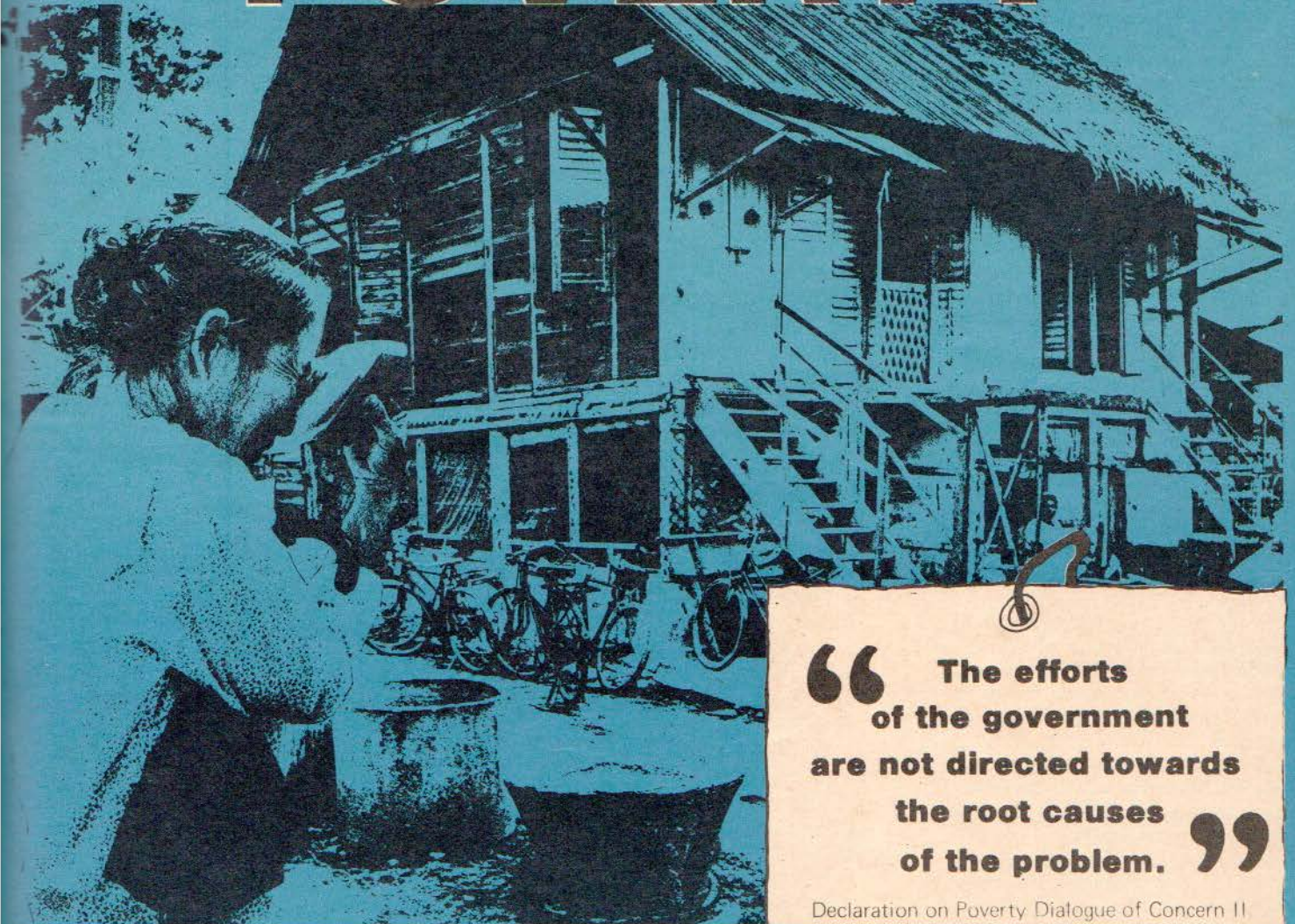


# ALIRAN

For Justice, Freedom, Solidarity ● MONTHLY

Dialogue of Concern

## POVERTY



“ The efforts of the government are not directed towards the root causes of the problem. ”

Declaration on Poverty Dialogue of Concern II

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The Aliran Monthly appears in the latter half of the month

Cover photos by courtesy of The Star Publications.

*Aliran held its second Dialogue of Concern on 17 February 1985 in Kuala Lumpur. The theme this time was Poverty. The first dialogue on Corruption was held in September 1984.*

*In all, 13 groups attended the second dialogue. They were 1) Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) 2) Democratic Action Party (DAP) 3) Institut Analisa Sosial (INSAN) 4) Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (PSRM) 5) Environmental Protection Society, Malaysia (EPSM) 6) Selangor Graduates Society (SGS) 7) Federation of Malaysia Consumer Associations (FOMCA) 8) Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-pelajar Islam Malaysia (PKPIM) 9) Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) 10) Student Christian Movement (SCM) 11) Selangor Consumers Association (SCA) 12) Alternative Resource Centre (ARC) and 13) Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN).*

*After a lengthy discussion the Dialogue adopted a Declaration on Poverty. With the exception of the Student Christian Movement, all the other groups signed the Declaration. In addition, the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) which could not attend, also endorsed the Declaration. Statements from the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public & Civil Services (CUEPACS) and the Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia were also read out at the Dialogue.*

*It is significant that groups with such diverse ideological and ethnic backgrounds have reached consensus on the nature, causes and consequences of poverty. It is even more significant that they have adopted common long-term and short-term strategies to overcome the problem of poverty.*

*In commenting on the Dialogue, Aliran President, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar said, "Achieving consensus on vital social challenges confronting the nation is crucial for the well-being of our multi-ethnic society. Unless important and influential groups with different ethnic bases and ideological orientations can develop common perspectives on issues such as poverty, corruption, freedom and unity, there is really no hope for a society like ours."*

*"The various public interest societies, political parties and trade union federations which have adopted the Declaration on Poverty today should continue to communicate with one another. There should be other attempts to exchange ideas and ideals among various social groups on issues of importance to the nation."*

*Apart from adopting the Declaration, the Dialogue also pledged to contribute to the 'Africa Famine Fund'. Individual societies will make their own contributions.*

*The next dialogue is tentatively scheduled for early July. It will discuss 'Parliamentary Democracy'. This year the nation is celebrating 25 years of Parliamentary Democracy.*

*We publish the full text of the joint Declaration on Poverty.*

## POVERTY

### The Situation

**P**overty is a major contemporary problem, globally as well as in this country. According to a study, more than 800 million people, mainly in the Third World, live in absolute poverty. Poverty is also one of our major challenges. Though the Government has, since Merdeka, implemented a number of programmes aimed at eradicating poverty, the problem remains serious. The rate of poverty continues to be significant. According to government statistics, 30.3% of the population were living below the poverty line in 1983. In rural areas, the rate of poverty actually increased from 37.4% to 41.6% in 1983. In urban areas, on the other hand, poverty decreased only slightly, by 1.5% — from 12.6% to 11.1% in 1983. This is an indication of how serious absolute poverty is in our country.

The poorest groups have been identified as the rubber, coconut and oil palm smallholders, padi farmers, fishermen, plantation workers, the orang asli, the new villagers and those earning very low incomes in urban areas. The rate of poverty is much higher in those states which are more dependant upon traditional agriculture like Kedah, Trengganu, Kelantan and Perlis. In Sabah and Sarawak too, poverty constitutes a serious problem. It is therefore disappointing that the government has failed to provide statistics on poverty in those states.

As with the poverty rate, the income disparity between the rich and the poor is also a matter of concern. This disparity is a reflection of the extent of the problem of relative poverty. According to an academic source, in 1957/8, the bottom 40% of the population accounted for 15.9% of total income, but in 1976 its share had dropped to 10.3%. The top 5% of the population, on the other hand, increased its share of total income from 22.1% in 1957 to 26.4% in 1973.

The same source has shown that the income gap between the rich and poor in every community has been widening since Merdeka. Absolute and relative poverty exist in all communities. This goes to show that poverty is not a communal problem.

### Effects

To understand the effects of poverty upon society, one has to examine the problem from the perspective of the poor.

For the poor, the reality of poverty means, amongst other things:

- low incomes
- no (or limited) financial assets
- lack of employment prospects
- debts
- inadequate food, clothing, shelter and other basic needs
- lack of skills
- insufficient formal education
- lack of knowledge and social awareness
- lack of access to modern health facilities
- lack of access to electricity, potable water, modern toilet facilities and other such amenities
- lack of access to legal redress
- big families resulting in onerous responsibilities
- erosion of family life
- exploitation at work
- lack of occupational safety
- being a victim of unjust purchasing arrangements
- constant exposure to all sorts of environmental pollution
- being unable to play an active role in the political process in order to safeguard his or her own rights, and
- being unable to help shape the culture of one's society

The moral and spiritual consequences of poverty are equally adverse. The poor do not live like human beings in the real sense of the word. Their dignity and honour are often violated. This is what explains their sense of inferiority, their lack of confidence, their unwillingness to take the initiative.

Poverty also tends to polarise members of society. It divides society into conflicting classes. As a result, it becomes difficult to create unity among the people.

This is all the more true of societies like ours where a significant segment of a particular community lives below the poverty line. In such a situation, the question of poverty is transformed into a communal issue by those in authority.

## Causes

The unequal distribution of wealth and power is the main source of poverty in the country. Because of this inequality, groups with wealth and influence at the upper levels of society have been able to dominate and determine our economic development.

The production system, the consumption pattern, technology, the type of investment, the direction of industrialisation, the orientation in commerce, the form of agriculture all reflect the interests and aspirations of those groups. In a system like this, the standard of living of the majority cannot be improved rapidly. Consequently, a huge segment of them remains shackled to poverty.

Besides, poverty among those at the bottom of society cannot easily be overcome since the economic system as a whole is based upon profit maximisation and accumulation of wealth. This makes it even more difficult for the poor.

If anything, the international capitalist system in which Malaysia has a peripheral role, further aggravates the position of the poor. This system is characterised by exploitation, for a minority of developed nations dominate economic, technological and cultural resources for their own interests. This affects our economy which is still a dependent economy — a characteristic inherited from the colonial period. Dependency means that domestic wealth continues to flow out of the country through the huge profits made by foreign companies in the industrial and commercial sectors. The dominance of these companies over the international market, technology and the movement of capital, has resulted in the weakening of our national economy. For the poor, this outflow of wealth means less financial resources which could have been used for raising their living standards. Also, as a consequence of dependency, the prices of our natural commodities have been declining in the world market while the prices of imported manufactured goods have been increasing. It is apparent that the poor who produce our commodity exports are the main victims of this unequal exchange. Similarly, the effects of imported inflation are much worse upon the poor.

Apart from the international economic order, the concept of development and related strategies and approaches to development which are based on blind imitation of the Western experience further hinders efforts to liberate the poor. The poverty that emerges from this general framework expresses itself in more specific forms in both the rural and urban economies.

The factors responsible for poverty include:

- small or uneconomic holdings

- outmoded methods of production
- low productivity
- insufficient credit, assistance and market facilities
- an unjust system of ownership and rental
- exploitation by creditors and middlemen
- restrictions arising from Government laws and policies which deny rural and urban workers opportunities for organising themselves into labour unions
- Statutory contributions from workers that do not benefit them directly and totally
- low wages and salaries
- inadequate basic amenities such as housing and education
- lack of industrial and commercial skills
- lack of opportunities for the realisation of individual potential
- increasing cost of living
- the incidence of direct and indirect taxation which tends to burden the poor unfairly
- the attraction of a consumer culture which encourages unlimited consumption and acquisitiveness at all levels; this in turn, further weakens the financial position of the poor
- wasteful expenditure on unbeneficial activities and projects
- unemployment and underemployment

## Measures Directed At The Eradication of Poverty

### Long-term measures

- the economy must be restructured with the main objective of ensuring the well-being of man as a spiritual being. Apart from fulfilling basic needs and providing important facilities to all in an equitable manner, the alternative economy that is being proposed here should also enable the people to live as dignified, intelligent, ethical human beings with noble ideals.
- the restructuring of the economic system must ensure that the majority would own and control natural resources, finances, basic facilities, major industries and commercial enterprises and all other economic activities linked to the well-being of the populace. In this way, it will be possible to not only eradicate poverty, but also reduce income disparities.
- the reorganisation of the economy in such a way that profit maximization will cease to be its basic foundation; instead sincere economic effort directed towards the well-being of the people as a whole will be the guiding principle. This means that labour will replace capital as the basis of the economy. This should result in much more serious attention to the problems of the poor.
- the reorganisation of the economy

should also result in the elimination of the present bias towards the city and big industry. All areas — and in particular the rural areas — should be given due attention in terms of financial allocation, basic amenities, employment opportunities and the like.

- To achieve this objective, the social system as a whole should be restructured so that the local-level community becomes the basis of politics, administration, economics, education and culture. This is one way of ensuring that the physical and social resources of a certain community bring direct benefits to the majority. In this connection, the establishment of cooperatives undertaking a variety of economic activities at the local level would be an effective way of eradicating poverty, exploitation and injustices as a whole.
- The local community, as with the cooperatives, should formulate and implement all their policies and programmes guided by the principles of freedom and justice. The majority of the people must be provided with the opportunity to participate directly in the decision-making process. Involvement and participation on the part of ordinary people will ensure that power remains with them; only if they continue to exercise power will it be possible to improve the standard of living of the poor.
- Apart from the holistic transformation of social structures, effective eradication of poverty also requires a strong scientific foundation. The development of indigenous technology and the absorption of foreign technology would require a creative, autonomous scientific base. Scientific and technological knowledge should be used as widely as possible in our production system. It will help increase our economic productivity. High productivity based upon science and technology and the concomitant redistribution of wealth was what led to the eradication of poverty in some of the 'developed' countries which are worthy of emulation.
- Finally, to ensure that these changes succeed, we must emphasise alternative values such as cooperation, compassion, love, equality, freedom and justice — apart from discipline and hard work. These spiritual values must be embodied in an alternative social philosophy which is genuinely just to the position of the human being. It is important that these values are emphasized because the mass media tends to encourage vices like greed and acquisitiveness.

## Short term measures

The government should:—

- increase the size of uneconomic holdings through land reform. A minimum and maximum land size should be specified. In this connection, the government should consider setting up a 'Land bank'. A land bank, through purchases of uneconomic holdings, would be able to integrate such holdings into more economic farms. This would be an interim measure to help poor farmers.
- re-structure and transform the marketing and credit system. Farmers and fishermen should be allowed to play more active, direct roles in marketing their produce. Towards this end, the co-operative movement should be expanded and strengthened. Co-operatives can also help emancipate poor farmers from 'credit exploitation' by providing interest-free loans for both economic and social purposes. The system of interest generally results in exploitation in economies that are not based on justice.
- control the prices of various farming and fishing inputs especially those that are imported.
- protect farmers and fishermen from the adverse consequences of declining prices for their produce which is often accompanied by increasing costs of daily necessities, brought about by inflation.
- encourage agro-based industries. Apart from using local materials, such industries should be located in rural areas. It is the duty of the government to ensure that the skills imparted to workers in these agro-based industries help to increase their technical knowledge.
- extend basic amenities such as electricity and potable water to backward areas and to squatters.
- give more attention and allocate more funds for rural development — without necessarily creating a huge bureaucracy. These allocations should not be misused.
- improve salaries and terms of service for the lower income groups in the public sector in line with the cost of living. The state should ensure that the private sector also undertakes similar measures. In this connection, the government should give more consideration to the idea of a minimum wage.
- launch a low cost housing programme on a big scale in the main towns. The concept of 'low cost' should be linked to the poverty line. To speed up housing, self help and 'gotong-royong' methods should be tried out.
- expand opportunities for self employment and relax regulations affecting

small businesses. School leavers and youths should be given training in industry and commerce to enable them to enter these areas with adequate preparation.

- the process of obtaining loans from banks and financial institutions should be simplified to assist ordinary people to set up their own commercial enterprises, industries and crafts on small and medium scales.
- control the prices of goods which are most directly relevant to the daily needs of the poor. The aim should be to check inflation. The government in co-operation with other groups, must try to set up 'fair-price shops'. At the same time, co-operatives should be encouraged to help in the fight against inflation and excessive profits.
- encourage greater involvement by academics and university students in activities that will promote awareness of problems relating to poverty.

It is apparent that the eradication of poverty calls for a number of short-term and long-term measures and a holistic, unified approach. The efforts of the government, it is clear, are not directed towards the root causes of the problem.

### Signed

1) Malaysian Trades Union Congress 2) Socialist Democratic Party 3) Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) 4) Democratic Action Party (DAP) 5) Alternative Resource Centre (ARC) 6) Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (PSRM) 7) Institut Analisa Sosial (INSAN) 8) Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (EPSM) 9) Selangor Graduates Society (SGS) 10) Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (FOMCA) 11) Selangor Consumer Association 12) Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-pelajar Islam Malaysia (PKPIM) and 13) Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN).

Other groups and individuals do not have the power or the means to undertake this task. Apart from organizing small-scale projects here and there in aid of the poor, they are in no position to help society as a whole.

The sort of contribution that groups and individuals outside the establishment can make, therefore, is to raise the consciousness of the people about the nature and causes of poverty. This should be done with determination and dedication.

We, who are gathered here for this Dialogue of Concern on Poverty, hereby pledge to disseminate a more profound consciousness about the problem of poverty in our society. All legitimate channels of communication should be used for this purpose.

We pledge to continue efforts to assist the poor organize activities directed towards the eradication of poverty.

We pledge through individual and collective efforts to fight any act of injustice against the poor.

We pledge to continue the struggle to establish the rights of the poor who are exploited so that they can live like human beings with dignity and honour ●

## Dear Reader

It is not too late, we hope, to wish you a Happy New Year. May 1985 bring joy and happiness to all of us who are involved in the noble struggle for truth and justice.

You will observe that this issue appears with a new look. There's more colour now — on the cover. We want to brighten up the Monthly. Many of you had suggested this in the survey we conducted some time ago.

We have also tried to incorporate a number of your other suggestions. The **Aliran Diary**, **Other Voices** and **Viewpoint** have been dropped. **Vital Statistics** will appear once in two months. So will the **Human Rights** column. Book reviews will be once in 3 months.

As a result of these changes, we hope to have more space for features, on both local and international issues, and articles and comments from you. We will now have greater flexibility to introduce new items into the Monthly.

One of the new items we intend to have in the course of the year is a **Question-Answer** column. Questions pertaining to not just politics and the economy but also very basic human concerns related to day-to-day living will be answered in a simple, straightforward manner. It could be anything — from Reagan's re-election to Third World under-development to professional ethics to TV watching to the decline of sporting standards to the lack of civic-consciousness in society.

Since this column is meant for you,

the reader, we want you to participate by sending in your questions. Is there something about man, about society that has been troubling you? Can we reflect on it together? Is there something you want to know about political trends, about our likely economic future? Just remember to make your questions direct and to the point. You may also want to keep in mind that your questions must have social relevance (we are not handling problems of a personal nature). The questions must be such that brief answers — not long essays — are possible as responses. Now, don't let some of these 'requirements' bother you. Once we get started, it will all look so easy.

In the meantime, we are keeping all the other features as they are. There will be the Lead article, Letters, Human File, Thinking Allowed, Opinion Poll, the Bahasa column and Current Comment. And of course the cartoons which are popular with most of you.

Finally, we want your help and support. Try to get more subscribers for the **Aliran Monthly**. This is one of the few magazines in the country that speaks up for the 'ordinary person'. It is, you will agree, a Monthly with courage and commitment. It is rational and analytical. It thinks, it feels, it cares.

Get your friends to support the **Aliran Monthly**. It is a worthy cause. You'll never regret it.

Sincerely,

The Editorial team

# Letters

We welcome letters from readers. These letters may be edited for purposes of space and clarity. The views expressed may not be those of the Aliran Monthly. Pseudonyms are accepted but all letters should include the writer's name and address.

Letters should be addressed to Editor, Aliran Monthly, P.O. Box 1049, Penang, Malaysia.

## AVOIDING MALAYSIAN BHPALS & OTHER CHEMICAL HAZARDS

Now that some of the actual facts behind the recent Bhopal tragedy in India are emerging, the Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (EPSM) believes that the time has come to assess the state of chemical and related industries in Malaysia. Tragic as the Bhopal accident was, it is even more important for both Malaysia and India to be concerned about the chronic pollution caused daily by the operation of badly managed chemical plants both to the health of their workers and to the general public by the irresponsible disposal of their hazardous toxic wastes.

Although Malaysia does not have a plant using the Bhopal villain of methyl isocyanate, we have plants processing a range of toxic and radioactive materials. These include chlorine and ammonia, thorium and arsenic-containing tin ores, pesticides, asbestos, nitrogen and sulphur oxides, cyanide and cadmium, lead and mercury and plastics. There have already been public reports of accidents and pollution created by the Chemical Company of Malaysia, Malayawatta Steel Corporation, Malaysian Smelting Corporation, Asian Rare Earth, a pesticide factory in Kedah, and an ice-factory in Terengganu. Thank God nothing on the Bhopal scale has yet occurred but we cannot afford to be complacent.

In order to avoid Malaysian Bhopals, EPSM urges that:

- all government agencies involved with the licensing and supervision of chemical plants, especially the Factories and Machineries Department, ensure that adequate safety regulations are drawn and strictly implemented, with periodic publication of inspection assessments;
- adequate buffer zones be implemented between chemical plants and residential areas, ensuring also that conditions which lead to squatters springing outside factories are resolved;
- all factory owners, whether foreign or local, demonstrate their corporate responsibility by observing the highest possible safety and environmental standards, allowing for periodic government and public inspection of their facilities as well as emergency procedures;
- the mass media regularly monitor the safety and environmental status of the chemical industry both directly and through the eyes of workers and nearby residents;
- preventive maintenance procedures be rigorously followed;
- workers and their trade unions pay greater attention to safety and occupational health issues.

But action and concern must not stop at this level. There is an urgent need for the Department of Environment to gazette and implement its proposed hazardous waste disposal regulations to cope with toxic waste that is currently ending up haphazardly in all parts of

our environment. This is a major and growing national problem and the establishment of secure and well-managed toxic dump-sites both in the Kelang and Kinta Valley is long overdue. It is also imperative that most of the material be neutralized before secure disposal.

EPSM, on its part, will run a Hazardous Waste Control Campaign throughout 1985 during which it hopes to mobilise the press and the public especially youth (since this is International Year of the Youth) and solicit the co-operation of both Government and Industry to address the environmental issues at stake. A Status Seminar is being planned for 23 & 24 March and about 3 months of field investigations will also be undertaken. Other details of the campaign will be announced from time to time.

Our Executive Committee is also considering encouraging environmental awareness and action (esp. in the chemical hazards area) by conducting a public assessment to select individuals/groups/firms that contribute most *positively* and *negatively* to the quality of the Malaysian environment every year. It is proposed to start the assessment this year and we invite Malaysians to write to us on

- a) how the assessment should be conducted, including suggestions on criteria;
- b) the possible candidates for the awards they already have in mind with their reasons for nominations.

We would appreciate receipt of all suggestions by 28 February so that our Executive Committee can make a public announcement on the final form of the assessment by early April.

Gurmit Singh K.S.  
President, Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia (EPSM)

## WHICH REALITY?

The Prime Minister has assured Malaysians that we would continue to be peaceful and progressive if we accepted reality.

Which reality are we being urged to accept, I wonder?

- The reality of the untruths, deception and corruption behind the BMF scandal?
- The reality of our shattering \$50.4 billion national debt?
- The reality of our rivers, streams and plant life being saturated with the deadly thorium hydroxide?
- The reality of our mothers giving birth to deformed infants as a result of exposure to radioactive dust?
- The reality of bridges and highways that are said to be supervised by experts, collapsing under us?
- The reality of our Ministers telling us that the opinions of "a trader, hawk or the others" are irrelevant?
- The reality of decidedly senseless policies like that of the 70 million population that has been set into motion on its irrevocable path?
- The reality of our women being instructed

on when to marry and when to produce their offsprings?

Are these the realities that our Prime Minister wants us to accept? Are these the realities that are going to make Malaysia peaceful and progressive?

The Prime Minister has also revealed that some people even consider us a model country. Surely this is doing it a little too hard especially since his revelation comes in the wake of the publicity that the BMF affair (which has been described as "one of the greatest financial scandals of the century") has enjoyed. Are we not also forgetting our rather unforgettable \$50.4 billion national debt?

We have also been exhorted not to be obsessed with finding faults with the government. Instead, we are told to compare ourselves favourably with other less fortunate Third World countries and to be grateful and contented with our lot.

Indeed, I agree that we should be grateful for all the things that the government says we enjoy, like development, social harmony, political stability, democracy. But are we really enjoying all this? 33% of our population can be termed as being poor, there is an ever widening gulf of racial polarisation in our midst and political party skirmishes both within and between the parties have become a common feature in our newspapers. And as for democracy, if the Universities and University Colleges Act is not a refutation of true democracy, I would like to ask what is? So, how does one, despite all the best intentions in the world, feel grateful and contented under such circumstances?

Besides being grateful and contented, surely every human being is entitled to his ideals and how does one realise these ideals except by striving and reaching for perfection? Perhaps man never really finds perfection in the true sense of the word but the important thing is he is motivated to steer himself towards bettering and improving himself and society.

If we were to stay grateful and contented with what we have achieved, then I am afraid we would be left with nothing but stagnation followed by inevitable deterioration at the end. Now, this is certainly not going to make us into a peaceful and progressive nation!

Libra  
Minden,  
Penang.

## A TRIBUTE TO ALIRAN

Yours is a work to be commended and supported all the way. You are always thought-provoking and enlightening.

But - alas - it leaves me sad most of the time. Sad because it only goes to show how weak Good is against Evil; how helpless Truth is against Falsehood.

The Bible says: "The meek shall inherit the earth" but it looks to me that the earth already belongs to the Arrogant.

Every good deed done, every good word uttered is but a little dwarf easily swallowed up in the Ocean of Injustice, managing an occasional gasp for air before the Giant foot of Arrogance stamps him down into the unseen depths again.

I look at Aliran and the other Public Interest groups against the Establishment and I see several dedicated foot soldiers rushing at the Enemy Tank that is armed to the teeth with all manner of weapons.

When will the table be turned? When will Good triumph over Evil? Will it be a futile struggle?

Catherine Choo  
Muar,  
Johor.

## THE NEED FOR NON-COMMUNAL THINKING

The nation's progress and prosperity depends to a very great extent on political stability and good inter-ethnic relationship. We may have political stability because the Barisan Nasional forms a strong majority in Parliament. But just because the Barisan is in the majority, it does not imply that there is good inter-ethnic relationship. The politics of accommodation practised by Barisan has many constraints and has often evoked unhealthy ill feelings among the various communities. The opposition is often blamed for all the problems faced by the Barisan and the nation, but the political power structure and the capitalist policies of the Barisan Nasional are really to blame.

Politics prevents or inhibits the people from identifying issues affecting the nation along non-communal lines. The political process has encouraged and strengthened communal thinking. As long as this pattern of political and racial identity is left to flourish, polarization is bound to get entrenched. True national unity and integration is bound to remain a far fetched dream. What the nation sorely needs today are leaders who have the courage, vision and wisdom to transcend communal politics and thinking. But this, the politicians will argue will spell their doom in the political arena. If we don't advocate communal politics there are others who are ever ready to do so, they argue. If the leaders while remaining within the framework of communal parties can tone down communalistic fervour and make the people accept the political and social realities and ultimately non-communalism, then they would have achieved the seemingly impossible and strengthened the foundation of this nation.

The nation is facing an economic slowdown. All the boom years are gone. The future is going to be more competitive and tough. In such circumstances the nation can ill afford any outbreak of racial conflicts. It will destroy the economy and bring untold misery to the people. The politicians wielding power should view this issue seriously. Instead of relying on stop-gap measures and the use of force and threats, they should tackle the problem at its roots.

The Malay community, I am sure will appreciate and respect non-Malay politicians who are moderate, and broad in their thinking. In like manner the non-Malay community respects, trusts and adores Malay political leaders who are truly moderate, and who have the guts and courage to take a non-communal stand on genuine issues. Let it be remembered that a politician who rises on the tidal wave of communal politics, though loved by one community will ever be viewed with suspicion and even hated by the others. At best, despite all his authority, he remains a communal leader.

What has been aggravated by politics, has to be toned down and smoothened by politics. Instead of hiding behind our own communities, we should venture out and take a deeper interest in the problems and fears faced by the others. The government should do more to bring about this integration instead of harping on doubtful and outmoded political theories.

The views expressed by non-communal groups and organisation like *Aliran* should not be viewed with suspicion by our political elites. Their views constitute one of the major positive factors in our highly communalised society. To view such thinking as a threat to Malay political dominance is misguided and mischievous. No political party can come to power without Malay political support. This however should not be used as an excuse to enhance Malay

communalism. The Malays should play a greater role in creating this Malaysian identity. Instead of playing the politics of dominance, they should now work in the larger context of the nation.

P.R.  
Ipoh,  
Perak.

## ETHNIC POLARISATION

I read with interest your latest issue on Ethnic Polarisation and I feel that it is really happening everywhere. It is a very sad thing that we Malaysians have to be classified as Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra.

I think racial polarisation here is like a cancerous growth and it needs to be checked before it proves to be fatal. The public and the people dare not voice their views for fear of being victimised or branded as 'Anti National' or worse still, charged under the Internal Security Act. No one really knows the actual situation and how bad it is. People's grievances, opinions, criticisms are kept bottled up. No one dares to speak against the Government even though it might be a constructive criticism for fear of reprisals from the authorities.

Just take a look at government Departments these days and one cannot help but feel the air of indifference to those who are from another community since these departments do not reflect racial harmony. I am not against the Malays having their special privileges but for God's sake please do not classify us Malaysians as Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra. Give us a place in the sun and the opportunity to earn a living without any discrimination as to education, jobs and business.

I am proud to be a Malaysian and I love this country and its people but I can't stand certain injustices and discrimination. I pray we can all think and act like Malaysians irrespective of race, religion or creed. It is my earnest hope that we can all live in harmony through understanding that reflects the true spirit of 'peaceful Malaysia'. Perhaps a commission of inquiry to probe into ethnic polarisation might be of some help.

Just a Malaysian  
Segamat,  
Johor.

## AN EX-DRUG ADDICT

I have just started reading "Aliran". It is very well written. It does not hide anything — unlike those newspapers which feed us with rubbish everyday.

I came across this act of injustice on the part of the department which I want you guys and others to know about.

Recently, I came to notice this shaggy, untidy man hanging around the bus stop in Jalan Midah Barat. At first, I ignored him but later after I heard about his story from someone who knows him, I pitied him.

He was once a postman who worked in the vicinity until some months ago. His mother disowned him and went back to Sri Lanka. He took drugs to overcome his frustration. He was sent to a drug rehabilitation centre and was discharged recently. He went back for his old job as a postman but was turned down because he was an ex-drug addict. His wealthy businessman brother and his relatives also disowned and ignored him. Unable to overcome his misery he became insane. Now, he sits at the bus stop daily waiting for his time to come. Passers-by who pity him give food and some money now and then.

How shall we describe the attitude of the Postal Department? Is this what we call justice? Our beloved leaders urge us "the rakyat" to give them (the ex-drug addicts) a second chance while their own departments don't. I would like to know why an ex-drug addict cannot be a postman again?

I would be most happy if our leaders could give me an answer. The *Aliran* Monthly should bring this to light.

H.P. Lim  
Kuala Lumpur.

## EXPLOITATION

I am writing this letter on behalf of all the Employees of E.E.S.B. Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur.

We are a total of a hundred over workers working off-shore, off Trengganu for ESSO Installations. All of us have been working in this field for not less than 3 years and all are qualified welders, fitters, material coordinators, riggers, rig foremen, technicians, general supervisors, electricians, electrical foremen.

We were paid fairly by E.E.S.B. according to off-shore rates. What has happened now is E.E.S.B. lost the contract to a company by the name of A.G. & P. Malaysia, which happens to be a foreign company operating in Malaysia. ESSO gave the contract to this company because it happened to be the lowest bidder.

Now this foreign company is paying our workers lower salaries. This means that a local company was paying more, and a foreign company is now paying less to our own people. This is going to make life tough for us workers. The foreign company has also employed its own workers — that is Filipinos. They are already in the ESSO platforms.

We believe something should be done. We are struggling for our rights as Malaysians.

All off-shore contract workers  
Seberang Takir  
Kuala Trengganu.

## ANWAR DAN ABIM (A BODOH IKUT M)

Saya telah terbaca (WATAN Sabtu 5 — 7 Januari) muka 10 yang berjudul ABIM: "Arab Brothers In Malaysia" dan teringatlah saya peranan-peranan Menteri UMNO Anwar Ibrahim selaku pemimpin ABIM sebelum "dibekukan" oleh UMNO pada tahun 1982 dengan harga yang paling tinggi. Dalam 2 tahun beliau telah menjadi M.P., Timbalan Menteri dan Menteri. Ini adalah suatu "promotion" yang sangat cepat dari segi politik tanah air. Semasa beliau memimpin ABIM, suaranya lantang dan dasar-dasar ABIM telah mendapat pujian dari banyak rakyat yang berbilang kaum. Berkaitan dengan "Islamisation" sangatlah hebat sehingga dipuji oleh para ulamak negara dan pemimpin-pemimpin Islam seluruh dunia. Dari segi politik, dasar-dasar kerajaan seperti Akta Keselamatan Negeri, University and College Act, Kebebasan akhbar dan lain-lain dikritik beliau. Semua ini disambut baik oleh masyarakat. Pendek kata ABIM telah menjadi satu organisasi yang hebat. Tetapi apa yang saya tahu pada masa itu, Anwar Ibrahim telah menggunakan ABIM dan bergaul dengan PAS semata-mata untuk kepentingan dirinya sendiri. Saya mengucapkan syabas kepada Anwar Ibrahim yang telah menggoncangkan UMNO. Malangnya EXCO dan ahli-ahli ABIM tidak sedar dengan permainan Anwar Ibrahim.



Tiba-tiba Anwar telah "ditawarkan" oleh Dr. Mahathir dengan berbagai-bagai "nikmat" dunia sehinggalah beliau khayal dan mula menjadi pemimpin UMNO. Beliau telah berikhrar kepada ABIM keseluruhannya yang beliau akan berjuang dasar-dasar ABIM dalam UMNO khasnya dan kerajaan amnya. Apabila beliau menjadi M.P. dan Timbalan Menteri, ABIM pun "hidup segan mati tak mahu". Tetapi telah jelas ABIM pun dengan tidak langsung menjadi "komponen parti" Barisan Nasional. ABIM tidak lagi bernafas melainkan mengharap Anwar Ibrahim "berdialogue" dengan UMNO/kerajaan berkaitan dengan dasar-dasar ABIM.

Sementara itu dasar-dasar ABIM telah diketepikan oleh Anwar Ibrahim. Beliau telah menukar corak asalnya, dari 'Islamisation' ke penyerap nilai-nilai Islam dalam pentadbiran kerajaan. "Islamisation" dan menyerap nilai-nilai Islam jauh berbeza maknanya.

Dengan sungutan ahli-ahli ABIM dan orang-orang persaoangan melalui akhbar-akhbar Bahasa Malaysia tempatan baharulah ABIM mula "bangun dari tidur" dan mula membuat kenyataan-kenyataan dasar-dasar ABIM dengan hati berbelah dua. Bagaimanakah kedudukan ABIM yang sebenarnya? Inilah soalan yang ditanyanya oleh rakyat yang masa dulu memandang tinggi terhadap Anwar Ibrahim dan ABIM. ABIM nampaknya dalam keadaan serba salah tetapi Anwar sungguhpun hidup di dalam suasana materialistik yang indah tetapi politiknya sangatlah dipandang rendah oleh masyarakat amnya.

Ismail Hashim  
Pengerusi, Parti Demokratik  
Sosial (SDP)  
Pulau Pinang.

## PASSING THE BUCK

It would appear that both politicians and bureaucrats are excellent examples of advocates practising the art of 'Passing the Buck'. First, the Malacca Chief Minister blames a clerk for committing the mistake of giving Bukit China the exemption from payment of quit rent and now, the Penang Municipal Council secretary attributes to the Socialist Front the granting of concessionary assessments to owner-occupied houses — rather convenient scapegoats since one is retired and probably, dead too, while the other is defunct!

Why does not the Penang Municipal Council admit its own shortcomings which were created by the folly of the present crop of City Fathers? Ever since, Datuk Mohamed Yeop assumed the office of Municipal President, the Council has been having deficit budgets annually. Where is the Council's accountability to the ratepayers?

Apart from curbing expenditure on jaunts and junkets, the Council should find other means of revenue in addition to improving upon existing sources of income.

It is quite clear that the Council has been 'ultra vires' in spending millions of dollars on the city In-Service Centre for the training of parking attendants to provide a pool of semi-skilled labour for the transnational electronic factories in Bayan Lepas when the project should have been financed and undertaken by

the Penang Development Corporation (PDC). Are there any provisions in the Municipal Ordinance, Town Boards Enactment or the Local Government Act which empower the Council to spend such funds? Ironically, these transnational corporations are paying nominal amounts of assessment on their factories. Why?

The Council also leases its lands at ridiculously low rentals to private enterprises and political parties for the furtherance of activities not in the public interest. In fact they serve the interests of a few individuals and groups bonded by some so-called common political beliefs or identified by the same ethnic origin. Many people even feel that corruption and other malpractices are involved in these leases.

These allegations are, of course difficult to prove, but if the Anti-Corruption Agency is conscientious enough, it should freeze the leasing and letting of council lands not done via open tender, impound all records pertaining to these transactions and conduct thorough investigations.

Inefficient department heads are also another reason why the Council loses a lot of revenue. All over the Island, houses and flats are being illegally used for commercial and industrial activities. No Herculean effort is needed to pin-point the numerous premises being used as bakeries, video centres, hairdressing saloons, massage parlours, motor repair workshops, etc.

These premises continue to enjoy domestic tariffs for water, electricity and telephone services. In addition, as no building plans are submitted for approval, the Council loses a lot of revenue in the form of plan consideration fees.

Furthermore when a residential premise is formally converted for commercial and industrial uses, a number of new rates become due. This brings in revenue to the Council. It shows how much money the Council has lost through the inaction of its officers.

Why are Council officers reluctant to take action? The answer is victimisation by the Councillors, many of whom and their proxies operate backyard factories and illegally-converted shops and offices. Rest assured that I will be sending a list of such premises to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) soon.

How can the taxpayer change all this? One way is to write to the Press in the hope that the papers will be brave enough to publish all the complaints. Another method would be for the public to ring the State Government's hotline 373737 day and night to report on the illegally-converted houses and flats, and follow up with a letter to the ACA.

Lastly one sits tight and hopes and hopes and hopes ..... that one is not just a voice crying in the wilderness.

A Defenceless Pensioner  
Penang.

## BMF SCANDAL

You (Chandra Muzaffar) wrote a very frank and rather courageous article with regard to the government's irresponsible handling of the BMF scandal.

Your article appeared in a Malay newspaper. I would like to convey my congratulations to you for such a well written article.

Sarong Pimpernel  
Kuala Lumpur.

## INTIMIDATION OF THE PRESS & ELECTORATE

There is nothing positive in the move of the Federal Government to intimidate the Press and the electorate by raising the bogey of racial extremism. Neither is there anything positive in the Sabah State Government's arbitrary abrogation of the distinct status of Tambunan. In fact, a number of very important issues have been raised during the last few weeks which the Selangor Graduates Society (SGS) must publicly comment on, at least for the record, even if the mass media chooses not to report these comments.

*Positive comments and action* The Prime Minister has stated that there is not enough of these, implying that the press and social action groups are being negative and irresponsible. SGS disagrees with this perception because we believe that it is because we really love and care for Malaysia that we, together with other groups like ALIRAN and EPSM, have criticised negative and anti-people actions and relapses in the past. On a number of occasions we have outlined alternative courses. Is it our fault or negative action, when the media chooses to block out our comments or when government ministries chose to ignore them? What is democracy if the only form of positive role allowed is that of blind obedience and praise of every action of the ruling party? Have we learnt nothing from the recent experiences of the Indian Sub-continent and the island south of the Causeway? As far as SGS's role in the Papan controversy is concerned, we acted positively in the Papan Support Group to de-communalise the issue and to inject scientific dimensions into the public debate. We reject any attempt to call this action 'irresponsible' or 'negative'.

*Press freedom* has been a major issue of concern to SGS for the past decade. As our forthcoming book will show, even in 1981 the Malaysian Press was working under great handicaps and there were many misgivings about its independence and credibility. As a social action group SGS has to depend extensively on the press to reach ordinary Malaysians since the electronic media remains firmly within the hands of the ruling political parties.

The New Printing Presses & Publications Act has worsened the Press's vulnerability. We gather that one large newspaper group is under orders to block out the views of the most vocal social activists while the STAR has just received a warning to remedy its coverage style, with Papan being given as one of the 'bad examples'. Is it any surprise then that our press statement on Human Rights Day went uncarried? We regret very much such intimidation of the press as it undermines the development of the nation while denying the public access to a broad spectrum of views and analyses.

*Pre-empting Public Hearing* We find it very strange that even before the hearings of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Dangerous Drugs (Preventive Detention) Bill began last week, the Committee Chairman had already pre-empted criticisms by publicly stating that 70% of the people supported the Bill. There were no details as to how this conclusion was arrived at. But even if it were valid, the effectiveness of the hearings have already been undermined. It would not be surprising if many of the groups which attend the hearings would be very hesitant to speak up against the official survey result!

*Punishing the electorate* as in the Tambunan case did not seem to win the approval of the Prime Minister. But such intimidation of the electorate is not that new, although in the past it has taken more subtle forms like not providing Opposition MPs with development grants or holding up the Kepong road-construction

project. SGS views such actions as political black-mail and as sabotage of fundamental democratic principles. We believe that all Malaysian citizens have equal rights to all government facilities and the provision of government services must not be used to sway election results whether in Sabah or elsewhere.

**BMF Issue** Although at last some positive action and information has surfaced, the overall handling of the issue over the last year has not been inspiring. There is nothing to show that these limited facts would have become public if there had been no public pressure and if the press had confined itself to just reporting government statements. Even today Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin finds his hands tied and can only hint at larger problems. A Royal Commission would be one of the most positive steps to take as it will prove to all, both within and without Malaysia, that this country is determined to expose corruption and mis-management openly at any level and is determined to avoid any repeat of this costly lesson. Communalising and politicising the issue will not help national progress at all.

SGS has always believed that it is our bounden duty as a group of concerned Malaysians to pay our debt to the nation by speaking up without fear or favour as and when necessary on issues of national importance. We believe that, at least in the last decade, we have discharged this duty to the best of our ability, despite many obstacles. We have never claimed a monopoly on what is right. We have in fact sought dialogue. But at the same time, we will not accept that any other group, including the government, has a monopoly on positive ideas and actions. SGS strongly believes in exercising the democratic rights of public consultation, debate and accountability.

Since our conscience is clear, we can only regret that our critics have to resort to "name-calling" and intimidation of sorts rather than participate in public debate. We urge them not to become paranoid. The Government must stop intimidating the press and the electorate.

Gurmit Singh K. S.  
President, Selangor Graduates Society  
Petaling Jaya,  
Selangor.

## PEOPLE OF TAMBUNAN, I SALUTE YOU

When I was but a little child, my Mama told me this fable: One day a tired and thirsty fox saw a bunch of grapes hanging from a vine. "Ah," said the fox, "those grapes look big and juicy. I'm sure they taste delicious!" So dear Mr. Fox jumped up and down trying to reach the grapes. Alas, his efforts were in vain. Try as he might he could not reach the tempting grapes. Grr! Finally, Mr. Fox walked off in disgust and frustration, more tired and thirsty than ever. "Hah! Who cares? Those grapes must be sour anyway!"

Let us now consider the Tambunan issue. Isn't the Sabah government behaving like dear Mr. Fox? At least Mr. Fox merely walked off in disgust. He did not attempt to destroy the grapes just because he could not get them for himself. Unfortunately, the Sabah government seems to be attempting to destroy the 'grapes' out of vicious spite! Why should it punish the people of Tambunan just because the Tambunan residents voted for Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, the Independent candidate? Is it just?

Malaysia is supposed to be a democratic country. According to the Constitution, Malaysians over the age of 21 are free to vote for any candidate they feel will fulfil the needs of the people. That is exactly what the people

of Tambunan have done. They have exercised their right to vote freely.

But the Sabah government, are they justified in their move to abrogate the district status of Tambunan? Why have they done so? Why was no explanation given? Is it an act of spite, of revenge? Despite the pleas of the people of Tambunan and Datuk J.P. Kitingan, why has the Federal Government not taken steps to investigate this matter? It seems as if no one cares, no one is bothered about the dilemma of the people of Tambunan.

Why this apathy? All of us should speak up about this matter and bring it to the attention of the proper authorities. The Sabah Government has violated the rights of the people, the trust of the people by its unjust action. What will happen next? Wither democracy? This silence is ominous. It's as if the death - knell of democracy has rung ..... and we are merely waiting with bated breath for the final rites.

It is to be hoped that something will be done, and soon. Come on everybody, rally round and make your voice heard! Let us help our fellow brothers and sisters in Tambunan by demanding an explanation. Together we can present a united front to save our democratic way of life. People of Tambunan, I salute you. I salute you for courageously taking the first step!

Adeline Lee  
Petaling Jaya,  
Selangor.

## A DEMOCRAT OR A DESPOT?

I refer to the report entitled "Harris: Don't Blackmail Berjaya" (Star 3/1/85).

While speaking about the discontent among members against the party leadership, Datuk Harris is quoted as having said, "You should try to change the leader through the democratic means. Of course, you must accept the majority decision."

But does Datuk Harris practise what he preached? In the face of facts, his platitudes and actions sound hollow and shallow.

Let's take the case of the Tambunan by-election in which the Berjaya candidate was soundly trounced by Datuk Kitingan. Shouldn't Datuk Harris "accept the majority decision" of the people? By his own acclaim, he is duty-bound to accept the verdict of the people. The electorate in Tambunan had overwhelmingly rejected his candidate and had chosen Datuk Kitingan as their leader and representative. The people of Tambunan had made their decision "through democratic means".

But why has this "preacher of democratic principles" gone back on his own words? Why are the people of Tambunan being punished for exercising their democratic right? Why has he chosen to abrogate the district status of Tambunan? Why were the government offices transferred to Keningau District Office?

Isn't change part of the democratic process? And isn't acceptance of this process a reflection of maturity? Didn't Berjaya itself emerge as the Government through the democratic process?

How ironic Datuk Harris sounds when he says his party "will not allow racialists, chauvinists and religious bigots to blackmail the party to get their way"! Yet he has no qualms about blackmailing the people of Tambunan!

His pretense to democratic principles is exposed when he says, "Berjaya will not bow to any pressure, including pressure from the ballot box from any quarter. Berjaya will not change its policies and programmes to suit a few individuals". But was it "a few individuals" who defeated his candidate? It was a massive vote of no-confidence that routed his candidate. How can he say that he will not "bow to pressure



from the ballot box"? Isn't the politician the servant of the people and not its master? Isn't it his duty to yield to the wishes of the people?

It is indeed tragic that Berjaya which promised the Sabahans a democratic government as opposed to the despotic government of the USNO should now choose to abandon its earlier election pledges and transform itself into an autocratic government.

Datuk Harris may be well advised to heed these words: "The deterioration of every government begins almost always by the decay of the principles on which it was founded."

Why Punish Me?  
Penang.

## ELECTORAL BLACKMAIL

Berjaya Party deserves the highest accolade for having brought into national political debate a matter of the utmost importance. For those of us who have despaired of the empty platitudes and evasive rhetoric so characteristic of Malaysian politics, Berjaya's clear statement of its principles of government is refreshing in its honesty, and revolting in its content.

The "democratically elected political government" of Berjaya is an obscene caricature which has nothing in common with the spirit and principles of liberal democracy. No amount of democratic posturing can hide its barbaric conception of the rights and responsibilities of a democratic state towards its citizens.

Berjaya seems incapable of understanding that the electoral mandate which a party wins is at best an endorsement of the party's platform and policies. It by no means entitles that party to be discriminatory in the implementation of those policies, especially in the treatment of its supporters versus its detractors. Berjaya interprets its electoral mandate in the manner of feudal overlords who have been given carte blanche to reward their supporters, and to viciously punish their detractors. The "political rights" which it claims are extremely subversive of one of the most fundamental requirements of electoral democracy, i.e. that the electorate exercise their right of vote under circumstances free from intimidation or threat of victimisation. In the United States, labour law expressly forbids the employer from engaging in acts which can be construed of as intimidatory of the employees, when they are engaged in balloting for or against unionisation. Does our Elections Offences Act similarly make it a criminal offence for politicians to engage in intimidatory acts during an electoral exercise?

Berjaya has been exceptionally blatant in its use of electoral blackmail, but this party by no means has a monopoly on strong-arm tactics. Berjaya is absolutely correct in its accusations

that its modus operandi has been standard practice for Barisan Nasional parties through countless elections and by-elections. The only difference has been the degree of subtlety of the threats. In the recent by-election in Padang Terap for instance, a Federal Minister again raised the perennial slogan VOTE BARISAN FOR DEVELOPMENT (but this was noticeably downplayed after the Tambunan issue blew up). Berjaya has provided other examples but quite a few others come to mind too: the eviction of TAKDIR land scheme settlers in Kelantan after the last general elections, the dangling of a multi-million dollar carrot of fertiliser subsidies, during the Bukit Raya by-election in Kedah some years back.

These repeated transgressions of the separation of party and government, especially during election exercises, have been taken too lightly thus far. The result has been that any party which succeeds in getting elected into office has at its disposal the immensely powerful machinery of government, which it can then use to unfair advantage to perpetuate itself in power. This makes a mockery of the electoral process, and of the democratic system. It is high time that those who declare themselves beholden to democratic principles, enact and strengthen legislation to guard against such abuse. Either that is done, or we dispense with once and for all this charade of democracy.

Commentator  
Penang.

## BUILDING BRIDGES

I was disgusted to read Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid saying, "A PAS victory in Padang Terap will mean the biggest defeat to the people. It will mean there will be no development projects for Padang Terap in the years ahead."

I'm no sympathiser of PAS. My only concern in this statement is the principles involved in relation to the democratic process.

Datuk Seri Sanusi has no right to threaten or blackmail the voters of Padang Terap. The voters who are forced to vote under such duress do not enjoy the democratic freedom to exercise their franchise. In a democratic election, the choice should be based on the platform presented by the contending candidates. In other words, the candidates should convince the voters how they are going to serve the people of Padang Terap. The decision will be made by the voters based on the pledges of, and the performances promised by, the candidates. Instead of offering a clear choice, Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid is promising punishment should PAS score a victory. This is a very undemocratic approach to elections.

Why do you then hold elections if you deny the people their democratic decision? Why should there "be no development projects for Padang Terap in the years ahead" should UMNO lose the by-election? This is utter rubbish!

If Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid intends to stop development projects in Padang Terap, then the government should exempt the people of Padang Terap from all taxes. Why should they pay their taxes and forgo the services which is expected from the Government?

Datuk Seri Sanusi further states: "A Barisan victory on the other hand, will mean better days ahead. The Barisan man will serve as an important bridge between the people and the Government and be able to bring development."

Talking about bridges, I was reminded of what I read recently: "Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even when there is no river."

Dissatisfied  
Penang.

## Values

# The Threat of Materialism

P. Rasahugan

**I**ncreasing materialistic consciousness is beginning to have its impact upon all of us. Social and cultural values are slowly crumbling. Our morals and ethics are becoming a farce. Double standards are on the rise. Capitalism is increasing our materialistic thirst. People everywhere are becoming more conscious of their possessions. Aesthetic, cultural and spiritual values and interests have become insignificant in our lives. If this trend is left unchecked, it will ultimately create a society of men and women hankering after possessions, completely devoid of soul.

Even our quest for an education has become a farce. There is a scramble to enter the universities, not with any love to acquire knowledge but to enable us to realise our dream of leading a life of material comfort and affluence: this mundane passion is driving us crazy. Some of us are guilty of forcing our primary school children to score 5A's in the standard five Assessment examinations. We are instilling in them undue tension and fear. We are curtailing their youthful freedom and forcing them to slog, just to console our fears and boost our egos. It is of course necessary to strive harder in a competitive world but to drench ourselves in total materialism, oblivious to the deeper human needs and necessities is fatal and self defeating.

Our religious and spiritual enthusiasm is bogged down by our mundane anxieties and passions. Unable to practise even the fundamentals of our religion, we turn to slogans and even extremist forms of religious zeal. Worse still, we get our religions entangled with our political ideologies, and try to prove ourselves as religious puritans by zealously expounding religious dogmas with political passion and condemning others as infidels. And there are the others — excited by all the glitter and so-called "modernisation" around them, trying to steer themselves clear of all religious and cultural values. They are the 'free thinkers' as they claim to be. These are the so-called thinkers in our society who do little or no thinking at all. Having entangled themselves in the

material passions of the world, they have little time to think but nevertheless have dignified their lot by calling themselves 'free thinkers'.

In some quarters the religious quest has been more a harping of the externals and dogmas, and perpetually pointing a finger at our differences. The surface aspects of religion are exaggerated to a point where they become the whole. The religious spirit in its true depth is missing. True spirituality accommodates and tolerates different approaches to the divine path. If a religion isolates and creates feelings of exclusiveness then something is really amiss in the way we practise our religion. We may in fact be

**Having entangled themselves in the material passions of the world they have little time to think but nevertheless have dignified their lot by calling themselves 'free thinkers'.**

pampering our ego in the name of pursuing some grand ideals.

Materialism has clouded our spiritual vision. Adherence to a simplistic code of external conduct is sometimes viewed as having lived a completely religious life.

On the one hand we talk of God and the glories of our scriptures. On the other we go on greedily acquiring and amassing wealth. We have no time even for our less fortunate brethren. Are we building a hypocritical society, a schizophrenic society? We talk so much of religion but have yet to produce a man of true spiritual compassion, dedicated to the selfless service of humanity. Despite all our learning and noisy trumpeting are we not really drifting towards mental and spiritual poverty? All our social organisations and cultural groups should commit themselves to the deeper problems afflicting us. Merely tending to the surface needs of man is not going to do us much good. We must add an aesthetic and a spiritual dimension to our visions and dreams.

Guest writer, P. Rasahugan, is a regular contributor to this Monthly.

# Poor — amidst plenty

**K**ampung Bundu Tuhan is set in idyllic surroundings about 2000 metres above sea level on the southern slopes of Mount Kinabalu. The Kadazans here, as in nearby Kundasang, eke out a living mainly by growing vegetables for the market. Thirty-nine year old Aban Lubak is no exception. However, he had not been a vegetable farmer all his working life. In fact, for 16 years before September last year, he had been employed as a work-hand by the Kinabalu Development Project, a co-operative scheme of the Catholic Mission Church in Bundu Tuhan. His was not a permanent position, being paid rather on a daily basis as and when there was work to be done on the cooperative's chicken, coffee, or vegetable farms. In a good month, he could earn about \$300.00, but most times it would be less. Nevertheless, he had somehow been able to support himself and his growing family.

The cooperative has since closed down, largely because of the departure of the chief motivator of the project, a foreign missionary, who was not able to have his work permit renewed. Aban, however, was allowed to keep his 8 metre-by-5 metre wooden house, which was built on Mission land. Occasionally, there would be casual work on the Mission, but Aban could not depend on this irregular source of income to meet his basic needs. Vegetable farming seemed the most logical alternative for him.

Not having any land of his own, however, posed a problem initially. He had applied for a piece of land in Tamparuli about four months earlier but, judging from the fact that he is still to receive the receipt for his application fee, the likelihood of owning his own land seems rather remote for the moment. Nevertheless, Aban was fortunate in that he has a politically well-placed cousin who could 'spare' three acres of steep-sloping forested land for his use. If not for this, he would have to pay about \$100.00 a month as rental for an acre of cultivable land.

Using his own labour and that of his wife (who, despite carrying her 7th child, did a fair share of the work), they were able to clear a half-acre plot and planted it with cauliflower, broccoli and onions.



Often, he resorts to borrowing to help tide things over.

Sometimes their children and the girls in the Mission school would help, but Aban would rather that they do not miss their lessons so that they will be able to read and write — something which both he and his wife are unable to do.

If the harvest is good, Aban can earn between \$200.00 to \$300.00 for the three months it takes for the vegetables to mature. The products are sold by the roadside or to the occasional buyer who comes to purchase them direct. Manure, lime and other input costs add up to \$90.00. On an average, therefore, Aban gets about \$50.00 to \$80.00 per month from his half-acre plot. Despite supplementary food from his small subsistence garden, it is still difficult to make ends meet. Often, inevitably, he resorts to borrowing some cash from the missionary to help tide things over.

Aban is determined to see that his six surviving children, aged between 2 weeks and 14 years, are not destined to a future that is similar to their present. Four of them are schooling in the mission school nearby. They are not on any scholarship but they get a pair of rubber shoes and one or two (he cannot remember) sets of school uniforms a year from the government.

Whenever any of his children falls ill, Aban gets into a depression worrying

about all kinds of things. His first child had died when he was a little over two years, from a disease ("Kuris") which had caused his skin to break into ulcers, accompanied by high fevers. Even bringing him to hospital did not help. A number of other children in the area also died at about the same time. His eldest daughter is now suffering from asthma. He had not known what was wrong with her at first. He took her to the government clinic in Kota Belud, but her illness was only diagnosed correctly by a private practitioner in Kota Kinabalu. Being the eldest daughter, she is now entrusted with the care of her 2-week-old brother while their parents are working in the field.

In many ways, however, Aban considers himself lucky. He doesn't blame anybody for his difficult struggle to keep alive and to live in dignity. He has learnt to take it as a matter of course — as God's will. But is it? Sabah is reputed to be the richest state in the Federation. How is it then that people like Aban and his family have to struggle hard to exist — from day to day? ●

Francis Otigil & Colin Nicholas

**Note:** Francis Otigil (guest writer) is a Kadazan living and working in Kota Kinabalu. The interview was conducted in early February this year.

# Elections Very Soon?

**A** number of people have been saying that General Elections will be early next year. However, there is increasing evidence to show that elections will be even earlier than that. Perhaps by August this year. Perhaps even in April 1985!

The signs are there. **First**, of late the government has been in a desperate hurry trying to resolve some public controversies which have affected its credibility quite badly. The Papan nuclear waste dump, for instance, is to be moved to an uninhabited spot somewhere in the hills. Rumours have it that the Bukit China issue will be settled soon — in a way that would accommodate substantially some of the sentiments of the cemetery's trustees and the many critics of the Malacca state government. Most of all, the government is now seen by the public to be doing something about the BMF scandal — easily the most serious challenge it has had to face in the last two years. By allowing Bank Bumiputra to take action against allegedly corrupt ex-BMF officials, the impression is created that the government is going to bring all the crooks to book.

**Second**, Barisan Nasional leaders, including Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad himself, are trying their best to settle the internal difficulties of certain component parties in the ruling coalition. It is reported for instance, that Dr. Mahathir has been meeting both Dr. Neo Yee Pan and Tan Koon Swan in a concerted bid to get the divided MCA reunited once again. He is also going to Sabah soon — around 16 February — to make sure that Kadazan support will remain with the Barisan, after Berjaya's humiliating defeat in the Tambunan by-election. The problem between the Sarawak Chief Minister and the State's Governor is almost over especially since the Federal Government has chosen to give its full support to the former. The uncharacteristic swiftness with which the Federal leadership acted is perhaps an indication that it does not want any new controversy to crop up at this point.

**Third**, yet another piece of evidence of impending elections is the order to all UMNO divisions to hold their elections

by March 31. At the same time, the Annual UMNO General Assembly has been postponed to mid-October which is unusually late. Could this be because anywhere between March 31 and mid-October, the party will be involved in the General Elections?

**Fourth**, top Barisan leaders, notably Dr. Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, are paying many more visits to certain parts of the country than they are normally inclined to. The Prime Minister was in Perak (the Papan controversy state) recently and then in Melaka (the Bukit China issue state). A mammoth welcome, with the appearance of a public rally, was organised for him in Melaka.

**Fifth**, equally interesting is the news that the Prime Minister will be visiting China soon. It is said that the Barisan will use the trip to chalk up some electoral mileage. This is what the coalition did with Tun Razak's China trip in the 1974 election. Posters of the late Prime Minister shaking hands with Mao Tse-tung was part of the Barisan's campaign. Will it try a similar trick a second time?

**Finally**, as so often in the past, it seems likely that salary increases and better fringe benefits will be given to public sector employees at certain levels and in certain categories. There was some hint of this in the Prime Minister's meeting with CUEPACS leaders recently. He did not reject outright their request for better terms of service. Similarly, lower echelon police personnel have been promised better terms for housing loans. There could be other such promises for other occupational groups in the near future.

If elections are going to be held this year, the question that arises is this: why can't the Barisan wait till early next year when the impact of this year's fairly good economic growth rates would be felt to the full? There are perhaps two reasons. **First**, the Barisan's victory in the Padang Terap by-election has convinced UMNO in particular that it is still in command of Malay votes, in spite of PAS's determined effort to strengthen its support in states like Kedah. Padang Terap has made the Barisan confident. At the same time,

however, it realizes that PAS is making inroads into UMNO strongholds. The decline in the Barisan majority in the by-election is perhaps a reflection of this. For after all, the ruling coalition put almost everything it had into the campaign. What this means is that while the Barisan is certain of its electoral power in Malay constituencies, it knows that PAS is no pushover. In fact, it is quite possible, given PAS's religious zeal, that in a year's time, its support may increase.

**Second**, and perhaps more important, there is the question of the BMF scandal. At the moment, the government, as we have seen, has succeeded in creating a favourable impact. But will it last? Sooner than later, there will have to be legal prosecution of the former BMF trial to take place. What if the trial reveals things which are embarrassing to some of our national leaders? If, on the other hand, there isn't sufficient evidence to bring the ex-BMF officials to court, it is quite conceivable that the public will once again clamour with perhaps greater vigour for an independent Royal Commission of Inquiry. The government is likely to continue to reject such a demand. This, in turn, would affect adversely its credibility for it will lend weight to the view that the government is afraid of telling the entire truth on the BMF scandal. This is why before court proceedings begin, or before it is established that there is no basis for criminal prosecution, the Barisan may want to get the elections over with. For once it is firmly ensconced in power again, it would be simply impossible for anyone to dislodge the Barisan. As our political history shows so clearly, there is no such thing as an individual or party resigning on moral grounds.

**On the contrary, the guiding motto of those who occupy high office is survive every scandal, get re-elected with a bigger majority and remain in power forever — if possible ●**

Chandra Muzaffar

Note: Since this brief article was written on 27 January, the MCA crisis has been resolved — editor.

# No Cause For Joy

Below we publish two views expressed in conjunction with Human Rights Day on 10 December 1984. They show how dismal the human rights situation is in our part of the world. The first is by Aliran executive member, Azmi Khalid, who is also a member of the Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia. The second is from the Executive Committee of the Selangor Graduates Society.



## I. Not a Day for Rejoicing

10 December 1984 marks the 36th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly.

In this fourth decade of that international charter on the rights of individuals everywhere, it is sad to note that the plight of mankind since the end of the Second World War has not yet been significantly alleviated. It is nowhere near the levels that human rights activists have been striving for.

**This day is observed everywhere with the grim awareness of the tragic fate that has befallen man at the hands of fellow human beings. The human dignity that is sought appears elusive for substantial communities in many parts of our world.**

Yet, men, women and children everywhere still live with hope — that efforts by some concerned and conscientious individuals, groups and even nations may one day bear the fruits of success that they eagerly await.

## II. The General Situation in South East Asia

The Asian continent, and in particular our region of Asia, may well be one of the very last areas on this earth to be penetrated by the rays of hope and enlightenment that comes with human rights awareness.

Governments and peoples elsewhere have for long expressed their firm commitment to universally-recognised human rights — through official adherence to Charters, Declarations, Conventions and Covenants; by the formation of diverse human rights educational and action groupings; as well as through policies and programmes aimed at promoting a

deeper understanding of, and respect for, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Yet, no South East Asian government has ever even voiced its sincere belief in the rights of individuals, much less taken positive steps to legally or morally bind itself to international or regional human rights obligations.

Despite stringent regulations and harsh controls, some concerned private individuals have lately taken the bold initiative to form themselves into regional associations to articulate the beliefs of the people, and to strive to attain some decent minimum standards of human rights for their peoples.

These endeavours may seem meagre and their successes so far may appear extremely limited. Yet, this may well be a harbinger of what could probably materialise from the millions of others should they be allowed to exercise their fundamental freedoms and express their basic rights.

Already in existence today are at least 3 Asian human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs):

### 1. Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia (RCHRA)

- a small association of concerned jurists and some other citizens with the primary aim of promoting human rights in the ASEAN region.
- formed on February 18, 1982 at a meeting in Manila; 1 year later in December 1983 at its 1st Council Assembly unanimously app-

proved the "Declaration of the Basic Duties of ASEAN Peoples and Governments".

- at its 2nd Assembly in Bangkok, it issued its 2nd Report on the State of Human Rights in the ASEAN region for 4 countries, except Singapore and Brunei.

### 2. Asian Commission on Human Rights (ACHR)

- comprises eminent human rights activists and enthusiasts from the region, for example Thongbai Thongpao from Thailand, Yap Thiem Hien from Indonesia, Jose Djokno from the Philippines and Chandra Muzaffar from Malaysia.
- this commission aims to organise action against specific violations of human rights.

### 3. Asian Coalition of Human Rights Organisations (ACHRO)

- formed in 1983 as a means of establishing contacts and linkages between national and regional NGOs such that cooperative ventures may strengthen existing groups and their noble endeavours.

## III. RCHRA Report for 1984

The Regional Council recently noted that

"... despite economic growth in some countries, *there has been no significant improvement* in the protection and observance of human rights, ..."

"... the state of human rights remains, on the whole, unsatisfactory ..." and

"... *in some areas the situation has even deteriorated.*"

These conclusions were drawn from the following observations, that:

1. *More restrictions* have been imposed on the rights of peace-

ful dissent, assembly, and freedoms of expression and association.

2. The right to personal security has been placed under greater danger, especially with continued policies and practices of preventive detention.
3. *Disparities between rich and poor* have not abated but tend to intensify. Rural and urban *workers* as a rule *do not receive adequate real wages* for their efforts.
4. The *position and rights of women and children* leave much to be desired.

On a positive note, RCHRA notes:

1. In some countries, there appears to have been more releases than detentions of political prisoners.
2. In some areas, the people have organised themselves and undertaken spontaneous actions to protect their rights even at the risk of their safety and personal security.

The Regional Council urges that the following moves be made in this region:

1. Governments ought to *adopt or observe in full the Declaration of Basic Duties*.
2. *ASEAN* ought to create a *human rights division* without delay.
3. Governments *should not impose new restrictions* on the freedoms of association and expression; *instead they should lift existing restrictions*.
4. Governments need to *encourage* (and facilitate) the formation and independent functioning of *authentic indigenous popular or grassroots organisations and movements* at local, national and regional levels.
5. Governments need to take *effective steps to prevent the erosion of the real wages and incomes of workers and farmers*.
6. Governments ought to *provide special care to children and women* so as to *prevent their exploitation as sex objects and workers*.

#### Conclusion

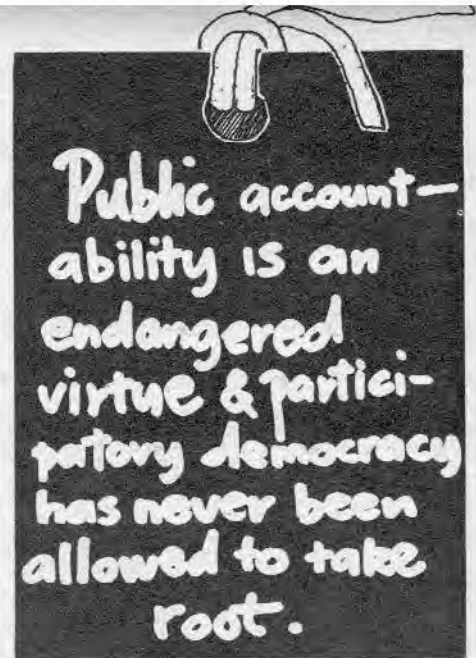
Recent trends in at least 4 countries in the region — Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand — indicate a slow but sure *rise in human rights awareness among the people*.

These recent developments provide some hope for human rights in the region. However, a lot depends on whether *people will be allowed to exercise their fundamental freedoms and encouraged to unleash their human creativity*, as they uphold their dignity as human beings.

**D**espite the Government's claim that Malaysia is not considered a major human rights violator by the United Nations, the Selangor Graduates Society (SGS) cannot celebrate International Human Rights Day today with much joy. This is not surprising in view of the steady (sometimes subtle) erosion of human rights that has occurred in Malaysia during the year.

Among the erosions and administrative constrictions that we regret are:

- **The 4 additional conditions imposed in all new KDN permits for publications which have now been compounded by the imposition of annual licensing fees. These are likely to be a financial burden to societies with small budgets and limited publication circulation.**
- **The Registrar of Societies use of the 1983 Amendments to the Societies Act to demand more irrelevant information from Societies.**
- **The Government move to silence criticism from Malaysian students overseas.**
- **The lack of attention to public opinion and rejection of the principles of public accountability and consultation on both the BMF and Papan issues.**
- **Amendments to the Official Secrets Act which further insulate government activity from public scrutiny.**
- **The new Printing Presses & Publications Act which undermines press freedom and provides a means whereby public access to foreign publica-**



rights. And yet many of these repressive legislations are unnecessary, although they are officially justified in the name of 'national security', 'religious harmony' and 'racial amity'. This is why we have the ISA, ESCAR, Trades Union Act, Societies Act, Universities & University Colleges Act, etc.

The Malaysian tragedy is perhaps the overwhelming Parliamentary majority that the Government has enjoyed since 1957. This power has been used to steamroll all manner of opposition, and dissent in any form, is hardly tolerated. Public accountability is an endangered virtue and participatory democracy has never been allowed to take root. Critics

## Malaysians should continue to oppose anti-life and anti-liberty laws

tions can be totally curbed by administrative decree.

- **The proposed Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Bill 1984 which extends the anti-liberty provisions of the Internal Security Act to already severe Drug legislation.**

SGS has always deplored the Malaysian Government's refusal to sign the various UN Declarations on Human Rights and the wide range of restrictive laws in force. Although some of them were inherited from the British like the ISA and Official Secrets Act, our last 27 years of independence have witnessed a host of amendments to the Constitution and enactment of laws, the majority of which have diminished basic human

are always considered irresponsible people (even 'rascals') and constructive criticism can only come from 'yes-men'.

All Malaysians who love a just society (including a clean, efficient and trustworthy government) should continue to oppose anti-life and anti-liberty laws, to expose exploitation of both Malaysian people and their environment, to reject bigotry of all forms, and to work for the improvement of the position of all our marginalised citizens. SGS calls upon the Government to repeal all legislation that violates the UN Declaration of Human Rights as well as to repeal Articles 149 and 150 of the Federal Constitution (since they prevent judicial scrutiny of alleged human rights violations in an emergency)●

# Withering Arts

Cecil Rajendra

**N**o National Theatre, no National Orchestra, no National Dance Troupe, no National Cultural forum . . . . . this is the lamentable state of the arts in Malaysia since Merdeka. What's more, in the 27 years of Independence, no major artist, novelist, actor, playwright, singer, sculptor, dancer or musician of any sort of international significance has emerged on our cultural landscape. And there have been no replacements for majors like P. Ramlee, Jimmy Boyle or Yong Mun Sen.

But our loss has been more than the loss of a few individuals. Whole species of the arts — especially traditional arts — seem to have vanished from the horizon. A few examples will suffice: Some readers may recall that not so long ago there used to be a band of itinerant hawkers who used to go from village to village, town to town peddling miniature multi-coloured dolls moulded from rice flour on to sticks. These exquisite figurines based largely on gods and warriors of Chinese mythology e.g. Kwan Yin, the Monkey God etc. sold for around 10-20 cents and were each a work of art in itself.

Where are they now? A seven year search has failed to uncover a single surviving member of this breed of unheralded master craftsmen.

And what about Wayang Kulit and kite-flying which used to be commonplace in our villages? They appear now to be corralled forever in Museums and campuses only to be trotted out on special occasions (like Merdeka Day?) or as tourist attractions.

The art of Mak Yong and Boria have all but disappeared. And Chinese puppet theatre and Chinese Opera groups are now, for the most part, being imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Sitar players and pianists, too, are few and far between. I guess they are probably playing Yamaha organs in some hotel lounge or pub!

In the world of Malaysian letters, the story is equally dismal. Post-Independence has produced nothing of note. The writers are mediocre and their efforts negligible. No one of comparable stature to Usman Awang, Samad Said or Ee Tiang Hong has emerged from the pack of manque writers who dominate the present scene.

What, one may ask, are the causes of this terrible post-Merdeka slump in the

arts which makes the present economic recession look like a recovery?

The reasons are many and varied. I do not pretend to know all, or even half, the answers but I suspect a major cause of this decline can be found in our national shift from things cultural and spiritual to things materialistic and military.

Children these days are far more interested in blowing each other to bits in video games than in reading a good story book. Likewise their parents, who are far more concerned about the health of their bank balance than any mental/cultural bankruptcy!

## The misuse of money and the misuse of language are certain symptoms of social illness

Star Wars has replaced Mickey Mouse and Sang Kancil; the Statement of Account has replaced the family library!

This obsession with materialism and militarism, I hasten to add, is not just typical of Malaysia but endemic in all Third World countries which measure the progress and development of their societies purely in terms of increased growth rates and so-called security. Security for what — foreign investors?

In a country where redundant flyovers take precedence over theatres and where billions are spent on arms while peanuts are flung to the artist, one cannot really expect the general populace to take music or literature seriously. The heroic figures of such societies — the men and women who shape and influence its history and development — are not its poets and artists but its four-star Generals and fly-by-night contractors. What hope then, for any awakening of the cultural consciousness of its children?

But the artist can sometimes flourish under conditions not altogether propitious. One does not necessarily need a Ministry of Culture stamp of approval to write a major novel or produce a great work of art. It depends, of course, on the artist. Why then, you may ask, have we produced nothing but nonentities.

A fundamental reason, I posit, is a collective loss of nerve among local artists. He is unwilling to take risks of any sort — artistic or otherwise — but appears content to work in well-ploughed fields. Constrained by some inexplicable conservatism he seems unable (unlike Filipino playwright Bonifacio Ilagan or Indian Novelist Salman Rushdie) to make that leap into the dark and be truly

innovative either structurally or thematically.

There is also a certain immaturity. An inability to respond to approbation or criticism of any sort. A favourable review of his work, nine times out of ten, will retard all further development of the artist who feels he has 'arrived'; and, the slightest adverse criticism sends him scampering into his shell like a spoilt child.

In conclusion, given current priorities of our society and the immature temperament of our artist, if the past twenty seven years have been bleak, the next

twenty-seven will be bleaker still. There are no hopeful symptoms of a recovery. The Spanish philosopher Ortega Y Gasset warns us of the fragile nature of the things which constitute "civilization" which, he says, "can escape from man's hands and vanish like phantoms at the least carelessness."

In our own society we have witnessed the truth of the philosopher's words in less than three decades. Rice-dolls, tops, kites, Boria, ronggeng, wayang kulit, puppet-shows etc. have either vanished or are fast vanishing. Even the art of conversation seems to be dying . . . . . (Note how dinner guests rush off immediately after the last course is served — no staying on for a leisurely chat over coffee).

The poet Ezra Pound (whose politics, incidentally, I hold no brief for) once wrote:

"The two most useful axes of reference in determining the health of any society are examination of financial practice and examination of arts — particularly the language arts. The misuse of money and the misuse of language are certain symptoms of social illness."

If Pound's dictum is correct, and I suggest it is, a cursory examination of our ostentatious abuse of money and the casual manner in which we mangle language daily will be enough for any physician to diagnose that our society is very ill indeed. And I hold out no hopes of the patient recuperating in the future unless drastic steps are taken immediately by both the society and the artist ●

Guest writer, Cecil Rajendra is a well-known Malaysian poet.

# The BMF Scandal: How Serious is the Government?

In January, we requested you to express views about the government's handling of the BMF scandal. How serious is the government in wanting to resolve the scandal? — this was the question we posed.

Below we publish your responses.

The BMF scandal took place between 1979-83. The shocking, glaring facts of omission and commission are now coming to light.

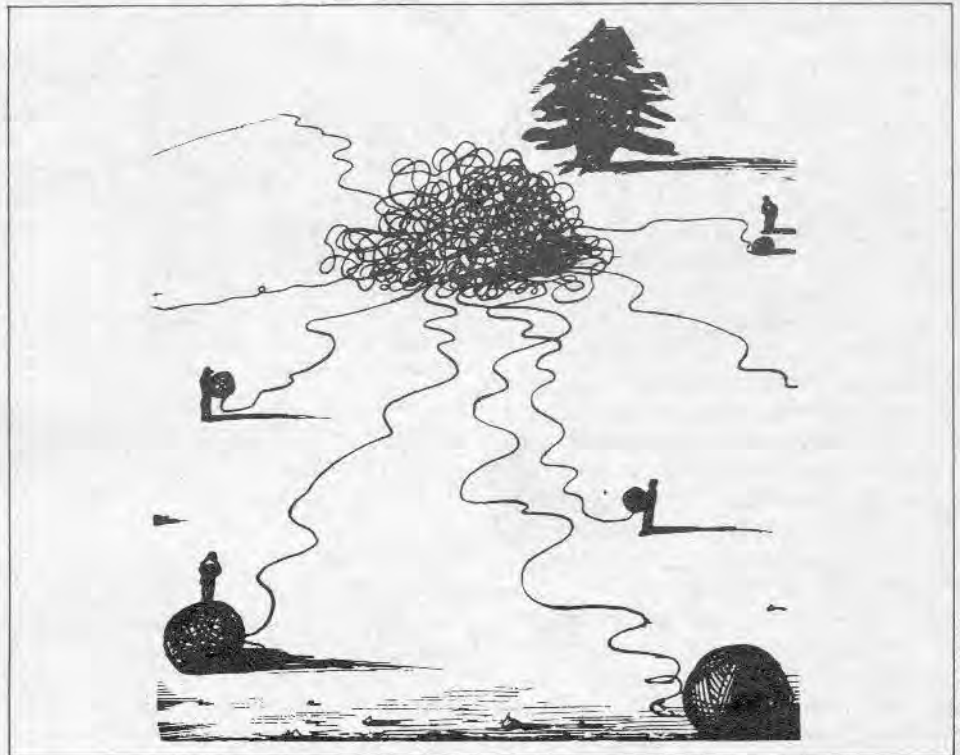
It would be naive to feel satisfied with the Government's response. I am particularly incensed because of the hope this leadership gave us through their slogan "a clean, efficient and trustworthy government". Matched against this call their performance in handling the BMF issue reveals a lack of serious intent.

A Bank Bumiputra Internal Auditor dealing with loans was murdered in Hong Kong. The murderer was caught, tried and sentenced. His appeal has also been heard in Hong Kong. In the meantime, here, the Government has in stages come out with the Auditor General's Reports. The Attorney General, meanwhile, and rightly so, pleads that he has to consider the criminal aspects before he can file cases against the accused parties. So, everyone has enough time to study the case.

Meanwhile, the culprits roam the world. They have had time to re-schedule their assets in compliance with the law or even move their ill-gotten money elsewhere. Perhaps, more than anything else the Government's response to the setting up of a Royal Commission has been **the most** disappointing factor. A loss of M\$2.5 billion should not only arouse moral outrage but inspire efforts more speedy and far reaching than what we have witnessed to-date.

Perhaps, the implications are more than what ordinary mortals like me realise. From the wheeling and dealing so far revealed and the kickbacks involved, the grapevine rumours may be true that there is much to protect, hide and circumvent.

However, there is a lot of good earthly



BY EUGENE MIHAESCO

common sense around and citizens are not fools. They do realise that such massive financial dealings could not have gone on without the knowledge of top personalities in Bank Bumiputra, Bank Negara, Ministry of Finance and the Barisan National. The Government in keeping with its slogan "Leadership by Example" must acknowledge responsibility for its wide administrative lapses in allowing a condition like this to persist over a 3 year period. If it does, then, some measure of credibility will be won and its serious intentions somewhat redeemed.

**Outraged Malaysian**  
Petaling Jaya  
Selangor

In my opinion, a Royal Commission of Inquiry should be set up to investigate the BMF scandal. I believe that the outcome of such an investigation would satisfy the public's expectation. The rate at which the government is tackling this matter is very slow indeed. Maybe the aim is to confuse the public in the hope

that all this will soon be forgotten. I do not think this is going to happen. The scandal, in fact, is going to remain in the minds of the people for generations to come. It is best, therefore, that the truth be revealed NOW!

I strongly agree with Tun Hussein Onn when he said that "... it is clear that the government could have done more and that the people are not happy with the way the matter is being handled." I am not happy and not satisfied with the reports of the Committee of Inquiry. The government should stop at nothing to make sure the culprits get their just dues.

**Marcus Lian**  
Seri Kembangan  
Selangor

If the Government was truly sincere in seeing that justice is done in the BMF issue, it should set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry without further delay. As it is, there has been too much footdragging already on the part of the Government. It was only on 11th October 1983 that the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir

Mohamed made his first statement on the BMF scandal, about a year after the first news of the BMF loans scandal in Hong Kong had broken publicly. Is this an example of what is meant by a "clean, efficient and trustworthy Government" or "leadership by example"?

The people have a right to know what happened to the BMF billions as Bank Bumiputra (BMF's parent company) was established with public funds. The sole purpose in setting up Bank Bumiputra was, in the words of the late Tun Abdul Razak, when he launched Bank Bumiputra on September 30th, 1965, "to remedy the lack of capital among the Bumiputras so as to enable them to improve their existing business and to encourage them to undertake new enterprises which are expected to accelerate development and increase the wealth of the country". It would appear therefore that Bank Bumiputra has strayed far afield from its primary objective!

The Committee of Inquiry commissioned by the Government to look into the BMF issue is far from adequate, as has been readily admitted by Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin himself, the head of the committee. We are not calling into question the personal integrity of the members of the team (on the contrary, we believe they are among some of the most upright and trustworthy citizens of the country), but rather the limited powers of the Committee, such that what is being revealed may only be the tip of the iceberg.

By far the most alarming factor about the BMF fiasco is that had it not been for the untimely (or should it be said timely, depending on one's point of view!) collapse of the Carrian Empire, all the unscrupulous dealings that have come to light may have gone undetected.

The Government's sincerity is highly suspect, with its adamant refusal to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry to look into the BMF issue. Indeed, to clear all doubts and to acquit the Government of complicity in the matter, it is imperative that a Royal Commission of Inquiry be set up without further delay.

**Mary Tan**  
Undergraduate  
UPM Serdang  
Selangor

Could somebody please let me know the fastest way to become an executive of a bank? I need to get rich quick. And judging by the way Bank Negara and the government keep tabs on the affairs of financial institutions in the country, and their tendency to treat multi-billion dollar frauds and acts of corruption as nothing extraordinary, I am sure that this is the place for me.

**Under-paid Taxpayer**  
Kuala Lumpur

Is the government serious in uncovering the scandal? It looks like they are more serious in keeping it under wraps!

It took the life of one dedicated Malaysian to bring to public notice that such a scandal did exist. And when demands were made for a Royal Commission of Inquiry, the government only acceded to a Committee of Inquiry. It appears, therefore, that the government is serious after all — in hiding the facts, that is.

**George Lim**  
Petaling Jaya  
Selangor

The government should set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry to investigate the BMF scandal. Only then will the rakyat be satisfied that the government is handling the issue seriously. Losing more than \$2 billion belonging to the rakyat is no small matter. That the scandal should take place when the economy of the country is beset with huge trade deficits and foreign debts, makes the whole affair stink. The government, however, appears to have lost its sense of smell!

**Charles Siaw**  
Kuching

It is unfortunate and sad that our beloved country Malaysia has recently made its name known throughout the world, not because of any proud development but because of the biggest financial scandal in the country's history. The Bank Rakyat scandal (involving Dato Harun and others), by comparison, looks like chicken-feed to us.

What is even more unfortunate is the fact that our honourable Minister of National and Rural Development, Dato Sanusi should ask us ordinary honest Malaysians to forget about the whole issue and not to get unduly excited over it. This brings doubt to my mind as to the level of intelligence of our so-called

political leaders.

The BMF issue is surely a serious national matter demanding the concern of every loyal citizen. It should be dealt with thoroughly and justly. Nobody can ask us to keep mum when such a huge sum of public money (no less than 2.4 billion) is involved.

Anyone in his right frame of mind would agree to the setting up of a Royal Commission of Inquiry to expose every fact and every person involved. There is no reason why the government should object to it if they have nothing to hide. After all isn't this a clean, efficient and trustworthy government? The Committee of Inquiry headed by Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin has really very limited powers especially in jurisdiction. Our former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn should be given three cheers for his uncompromising and courageous comments on the issue.

I believe the taxpayers would like to see that justice is done. All those who were responsible for causing the scandal should be properly dealt with in accordance with the law and hopefully part of the money can still be recovered.

**A True Malaysian**  
Penang

Thank you for this golden opportunity to express my views on a very important subject.

I think the Government is not serious enough about this scandal. It has no interest at all. Everything that is being done or is going to be done in the BMF scandal is merely because a few concerned bodies like the DAP, the PSRM and the Aliran continue to make noise. And also because the unfortunate Jalil Ibrahim was murdered on foreign soil. Otherwise everything will be kept under wraps.

**B.A.**  
Kedah

### MALAYSIA'S TOP BANKS IN MILLIONS OF MALAYSIAN DOLLARS

BANK	ASSETS	DEPOSITS
1. Bank Bumiputra.....	19,576	13,326
2. Malayan Banking.....	14,339	8,363
3. UMBC.....	4,474	2,772
4. Public Bank.....	2,685	2,133
5. United Asian Bank.....	2,602	1,682
6. Development and Comm.	1,807	1,390
7. Perwira Habib Bank.....	1,030	774
8. Hock Hua Bank.....	771	552
9. Southern Banking.....	658	471
10. Oriental Bank.....	599	554



# Pemindahan Teknologi dan Semangat Sains

Ali A. Mazrui

"Sains dan teknologi dikatakan menjadi punca kebanyakan keadaan buruk kita pada masa ini. Sains telah berjaya menentang penyakit dan memanjangkan umur manusia, maka sains dan teknologi dituduh menyebabkan perkembangan penduduk yang banyak. Oleh kerana daya pengeluaran ditambah dan taraf hidup dibaiki; sains dan teknologi juga dituduh menghabiskan sumber alam dan menyebabkan pencemaran. Dengan cara mengembangkan ilmu pengetahuan dan mengutamakan kecekapan, sains dan teknologi dianggap bertanggungjawab mengecilkan mitos dan memperkecilkan manusia. Sains juga telah memberi kuasa yang banyak kepada manusia. Ini telah membawa manusia hampir kejurang kemusnahan."

Itulah ucapan Glenn Seaborg, seorang ahli kimia nuklear dan pemenang hadiah Nobel apabila membicarakan penentangan kini terhadap sains dan teknologi. Walaupun ucapan-ucapan sebegini penting sebagai penunjuk tentangan orang ramai terhadap tindak-tanduk ahli-ahli sains dan teknologi, kritik seperti ini sebenarnya berdasarkan salah faham tentang sifat sains dan teknologi. Kumpulan pengetahuan sains ini bukanlah kutipan fakta-fakta koheren yang berkait rapat secara tertib dan logik seperti yang di jangkakan oleh orang awam. Sebaliknya apabila fakta-fakta baru ditemui, fakta-fakta lama perlu disingkirkan. Ahli-ahli sains itu sentiasa pada asasnya tidak benar. Sains berdasarkan ketidak-tentuan; ianya merupakan penuntutan sesuatu yang seolah-olah tidak diketahui. Oleh sebab itulah maka sains ini berhubung rapat dengan aspek-aspek kebudayaan manusia yang lainnya.

Sebaliknya teknologi didasarkan kepada apa yang boleh dikatakan fakta-fakta mekanik yang nyata. Hanya apabila mula digunakan baharulah teknologi menemui berbagai angkubah yang tidak terkawal dan timbul berbagai ketidak-tentuan. Dan tidak ada amaran suabalik, iaitu tidak terdapat sesuatu peraturan bagi mengubah haluan pada awalnya jika terdapat sesuatu teknologi itu salah kegunaannya.

Adakah tidak ada jalan bagi kita menghapuskan faktor ketidak-tentuan dalam penggunaan teknologi? Tidak bolehkah kita adakan penunjuk-penunjuk baru supaya amaran awal bagi penyalahgunaan diberikan? Agak ganjil juga, kita dapati bahawa masalah kesan sains & teknologi ke atas manusia dan masyarakat itu jelas dilihat di dalam bidang perhubungan — satu bidang yang sangat pesat berkembang dalam abad yang lalu. Kegunaan-kegunaan satelit pemancaran terus, videocamera, videokaset, televisyen kabel, teleks kepada berjuta-juta manusia di seluruh dunia. Adakah berkemungkinan sains dan teknologi ini digunakan untuk penjajahan kebudayaan oleh beberapa kuasa besar terhadap manusia-manusia lain? Teknologi-teknologi ini juga membolehkan penonton TV dan pendengar radio mendapatkan berbagai rancangan yang berbeza-beza dan berdialog dengan serta merta bersama juruhebah yang berkenaan. Adakah ini bererti bahawa manusia biasa kini dapat mengesan dan mempengaruhi insan, mesin dan juga peristiwa yang mempengaruhi untung nasib masa depannya.



**P**emindahan teknologi merupakan sebutan yang menyeluruh dan merangkumi kedua-dua gerakan teknologi jangka-pendek dan jangka-panjang, dan termasuk antaranya penyewaan komputer ke negara-negara Afrika hingga mendirikan institut teknologi setempat. Sama ada ia sesuai atau tidak, semua ini dimasukkan sebagai "pemindahan teknologi".

Sebaliknya 'pindah-tanam teknologi' adalah agak berlainan. Kata kiasan yang dipinjam dari bidang biologi ini mementingkan penerimaan dari jasad tuan-rumah atau penerimaan. Mesti ada sekurang-kurangnya sedikit penyesuaian di antara benda yang di 'pindah tanam' itu (sama ada biji benih atau jantung) dengan pihak penerima. Pernyataan kita dalam penilaian ini ialah memang telah ada banyak pemindahan teknologi kepada Dunia Ketiga sejak tiga puluh tahun yang lalu — tetapi sangat sedikit pindah-tanam teknologi. Lebih-lebih lagi di Afrika sedikit sekali yang telah dipindahkan itu berjaya dipindah-tanamkan, terlalu sedikit yang berakar umbi. Soalnya ialah kenapa?

Di sini saya ingin berhujah (dengan rujukan kepada Afrika) bahawa walaupun suasana normatif itu sesuai bagi pindah-tanam teknologi, tanah sosiologi dan struktur masih lagi agak tandus. Walaupun terdapat minat dan perhatian terhadap kebudayaan teknologi, tanah sosiologi sebenarnya masih lagi menolak apa yang dipindah-tanamkan. Mari kita telitikan kedua-dua bahagian hujah ini.

Pendapat umum dalam kebanyakan negara-negara Dunia Ketiga menyokong gerakan ke arah "pemodenan", "perindustrian", "kemajuan desa" yang lebih

cepat dan cara perjalanan yang lebih pantas. Tidak terdapat gerakan-gerakan yang menentang perkembangan perindustrian dan perubahan teknologi, kecuali beberapa orang penyair dan ahli falsafah saja.

India menghormati mending Mahatma Gandhi tetapi orang-orang India yang kini menyokong perkembangan industri di rumah hanya menganggap industri ini sebagai strategi pembangunan tambahan saja dan bukan sebagai ganti kepada syarikat-syarikat besar seperti Syarikat Tata dan perusahaan keluli. Penyokong-penyokong falsafah ekonomi Gandhi yang lebih militan (yang ingin kembali kepada sistem ekonomi mudah) tidak berkesan mempengaruhi polisi dan tidak mendapat sokongan gerakan massa.

Dari masa ke semasa Afrika dan Hindia Barat juga menghasilkan ahli-ahli ekonomi primitif yang berdedikasi. Pemiikiran "negritude" di Afrika dan Hindia Barat itu kadangkala merupakan perasaan rindu kepada sistem ekonomi mudah Afrika di zaman silam. Penyair dan ahli politik Martinique iaitu Aime Cesaire pernah menulis:

... Eia kepada yang tidak mencipta sesuatu  
Juga kepada mereka yang tidak menemui sesuatu ...  
Bagi mereka yang tidak menjelajah kemana-mana ...  
Eia bagi keriangun  
Eia bagi kesugulan punca air mata jelma ...  
Sifat Negro ku bukan menafa dan bukan juga gereja  
Ia mencucuk ke dalam bumi merah ...  
(Kembali ke Tanah Asalku)

Cesaire memuji kebudayaan Afrika yang tidak langsung berunsur teknikal.

Penyokong pemikiran "negritude" yang paling terkenal di Afrika ialah Leopold Senghor. Tetapi walaupun Senghor ialah Presiden Senegal lebih dari 20 tahun, beliau tidak memulakan rancangan kembali kepada sistem mudah. Sebaliknya, polisi yang ditekankan di Senegal di bawah pemerintahan Senghor ialah ke arah kemajuan sektor perindustrian dan kewangan.

Dari sini kita dapat menyimpulkan bahawa fahaman agama industrialisme itu tidak mendatangkan sebarang bahaya di Dunia Ketiga. Negara-negara seperti Burma dan Republik Rakyat China yang satu ketika menolak teknologi Barat, kini telah menunjukkan minat terhadapnya.

Oleh sebab itulah kami menjangkakan bahawa susunan normatif bagi pemindahan-tanam teknologi nampaknya mendapat sokongan di kebanyakan negara Dunia Ketiga. Ibu bapa berminat menghantar anak-anak mereka ke sekolah-sekolah jenis Barat; kerajaan-kerajaan nampaknya bersungguh-sungguh menjalankan rancangan lima tahun; juga terdapat ramai pakar-pakar teknik yang di import khas dari luar. Dalam suasana yang begini menggalakkan, kenapakah pohon teknologi itu tidak berakar umbi? Ya kenapa? Ini membawa kita kepada kiasan tanah tandus tadi. Kita melihat tanah ini dari segi sosiologi masyarakat berdasarkan kaitan strukturnya dengan dunia luar. Tanah ini tidak sesuai bagi pemindahan-tanam ini. Kita dapat memahami keadaan ini dengan melihat kepada beberapa kejadian yang bertentangan dalam masyarakat Dunia Ketiga.

Pertama sekali, adakah kebudayaan beberapa kawasan di Dunia Ketiga itu mengalami pengaruh Barat yang kuat tanpa permodenan ekonomi? Adakah terdapat corak *penggunaan* Barat tanpa pemindahan kaedah *pengeluaran* Barat? Adakah terdapat kegunaan terhadap alat-alat teknologi Barat tanpa ada rancangan mengeluarkan barang-barang ini di negara Dunia Ketiga itu sendiri?

Corak penggunaan menggambarkan nilai-nilai samada baru atau lama. Kaedah pengeluaran pula merupakan gambaran kemahiran. Negara-negara Barat lebih berjaya dalam mempopularkan nilai-nilai dan kehendak mereka daripada dalam usaha memindah-tanam kemahiran mereka. Kepincangan ini sengaja diadakan. Adalah menguntungkan negara Barat jika mereka dapat menyemaikan kegemaran kepada barang-barang mereka tanpa mengeksportkan kaedah dan kemahiran mengeluarkan barang-barang itu oleh Dunia Ketiga.

Dalam usaha-usaha mengeksportkan kapitalisme, negara-negara Barat lebih berjaya mengeksportkan tujuan keuntungan itu dan bukan kemahiran menjadi peniaga. Tujuan laba ini hanyalah

## Adakah dunia Barat menghantar corak penggunaannya saja dan bukan kaedah-kaedah pengeluarannya?

kemahuan keuntungan. Ia tidak semestinya bererti kemahiran mencapainya.

Saudagar-saudagar Afrika mungkin sangat berminat memaksimumkan pulangan modal mereka. Tetapi kebanyakan dari mereka hanya ingin berada dalam Lembaga Pengarah saja dan bukan ingin mencuba kaedah-kaedah perniagaan yang baru. Di Dunia Ketiga, saudagar-saudagarnya tidak berani mengambil risiko — iaitu satu aspek pengusahaan — tetapi hanya mengutamakan pelaburan yang selamat.

Prinsip tatasusila Barat iaitu "kumpulan wang — tetapi jangan membelanjakannya" itupun nampaknya diabaikan. Wang memang dikumpul tetapi dibelanjakan dengan serta merta secara menunjukkan pula. Mereka tidak mementingkan pelaburan dalam peralatan yang lebih baik atau kaedah-kaedah yang lebih berkesan. Jika peralatan baru pula dibeli, kerapkalinya barang-barang yang dibeli itu dari jenis yang salah pula.

Prinsip moral Protestant tentang "kerajinan" (atau etika kerja) ini lebih merupakan ciri bagi golongan marhaen Afrika dan buka bagi golongan perniagaan.

Golongan perniagaan Afrika ini hanya inginkan keuntungan semata-mata. Walaupun ada di antara mereka yang beragama Protestant, tidak semestinya mereka mengganti "etika Protestant" yang klasik seperti yang disarankan oleh Max Weber dalam bukunya *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Tujuan keuntungan sangat kuat diseluruh Afrika tetapi daya pengusahaan masih lemah. Inilah sebahagian daripada ketandusan tanah sosiologi yang menghalang pindahan-tanam teknologi yang berkaitan secara lebih berkesan.

Sistem-sistem pendidikan di Afrika juga adalah lebih baik dari segi menyampaikan nilai-nilai dan kegemaran Barat daripada kemahiran dan kaedah-kaedah Barat. Sekolah-sekolah yang diwarisi dari zaman kolonial merupakan alat mengorientasi semula kebudayaan saja dan bukan untuk mengubah ekonomi. Di bilik-bilik darjah terdapat pemindahan seni pertuturan dan bukan kaedah pengeluaran.

Universiti-universiti di Afrika pada umumnya diadakan untuk mengeluarkan orang-orang yang pandai berkomunikasi dan bukannya orang-orang yang mencipta, iaitu orang-orang yang "mahir" berhujah dan menulis dan bukannya orang-orang yang boleh mempraktikkan seni pembaharuan. Oleh kerana kolonia-

lisme mengutamakan orang-orang yang hanya pandai meniru dan berhujah dan bukan pencipta yang inovatif, maka sekolah-sekolah penjajah ini dijalankan dalam bentuk yang dikehendaki.

Struktur pendidikan kolonial menghasilkan saintisma dan bukan semangat sains. Ideologi "Saintisma Modern" dan bukan prinsip saintifik yang jujur yang diutamakan setelah mendapat ijazah. Orang-orang Afrika di latih hormat dan takut kepada sains, bukan mempelajari dan menguasainya. Mereka dilatih supaya memandang tinggi kepada pencapaian sains Barat dengan tidak diberi sebarang peluang untuk mengembangkan sikap keberanian sendiri terhadap Sains. Ideologi Saintisma membuatkan orang-orang Afrika bukan saja gentar terhadap sains Barat tetapi juga membuatkan jiwa mereka bergantung kepadanya juga. Dan nampaknya, bibit-bibit untuk menentukan bahawa teknologi Afrika sentiasa bergantung kepada Barat telah ditanam.

Inilah sebahagian daripada pertentangan-pertentangan yang membuatkan tanah warisan penjajah itu sungguh tidak sesuai bagi pindahan-tanam teknologi yang berkesan. Suasana pemikiran memang mahukan pembangunan teknologi tetapi kita perlukan perubahan-perubahan dasar dari segi sosiologi dan struktur.

Jika kita boleh terus memanjangkan penggunaan kiasan tanah tadi, apa yang diperlukan ialah baja untuk tanah itu supaya pokok teknologi baru itu dapat tumbuh dengan subur. Kita jangan hanya mengadu tentang penyalahgunaan Utara-Selatan dan sikap melampau perbadanan dan syarikat antarabangsa. Kita jangan hanya menumpukan perhatian terhadap pembatasan hak cipta dan patent, atau sikap exploitasi yang melampaui batas. Walau bagaimana benar sekalipun perkara-perkara ini, lambat laun kita terpaksa juga menghadapi kekurangan tanah penerima itu sendiri — iaitu yang disebabkan oleh putar-belit penjajah dan oleh berbagai-bagai kebudayaan masyarakat setempat. Apa yang penting ialah faktor-faktor dari corak dorongan kepada sistem pendidikan, dari etik Protestant yang menyeleweng kepada ketidakseimbangan ekonomi dunia.

Usaha-usaha mencari susunan Teknologi Antarabangsa yang Baru ini mesti bermula dengan isu baja — iaitu baja teknologi yang akan menukarkan tanah tuan rumah di Dunia Ketiga. Ini akan membuat tanah itu lebih menerima pindahan-tanam kemahiran pengeluaran dan seni pembaharuan yang sebenarnya.

**ALI A. MAZRUI**, dari Kenya ialah Profesor Penyelidikan di Universiti Jos, Nigeria dan Profesor Sains Politik dan Kajian Afrika dan Afro-Amerika di Universiti Michigan, Ann Arbor. Beliau ialah Pengarang buku-buku *A World Federation of Cultures: An African Perspective* (1976), *Africa's International Relations* (1977) dan *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (1978).

# ANNOUNCEMENT

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### WORKSHOP — EXHIBITION

with slides, videos, cultural show

PLACE: National Union of Plantation  
Workers (NUPW) Building  
2 Jalan Templer  
Petaling Jaya

DATE: 23rd — 24th March 1985  
TIME: 9.00 am — 6.00 pm

- \* ALL ARE WELCOME
- \* ADMISSION FREE

Organised by Joint Action Group Against Violence  
Against Women: Federation of Women Lawyers, Malayan  
Trade Union Congress (Women's Committee), Selangor  
Consumers' Association, University Women's Associa-  
tion, Women's Aid Organisation.

For more information contact:

The Coordinator  
Joint Action Group Against Violence Against Women  
c/o Selangor Consumers' Association  
5-A Jalan 18/17 Taman Kanagapuram  
6th Mile Old Klang Road, Kuala Lumpur  
Tel: (03) — 528184

### PROGRAMME

	SATURDAY 23.3.85	SUNDAY 24.3.85
9.00 — 6.30 Morning	Exhibition	Exhibition
9.30 — 10.00	Official Opening	—
10.00 — 12.00	Workshops (Simultaneous) 1) Violence 2) Media	Workshops (Simultaneous) 1) Violence 2) Media
12.00 — 2.00 Afternoon	Lunch/Videos	Lunch/Videos
2.00 — 4.00	Workshops (Simultaneous) 3) Prostitution 4) Legal Aspects	Workshops (Simultaneous) 3) Prostitution 4) Legal Aspects
4.00 — 4.30	Tea	Tea
4.30 — 6.30	Cultural Show	Plenary Session

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# CURRENT COMMENT

A record of Aliran's complete press statements  
made in the preceding months

## Need For Open Exchange

The Executive Committee of Aliran wishes to thank Mr. Chan Kim Boon for his letter (Star 4th Jan. 85) extending support and good wishes to Aliran in our work.

We agree that there should be more open exchange of views on religious and cultural matters in this country, but with due regard for the inherent differences in beliefs and practices among the various faiths. As long ago as March 1980, Aliran had taken the initiative to hold a Seminar on Belief in God and its significance in a multi-religious society. The proceedings of this Seminar were subsequently published in our book 'One God, Many Paths' as a modest contribution to inter-religious dialogue.

Religious principles and practices which are rational and derived from basic ethical values should certainly be accepted by all ethnic groups in Malaysia. In fact Aliran has long advocated that common spiritual beliefs like the unity of all creation, the spiritual destiny of humankind and the supremacy of a moral order should be given due prominence in any multi-religious setting.

Similarly, the study of the main world religions would be a beneficial undertaking for enriching one's own religious experience. Perhaps a course in comparative religion could be introduced in our secondary school curriculum to promote inter-religious understanding.

As for intermarriages, one ought to bear in mind that the religious rules regarding conversion in intermarriages are not susceptible of 'adjustment' or debate. In any case intermarriages do not really help in enhancing national unity for the couples concerned rarely enter into their relationship on the basis of inter-religious understanding.

Finally we should mention that, while hoping for the best, Aliran does not carry out its work in the expectation of success or reward, at least not in the present circumstances.

Gan Teik Chee  
Secretary

11 January 1985



## Tambunan: A Reply to Berjaya

I am amazed by the utterly illogical reaction of Berjaya Secretary-General, Datuk Muhammad Noor Mansor, to our stand on Tambunan.

Does one have to visit a certain place before commenting on an issue in which the element of injustice is so apparent to all? If that is the case then Malaysian leaders should not condemn apartheid in South Africa, or Israeli aggression or the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Datuk Muhammad Noor should not try to camouflage the central issue by dragging in totally irrelevant points. A simple and straightforward principle is involved in the Tambunan case. The Berjaya state government has no right to withdraw governmental amenities from Tambunan. It is not just a question of denying development which is already a gross violation of an inherent right of a people. In this instance, the Berjaya leadership has gone even further by threatening to remove existing social facilities which are basic to the people's livelihood.

Berjaya's unparalleled vindictiveness strikes at the very heart of the democratic system. This is why all sorts of groups — including pro-establishment newspapers — have chosen to criticise the Sabah government's unjust, inhuman action.

For it is legitimate for all Malaysians to ask: if voters can be punished in this way, what is the point of having elections? If election in a democracy means offering democratic choices to the people, then how can the people be punished for exercising that choice? If such an obvious transgression of a fundamental democratic norm is left unchallenged, then it will only be a matter of time before the entire democratic process is in shambles.

Today it is Tambunan; tomorrow it may be Padang Terap; and the day after Tanjung or Damansara. This is why Aliran once again calls upon the Prime Minister to intervene in Tambunan on behalf of the people. One can understand if he wants to resolve the problem quietly. For what is involved is a recalcitrant party within the Barisan Nasional itself. But it is important that he acts to check this abuse of power without any delay. Otherwise, people's confidence in the Barisan Nasional government will be further eroded.

Aliran, for its part, will be watching the situation very carefully. It will be in active consultation with other public interest societies, political parties, trade unions and professional bodies to plan some form of collective, democratic action — if nothing is done to safeguard

the interests of the people of Tambunan in the next few weeks.

For we realize that Tambunan raises one of the most fundamental questions about the practice of democracy in Malaysia: Are those in power prepared to defend the integrity of the democratic system against the blatant authoritarianism of their own colleagues?

Chandra Muzaffar  
President

11 January 1985



## The Right Of Development

Aliran commends the stand taken by the Prime Minister in saying that the Barisan Nasional is committed to provide development and other infrastructure facilities to the people irrespective of their political inclinations. It is good that the Barisan Nasional makes clear to the public a commitment to be non-discriminatory in carrying out development projects regardless of the choice of electoral constituencies.

At the same time however, Aliran would like to re-affirm that the right to development is an intrinsic right of the people. It is not a privilege. It has to be recognised that people should benefit from roadworks, water and electricity supply and public transportation not because the ruling party decides to provide development but because the ruling party is fulfilling its primary duty in government which is to serve the citizens. Indeed the concept of an inherent right to development is embodied in the United Nations Declarations on Economic and Social Rights.

It is thus most unbecoming of representatives of the government in power to threaten voters in any way with the withdrawal or the withholding of development funds should voters reject the ruling party's candidate. It is plain that such an act would constitute the debasement of an inherent right of people into a lowly tool for political blackmail.

Some of this has happened in previous elections as well as in the present run-up to the Padang Terap by-election. A more graphic example is the abrogation of the district status of Tambunan. It is Aliran's fervent hope that any ruling party in future will not again resort to such political techniques so devoid of a sense of self-respect and ethics.

Tong Veng Wye  
Exco Member

13 January 1985



## The Role Of The Elections Commission

Aliran would like to see the Elections Commission play a more active role in the actual conduct of elections to the

House of Representatives and the Legislative Assemblies. This would be in line with its functions as specified in the Federal Constitution.

At the moment, the Commission seems to be more concerned with delimiting constituencies, preparing and revising electoral rolls and ensuring that procedures are followed on nomination day and on polling day. However, it is important that the Commission also oversees actual electoral campaigning. It is its responsibility to ensure that those involved in the campaigning do not bribe or blackmail voters. The Commission must also make sure that government machinery is not used for purposes of party campaigning. It is morally and legally wrong to do so.

The Elections Commission should not wait for affected groups or individuals to complain to it about electoral misconduct. It should act on its own initiative to ensure that elections are fair and honest.

In this connection, Aliran is perturbed to learn from the Minister of Information himself that the Information Department was mobilised to campaign for the Barisan Nasional candidate in the recent Padang Terap by-election. According to a report in a local daily, the New Straits Times, Friday, January 18, 1985, the Minister, Datuk Rais Yatim is alleged to have said, when asked about the chances of the Barisan Nasional candidate, "I am satisfied with the efforts carried out by the Information Department over the past two weeks. A total of 57,114 people took part in the department's activities like civics and information courses during the period". This is stark evidence of blatant abuse of governmental power.

As a citizens' group that is not part of electoral competition, Aliran feels that the people have every right to demand that the highest standards of morality be observed in the conduct of elections. Otherwise, the people will become even more cynical of the claim that we have a 'clean & trustworthy government'.

24 January 1985

Ang Boon Chong  
Exco Member



### The Industrial Master Plan

**A**liran hopes that the Industrial Master Plan that the government intends to launch in the middle of the year will be subjected to public discussion and debate before it is adopted as official policy. This is important since industrialization is going to play a very big role in the lives of our people in the years to come. The government should listen to the views of not just the big industrial and commercial groups but also trade unions, public interest societies and political parties.

In drawing up the industrial master plan, Aliran urges the government to give special attention to the development of a creative, innovative scientific spirit through a major transformation of the present curriculum in schools, colleges and universities. It is not just science curricula that will have to be changed; the methods of inquiry and analysis in all other subjects, including religious courses, will have to give greater emphasis to critical thinking.

Without a creative, innovative scientific spirit we will not be able to build up an autonomous scientific base. Without an autonomous scientific base, there can be no successful industrialisation.

At the same time, Aliran would like the Industrial Master Plan to incorporate ideas on appropriate technology, small and medium-sized industries, rural industrialization, food and agro-based industries and industries that serve the basic needs of the majority of the population.

29 January 1985

P. Ramakrishnan  
Exco Member

\* The above statement did not appear in any newspaper — editor.



### The Right To Basic Public Amenities And Social Facilities

**S**ince the government's power to provide basic amenities and developmental facilities is often used as a weapon to persuade or punish voters in elections, Aliran suggests that Parliament should, at its next sitting, resolve that 'every human being is entitled to basic public amenities and social facilities'. This should be guaranteed in part II of the Malaysian constitution under 'fundamental liberties'.

Aliran hopes that the cabinet would on its own initiate such an amendment to the constitution. It would be in harmony with the Prime Minister's recent declaration that opposition constituencies would not be discriminated against when it comes to development assistance.

There are 3 reasons why a clear, unambiguous article in the constitution pertaining to the right to basic public amenities is necessary.

**First**, it will serve as a sort of constitutional check against the pervasive tendency to bribe or blackmail voters during elections. Voters will now have a much stronger legal argument on their side if they have to challenge those who abuse their power in this manner.

**Second**, it could, in the long run, change the relationship between government and people from one that has obvious feudal overtones to one which has a distinguishable democratic tenor. The people will become more conscious

of their democratic rights just as the government will become more aware of its democratic responsibilities.

**Third**, it will help broaden our concept and practice of fundamental human rights. At the moment in our country, human rights is seen largely in terms of political, civil and cultural rights. The economic and social dimensions of human rights are equally important. By recognising the right to basic public amenities and social facilities as a fundamental right, we would also be much closer to the United Nations' own notion of human rights embodied in its various declarations and covenants. It would then be even more logical for us to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

For all these reasons, Aliran urges the government to present a Bill on 'The right to basic public amenities and social facilities' at the coming session of Parliament. It will show whether the government is prepared to place the people's welfare above party interests. It will be an indication of the extent to which the government is committed to ethical values and democratic principles.

31 January 1985

Chandra Muzaffar  
President



### Public Hearings For Important Bills

**I**t would indeed be laudable if there are public hearings for all important parliamentary Bills. A Bill should be considered important not only when it deals with aspects of the constitution or human rights but also when it is concerned with policy issues.

We should have held public hearings for a whole variety of issues of immense social significance which have now become deeply entrenched laws that cannot be amended in any way. This includes the Internal Security Act, the Trade Union Ordinance, the University & University Colleges Act, the Printing & Publications Act and the Civil Law Act.

In any case, if there are going to be public hearings for important Bills in future, the following considerations may be worth keeping in mind

1. The government should furnish the public with all relevant background data pertaining to a proposed piece of legislation so that the public can provide intelligent inputs to the parliamentary select committee.
2. The hearings should be truly public in the sense that any member of the public ought to have the opportunity to listen to submissions to the Select Committee by groups and individuals.
3. The media should give full coverage to the views submitted by the public to



the Select Committee.

4. All in all, a total of 4 months should be set aside for public participation in the formulation of a new law. This will encompass 2 months for public hearings and another 2 months for comment and scrutiny of various viewpoints through the media. Only at the end of this period, should the Bill be presented to Parliament for a second reading.
5. There should be no reluctance to discard the Bill completely or revise it extensively as a result of counter arguments put forward by the public. Public hearings would have no meaning if a proposed law is regarded as unchangeable however convincing the criticisms from the public might have been.

2 February 1985

**Chandra Muzaffar**  
President

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### Professionalism And The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA)

In an interview with Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chee Khoo (The Star 19 January 1985) Tan Sri Ahmad Nordin, Auditor-General heading the Committee of Inquiry into the BMF scandal expressed his view that if he had the full power he would revamp the Anti-Corruption

Agency (ACA) so that it could tackle the problem of corruption more effectively. In order to do this he said that it should be "equipped with professionalism in many fields, in many disciplines that is really necessary for it to be effective. You need people in many fields of expertise — commercial crime, accounting finance — in fact in every line of business in order to be effective".

Aliran supports the idea that the ACA should be staffed with professional people with expertise in various fields and disciplines to deal with corruption and sophisticated white-collar crime. The intricate nature of the BMF scandal is ample proof of how complicated cases of mismanagement and corruption can become. Mismanagement in Bank Rakyat and many of our public agencies too reveals the complexities involved in setting straight modern enterprises. It is only too obvious that without the skills of competent accountants, auditors, financial analysts and lawyers it would not have been possible to expose wrongdoings in these institutions. There are other instances that Aliran is aware of where combating corruption requires the specialised knowledge of engineers, surveyors and architects. This is why there is a need to bring in professionals and specialists into the ACA.

Towards this end, the government

should allocate more funds for the training of these professionals so that they would be more efficient in their trouble-shooting tasks.

At the moment, the allocation for the Anti-Corruption Agency is meagre. Though exact figures are not available, the lack of competent, skilled staff in Anti-Corruption Agency offices throughout the country is a reflection of the absence of emphasis upon this aspect of administration. It is worth observing, in this connection, that in the mid-term review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan, there isn't even mention of how effective the government has been in fighting corruption.

If the fight against corruption was supported by extensive financial and moral resources it would be possible to develop 3 types of training programmes aimed at enhancing professionalism in the ACA.

First, existing training programmes on combating white-collar crimes provided by the Police Department could be upgraded and expanded.

Second, ACA personnel could be sent for short-term and long-term diploma and degree courses at local universities which would increase their knowledge and understanding of white-collar crimes. For this ACA personnel should also be exposed to specific programmes in economics, sociology and political science.

Third, the ACA would be able to send some of its personnel abroad for courses connected with corruption control. The Scandinavian countries and Britain are reputed to have good facilities in this field.

Apart from training programmes, an adequate budget would also enable the ACA to recruit much-needed professionals without any problem.

It is Aliran's hope that the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986-1990) will contain a sizeable allocation for the unending fight against corruption.

2 February 1985

**Mohammad Kadir**  
Exco Member

I have come to regard secrecy as a sin . . . If we realised the presence of God as witness to all we say and do, we would not have anything to conceal from anybody on earth. For we would not think unclean thoughts before our Maker, much less speak them. It is uncleanness that seeks secrecy and darkness. The tendency of human nature is to hide dirt; we do not want to see or touch dirty things; we want to put them out of sight. And so must it be with our speech. I would suggest that we should avoid even thinking thoughts we would hide from the world.

Quoted from the book "The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi".

# Thinking Allowed

A closer look at what people say and do the world over



**S**abah Chief Minister Harris Salleh recently alleged that there were "some people" who, through the newspapers in Peninsular Malaysia, were plotting to destroy Berjaya and topple the Sabah State government.

This tirade not only aroused the resentment of many of the Peninsular Malaysian journalists but also caused the Sabah Press Club Vice-President, Encik Emin Madi, to criticise his peninsular peers for trying "to drag Sabah reporters into their quarrel with Berjaya".

This criticism was also in response to another allegation that the Sabah reporters were toeing the Sabah government's line. Which probably compelled Emin to retort: "The freedom of the press in Sabah is no different from that in the peninsular."

One cannot help but ask: What really is Encik Emin trying to say as far as press



Drawing by Nôit Galang

freedom is concerned? Perhaps his peninsular friends could help us in showing the difference, if any.

Perhaps, Emin is right after all. Perhaps, there is no difference. Perhaps, the Sabah press, like the peninsular press, is made up of creepers, by and large. This is why a most relevant journalism course in Malaysian universities would be on **creepology**.

**C**ooperative societies, advised Deputy National and Rural Development Minister Datuk Mohamed Yahya Lampong, must get the aid of experts, think big and do big if they want to be effective and to expand.

There may be a danger to this big-thinking. It might just create some big-headed cooperatives that are not sensitive to the needs of their ordinary members. Besides, expanding and going all out for bigger profits need not necessarily benefit the ordinary members. It might just mean bigger bureaucracy.

In other words, doing it big doesn't necessarily lead to better things. It could also bring us a billion-dollar bungle.

**R**etiring Director General of Education says that students abroad on government scholarships who criticize the government are disloyal to the nation.

What a pity that such an "educated" man should hold such an "uneducated" view. It just goes to show that even if you have been "directing" education for years and years you can still remain "uneducated" in some important matters.

**F**eminists who can be depressed by earlier statements of our political leaders as regards their status at home, take heart.

Neyri Sembilan Menteri Besar Datuk Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad recently urged women holding key posts in the Government and private sector to prove "their capabilities so that all women could benefit".

This really is a fresh breeze — after months of newspaper reports padded with government leaders' calls to women to dedicate themselves to bringing up the

family and the husband.

Indeed, women's capabilities shouldn't be confined only to the four walls of the home, but should also be spread out to other areas of social significance.

★★★  
**P**AS held a symposium recently on national unity. It was held at the Chinese Assembly Hall and some Chinese was used both in the banner outside the Hall and in the proceedings.

UMNO officials and the unofficial UMNO organ — Utusan Malaysia — went all out to discredit PAS. They mounted a communal attack which was vulgar, crude and coarse. And yet, these politicians and their stooges in the media talk of 'Islamization'. Don't they realize that holding a meeting in a Chinese Assembly Hall or using the Chinese language is, in no way, against Islamic values which are universal?

And so, you have a situation where on the one hand, PAS is accused of being 'anti-national unity', 'extremist', 'racist' and the rest, and yet, when it tries to reach out to the other religious communities, it continues to be criticised for betraying the Malays, for threatening Malay sovereignty.

It is a classic case of 'Heads I win tails you lose'. This is what happens when power has gone to your head and principles have disappeared through your tail.

★★★  
**C**ongratulations to David Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister who defied the bullying gestures of that mighty superpower, the United States. He defended a moral principle through deeds not words.

Lange is reputed to be a devout Methodist. His action reflects the best in spiritual values. This is what we expect of those who "affirm the presence of God".

He is so unlike others who proclaim all the while their morality and religiosity through all the external symbols and rituals. They say they stand firm on moral principles — so firm that they finally trample on them.

Mustafa Anuar