neglected. The government courts the people through its policies. Other political parties court the people through their deeds and their ideologies. The fact remains that there is an intimate relationship between the people's mandate or choice, public policies, and political parties. They are mutually reinforcing and they affect political stability. The results of several Parliamentary and State Legislative elections and by-elections, since independence, attest to this relationship. The Alliance Government, and then the Barisan Nasional Government, has ruled the country for more than thirty years since independence. The occasional pendulum swing of pro-government to pro-opposition votes is ruffling but not critical, with the

exception of the general election results before the May 13, 1969 calamity.

Over the years, the Barisan Nasional Government has been able to minimize the pendulum swing. This is partly because there has been greater unity among Barisan Nasional components than among the opposition parties. Today, the former is disquieting while the latter is unusually quiet. Also, the Barisan Nasional members have been able to anticipate potential issues of exploitation and the government has been able to forestall such exploitation before they become widespread. Moreover, the government has been quite successful in timing diversions which have shunted public interest from critical domestic issues to issues of regional and international relations. In short, the government has been quite successful so far in frustrating any anti-government or anti-Barisan Nasional attempt to garner popular support for the opposition. It has used its authority, power and available means to full advantage.

At the same time, the opposition has had its share of problems. It has a tendency to over-emphasise an issue, even to the extent of flogging a dead horse. Since their releases from political detention, and under the watchful eyes of the Internal Security Act (ISA), some of the more vocal members of the opposition are now restrained by the conditions of their freedom. They seem to have lost their incisive public oratory. The mass media, except for partisan publications, also seems less liberal in its treatment of pro-opposition news items. Moreover, the more recent cooperation between the opposition parties seems to have been an unholy alliance which elicited little support from the public.

The point is that the Barisan Nasional Government has been able to manipulate the uneasy quietude which pervades the fabric of society, following the implementation of the NEP and the negative sentiments arising therefrom. It has been able to "read" the political situation fairly well. And it has used its instruments of office well to stave off negative allegations and to appease "voter's temperament" to a large extent. Of course, the short-term impact of these moves became obvious immediately after the general election. But the long-term effects will only be felt during the post-NEP period.

SEVEN
"ONE"–PROBLEM SYNDROME

As a society changes, there are almost always some old problems that are not resolved while new ones are being generated. In between these two sets of problems, the beginnings of future problems may evolve. The gestation period, however, varies with the intensity and pace of development in the society. Conceptually, these problems can be depicted as shown in Figure 4, as two over-lapping circles. The circles each represents the old and new problems. The latter increases as old and new problems recede into the background, as indicated by the broken lines in 1 and 2. But the "ONE" (Old, New, Emerging) – Problem Syndrome ("OPS") will continue to be a major feature of a society in transition. And this transition may be from a traditional to a modern society, or from an industrial to a post-industrial and infor-mation-technology society.

Similarly, the problems of national unity in Malaysia today may also to be construed as the "ONE"-Problem Syndrome (see Figure 5). Old problems of national unity are those related to inter-racial con-flict. New problems of national unity are those that are related to intra-racial conflict. And emerging problems of national unity com-prise those that transcend inter-racial and intra-racial conflicts. They include a hybrid of class, interest-groups, and generational conflicts.
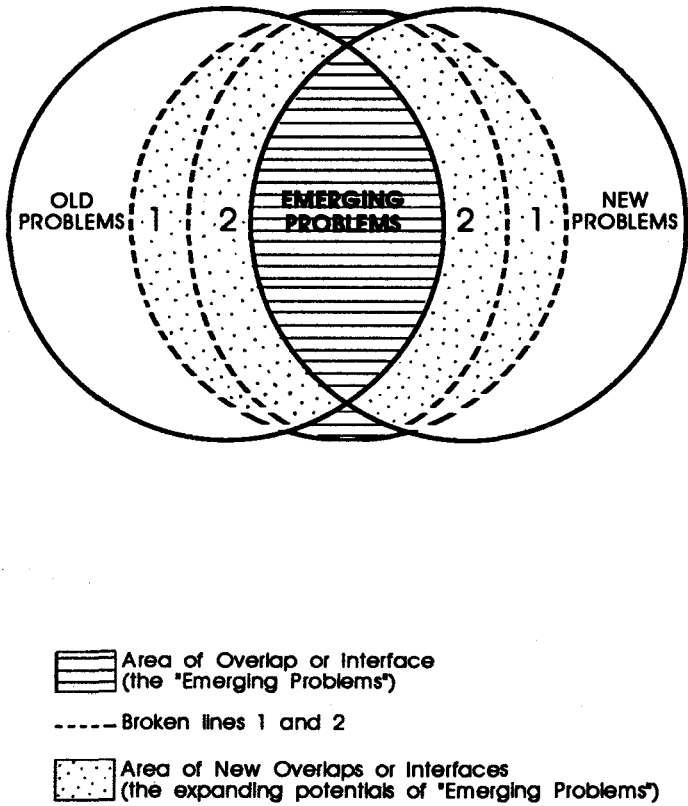
Figure 4
The "ONE"-Problem Syndrome
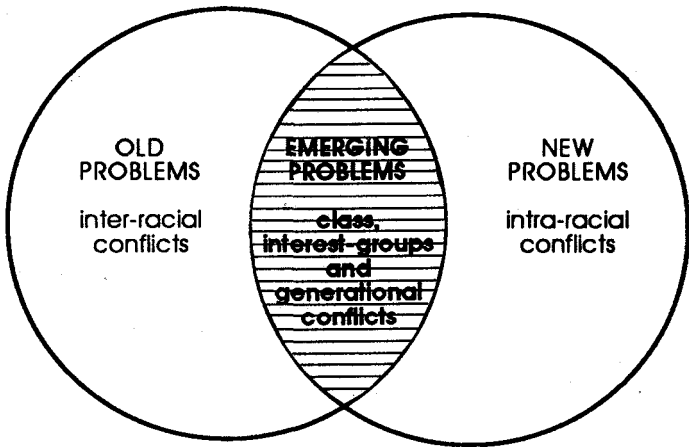
Figure 5
Perspectives on Problems
of National Unity

The "O" Factor

Old problems which challenge the spirit of national unity manifest
themselves in inter-racial conflict. Conceived as the "O" factor in the
"OPS" concept, this conflict is usually seen in terms of communal
confrontations. These confrontations occur when different races ex-
press hostile sentiments towards one another, either through their
political representations or through other sources of vested interests.
Political representations and vested interests, who are always keen to
maintain and expand their grassroots support, are normally very sen-
sitive and responsive to partisan demands, especially those that are
racially biased. This situation is more pronounced when political rep-
resentations and vested interests depend on racial membership for
their survival. In this respect, some political parties and interest
groups, whose membership comprises more than one racial affinity,
have yet to make significant inroads into Malaysian politics. Instead,
politics has been dominated by one-race-based parties and interest
groups. This deficiency, among other reasons, is partly due to the in-
herent weakness in the nominally multi-race-based parties whose
overall membership usually show a predominance of one race.

Given this situation, ideology becomes a major influence in the
drive for membership. So far, communal ideologies, as represented
by UMNO for Malays, MCA for Chinese, and MIC for Indians, are
successful because they do not profess to represent more than one
race individually although they make no bones about representing all
races as a collectivity. In a multi-racial and multi-religious society,
communal ideologies, in whatever forms or guises, are what they are
– the embodiment of doctrines or beliefs of a community. And, unless
they are so represented often, the vitality and even the credibility of
the standard bearers become suspect. And popular support might
wane. In this respect, the paradox of the Gerakan and the DAP has
thwarted their potential for more effective representations of public
interests. While their "Malaysian Malaysia" is credible, their mem-
bership is predominantly one-dimensional. Moreover, their mission
so far has been a long courtship for a share, if not domination, of
Chinese votes in the MCA threshold.

The inherently divisive politics is a latent mine-field which can be likened to Karakatoa. The latter is a dormant volcano in Indonesia; but it may be lethal when an eruption should occur. Such politics have accounted for the May 13 disaster. Since then, the ameliorative influences of an alert government, a subdued opposition, a controlled press, arrests for sedition, and the mandatory NEP, among others, have tamed an otherwise spirited display of racial hostility.

Racial hostility was expressed in terms of demographic and economic polarization. Political power was shared between the component parties of the government on an assumed basis of proportionate representation in relation to the racial composition of the country. Demographic polarization was characterized by a predominance of Malays in the rural areas and a predominance of non-Malays, particularly the Chinese and Indians, in the urban areas. Economic polarization was characterized by the concentration of much wealth and capital in the hands of the non-Malays and foreigners, especially the British-owned companies. Shared political power was characterized by a tacit understanding that UMNO was the senior partner and the leader of the coalition government. Cabinet posts and other portfolios were allocated according to a mutually agreed pact between the members of the coalition.

The pact, usually concluded behind the closed door of the Alliance's consultative politics before and the Barisan Nasional's confrontational politics today, remains a prerogative of those involved. Nevertheless, the fact is that the concept of equal share of political power is a function of these closed-door compromises. As the political environment changes, especially in terms of gerrymandering and new constituencies, the creation of new portfolios, and the desire to sustain political support, the demand for a more equitable share of political power is inevitable. However, the interpretation of more, like most other things in any partnership except for those terms that are specified in black and white, is a relative conjecture which is often fraught with disagreements.

Usually, for the sake of party unity, any seed of discontent that might have been sown by the demand for a more equitable share of political power among non-UMNO members is often muted. But, it is

quite common for disgruntled members to express this demand during strategic occasions such as a party general assembly, pre-election campaign, party dialogue, or public political forum. Discounting the exhibition of political ploy, a recurring phenomenon is evident in the occasional rumbles in the Barisan National. This phenomenon suggests that non-UMNO members have asked for more numerical representation, perhaps in an effort to boost their reported lack of effective representation. In this instance, the lack of effective representation refers to the enervated inputs into critical policy decisions which non-UMNO members have been reported to complain about occasionally. It also refers to the reported spates of disagreement over some major policy issues, usually in the form of contradictory press statements which often disappear as quickly as they appear.

Usually, disagreements, even differences, within a coalition are more likely to be contained (if not resolved eventually) than those that develop outside the parameters of any political pact. This is partly because the coalition has to maintain its public image of unity in diversity, and hence, inter-racial conflict must be minimized at all costs. At the same time, the coalition, which is itself an amalgamation of different racial parties, has to provide an exemplary behaviour of racial cooperation and understanding for the diverse communal interests which they profess to represent. Hence, inter-racial disputes are often aborted before they are allowed to become seeds of social discord.

The reality, however, remains that inter-racial differences are only repressed in the interest of national development. This situation is somewhat akin to the experience of the Barisan Nasional components in which their expressions of individual communal interests are repressed by the need to project the common-interest pursuits of the coalition. Such repression is often symptomatic of the fact that inter-racial conflict is far from being resolved. On the contrary, it may reflect a certain level of tolerance for political and socio-economic privileges, even discrepancies, which policy imperatives like the NEP might dictate. Yet, it also reflects the existence of a safety point in which persistent repression may prove too stressful for a higher level

of tolerance to sustain racial harmony, despite the best of intentions of any leadership.

The phenomenon of repression of certain interests articulated by racial groups, and its accompanying levels of tolerance and intolerance, are not new. On the contrary, they are inherent characteristics of the Malaysian society. For example, before independence, it was difficult to gauge the presence and pervasiveness of inter-racial sentiments among the different races, and even against the colonial master, because the British policy of "divide and rule" had kept the local population apart. However, it was less difficult to assess anti-colonial sentiments among the traditional leadership who had lost its political and administrative powers to the British. Moreover, the racial, occupational, and ethnic ("ROE") stereotypes of the local population did little to provide an insight into the inter-racial sentiments of the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, and other groups. In the eyes of the colonial rulers, they merely represented descriptive categories of racial types and characteristics which facilitated administrative expediency in the interest of the British Empire. Even in the market place, the urban centres of economic transactions, the preoccupation was less with the economic domination of a single racial group than with the overall performance of the transactions in the interest of the Crown.

After independence, the British legacy of demographic and economic polarization, as well as the "ROE" stereotypes of the Malaysian people, became more pronounced, especially when the Alliance government ruled and divided. The division, however, was inadvertent because the consultative politics and mutual exchanges among a group of close friends in the tripartite zones of influence, consciously or unconsciously, were based on personal forte and party representation. In this instance, leadership in UMNO represented the elite Malays who were involved in politics and administration. The MCA leadership represented the elite Chinese who were engaged in commerce and industry. So, too, the MIC leadership who represented the elite Indians who were involved in trading and the professions. Thus, the zones of influence so determined tend to reinforce the popular notion of unequal power equations which attributed Malay domination

in politics and administration, and non-Malay primacy in the economic domain. Ironically, with independence, race relations in the country became identified with these equations.

But these equations survived the initial years following independence, especially when communal politics harnessed the spirit of inter-racial cooperation and goodwill to modernizing the Malaysian economy. The emphasis on improving per capita income and on infrastructure development to improve accessibility into the rural areas, however, exacerbated the differences between rural and urban living. And, in turn, the differences between rural Malays and urban non-Malays were highlighted. Abetted by a rising tide of Malay nationalism, and an unbridled zest of Chinese chauvinism, demographic differences and economic discrepancies were endowed with racial overtures. The frequency of these overtures increased with the formation of Malaysia and the greater alliance in the form of the Barisan Nasional. Finally, the frailty of the power equations was put to test as non-Malay demands for more political power reached a fever pitch during the 1969 general election. Inter-racial sensitivities were transgressed. And the May 13 racial riots became a historical maelstrom in which political stability was uprooted, economic progress was shunted, social development deformed, and parliamentary democracy suspended.

In the years following the reconstruction of the country, under the NEP, affirmative action programmes, which facilitated the sponsored mobility of *bumiputera* candidates in education and business to fulfill specified quotas, were perceived in terms of a zero-sum equation which politicized patronages seemed to reinforce as the implementation of the NEP matured. In this context, political and economic gains of one racial group were perceived as losses for another. Furthermore, the level of rising expectations of one racial group, particularly the target beneficiaries of the NEP, was contrasted against the expectations of another racial group, especially the marginal beneficiaries of the same policy.

On the whole, the net effect of the NEP seems to suggest a new dimension in race relations which replaces pluralism with ethnocentricism. In this situation, a parallel may be drawn from the

pioneering experiences of the Americans in translating the social agitation for reforms into affirmative action programmes. These reforms revolved around the issues of equal employment opportunity (EEO) and women's Equal Rights Amendments (ERA). After a long-drawn battle with Civil Rights activists and a compendium of judicial records of cases of discrimination, the United States of America finally promoted an ethnocentric-bias policy in the mid-1970s to right the past wrong.

Primarily, the policy of affirmative action (PAA) is aimed at eliminating past discriminatory practices based on race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin. At the same time, it is directed towards promoting equal employment and education opportunities for the racial minorities initially, and for women in general subsequently. But the implementation of affirmative action programmes, characterized by indictments of tokenism and preferential treatment, among others, is peppered with repressed racial overtures, especially from the Whites, about the negative long-term effects of reverse discrimination and sponsored mobility. These overtures belie a tale of *affaphobia*, that is, a fear among those Americans about the hidden consequences of affirmative action. They are uncertain, and therefore fearful, of the consequences that tend to undermine traditional power relations between the Whites (majority race) and the Blacks and other minorities, and between men and women. Today, these overtures are reverberated in isolated pockets of racial hostility and in an uneasy peace which characterizes American race relations, especially in the cosmopolitan cities in the East and West Coasts of U.S.A.

The contextual experiences of the U.S.A., the nature of the affirmative programmes, and the beneficiaries of such programmes may be different. But the objective to right the past wrong and the consequences, both intended and unintended, of a major public policy for social reform are quite similar. Basically, the NEP hopes to rectify the imbalances of a colonial legacy. In so doing, the political and administrative dominance of the Malays remain a constant variable. The target for reform is the unequal distribution of economic power in the hands of the non-Malays and foreigners. Hence, affirmative action programmes of the NEP are targeted at restructuring the ownership of

wealth and capital to enable a 30-per cent *bumiputera* equity participation in all economic activities. At the same time, they are directed at fostering a community of *bumiputera* businessmen who are actively involved in all levels of business ventures.

However, sheltered by a prohibition on public debate on sensitive issues related to the implementation of the NEP and the NEP itself in particular, and pertaining to other facets of racial susceptibilities in general, it is difficult to assess the true reactions of different racial groups to the NEP. But, based on reports in the printed media and the records of Parliamentary debates on the NEP, it is inconceivable that repressed racial sentiments do not exist among the different races in the country. In fact, the reported existence of racial polarization and its gradual deterioration, especially in educational institutions throughout the country, attests to the rising spectre of inter-racial hostility. The pervasiveness of this hostility, however, remains pure conjecture at this point in time.

Unless the phenomenon of racial polarization and its associated manifestations, particularly in the forms of sponsored mobility, preferential treatment, tokenism, *bumiputeraism*, and Gender, Race, Ethnic, Employment, Doctrine ("GREED") stereotypes are taken seriously, the resurrection of inter-racial conflict in any guise is likely to have damaging consequences for the country. A likely consequence is the destruction of the country's international credibility as the vanguard of anti-apartheid and racial oppression in South Africa. Another likely consequence is setting the country's clock back to the infamous racial riots of May 13, and perhaps the demise of parliamentary democracy. These speculative conjectures, however, should not detract from the bottom-line of affirmative action. And the bottom line is: to right the past wrong is noble. But ethnocentric interests are not all right and plural interests are not all wrong, especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious country where mutual respect for individual racial identity and idiosyncrasy, and ethnic sensitivities is a crucial key to national unity and political stability.

The "N" Factor

New problems which threaten national unity take the guise of intra-racial group conflict. Conceived as the "N" factor in the "OPS" concept, this conflict is usually seen in terms of contradictions and confrontations within a racial group. It is founded on the need to change within a racial group in response to changes in its external environments. It extends beyond the mere claim for more political representations and economic control of productive resources. It also includes the issues of factional leadership and party support for conventional values such as Malay nationalism, Chinese chauvinism, Indian neutrality, Islamic revivalism, Malaysian identity, clan fidelity, and "roots" (native) patriotism.

At the level of party politics, the need to vary factional leadership representation has endowed *en bloc* obeisance and unquestioning a allegiance with factional parleys of segmented fealty. This situation is characterized by factional manoeuvres and surreptitious manipulations of cadre loyalty, suspicion and distrust, conceit and deceit, character assassination and moral innuendo, money politics and godfather patronage, and not infrequently even the *harum-scarum, hocus-pocus* of traditional spiritual invocation.

At the level of intra-group interactions, perceptions of rewards for loyalty and of payoffs for services rendered are coloured by factional confrontations. Otherwise perceived as a normal phenomenon, career advancement, political appointment and promotion, and economic renumeration are punctuated with libellous insinuations of corruption, favouritism, chicanery, malversation, and even perfidy. Consequently, these innuendoes are blown out of proportion and aggravate the rift between factions whose human frailties when impaired require a painstaking recovery, if indeed some impairments are not already terminal.

In fact, given these circumstances, what were perceived initially as products of astute manoeuvres by factional representatives tend to be perceived subsequently as gains from treacherous manipulations by disgruntled beneficiaries. Also, what were perceived initially as consensual achievements by those who were in power and authority

tend to be perceived subsequently as despotic extravagance by power brokers in the factions. In short, washing dirty linen in public becomes a norm and vindictiveness becomes a fad, as factions protracted their feuds sometimes beyond the decorum of personal dignity.

Often, the protracted feuds are indicative of the growing discrepancy between personal idiosyncrasy and factional ideology within a particular group or party. Also, a dominant feature emerges in the scene as factionalism breeds enmity and fosters a blanket of uneasiness, even hostility, in intra-group interactions. This feature is the formation of cliques. In cases where cliques are already in existence, there might occur a realignment of interests.

The operation of the clique system usually excludes outsiders from the mainstream of its activities. For example, these activities might include those involving the procurement, management, and follow-up of NEP projects and its paraphernalia. Apart from members of the clique and their immediate blood and marital relatives, other beneficiaries of the clique system include its associates and network contacts. As the clique system radiates and consolidates its zones of influence over the allocative returns of the NEP, outsiders tend to become more alienated. The alienation, especially in the form of a sense of deprivation or a feeling of powerlessness, further stretches factional discord and increases the variance in intra-group interactions.

Moreover, as factionalism spreads so, too, the tendency to employ discretionary imperatives becomes conspicuous. Such imperatives are manifested in public display of scapegoats or even the proverbial sacrificial lamb to silence the critics of clique misdemeanours and factional feuds. Given this situation, the belief that intraracial conflict can be resolved through conciliatory consultations and manoeuvres by factional representatives is optimistic. However, it cannot ignore the fact that such a conflict involves more than the obvious and more easily resolvable aspect of patching strained, sometimes hostile, relationships. The resolution of such a conflict also involves the healing of the unobtrusive and more sensitive aspects of psychological and emotional wounds of the participants in these relationships.

The incidence of factionalism over the last two decades is more pronounced today. The communal-based parties of the Barisan Nasional is illustrative of this trend, both in West and East Malaysia. In West Malaysia, this trend is evident in the collective leadership responsibility concept of the MCA, the birth of Semangat 46, the recent "triple S" (Samy-Subramaniam Showdown) in the MIC, and the Penang Chief Ministership issue of the Gerakan. In East Malaysia, factionalism is reflected in the revivalist movement of past Barisan Nasional leadership and the popular parochial appeal to native or clanship roots in Sarawak and Sabah.

The MCA's promotion of the collective leadership idea is a manifestation of its gradual recovery from two major setbacks in the last decade. These setbacks involved two different aspects of factionalism. One aspect is concerned with the ideological ambivalence of the party. The other is concerned with incompatible personalities. Underlying these two aspects, of course, is the synergistic interplay of clique manoeuvres. Also, these situations do not exclude the possibility for organizational self-renewal within the party which cannot be controlled by either faction. Rather each faction will use it to advantage.   .

The first setback involved the confrontation between two former Presidents, Dr. Neo Yee Pan and Tan Koon Swan. Between a former academic-cum-politician and a former businessman-cum-politician, the MCA vacillated between the ideals of political professionalism and the realities of business politics respectively. The embittered struggle between the two and their respective cliques finally resulted in a partial purge which saw Dr. Neo and his allies being replaced by Tan Koon Swan and his business associates. Later, the purge was completed with Mak Hon Kam and his supporters leaving the party. While Dr. Neo is presently obscured, Mak and his men are trying to maintain their political visibility by controlling the PPP in Perak. At the moment, the PPP is hardly making any significant impact because it has been embroiled in internal problems that are related to legal issues pertaining to Mak's ascendancy in the party. Moreover, without new blood and a revised ideology, the PPP is likely to remain a party

of ex-MCA members and a small cadre of original PPP members who can only hope to keep their party alive.

The triumph of Tan Koon Swan signalled the return of the business-politics heritage of the MCA which Lee San Choon, a past President, had tried to diffuse with the injection of academic-professional Chinese into the party. As Tan and his business associates blazed a trail of support for business and money politics to strengthen the economic power of the MCA, the ideals of political professionalism that were peppered with the subtleties of business-politics were side-lined. And so began the demise of the first intellectual-cum-President of the MCA.

But the ferocity of the clash between Dr. Neo Yee Pan and Tan Koon Swan is reminiscent of the contradictions inherent in the MCA that were never really resolved. The contradictions centre around efforts to create a new party image that does not make the MCA a businessman's cartel nor a professional's exclusive club. Today, the party is still grappling with this reality as it undergoes a soul searching exercise for a second time to re-establish the new identity it had never been able to consolidate in the first place. In this process, the spectre of Tan Koon Swan's own later debacle is also reminiscent of a factional crisis which, in the heat of accusations and counter-accusations, saw the fiery, intellectual, and reportedly autocratic leadership of Dr. Neo pale against the persuasive, shrewd and reportedly participative leadership of Tan Koon Swan. Moreover, the crisis was also characterized by a party sentiment and a fairly large portion of Chinese public opinion that had favoured Tan Koon Swan's brand of politicking.

This brand of politicking portrayed an MCA that could only be politically strong if its economic power was fortified. As the party stepped up its business ventures and embarked on innovative campaigns to raise hitherto untapped sources of financing, new prospects for more business investments and the promise of a countervailing influence against the erosion of Chinese economic interests following the implementation of the NEP appealed to the Chinese community at large. The momentum that had gathered to propel a group of new faces into public prominence could not be stopped. Murmurs of un-

ethical practices fell on deaf ears, as communalistic patriotism incensed a unity, by circumstances, which made collective responsibility and collective leadership new slogans in the party's efforts to repair its battered image.

The second setback came when the bubble burst in the wake of Tan Koon Swan's conviction and imprisonment for criminal breach of trust. He was followed by two of his inner circle aides – Kee Yong Wee and Wang Choong Wing, who were also incarcerated for similar offences. But the remaining members of Tan's faction continued to steer the party away from the mainstream of internal controversies under the banner of collective leadership and collective responsibility. Hence, Dr. Ling Liong Sik and Lee Kim Sai, current President and Deputy President respectively, were able to survive the fiascos of the MCA-owned and MCA-affiliated financial institutions and cooperative societies despite mounting debts and popular censures.

More significantly, these fiascos and the party's massive debts reflected the history of a public faith that was enticed to support a political momentum for installing a new faction in the MCA whose manifesto seemed to click with the demands of the external environment. This manifesto reflected a combination of business ingenuity and political shrewdness which seemed to advocate that politics without business is no business with politics. The proliferation of MCA-owned and MCA affiliated business ventures attested to the practice of this belief.

The price of this belief almost made the MCA lose its seat of power – the debt-ridden MCA Building in Kuala Lumpur which was reportedly saved following a nationwide campaign to solicit pledges of financial support from its members. Also, the party was reported to have lost much popular support, although the extent of the damage was difficult to ascertain. It has also been quite difficult to assess the effectiveness of the collective leadership effort because of the broad spectrum of personalities who are leading the party. There is a distinct dividing line in terms of the social background of the leaders, that is, between those who have been described as vernacular-educated and those who are English-educated. Then there is reportedly

differences between veteran grassroot leaders and new recruits with an academic or professional bias or the "lateral-entry leaders".

Despite the three recent successful by-elections which have boosted the morale of the party, the trauma of intra-group differences or factionalism is far from over. The Parliamentary by-election in Gopeng, which marked the turnaround for the MCA after its problems, may have paved the way for the admission of future "lateral-entry leaders". The Ampang Parliamentary by-election had shown that the MCA cannot dispense with the assistance of UMNO, especially in soliciting the Malay votes in a racially mixed constituency. And, finally, the Bentong Parliamentary by-election propelled a long-serving, local State Assemblyman into national prominence and a full Ministership, to the possible chagrin of some Deputy Ministers, who have been replaced during the October 1990 general election.

Undoubtedly, the MCA's thrust of introducing new faces to complement the old ones is strategic and vital to remoulding its political image. This image, however, is still hazy as efforts to decorporatize the corporate image of the MCA are being conducted, especially in the form of divesting its business investments to public-listed companies like the Kamunting Corporation. In the process of image change and self renewal, the MCA is finding some difficulty in dealing with the grouses and disappointments of aspiring grassroot leaders, some whose ambitions for national politics are well-known. Also, the readmission of ex-Gerakan, and the ex-MCA, ex-DAP leaders and their supporters – into the MCA is not likely to enhance its image change nor to stabilize its ideological stance. The reported contest for the party's presidency by the Deputy President, initiated by his supporters in mid-1990 was rather interesting. And it may have been a ploy to gain political mileage in view of the country's general election. But it was also a manifestation of an opportunity to realize a personal leadership ambition and to rejuvenate the party. Perhaps, simply, it was a case of testing unity and commitment among the rank and file, as well as among the collective-leadership advocates. Regardless of the reasons, the implication is quite clear. The positive impact of factionalism aside, the party cannot afford to have a resur-

gence of another protracted internal strife, without damaging its image of collective responsibility and reform (see Postscript).

Meanwhile, UMNO was also not spared its share of factional turbulence. Since April 1988, when Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was returned as UMNO's President by a reduced majority, a group of dissident members began to test his leadership authority. While Mahathir and his deputy, Ghafar Baba, managed to shake off the challenge, the dissidents then tested the legality of their own political organization. What had started off as a challenge on the nullity of 30 party branches, allegedly without proper registration partaking in the General Assembly elections, ended in a court decision which ruled UMNO an "unlawful society". This legal technicality sparked off a divided UMNO into UMNO *Baru* (new UMNO) and UMNO *Lama* (old UMNO). The former is under Dr. Mahathir. The latter is headed by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

The existence of two UMNOs, and the subsequent conversion of old UMNO into Semangat 46, attest to the dynamics of intra-group conflict which, given the *status quo*, was reported to undermine Malay unity. But the issue of Malay unity *per se* has existed for some time although in the context of inter-group or inter-party interactions. For as long as PAS has existed, the issue of Malay unity has been seen as one that involves a struggle between the ideological differences of UMNO as a whole and PAS in particular, along secular and religious dimensions respectively. Even UMNO's attempt to fortify its own religious inclinations to complement its secular orientation over the years has yet to pay dividends, especially in terms of unifying all Malays into a single political party.

Nevertheless, the issue of Malay unity within UMNO was hardly an issue before the party's crisis, despite the existence of factional interests. Factional interests, differentiated along territorial affinity and personality cult, seldom involved the mercenariness of money politics. And conflicting factional interests were rarely based on personal incrimination and vendetta, especially in public. Also, factional differences hardly extended beyond the debates and controversies of the UMNO General Assembly although factional grouses echoed beyond the corridors of the Assembly. In short, Malay unity within UMNO

was almost impeccable because factional leaders often returned to their portfolios in the Cabinet.

However, in the case of the two UMNOs, factional leaders were sacked from the party and their Cabinet posts, although a few returnees have been given their party posts again. But the sacking was only the catalyst of the crisis. The roots of the crisis are beyond the personalities of Dr. Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh – the former's increasing international exposure has made him a formidable world citizen which the latter had been, especially during the heyday of Tengku Razaleigh's ministerial stature as the country's foremost economist-Prince of finance. Perhaps the issue of royalty-versus-commoner origin between the two leaders, and the speculative paraphernalia arising therefrom, may provide a diversionary interest in comprehending personality differences. And also, the issue of different leadership styles may provide an insightful discourse about the feuding factions.

In the final analysis, however, the split personality of UMNO today reflects an interplay of three mutually reinforcing issues which have become more evident since Dr. Mahathir succeeded the late Tun Hussein Onn as the party's President. These issues comprise an ambiguous line of leadership succession; an unsettling but rather unobtrusive influence of the power behind the throne, that is the party's power-brokers; and a pervasive mental set which seems to equate money with power and *vice versa*. While Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah used all his political acumen to forge an opposition coalition, Dr. Mahathir, with the dexterity of an experienced medical practitioner sought to perform a political surgery on UMNO to relieve it from its ills.

Although UMNO was embroiled in a mesh of suits and counter-suits, the Prime Minister was able to ride out the critical developments during and after the surgical turnaround. These developments included the readmission of some dissident members and their leaders, the apparent pacification of Musa Hitam – a former Deputy Prime Minister and a key actor in the factional trauma of UMNO – who was appointed as the country's representative with special functions in the United Nations, and the personal marital controversy of

the Chief Minister of Selangor which had incensed the Sultan of the state he now serves. Despite UMNO's assets of billions of ringgit being frozen, and some of the country's best political and legal minds agonizing over the legal recovery and rehabilitation of the party, attempts were made to thaw the cold war between Dr. Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh.

The stage was set for a first meeting before the end of 1989. Initiated by the Father of Independence and the Advisor of Semangat 46, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, and with the consent of the 1989 UMNO General Assembly, the actors strutted on the stage, but the script was fluid as the numbers of actors from each party were flexible. The meeting was cordial, and the prospects of more dialogues in future seemed encouraging. In the wake of the election defeat, however, Semangat 46 will be preoccupied with its own organization problems, especially in consolidating its own support and in bridging the gaps between the alliances it has developed outside UMNO *Baru*.

In retrospect, the opening address and the closing speech by Dr. Mahathir during the 1989 General Assembly have revealed yet another changing dimension to the Prime Minister's political image. His speeches, interpreted in the most optimistic mode, revealed attempts to transcend the ethnocentric decorum of a parochial gathering and which advocated a renaissance of the country's plural value systems and an eclectic worldview. The issue of rapprochement with Semangat 46 had taken a backseat to endeavours to project Malaysia's image as a leading light of the Third World. This was certainly strategic especially after Dr. Mahathir's successful hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting in October 1989. Now, attention is again given to the November 1990 UMNO General Assembly (see Postscript).

The "Triple S" affair in the MIC dominated the media in the months preceding and during its vituperative presidential election in October 1989. Factional animosity and the challenge to the leadership of Samy Vellu culminated in the dramatic display of Pandithan's "fast-coffin" episode in the premises of the MIC Headquarters. This episode led to the political demise of Pandithan, and it continued to

spark off a series of factional exchanges. Subsequent exhibitions of emotional protests, mainly against a pro-Samy dominated Central Working Committee (CWC) and its high-handed actions on sensitive partisan issues, also resulted in the sacking of dissident leaders. However, unchastened by an increasing anti-Samy sentiment, the MIC President met fire with fire. His public speeches, when they touched on partisan issues, were coloured with an arrogance that betrayed the effrontery of a man who could do no wrong.

Perhaps, motivated by the promise of Pandithan's grassroots support, the propensity to restore factional unity, the prospect of being elevated to the party's seat of power, and the guarantee of a nationwide press coverage for a presidential poll, Subramaniam – the Deputy President – entered the fray of intra-group conflict openly. His own confidence aside, and the roadwork of K.Pathmanaban – an MIC Vice-President, Subramaniam's showdown with his President was a necessity to assess the real extent of anti-Samy sentiment as well as to evaluate the spread of his own influence. In the process, however, dirty linens were washed in public, skeletons in the closet were exposed, and character assassinations knew no bounds. Accusations and counter-accusations of mismanagement of MIC-owned enterprises, sabotage, despotism, and other slanderous bickerings provided an intense backdrop to an otherwise united Indian front relative to the other components of the Barisan Nasional.

An incensed President, abetted by his shrewd right-hand man D.P. Vijandran – who has since retired from political limelight, waged a relentless assault on his opponents. He was openly reported to consider readmiting Govindaraj – a former aide and current President of the break- away faction known as the Democratic Malaysian Indian Party (DMIP) if his opponents persisted in their insubordination. However, despite his victory, the outcome of the presidential election results showed that Subramaniam had a substantial support, polling 7,305 votes to Samy Vellu's 11,808 votes. Since then, the President has been uncharacteristically quiet, declining to make any comment about the party. However, his subsequent press statements and recent actions may yet initiate another bout of anti-Samy sentiments. Through his close allies, anti-Samy MIC-branches were

declared defunct and new ones were set up. Samy Vellu did not select some Members of Parliament, including his Deputy and Pathmanaban, and State Assemblymen during the last general election. Instead, he appointed his allies who contested and won. He also postponed the party's general assembly from December 1990 to June 1991.

Meanwhile, the problems which emerged during the 1989 presidential contest are far from over. As the election agent for Subramaniam, Pathmanaban has filed an appeal to nullify the presidential election on several grounds, including irregularities and improprieties before and during the election. Another defeated candidate with 26 votes, Satchianathan, has also appealed and filed a court action which, among other things, seeks to declare the election illegal. Regardless of the action taken, the MIC is not free from the politics and hostility of factionalism. And, ultimately, it is the extent of the divisiveness of factionalism that will decide the demise or the rise of a leader. In this instance, however, the results might tame a President whose temerity and arrogance tend to overshadow his personal achievements and a fairly good track record for his party. For his Deputy, the results might secure for him the promise of the party leadership in time to come, if he maintains his political visibility and party influence. But, of course, the President and his men are unlikely to forget the party's pre-election incidents. In fact, after the 1990 general election, Samy Vellu insisted that two of his allies be appointed as Deputy Ministers to replace Subramaniam and Pathmanaban. This insistence remains a thorny issue which extends beyond the MIC threshold.

In East Malaysia, the attention is drawn towards increasing factionalism in Sabah. A lull seems to pervade politics in Sarawak. But, in Sabah, the formation of a fourth political party within a year in 1989 seemed reflective of the weaknesses in the ruling party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), which had displaced Berjaya before. Also, the fourth party, United Action Party (UAP), heralded a political comeback of some former Berjaya stalwarts. The other three parties, Parti Rakyat Sabah (PRS), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (Akar), represented an attempt to break-through the threshold of PBS. The racial overtures, especially in terms of clanship

and roots origin, are undisguised as these new parties plot to claim a share of the Sabah Government.

Before the Ranau by-election in Sabah in December 1989 , the poli- tical heat for PBS chief, Pairin Kitingan, was trying. Apart from the fiery threats of a former associate and party-man, Mark Koding, who is now Akar's President, Pairin is confronted with allegations of favouritism in answering issues related to his brother's alleged malpractices as Director of Yayasan Sabah (Sabah Foundation). Meanwhile, as the by-election surfaced controversial issues that challenged the credibility of the PBS Government and that which appealed to factional interests, more PBS officials in Government resigned to join Akar. With them, came more sordid tales of PBS and the Kitingan "empire". Nevertheless, the PBS won the by-election, and Akar vowed to return in full force when the general election was held. For a time the lull was omnimous.

Given the present situation in Sabah, it would seem that PBS did not really have a chance to settle down politically before it was plagued with problems of factional loyalty. Stronger personalities within PBS, such as Mark Koding, provide an interesting contrast to Pairin's soft approach. But, basically, the foundation of PBS itself is wanting. More significantly, however, is the changing character of politics and politicians in Sabah in particular, and in East Malaysia in general. And this changing character is inevitable as political maturity is abetted by a growing elite and literate group of East Malaysians who seem keen to claim their birth rights and to decide their political future. This phenomenon is reminiscent of a similar group of West Malaysians who long ago agitated for independence from the British. But before the dust of the 1990 general election can settle, Sabahans will go to the polls again to decide on their State Assembly representatives for the Sulabayan and Sipitang constituencies. The two by-elections are significant because they will show if PBS's domination of Sabah politics remains unshaken, despite its withdrawal from the Barisan Nasional.

Regardless of the political futures of West and East Malaysia, the fact today is that no political party is free from intra-group conflict. Other parties like the Gerakan and PAS may have had their share of

internal upheavals, but the component parties of the Barisan Nasional are being afflicted with bitter factionalism which, in the final analysis, might either unify the coalition or threaten its stability. But an alert government seems to be watchful of possible threats to the country's stability and has so far successfully defused potentially explosive situation. The Prime Minister has been able to maintain an even keel in the turbulent waters of factionalism in UMNO and within the component parties of his Barisan Nasional government. But, with the dawn of each day and the effects of post-election results, new episodes of inter-group and intra-group conflict are surfacing in different guises.

The "E" Factor

As the "O" and "N" factors affecting national unity remain potent, a hybrid of species is developing from inter-racial and intra-racial interactions. Conceived as the "E" factor in the "OPS" concept, its genre can be identified but its character remains an enigma. The genre stems from a configuration of members of different racial groups with common or shared values that transcend racial identification and factional allegiance. This configuration may constitute a class of people whose common or shared values are rooted in economic and socio-cultural sources. For example, the needy, the affordables, and the wealthy are three classes of people whose income disposition and life-styles are different. Other classes of people include the religious moderates and fanatics, or the social conformists and the political activists, or the protagonists of change, whose ideological beliefs, nuances, and practices are not the same.

The configuration of members of different racial groups who share common values may constitute a diversity of interest groups. For instance, the unionists, who strive to protect and advance their interests, may constitute an interest group whose membership is based on similar trade, occupation, or professional affiliation. Environmentalists or conservationists form another interest group whose preoccupation with a host of environmental issues brings together different

people who make it their business to prevent the rape of the natural environment and to conserve the natural heritage of mankind for posterity. Another interest group is made up of consumer advocates whose principal concerns are to ensure that the consumers are not exploited by indiscriminate increases in the prices of essential items, and that the consumers are getting their money's worth for the goods and services they purchase.

Whether they share common values with different ideological and religious beliefs, or whether they share common values with similar interests, the membership of a class of people or of an interest group usually transcend the constricting boundaries of race, religion, colour, or creed. The values of "IM-ism", that is, individualism and materialism, for example, which have been a major characteristic of a developed society, are also a prominent feature in the so-called Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs). Malaysia is no exception. Its youths, regardless of racial affinity, are increasingly individualistic and materialistic. This is not because they are imbibing the influences of the West *per se,* but because they live in a society which places a high premium on "ISA" (independence, self-reliance, and affluence) as the foundation stones of modern technological living. Inevitably, a lifestyle that is not supported by material or monetary capability is doomed to wallow in the conscience of spiritual skepticism, moral dubiety, and personal tribulations.

Differences between classes of people or interest groups are usually dormant in any society. So far, in Malaysia, they tend to be over-shadowed by a variety of problems that are identified along racial origin and ethnic affinity. For instance, the problem of poverty. Perceived along racial and ethnic dimensions, this problem becomes a political bone of contention. There is a reluctance to address the question "Who is poor?" *per se.* Instead, the focus becomes "Who is poorer?" Conversely, on the issue of wealth, the tendency is also to reiterate "Who is richer?" rather than "Who is rich?" Inevitably, programmes that are directed at eradicating poverty and restructuring equity participation are often coloured by political innuendoes throughout the lifespan of the NEP, even from within the ruling coalition party.

However, perceived along class dimension, or even interest-group lenses, poverty or wealth is a universal phenomenon. It transcends race, religion, colour, or creed. It is a world without racial and ethnic boundaries. Similarly, ideological beliefs such as fundamentals of religion, politics, and economics influence only those who adopt and practise them. Also, issues of interest-group demands, such as better work conditions, higher renumerations, consumer protection, and environmental conservation, do not favour any particular racial group. But these issues often find willing patrons, among political parties and other organizations with an ethnic-bent, who seek to politicize them for selfish motives.

Also, perceived along another class dimension, particularly in terms of class values, the emerging problem in Malaysian society seems to revolve around the scramble to scale Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Apparently, there are increasing numbers of Malaysians, transcending the generation gap, who have satisfied their physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. But, conceived along racial and ethnic perceptions, the issue becomes what groups of Malaysians have satisfied which hierarchy of needs more than others. Shrouded in this controversy is the basic reality that there are all kinds of Malaysians who struggle to ascend the hierarchy of needs. This means that, at each hierarchy, there are Malaysians who share common values and similar aspirations, regardless of their racial origin and ethnic affinity.

In the context of race relations and ethnic sensitivities, Maslow's theory suggests a discrepancy between need-values and satisfaction-fulfilment. This discrepancy reflects a disparity between achievement-ability and performance-results or between achievement-opportunity and performance-results. Basically, however, discrepancies in realizing the Maslowian values suggest a disparity between income disposition and capital ownership, apart from differences in innate ability and acquired skills. A common platform for grievance-articulation and change-inducement is thus available to those who seek to change *status quo* and those who want to protect their interests by preserving *status quo*. In this instance, class conflict is most likely to develop between the "haves" and "have nots". In terms of interest

groups, the conflict is most likely to develop between the supporters and opponents of change.

Given this situation, it is still premature to ascertain the character of class and interest-group conflicts with fair accuracy. Nevertheless, the presaging proxy power in politics and economics seems to suggest a pervading control by those who are powerful, in terms of the wealth and influence they command. In this regard, political and economic opportunities tend to be perceived as prerogatives or privileges that are accorded largely to those who are powerful or influential as well as those who are connected with them. Also, compromises between different racial groups, often achieved through interest-group lobby, tend to be perceived as tokens by those who hope for a larger share of the economic pie. And compromises between different income groups, often achieved through common-cause rally, tend to be perceived as pledges and reparations by those who aspire to scale Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Thus, the beliefs that inter-racial and intra-racial conflicts can be resolved through the achievement of the NEP aims alone merely distorts the reality that the gaps between the "haves" and "have nots", and between the powerful and the powerless, still exist, despite thirty-two years of independence. More significantly, these gaps are manifestations of feelings of alienation which may transcend the boundaries of ethnic affinity and racial prejudices. Of course, momentarily, the feelings of alienation cannot be ascertained unless more serious research undertakings are promoted beyond the current endeavour of collating data, collaborating evidences, and of verifying justifications on the statistical compilation of NEP achievements and failures by organizations which sometimes tend to assert their monopolistic authority over the subject.

In this respect, the establishment of these organizations in themselves are praiseworthy. For example, the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) have generated invaluable data and research publications to complement those produced by other conventional sources such as the local universities and government departments, and non-conventional sources such as the "think tanks" of political

parties. But these organizations have to be on guard against unwittingly giving rise to monopolistic tendencies in their efforts to assert and reinforce their professional credibility and status. There is a great need for healthy competition and closer interaction between the organizations and institutions in coordinating research in the social sciences. The basic issue, however, is not the problem of too many data inputs. The problem lies in the creation and use of competitive data for organization enhancement and professional aggrandisement. In short, goal displacement, insofar as competitive data bases are concerned, is unhealthy as the real issues remain embroiled in a statistical maze.

Perhaps the most visible characteristic of shared-interests or common-values conflicts is manifested in the broad panoply of Malaysian youths today. The youth culture seems to transcend the confines of racial prejudices and ethnic sensitivities as, for example, sports and its related activities have illustrated. But this culture is still formative. And it remains shackled within the parameters of an ethical crisis.

Conceived in the environment of traditional "We-ship" (Worship and Eldership) values, but nurtured in the milieu of modern "IM-ism" predilections, a large number of young Malaysians are entrapped in a labyrinth of cultural dissonance. This dissonance is characterized by value contradictions and moral laxity which tend to generate an atmosphere of cultural abeyance. In this atmosphere, the broad panoply of Malaysian youths exemplified by the "Yuppie" generation and the tight jeans cult on two extremes wrestles to liberate itself from the veneration values of "We-ship" while, at the same time, it jostles its entry into the threshold of the acquisitive values of "IM-ism". The veneration values of "WE-ship", which emphasize the "We" relationships, filial piety and kinship affinity, place a high premium on reverence for religion and moral ethics as well as respect for seniority or the elderly. The acquisitive values, however, stress the egoistical "I" syndrome and they place a high premium on the pursuit of introverted concerns and pecuniary enrichment for personal life-style enhancement.

The conflict between the veneration and acquisitive values, and the conflict within the acquisitive values themselves, especially, the

imitative values of Western life-styles, are not without serious moral or ethical overtures. These conflicts are part and parcel of the emerging problems which challenge the tenacity of the Malaysian government to free itself from the bondage of racial myopia and ethnocentric encapsulation. The consolation, however, is that these conflicts reflect a set of problems that transcend race, colour, religion or creed. And, without political overtures, their resolution could provide the bases for an integrated multi-racial and multi-religious country.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The "ONE"-Problem syndrome or "OPS" provides a synthesis of the different issues and challenges which threaten national unity in Malaysian society. The relationships between old, new, and emerging problems and the challenges they pose the government are summarized in Figure 6.

The "O" factor of national unity tends to generate an aura of suspicion and distrust, a protective instinct for survival, and a spirit of chauvinism among and between different races. Under these circumstances, the government is confronted with the challenge to inculcate a spirit of goodwill and camaraderie, to promote a commitment to sacrifice in the national interest, and to invoke a sense of patriotism among its citizens.

The "N" factor of national unity, however, tends to generate a climate of hypocrisy and selfishness, a keen competition for success and patronage, and a spirit of individualism among and between different races. Under these circumstances, the government is confronted with the challenge to discourage the practice of favouritism, to contain the abuse of power and authority, and to curb the misuse of privileges.

The "E" factor of national unity may generate an atmosphere of cynicism and apathy, an environment of exploitation and chicanery, and a feeling of alienation within and outside the boundaries of racial identification and ethnic affinity. Under these circumstances, the go-
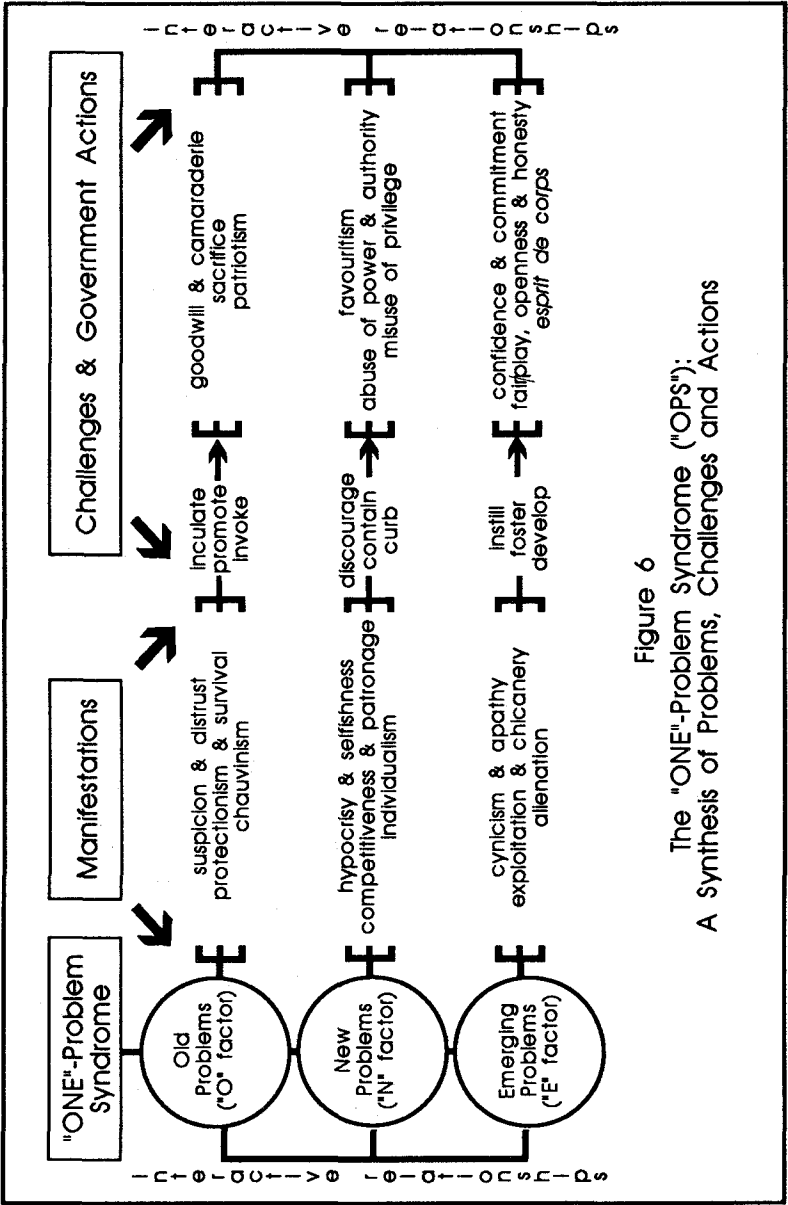
Figure 6
The "ONE"-Problem Syndrome ("OPS"):
A Synthesis of Problems, Challenges and Actions

government faces the challenge to instil a sense of greater confidence and commitment in its schemes, and an open and honest image, and to nurture a more permanent *esprit de corps* among its citizens.

Whether these problems and challenges are real or perceived, the fact remains that they do threaten to disrupt national unity and to undermine political stability. Solutions must be conceived that are directed at dealing with the problems arising from substantive issues of national unity and those arising from differing perceptions, too. Present-day solutions are geared towards resolving the former. They constitute the intended consequences of the NEP. Although these solutions are commendable, they are inadequate. This is because they do not deal with the problems arising from differing perceptions about the issues of national unity and their unintended consequences. Paradoxically, some of the economic-based solutions, like strategies and programmes that are directed at eradicating poverty, redressing income inequalities, restructuring business operations, and redefining education and employment opportunities, have produce unintended consequences, especially of the "E" factor genre. And differing perceptions of such consequences are counter-productive to any effort that is expanded towards fostering goodwill and national unity. In this respect, it is imperative to recognize the types and levels of perceptions involved when reviewing problems arising from differing perceptions about issues of national unity and their unintended consequences. Similarly, it is also necessary to recognize the types and levels of problems involved when reviewing the substantive issues of national unity and its intended consequences. Unless this conceptual distinction is clear, it is unlikely that mismatching solutions will mitigate the problems and challenges of race relations and national unity in Malaysia. On the contrary, they tend to compound these problems and challenges which are as complex as the human relationships that exist among its multi-racial and multi-religious peoples. Nevertheless, the emerging scenario that is premised on the "E" factor genre will pose new challenges that will determine the direction of national unity and the future of political stability in this country.

Today, the country is confronted with a reality that is not avoidable. The beginning of the last decade of this century witnesses the conclusion of the NEP. And a new public policy is in the offing. The aims, aspirations, and objectives of the NEP were developed in the spirit that no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation. But the implementation of the national policy became encrusted with controversial issues such as abuses in large contract awards, banking indiscretions, fraudulent partnerships, and gross mismanagement.

The pervasive influence of political retirees, prominent dissenters, incarcerated businessmen, ex-V.I.P. (Very Important People) convicts, and political chameleons are fairly deep-rooted in the politico-economic environments which they had once helped to create. Even the government bureaucracies are infiltrated with civil servants whose political affiliations, and in some instances, whose active political participation in grassroots politics, make a mockery of bureaucratic neutrality. Divided loyalty and insidious manipulations have become hallmarks of management decisions in both public and private sectors, especially as politicized managers and administrators see-saw between the demands of present leadership and the requests of past political masters.

The role of power-brokers in a money-oriented political environment is significant. Abetted by an inherent capacity for organization self-renewal, a clearly defined line of succession in the leadership might diminish the influence of power-brokers. But it will not eliminate their role altogether. This is because the power-brokers are political chameleons who are astute politicians and can change the character of factionalism as they themselves change in response to their environments. And their environments are increasingly sophisticated and subjected to the vagaries of shifting loyalty which often transcend the boundary of ideological persuasion and personal convictions into the realm of material supplication and moral sanctimony.

The future of Malaysia and its progress into the twenty-first century may rest in its economic performance *vis-a-vis* increased international trade with new markets. This assumes an improved domestic

performance in its present industries and the establishment of new enterprises that will broaden the existing industrial bases and that will encourage the maturation of service-oriented ventures. The country, however, should avoid being constricted by its new-found leadership role in international and ASEAN affairs as the vanguard of regional catechism of cooperative development and diplomacy.

On the whole, the future of Malaysians will depend on the twin forces of when and how much differences between races are exploited or how often inter-group and intra-group similarities are consolidated for partisan interests. It will also depend on how well the universal values of its youth culture and interest-group pluralism are adapted and integrated into the fabric of ethnic diversity to pave the exit for the myopic concerns of partisan politics. The reality, however, remains that the chameleon is a habitual creature of survival, a crisis-oriented reptile whose natural adaptive ability varies as its environments change. Thus, the Malaysian legacy may be enriched or impoverished as the adaptive ability of the ethnic chameleon is challenged from time to time. But it will outlive the test of time as the apotheosis of an integrated Malaysian society is pursued by new waves of young Malaysians whose own kaleidoscopic ethnicity and shifting values may well tolerate the imperfections of cultural pluralism.

The controversy which surrounds the Prime Minister as the leader of UMNO, allegedly dictatorial and uncompromising, may have abated. But he is far from being absolved for the crisis which created Semangat 46. The results of a nationwide general election in his party's favour in particular, have helped to put to rest the problem which has played so much havoc over the last two years. Many may disagree with the man and his *modus operandi*. But few can dispute his leadership qualities which have tested his own political astuteness and which have put Malaysia on the world map. The challenge posed by Semangat 46 and its allies is yet another test of the character and resiliency of his leadership.

Future scrambles for media publicity and the race for political mileage before a general election will almost certainly produce new targets of character assassination and defilement. But these events

should not sidetrack the main issue of what Malaysians really are and how best their plurality of interests are represented, developed, and preserved for posterity.

POSTSCRIPT

An Update

1. The MCA leadership crisis was melodramatic. The "on-off" contest between the incumbent and his Deputy fizzled into a "no contest", but with consequences for proxy players. Some of these players found themselves out of the mainstream of MCA politics. Although the washing of dirty linens in public and the emergence of proxy politics have ended, the divided loyalty among the followers of the two leaders remains suspect. Despite the apparent domination of the President's men in several key positions in the party, the overall influence of the Deputy's men cannot be underestimated. However, the defeat of some of his men in the recent general election may weaken the Deputy President's bargaining power in the party.

    Ironically, the basis – collective responsibility – on which these leaders came into power should now become a major grouse for factional conflict. Could it be a camouflage for a succession heir in the third echelon leadership beyond the President and his Deputy? Could it be a manifestation, too, of the chauvinistic claims of the so-called Chinese-English educated and Chinese-Chinese educated leadership effectiveness in dealing with its Barisan partners? Also, could it be just a manifestation of human failings in power-positions who seek to advance and glorify personal ambitions?

Regardless of the present grouses and their manifestations, all is far from well in the party. Unless the party finds a way out of the *cul-de-sac* and charts a new course where its leaders avoid proxy politics and advocate directional growth strategies, the potential of a strong MCA remains an unfulfilled dream. The facade of a united front in crisis-oriented situations such as elections at party and national levels cannot continue to guarantee an acceptable party image which seems to lack the character of genuine cohesiveness and non-factional indulgences. In this regard, the third echelon leaders may hold the key to the future of a truly representative Chinese party. And an injection of fresh blood, in terms of new members with innovative and action-oriented capabilities, is imperative to providing the supportive networks for recapturing "lost bases", building party image and unifying the Chinese community, regardless of education, status, sect and occupation. The task of removing ineffective members is often unpleasant but it must be done so that the party can function well. Thus, a proactive approach is suggested to bringing about major changes instead of little or incremental changes, characterized by reactive behaviour to problems or crises.

2.   The Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Parliament on October 5, 1990. And the Elections Commission fixed the eighth general election for the nation on October 20 (for East Malaysia) and October 21 (for West Malaysia).The results of the 1990 general election showed that the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition had been returned to power with a two-third majority. It secured 127 seats out of a total of 180 parliamentary seats. The remaining 53 seats were captured by the Opposition as follows: DAP – 20, Semangat 46 – 8, PAS – 7, PBS – 14, and Independents/Others – 4. On the whole, UMNO performed creditably (securing 73 parliamentary seats and most state seats), thus consolidating Dr. Mahathir's hold over his party except in Kelantan where the Opposition PAS swept into power. Semangat 46, despite its last-minute attempts to consolidate the opposition coalition under Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (with PAS and

some minor Muslim parties) and Gagasan Rakyat (with DAP, PRM, IPF and PBS), did not do well. Its candidates, including most of its kingpins, lost in most constituencies, except in Kelantan where 8 candidates entered Parliament and 13 candidates share power with PAS.

UMNO's Barisan Nasional partners, especially the Indian-based MIC and the Chinese-based MCA, performed reasonably well. The latter, however, saw all its candidates beaten in Penang by the DAP whose increased representation (14 seats) was not enough to realize its "Tanjong 2" aspiration of forming the island's next Government. Here, UMNO caputured 12 seats and the Gerakan secured 7 seats although the latter's long-serving party stalwart – Dr. Lim Chong Eu was the most conspicuous casualty. In forming the State Government of Penang, the *status quo* was maintained. A Gerakan-Chinese candidate, Dr. Lim's former Political Secretary – Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, became the Chief Minister. However, a new phenomenon is seen in the appointment of Dr. Ibrahim Saad as the Deputy Chief Minister. Understandably, this appointment reflects UMNO's success in the election in Penang. A fitting reward, perhaps, for keeping the island within the fold of the Barisan Nasional coalition.

The victory of Barisan Nasional, especially among many UMNO candidates in straight-fights with Semangat 46 and Malay opposition cadidates, suggests a familiar phenomenon in Malaysian society. This phenomenon is related to the intervention of ethnic and racial forces in shaping the character of multi-racial politics in Malaysia.

In the general election, when UMNO appealed to the Malay voters on racial and religious grounds following the crossover of PBS to Gagasan Rakyat, they decidedly cast their votes for UMNO against Semangat 46 to represent their interests and to preserve their political dominance in the country. In this instance, the PBS pullout from Barisan Nasional and its decision to join Semangat 46 could have ricocheted adversely on the performance of Semangat 46 in the election. Probably, the racial and religious slant towards the close of the election campaigns could

have influenced the trend of Chinese votes in favour of the DAP. Of course, the exception was in Kelantan where the PAS and Semangat 46 candidates demolished UMNO. Here, parochial interests, including anti-Menteri Besar sentiments, a divided loyalty in the state bureaucracy, and pro-Tengku Razaleigh support, tend to dominate voting behaviour. Moreover, the momentum for change had already been set in motion long before the gene- ral election. And, if this is so, perhaps UMNO Kelantan could have misread the undercurrents that were building up in the state, despite public show of support during the campaign trail of UMNO leaders.

Nevertheless, the choice among a large majority of Malays throughout the country is clear at the moment. UMNO reigns supreme. And, until its November 1990 general assembly, factional interests will take a back-seat. However, it is interesting to note that, since the pullout of PBS, UMNO has been harping on a possible threat to the rights and privileges of other racial and ethnic groups in Sabah if a Christian-dominated party like the PBS continues to rules. Hence, the mood is set for UMNO to take root in Sabah. Whether the other component parties of the Barisan Nasional would follow suit remains speculative although the Gerakan had indicated its willingness to cooperate with PBS before the latter's pullout.

The non-Malay component parties of Barisan Nasional, especially the Chinese-based party of MCA, seem somewhat resigned to accepting the contributions of UMNO votes towards the success of its candidates in Malay-dominated constituencies throughout the country. It remains perplexed, however, at its own inability to sustain and garner enough Chinese votes in Chinese-dominated constituencies despite its service-oriented programmes and the presence of well-known party stalwarts. At the same time, the ability of the DAP to persuade a large following of Chinese voters especially in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca continues to affront the MCA's claim to representing the interests of the Chinese community in Malaysia.

The reality is that when both parties compete for urban and suburban votes, the DAP has had the edge over the MCA, especially in securing the additional votes from non-Chinese middle-class and professional voters. So far, among the reasons given for the DAP's success are anti-establishment sentiments, protest votes, apathy and the DAP's tag as champion of the underdogs. But, the DAP has also been known, rightly and wrongly, for its courageous indictments of alleged corrupt and unfair practices. Hence, its new role as a vociferous public custodian of justice tends to draw sympathy votes for its candidates, some of whom are no more better known than their MCA counterparts. Generally, the DAP has a better feel of the Chinese pulse.

Of course, the DAP has not spared the weaknesses inherent in the MCA itself. A weakness is MCA's failure to resolve its factional rivalry. Another weakness is its wrong choice of strategies as exemplified by the candidacy of two ex-Gerakan-cum-MCA members in the Penang-state general election. In this instance, such candidacy tends to incite adverse conjectures of MCA's long-term ambition in Penang – the seat of Gerakan dominance. And in Petaling Jaya and Kelang, the candidates may appeal to the petty traders and small-businessmen for services they might have performed or promised to perform. But they could not have persuaded nor convinced the middle-class Chinese and professionals of the effectiveness of their representation in government. Moreover, many voters who had discovered changes in their original polling stations and had suffered the inconveniences of relocating their new stations could not have been sympathetic towards the Barisan Nasional candidates. And, in Puchong, the MCA candidate failed not because she was not a good candidate but because she could not get the support of migrants and urban drifters who tend to identify with the DAP candidate.

The most fundamental weakness in MCA today is its image. A relevant question is "What does MCA represent?" In this instance, the DAP has no pretensions about its stand as an opposition party whose political bent is championing the rights and

privileges of the Chinese community. Usually chauvinistic in its *modus operandi* and quite dramatic in its articulations, the general public has little difficulty with the DAP's image, despite its alliance with Semangat 46 and the rest of the Gagasan Rakyat components. Thus, in city centres, urban and suburban areas where development is seen as inevitable – regardless of who forms the government, the bottom-line is "Which party is more effective in articulating the interests of the constituents?" In this instance, party-image becomes a decisive factor. Of course, the issue of deeds (i.e., the attainment of interest-articulation ends) is often secondary to the issue of articulation itself. This paradox may be likened to the situation where the accent is on justice as seen to be done rather than justice as seen done.

In the final analysis, the ruling party's defeat in Kelantan, and in Sabah where the ruling PBS defected to the Opposition Front, and the overall reduced majority of the Barisan Nasional could underline the electorate's dissatisfaction with the pro-longed intra-party and inter-party factionalism that had been plaguing the ruling coalition. The results also show emerging voting trends among the country's younger voters concomitant with the change in values and lifestyles discussed in the main text. Also, especially in city centres and urban and suburban areas where migrants and urban drifters are found in fairly large numbers, they seem to form pockets of infleuntial voters. After all has been said and done, the Barisan Nasional has been given a new mandate to complete the tasks it started.

The UMNO General Assembly was scheduled for November 30, 1990. The nomimation of Dr. Mahathir and Abdul Ghafar Baba, as President and Deputy President respectively, showed a general consensus among all party divisions that the two should continue to lead UMNO. Attention, however, focussed on the race for the three posts of Vice-Presidents. The Vice-Presidents are important because they represent the next echelon of leadership to succeed the President and his Deputy in any eventuality. Six candidates, including three incumbents contested. Two incumbents were

returned to office while a new Vice-President was also elected. The results of the contest suggest that the new Vice-Presidents command a substantial following in the party.

At the same time, competition for the 25 UMNO Supreme Council seats was also intense. Thus, the 1,518 delegates who cast their votes decided on whether party or factional interests were important to the unity of UMNO, and their choices of candidates reflected this decision. Apart from this selection process, a major focus of the proceedings was on the issue of the alleged "palace involvement in politics". The resolutions reiterated that the King and the Malay Rulers must uphold the federal and state constitutions to protect the sovereignity and survival of the constitutional monarchy. Regardless of the problems faced by it, UMNO will survive under the present leaders whose visions and experiences have made the Mahathir-Ghafar Baba combination a formidable team in party unity and nation building.

Conclusion

These developments represent the outcomes of, and commentary on, the said events which, in the final analysis, do not detract from the main ideas of this book. On the contrary,the events and their outcomes remain examples that are illustrative of the under-currents which continue to generate and perpetuate parochial and factional interests among political parties and within the Barisan Nasional and Opposition coalitions.

Such interests often clash when political credibility is challenged and when unexpected events threaten political survival. When they clash, these interests are orchestrated in a symphony of collective leadership and responsibility, party unity, and national security. During this symphony, however, the cacophonies of parochialism, factionalism, and ethnocentricism are momentarily replaced by a repertoire of compromise, goodwill, higher levels of tolerance, and even increased public spiritedness.

But when the orchestra has played its last notes, the different ensembles retain their individual identities and continue to assert their parochial demands. In this sense, Malaysian politics, in general, and the political parties, in particular, are unlikely to behave very differently from the chameleon whose adaptive ability varies with the circumstances and the environments in which it exists. And, despite the speculative trend of a two-party system in the country, the reality remains that the cacophonies of individual component parties tend to make permanent and co-operative relationships rather trying although basic coalition along the Alliance-model of the *Merdeka* era might prove fruitful in the future.

The first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, passed away on December 6, 1990. Malaysia has lost an illustrious son, a Kedah prince, who had secured the country's independence from the British in 1957. He believed that the greatest asset of Malaysia is its multi-racial population and that national unity based on cultural pluralism will continue to be the collar-stone of the country's prosperity and progress.

EPILOGUE

There is, however, one ground of prophecy which con-
tinues to hold good: the unreal must yield to the real.
Truth may be displaced by better truth, but never by non-
truth: Humanity can never give up nor go backward in its
pursuit of truth at various levels.

William Ernest Hocking

GLOSSARY

Abdullah Ang Fiasco: A questionable incident which involved an incarcerated public personality, Mr. Abdullah Ang, the former Chief Executive Officer of the now defunct Malaysian Overseas Investment Corporation (MOIC). He was allegedly allowed to move in and out of the prison in Kajang (in Selangor state) to conduct his family-related business in Kuala Lumpur freely during the duration of his incarceration. This incident was only highlighted by a local tabloid a few days before Ang was set free.

Affaphobia: A new concept, developed by the author in 1975-76 for his Ph.D. thesis in U.S.C., as part of the research on Ameri-can students reactions towards the implementation of Affirmative Action (AA) policies, following the promulgation and practice of equal employment opportunity (EEO) in the 1970s.

   The concept is formed by agglutinating "affirmative action" and "phobia". Literally, it means "a fear of affirmative action". Operationally, it means a fear that is rooted in the belief that affirmative action transactions (AAT) tend to undermine traditional power relationships between majority (whites)and minority (Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, Asian Americans, etc.) persons as well as between males and females. In short, "affaphobia" is a fear of a threat, perceived or real, to the bases of social power that determine superior-subordinate relations in any

social situation, an organization, or a society. It is also a fear generated by the uncertainties of what affirmative action transactions portend for the future of Americans, especially in the context of race relations in the country.

Affirmative Action: This concept refers to the conduct of business, public and private, that is designed to translate the guidelines and remedies for equal employment opportunity into positive results. It operates on the basis of an affirmative action programme which comprises numerical goals (employment goals) and timetables (target dates) aimed at recruiting, training, and advancing minorities, women, the disadvantaged, and the handicapped. The programme is usually tailored to meet the circumstances and prevailing administrative patterns of an organization or agency. Thus, it is expected to complement rather than contradict the merit principles of employment. It is also expected to be executed in good faith.

On the whole, affirmative action transactions are premised on Title VII of the EEO Act of 1972. And they are expected to eliminate employment discrimination in the long run as well as to redress inequities in employment procedures and practices, such as qualification requirements, selection methods, job structures, and promotion and training policies.

In the context of Malaysia, semblances of affirmative action transactions are visible, expecially in the private sector, following the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In these instances, the majority (*bumiputera* community) is seen as the principal beneficiary of affirmative action.

Bumiputera: A popular term used to describe the majority race in Malaysia, following the implementation of the New Economic Policy. Basically, the *bumiputera* community comprises the Malays, Malay-related, and the aborigines. (See Appendix I).

Bumiputeraism: A phenomenon so-called because the *bumiputera* community seems to be the target-beneficiary of economic trans-

actions following the implementation of the NEP. These transactions are aimed at creating a 30 per cent-ownership participation of the *bumiputera* community in the country's wealth. Also, this phenomenon is often seen as a manifestation of increased *bumiputera* employment in the private sector (for example, as Personnel Managers or Human Resources Directors, and Chief Executive Officers of financial and trading concerns) and of increased *bumiputera* scholarships in education. Of course, the impact of this phenomenon remains speculative and it is often controversial.

Cultural Pluralism: A concept which emphasizes cultural diversity as the basis for integration and unity in a multi-racial and multi-religious country (see Appendix II) like Malaysia. The close of the 1980 seems to usher in a condescending attitude towards the practice and revival of this concept, especially following the various efforts of the Government in promoting "Visit Malaysia Year 1990". The prime-mover is the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. For the moment, the richness of Malaysia's plural ethnicity is enjoying the attention of local and foreign mass media who seem to be preoccupied with the artifacts of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others cultural legacies. It must be emphasized that cultural pluralism includes both the artifacts and mentifacts of different racial and ethnic groups in the country.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO): As a policy statement, it prohibits discrimination against persons with respect to employment, compensation, training, and advancement on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin. However, the exceptions are where age, sex, or physical requirements constitute a *bona fide* occupational qualification for effective and efficient administration.

As an action plan, it consists of non-discriminatory and remedial strategies to effect change in past discriminatory personnel policies. Among these strategies are those that are aimed at:

    a. revising recruitment, training, and promotion proce-
       dures,

    b. restructuring job and personnel practices, and

    c. creating a more representative labour force at all
       levels of employment by hiring those who had been
       discriminated against previously.

Ethnocentric Development: An inclination towards, or a pre-
ference for, a particular racial or ethnic group, especially in terms
of allocating resources for the development of the said group.
Such inclination or preference seems more evident during the im-
plementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). One of the
manifestations of such inclination or preference is the emergence
of the phenomenon of *bumiputeraism.* Another is the pheno-
menon of "preferential hiring" or "preferential treatment".

Greed: An acronym for gender, racial, ethnic, employment and
doctrinal stereotypes. They reflect the images of Malaysians in
general. In this classification, "gender" and "doctrinal" stereo-
types are relatively new. For example, the gender stereo-type in
Malaysian society has extended the image of Malaysian women
beyond "housewives" to professionals, politicians and active so-
cial workers. The doctrinal stereotype has identified PAS-related
members as religious (Islamic) fanatics whose bent on creating
an Islamic state, if it forms the government, remains unwavering.
It also represents an extension of the traditional classification of
stereotypes under "ROE" (see further explanation below).

IM-ism: A composite of two letters representing the words "indivi-
dualism" and "materialism". The former emphasizes the egoisti-
cal "I" which places a premium on the "self" and self-related or per-
sonalized ventures, achievements and development. The latter
stresses the contemporary preoccupation of society with mone-
tary and material pursuits of contentment. Higher renumeration,
property purchase and ownership, and status symbol-enhance-
ment objects such as brandname products and exotic leisure in-

dulgences are some examples of materialistic lifestyles. These acquisitive values constitute a major orientation of a fairly large section of younger Malaysians today, especially the educated young executives and the so-called "yuppies".

ISA: It is an acronym for independence, self-reliance, and affluence. These three characteristics represent a set of value-orientation which younger Malaysians seem to be cultivating today. They may form a part of the "IM-ism" syndrome whose impact on society remains unresearched.

KBSR and KBSM: The *Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah* (KBSR) and the *Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (KBSM) are two major educational reforms which are directed at overhauling the objectives, syllabi, and contents of primary and secondary education respectively. They also represent innovative reforms which bring in its wake new teaching methods, textbooks and workbooks, and more creative teaching staff. Basically, they constitute new approaches to imparting knowledge and skills more meaningfully and effectively to school-going children. The impact of these reforms is being monitored. The outcomes will be known a few years from now as the "pioneering students" leave the shelters of their school, either for employment or for further studies.

NEP (DEB): The New Economic Policy (NEP) is also known as the *Dasar Ekonomi Baru* (DEB) in *Bahasa Malaysia*. It is the landmark of post-*Merdeka* or post-independent development. It is a significant public policy that was introduced following the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Malaysia on February 23, 1971. It has a two-fold objective of eradicating poverty and restructuring society, with the ultimate aim of fostering national unity among its diverse population.

This policy covers the duration of four 5-Year Malaysia Plans (MP), *viz.*, 1971-75 (second MP), 1976-80 (third MP) 1981-85 (fourth MP), and 1986-90 (fifth MP). It also marked the

beginning of the era of "ethnocentric development" which attempts to fulfill the target of 30 per cent-equity participation of the *Bumiputera* community in the economic activities of the country. 1990 represents the year in which the implementation of NEP or DEB programmes is set to end. And the country as a whole awaits the Government's next move to install a new policy.

OPS: This acronym comprises two composite concepts, *viz.*, "ONE" and "PS". "ONE" represents old, new and emerging. "PS" represents problems syndrome. "OPS" is basically a conceptual framework used here to synthesize and incorporate the salient features of old, new and emerging problems which confront Malaysia today. To a large extent, these problems, in various forms and guises, may be likened to the "ethnic chameleon" in Malaysian society that is susceptible to the influences and demands of changing political, business, and socio-cultural environments.

PALACE: A composite of two concepts, *viz.*, "PAL" and "ACE", which forms part of the conceptual framework – "Royal PALACE" Culture – for understanding the interactive elements and the nature of their relationships in a Malaysian society that was once under the British (see Figure 1). "PAL" and "ACE" represent two middle strata of political and economic relationships respectively within the traditional hierarchy of plural interactions in the society. "PAL" or political alliance leadership, is represented by the Alliance Party whose membership includes the Malays from UMNO, the Chinese business community from MCA, and the Indians from MIC. This coalition formed the Government after securing independence from the British on August 31, 1957. Today, this coalition forms the core of Barisan Nasional, the ruling political alliance.

"ACE" is an acronym for associations, clanship organizations, and elite groups who form a very influential interest-group in the country and from where traditional MCA and MIC politi-

cal leaders had originated. Together with foreign investment (FI) interests, "ACE" dominate most of the economic activities in the country. To a large extent, too, the "Royal PALACE" culture had been contributory towards the formation of Malaysian stereotypes and their implications for the country's race relations in general .

Preferential Hiring or Treatment: It encompasses the notion that persons are generally accorded special favours when there are job vacancies and advancement opportunities available in an organization or an agency. In this instance, they are employed or promoted because of their racial or ethnic affiliation or/and socio-political connections.

ROE stereotypes: "ROE" is an acronym for racial, occupational, and ethnic. The racial, occupational and ethnic stereotypes of the Malaysians are described in the text (see Chapter Two).

Stereotypes and Stereotyping: Stereotypes refer to "perceived images" of persons.The characteristics of these images are often defined in terms of racial, occupational, ethnic, gender and doctrinal attributes. Stereotyping refers to the process of categorizing people or persons according to perceived attributes rather than actual attributes that they have.

We-ship: This concept involves understanding two important values which had been responsible for the moral orientation of middle-aged and old Malaysians. It involves the values of worship and eldership. The former refers to a penchant for upholding religion and religious beliefs and practices. The latter refers to a genuine respect or reverence for one's elders in the family or in the community at large.

This respect or reverence is not only in terms of age and experience. But it is often for what the elders symbolize – the head of a rich cultural heritage and familial lineage with historical roots. These values constitute a part of what society terms as

venerative values that are important in the socialization of the young in particular and society in general. They are generally significant in inculcating a sense of morality and fairness among peoples and cultures in various societies over the years.Thus, We-ship, when propagated in Malaysian society among the younger Malaysians, can help develop lasting relationships that transcend race, colour, religion or creed because worship and eldership are universal values of bondship.

APPENDIX I
THE MALAYSIANS

The population of Malaysia is characterized by two broad categories, *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera*. But these categories are misleading because they represent a diversity of racial ancestry and ethnic heritage which continues to fascinate the foreign eye. In fact, they constitute the backbone of Malaysia's rich cultural plurality which, without political intervention, has been responsible for national unity and general stability in the country.

The *bumiputera* group is as variegated as the non-*bumiputera* group. The former comprises the largest percentage of the total population, more than 56 per cent. The Malay, non-Malay *bumiputera* or Malay-related, and aborigines *Orang Asli* form the *bumiputera* community. The Chinese, Indians, and Others form the non-*bumiputera* community. And they are distributed throughout West Malaysia (also known as Peninsular Malaysia) and East Malaysia (which consists of Sabah and Sarawak).

The *Government Official Yearbook 1988* showed the 1985 population spread as follows: 13 million people resided in Peninsular Malaysia, 1.2 million in Sabah and 1.5 million in Sarawak. In Peninsular Malaysia, there were 56.5 per cent Malays and other *bumiputera*, 32.8 per cent Chinese, 10.1 per cent Indians, and 0.6 per cent Others. In East Malaysia, 70.1 per cent were *bumiputera*, 28.7 per cent were Chinese and 1.2 per cent were Others.

Being the predominant group in the *bumiputera* community, the Malays include the Javanese, Bugis, Minangkabau in West Malaysia, Bajau of Sabah, etc. The non-Malay *bumiputera* are mainly found in Sabah and Sarawak. The Iban, Bidayuh or Land Dayaks, Melanau, Kenyah, Kayan, and Bisayah live in Sarawak. The Kadazan or Dusun, Murut, Kelabit, and Kedayan are found in Sabah. Racially, these natives or sons of the soil (*bumiputera*) originate from the same roots. However, in West Malaysia, the aborigines are spread out in small groups throughout the eleven states. Comprising more than 62,000 people, they include the Negritos, Senoi, and Proto-Malay. Even among them, there are different ethnic groups. For example, the Jahai and Batek are representative of the Negritos. The Senoi are represented, among others, by the Semai and Temiar. Among others, the Proto-Malay are represented by the Jakun and Temuan.

The Chinese are the predominant group in the non-*bumiputera* community. They constituted about 34 per cent and 46 per cent of the population in West and East Malaysia respectively in 1980. Even among the Chinese, they are differentiated by the dialects they speak. The Cantonese, Hokkien, Khek or Hakka, and Teochew form the larger dialect groups that are spread over the country. However, the smaller dialect groups such as the Foochow, Henghua, Kwongsai, Hokchia and Hokchui are mainly found in West Malaysia. Basically, the Chinese are descendants of immigrants who had left the shores of mainland China to seek their fortunes in the *Nanyang* or overseas. The exception is the Chinese *Baba* or the *Peranakan* community of Malacca on the west coast of Peninsular ·Malaysia. Their ancestry dates back to 16th century Malacca.

The Indians are also of immigrant ancestry. They are mainly found in West Malaysia. The Others, comprising the Arabs, Sinhalese, Eurasians, and Europeans, are found throughout Malaysia.

Numbers aside, the racial and ethnic diversity of the country's population is fascinating. So, too, the distribution pattern across the country. And, with a target population of 70 million at an estimated growth rate of 3.2 per cent per annum, Malaysia's plural society seems secured. It can only be enhanced by political stability, economic growth, and socio-cultural development. Given this population,

the "soul" of Malaysia is not *bumiputera* or non-*bumiputera*. It is also not Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians or other groups. It is simply the citizens of Malaysia – the Malaysians! And Malaysians can be proud of this different ancestry and their diverse socio-cultural practices without suppressing the right and freedom of choice to express individual legacies and religions. Such legacies may be enriched over time by mixed marriages, but their basic ethnicity will remain. The different religions, however, will be practised regardless of the dominance of a particular religion – Islam in the case of Malaysia, simply because worship and obeisance to God, is up to the individual.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

The racial and ethnic diversity of Malaysians is complemented by its cultural plurality, especially in terms of the different religions and religious ceremonies which Malaysians practise. Although Islam is the official religion of the country, the freedom of other forms of religious worship is guaranteed by the Constitution.

Islam is mainly identified with the Malays. Confucianism, Taoism, and Ancestor Worship are exclusively identified with the Chinese. However, the Chinese also practice Buddhism which, in Malaysia, is represented by the Mahayana and the Theravada sects. Hinduism is mainly identified with the Indians, and Sikhism with the Sikh community. Christianity, however, provides an interesting mix of Malaysians (with the exception of the Muslims) who embrace the different sects as represented by three primary groups – the Roman Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia, and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship.

Religion, being a sensitive subject, is even more sensitive in a multi-racial and multi-religious country like Malaysia. So far, the Government has tried its best to prevent political parties from using religious issues to gain political mileage. But, between UMNO, Semangat 46, PAS, and the smaller Muslim-based parties, Islam and the formation of an Islamic State have been discussed on several occasions. In fact, some Islamic concepts such as cooperation, discus-

sions and meetings have been practised. Nevertheless, UMNO has maintained that Malaysia cannot be an Islamic State although Islam is the official religion of the country. Over the years, PAS has toned down its propaganda on forming an Islamic State. However, it is interesting to watch how PAS, as the new State Government of Kelantan, will rule and develop Kelantan according to the precepts of Islam. Also, it is interesting to watch how a predominantly Christian-based party – PBS – will conduct its public administration and development projects as it has withdrawn from the Barisan Nasional coalition. The bottom-line is that religion is too sensitive to be manipulated for selfish interests, without serious consequences for the country as a whole.

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INDEX

This book argues that politics in Malaysia is essentially shaped by ethnic or racial forces.

The 1969 racial riots violently replaced the cultural pluralism of post-independent Malaysia with a new era of increasing ethnocentric articulations and affirmative public policies. Seemingly, the trend before the October 1990 General Election suggests a revival of some forms of cultural pluralism.

Recent years, however, have witnessed increasing intraethnic disputes and hostile factionalism amidst dormant inter-ethnic rivalry. These have been aggravated by new problems related to class, interest groups and generational conflicts which transcend ethnic differences. The chameleon-like nature of Malaysian politics merely camouflages the real problems of race relations and national integration in Malaysia.

The author examines the main issues in Malaysia's complex political landscape. He tenders several original and thought-provoking ideas like:

* Has the "Royal Palace" culture of post-independent Malaysia given way to "IM-ism" (Individualism and Materialism)?
* Should the New Economic Policy be replaced with a Participative Economic Policy?
* Whatever happened to the National Ideology?
* How can the country create an eclectic value-system like "WE-ship" (worship and eldership) which transcends racial and ethnic differences as a basis for national integration?