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Of Secrets, Volvos and Public Accountability

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Of Secrets, Volvos and Public Accountability

Democratic Right Under Threat

Just when investigative journalism has found a little courage to be true to its profession, newspaper reporters are reminded of the existence of the OSA and the dire consequences that would befall on those who fall foul of the law. In this article, MUSTAFA K ANUAR argues for a Freedom of Information Act to replace the OSA.

The controversial issue of 22 Volvo cars being purchased by Tan Sri Elyas Omar's Kuala Lumpur City Hall and the subsequent resignation of the mayor himself is in one sense a sad commentary of the curious and seemingly incurable obsession that many high government officials in the



Elyas Omar: Symbol of power is a sleek Volvo?

country have with expensive, big cars. It is as if the height of their positions in government must be matched with, or glaringly indicated by, the size of their official cars. These officials, it appears, are not easily driven by the motors of modesty and moderation.

In another sense, more important and serious, this episode has once again brought to the fore the contentiousness of the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and, consequently, the vital question of public accountability of government administration, and of democracy in general.

For one thing, the Volvo issue clearly shows that the OSA really has too broad and vague a definition of "Official Secrets" that can only be injurious to citizens' democratic right to information. Surely the buying of these expensive cars cannot, and should not, be conveniently given the stamp of "Official Secret" as the taxpaying rakyat are entitled to know how their money is being spent by government departments such as the Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

Besides, it is hard to visualize how such a disclosure can threaten, if at all, national interest and security which the OSA was originally meant to protect. One can only surmise that the only interests at stake here are those of the City Hall officials concerned - i.e., they might not get to keep and flaunt their vibrant Volvos.

Of course, the Government had given the assurance that it will take action if wrongdoings

such as financial mismanagement are found in the administration. But the manner in which this case was being handled somewhat belies this assurance. For instead of swiftly acting on those who were responsible in the questionable purchase of the expensive cars, the Government was quick to reprimand the conscientious civil servants (who "leaked" the information) and even threatened to use the OSA against them.

The Opposition, certain sections of the Malaysian press, and other concerned citizens were equally warned of the dire consequences of getting and publicising this sort of information. True, as the law now stands, these people can be considered as contravening the OSA if they persistently look for such information, and hence "guilty" of trying to right a wrong.

Herein, as already implied earlier, lies the nub of the matter. For as long as the OSA remains in the statute book and in its present form, the task of making the Government as a whole more accountable to the people becomes an arduous one. This argument, to be sure, is not new. For this point had been raised vehemently by those people who protested against the amendment to the OSA in 1986.

The protesters of the amended OSA felt, and still do, that nearly all information about all Government activities are "protected" from public scrutiny by the catch-all provisions of the Act. In addition, they are also disturbed by the fact that no



The OSA is inclined to creating a culture of rumour-mongering.

safeguard exists against over-zealousness in classifying any particular information as "Secret".

Not that we don't appreciate the need for strict confidentiality of certain information that really relates to the country's interest and security. But there certainly is a case for a clear guideline as to what kinds of information that constitute Official Secrets. Also for the common good of the Malaysian people, there is a need to impose a particular time duration or frame upon certain secrets to be classified Official Secrets, after which any interested individual can have access to these data.

Looked at in another way, the OSA can go a long way towards obstructing the noble objective of creating a caring society. Civil servants, journalists and other concerned Malaysians who are not only conscientious but also deeply care for the overall welfare of the country will not be able to effectively assume this responsibility. The OSA, in other words, can encourage Malaysians to be lackadaisical, care-free about their own society and, worse even, selfish and may well send the wrong signal that it's fairly alright to indulge in certain misdeeds.

To expose wrongdoings - and subsequently help put things

right - is the duty of everyone. Indeed, this is very much in line with the philosophies of the major religions in the world. Taking Islam as an example, since it has been the Government's commitment to infuse Islamic values in the administration, the establishment of all that is right (*alma'ruf*) and the elimination of all that is wrong (*almunkar*) is the sacred duty of everyone, including rulers and the ruled. The Holy Quran recommends that everyone should fight for what is right (Surah Al-Haji [2] Verse 41; Surah Al-Imran [3] Verse 10).

It is therefore heartening to learn that the Government is concerned about mismanagement, scandals, etc. in the administration. However, past incidents and cases involving financial scandals in Malaysia did not lend enough credence to the Government's professed commitment.

One only has to remember cases such as the BMF scandal, the Maminco mystery, and the recent Telekom-Maika Holdings share issues controversy, to name but a few. In most of these financial controversies, it usually took individuals and/or groups outside the Government to spearhead the revelation of such misdeeds.

Indeed, such a political culture is not unique to Malaysia alone. Elsewhere, the United States in particular, scandals such as the Watergate and the Iran-gate affairs couldn't have reached the public domain had it not been for the investigations and inquiries done by journalists, other individuals and non-governmental groups. In short, it is fair to argue that it is rather naive to assume that governments, whether in the US, Britain, Japan, India etc., would take the leading role in revealing mismanagements committed in their own administrations. Hence, if we may repeat here, it is essential that individuals and groups outside government have access to important information.

Another implication arising from the use of the OSA is the cultivation of an unhealthy culture of rumour-mongering and wild speculations. Of course, this is not to say that without the OSA rumours will be eradicated. But it will certainly reduce the number of rumour mills and, more importantly, will encourage people in general to be more cautious, prudent and accountable.

Finally, in our desire for better public accountability and serious commitment to democratic-practices in our society, we would urge that the vague OSA be replaced with a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The making of this law (FOIA) would in essence ensure that the public gets information about the activities of government departments and public authorities. In addition, this right will give the Malaysian public access to information held by ministers, departments and public authorities except such information that must be kept secret in the real interest of the public. □

Malaysian Educational Reforms: Change For The Better?

Recently our educational system has seen many suggestions for reforms, some of which have been implemented. MOLLY LEE, a lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia, analyses the rationale behind these reforms and assesses their advantages and disadvantages.



When schools started for the new school year last December, there was a lot of confusion especially among the Form Four pupils for they were not sure which class they were being assigned to by their schools. This confusion arose because for the first time Malaysian schools are doing away with the Science and Arts streams at the upper secondary level. This is just one of the many reforms that have been introduced into our educational system since the release of the Cabinet Committee Report in November, 1979. This article is a critical review of some of these educational reforms - analysing their rationale and innovative features, highlighting both their intended and unintended outcomes.

The educational reforms can be divided into structural changes and curriculum changes. The structural changes involve the number of years of schooling at each educational level and the

Much needs to be done on the part of the school to effect actual changes in the educational experiences of the pupils.

type of examinations one has to pass before one moves up the educational ladder; whereas curriculum changes involve the types of learning experiences, such as subjects and co-curriculum activities, that are offered in the schools. We shall examine first the structural changes and then the curriculum changes.

Structural Changes

One of the main recommendations in the Cabinet Committee Report is to extend the number of years of basic education from 9 to 11 years for every child in the country. While, in the past, a child was guaranteed a place in the school system from

Primary One to Form Three, now he/she can go all the way to Form Five.

This new policy brought about several changes. Firstly, the Sijil Rendah Peperiksaan (SRP) examination taken at the end of Form Three is no longer selective. In other words, every child is entitled to be promoted to Form Four no matter what his/her SRP results were. This reform implies that the government would have to ensure there are enough school places and teachers to accommodate the increased number of pupils entering the upper secondary level.

Secondly, starting from 1992, pupils are no longer placed in the Science or Arts streams. Instead,



pupils who have undergone KBSR are more expressive, articulate and active ...

they are allowed to choose any combination of subjects they like for the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM) examination to be taken at the end of Form Five. The abolishment of the Science and Arts streams at the upper secondary level is aimed at the removal of "early specialization" in our school system. This reform is in line with the national educational philosophy which stresses the importance of an all-rounded development for the individual.

Before this particular reform can be effective, each school has to ensure that their pupils are given the freedom to choose any combination of subjects for their SPM examination. However, in practice, many schools are restricting their students to only certain combination of subjects due to time-tabling constraints and shortage of certain subject

teachers. To overcome this problem, schools would have to break away from the rigidity of common time-tabling practices, such as scheduling a fixed time-table for a particular class, a fixed number of periods for a particular subject, and a 40-minute period. Instead, schools may have to be innovative in scheduling their lessons such that several parallel sessions are going on at the same time, and pupils with different subject combinations can draw up their own time-tables for the week. This may imply that the lessons do not necessary have to be slotted into 40-minute periods, and that a particular lesson is taught once only. Unless the schools are prepared to question their taken-for-granted practices, not much change is going to take place. Much needs to be done on the part of the school to

effect actual changes in the educational experiences of the pupils.

Curriculum Changes

(i) KBSR

Another important recommendation in the Cabinet Committee Report is to revamp the primary school curriculum so that more emphasis be given to the teaching and learning of the basic skills - reading, writing and arithmetic (3M - membaca, menulis, mengira). In 1983, the new primary school curriculum (KBSR) was implemented in all schools, bringing about several curriculum changes. Among these changes, a major part of the school time is spent on the basic skills (70% in Primary I-III, 52% in Primary IV-VI); subjects like science, geography, history and civics are all taught under an integrated subject called "Man and His Environment"; moral education is compulsory for all non-Muslim pupils while Muslim pupils are taught Islamic studies.

The rationale for this new curriculum is to avoid overloading the school child with academic content, but rather focus on the development of communicative skills and high moral values. However, many parents, especially those from the urban areas, do view this reform with dissatisfaction because they feel that this curriculum is not challenging or demanding enough for their children. The common defence against such criticism is that the new curriculum provides for both weak and good pupils in the form of remedial and enrichment teaching. But again, in practice, many teachers for various reasons seldom carry out either remedial or enrichment teaching in their classes. A positive outcome of this reform, as several studies have shown, pupils who have undergone KBSR are more



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expressive, articulate and active in class.

(ii) KBSM

In 1988, as a continuation of the curriculum reform, the integrated secondary school curriculum (KBSM) was introduced to the secondary schools, starting at Form I. The KBSM has several innovative features and one of them is the teaching of moral values (*nilai-nilai murni*) across the school curriculum. The underlying assumption is that there is a set of universal values which are deemed as essential for the moral development of an individual, and these values are:- good-heartedness, dedication, courtesy, respect, love, justice, freedom, courage, mental and physical cleanliness, honesty, diligence, cooperation, moderation, gratitude, rationality and social consciousness.

The new curriculum requires the teacher to incorporate some of these values in each of his/her

lessons, no matter what subject he/she is teaching.

The intention of this curriculum approach may be acceptable to many, but one does question the pedagogical approach used here. How effective could a 5-10 minute lesson of moral values be, especially if it is taught by a teacher who does not subscribe to the selected values?

A more effective approach to moral education might be through role modelling of teachers' behaviour. Schools have been credited for socializing their pupils to certain norms and values through their "hidden curriculum" rather than through the overt curriculum.

Another innovative feature of the KBSM is the teaching of Living Skills (*Kemahiran Hidup*) to all secondary pupils. This part of the secondary school curriculum consists of several components, such as manipulative skills, commerce and

entrepreneurship, agricultural science, domestic science and family education. Except for manipulative skills and family education, the rest of the components were previously taught as elective subjects in the lower secondary school curriculum.

The rationale of teaching Living Skills to all secondary pupils lies in the belief that school children need to be taught to function effectively in a society that is fast becoming highly technological. Under manipulative skills, pupils are taught basic technical skills like repairing simple electrical gadgets, metal and woodwork, plumbing and others. The aim is to train pupils to be self-reliant when it comes to basic skills needed to perform simple household chores.

While some educators view this reform as a welcome move, I am of the opinion that our schools should be left to do what they are supposed to do and what they do well, that is, to provide a general academic education.

If we are not careful, our schools may end up having to teach all sorts of skills, including driving lessons (as suggested by one renowned local educator), at the expense of intellectual and thinking skills.

At this point, one has to question what are the priorities of our schools, considering that the number of years of schooling for many is limited to 11 years. Why should schools be required to teach skills that can be learned elsewhere? This is a classic example where the school is expected to overcome any shortcomings found in the society, to the extent that its conventional role is being neglected.

In conclusion, we may have witnessed many educational reforms in our school system but not all reforms are changes for the better. ♦

The Disabled in Malaysia: From Social Welfare to People's Movement

In this article, DENISON JAYASOORIA of Malaysian CARE and GODFREY OOI of the Malaysian Association for the Blind trace the development of the disabled peoples movement through its various phases. From humble beginnings which saw voluntary social work by missionaries in the early 20th century, there has emerged a genuine peoples movement which involves the disabled in the issues affecting them.

Social work among the disabled in Malaya can be traced back to the voluntary attempts by Christian missionaries in the early 20th century. The Sisters of the Infant Jesus responded to the social need of abandoned children among whom were handicapped babies. In 1911 they established the Home for the Handicapped. Following this Anglican medical missionaries established the St Nicholas home for the blind in 1926.

1940-1960: Institutionalized Relief

The colonial rulers only recognized their role after the

Second World War and provided 'institutional relief' for persons disabled through chronic illness, blindness and loss of limbs. The period between 1940s - 1960s saw the growth of both State and voluntary provisions for disabled persons. Organized social work developed with the setting up of the Department of Social Welfare in 1946 whose principle duty was "the care of the crippled, blind and feeble-minded".

One of its earliest projects was the establishment of the Jubilee Home in 1953, a residential centre catering for not only the severely mentally handicapped but also the physically handicapped and multiple handicapped children.

In the same year a 'Central Welfare Council' was established "to foster voluntary effort on the part of local welfare and charitable organizations and to achieve some coordination of effort". "The government encouraged voluntary effort, as it was evident that all needs could not be adequately met and sustained solely through statutory involvement." Voluntary attempts include the Malaysian Association for the Blind (1951), the Spastic Centre (1960), the National Society for the Deaf (1961), Cheshire Home (1964) and the Bethany Home for Epileptic Children (1966).

These attempts by State authorities and voluntary associations are indeed commendable. Work for the disabled

during this period can be said to be characterized in the following three ways.

Firstly, these avenues encouraged the wider community to take responsibility for affected individuals and families. They were the attempts by non-disabled persons to organize for disabled persons.

Secondly, these attempts were motivated by common good and an ideology based on charity and goodwill. It provided relief and assistance without which the disabled would have been totally neglected.

Thirdly, it was institutional care or custodial care. Although it provided residential care, educational and vocational training, due to the institutional character of its service the disabled were segregated from the mainstream of society. By the 1960s a deinstitutionalization strategy was introduced. For example, the blind were integrated into sighted schools and by 1985 community based rehabilitation programmes were introduced both by the government and voluntary agencies.

1960-1980: Emergence of Disabled People's Movements; Growing Awareness

These charitable attempts however, did not empower the disabled for participation in decision making, policy formulation, resource allocation



With education, the disabled became aware of their rights.

and service provisions. Because disability was viewed from a medical perspective, disabled persons were looked upon as recipients of the services and the providers of these services did not prepare nor take into account the need of the disabled to be involved in the decision making process. Consequently, the sixties saw the emergence of disabled people's movements which challenged the traditional approach to welfare provisions that isolated their participation.

In fact it was in the 1960s that "a group comprising mainly ex-students of St Nicholas clamoured for the rights to have a say in how things were being run for the blind by organizations serving their needs. When attempts to get into the decision making process of such organizations failed, they decided to set up their own organization now known as the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM)."

Following this trend the 70s and 80s saw the establishment of specific disability related groups by disabled persons themselves, namely the Society of the Orthopaedically Disabled

(POCAM) (1976), the Society of Chinese Disabled Persons, Malaysia (SCDPM) (1977) and the Society of the Hearing Impaired, Malaysia (SHIMA) (1987).

It is without doubt the decade of the 60s and 70s saw a growing awareness among disabled persons. Its development can be traced in three stages.

Firstly, the disabled became aware of their rights. This was probably the result of some of the disabled having been given an opportunity to receive education which provided an impetus for the development of self-consciousness. This led them to articulate for themselves their needs, frustrations and aspirations.

Secondly, they realized that they had a role to play in the planning of the work for the disabled. However they felt a sense of frustration in not being able to play this role because of the paternalistic orientation prevalent in the existing charities.

Thirdly, as a result of their exclusion from the existing structures they became aware

that the only way out was to organize themselves. In so doing they were able to play a constructive role in society and thus regain their self-respect and dignity. The changes taking place internationally also had an impact in mobilizing them. For example the blind were challenged by the example set by the National Federation of the Blind (USA) and its Braille Monitor.

The 1980s: Further Development of Joint Action

The 80s saw a further development of joint action among organized and informal groups of disabled persons. Undoubtedly, the International Year for Disabled Persons, 1981 (IYDP) had a tremendous impact. The IYDP and the UN Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) helped to legitimize the concerns of the disabled.

The most significant development was the setting up of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) in 1985. The MCD is a body comprising organizations of the disabled namely the SBM, POCAM, the SCDPM and SHIMA (having observer status with the view of becoming members soon). The MCD is a member of Disabled Peoples International (DPI). "This joint cooperation and solidarity has given many of the blind and other disabled persons a more direct link with the government and a more accessible forum to deal with problems and challenges affecting them".

Disabled persons now have a vehicle to express their view and take joint action. "The MCD is playing a significant role making representations on behalf of disabled persons. Some of their in-

volvement included, submissions to the government of a Memorandum on Access to Public Facilities (21 July 1988). This has resulted in the proposed amendments to the Uniform Building by Law (1984), representation on the Advisory committee on the welfare of the disabled, the representation on the Committee to promote employment opportunities for the disabled”.

The Present: Involvement in Issues Affecting the Disabled

The end of the 80s and the beginning of the 1990s saw the involvement of disabled persons in issues concerning their welfare and future.

Joint action was taken by seven organizations for and of the disabled to prepare a memorandum which was presented to the National Economic Consultative Council in 1989. This document was entitled 'Beyond '1990, equal opportunities for the disabled'. "It is intended that this document serve as an initial guide in developing a national policy that will provide equal opportunities for the disabled and allow for their full participation in nation building". It is however sad to note that a majority of the organizations for disabled people have not integrated disabled persons into the decision making process. We look with great anticipation that more charities will develop a plan of action which will include participation of disabled persons in the decision making process.

A negative trend we have noted is that even some of the organizations of disabled persons are perceived by grass roots disabled organizations as being elitist. Due to their organizational structure and personality differences, organizations of

disabled persons fall in the danger of limiting the participation of grass roots disabled persons. However the MCD is trying to remedy this by introducing the MCD Interaction Committee to organize joint programmes for the grass roots. In spite of this, some disabled persons in order to meet this lack have formed informal groups. This will have positive effects in the long run as more disabled persons are beginning to develop their leadership skills. We hope that in the 1990s there will be a greater consolidation and cooperation among the various groups for the betterment of the disabled.

Parents of disabled persons (especially those with learning difficulties) are beginning to come together to take an active involvement. Discussions are taking place for the registration of a Selangor/FT Parents Support Group. Currently parents support groups have been set up as being part of a charity. This new move in setting up a support group independent of a charity will provide a forum for parents to play a dynamic role especially in advocating changes, influencing policies and requesting increased resource allocations.

A stand was taken on 22 July 1990 by about 100 handicapped people who staged a solidarity rally to "welcome the government's proposal to amend the Uniform Building By-Laws (1984) to provide facilities for them in all public buildings." Disabled persons have made a public stand to be counted. This was a peaceful demonstration. Too often in Malaysia, many fear to make a public stand as this act might be misconstrued as political action. What is striking is the "non party politics" approach of disabled persons who are seeking to exercise their citizenship rights.

This development is parallel to the emergence of many new social movements. "These movements have been seen as constituting the social basis for new forms of transformative political action and change. These social movements are new in the sense that they are not grounded in traditional forms of political participation through the party system or single-issue pressure group activity targeted at political decision-makers. Instead, they are culturally innovative in that they are part of the underlying struggles for genuine participatory democracy, social equality and justice, which have risen out of 'the crisis in industrial culture'. These new social movements are consciously engaged in critical evaluation of capitalist society and in the creation of alternative models of social organization at local, national and international levels, as well as trying to reconstruct the world ideologically and to create alternative forms of service provision."♦

**EITHER
I WILL
FIND A
WAY OR
I WILL
MAKE
ONE**

Sir Philip Sidney

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Tragedy And The Challenge To The Tragedy

In the article below CHANDRA MUZAFFAR explores the tragedy of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He discusses how ultra Serbian chauvinism emanating from Belgrade has ruptured relations between Muslims and Croats on the one hand and Serbs on the other. The result is "ethnic cleansing", an ethnic pogrom of the vilest kind.

The second part of the article discusses the world's, in particular Europe's, response to the tragedy thus far. The extent to which this response - which does not equal the enormity of the tragedy whatsoever - stems from Europe's deep-rooted prejudice towards Islam and Muslim is explored.

The author ends with a call to Europe to act rapidly to stop the carnage which is primarily its responsibility. In so doing Europe might also cleanse its "polluted soul" ridding itself of "at least a bit of the ethnic prejudice and racism accumulated through the subjugation and subordination of the rest of humankind."

Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the most tragic examples in history of how unbridled chauvinism has resulted in the wanton massacre of an entire community. It is the relentless drive to create an "ethnically pure Greater Serbia" which has led to Serbian action against the Bosnians.

For a long while now, Serbians, driven by this chauvinistic dream, have seen the Muslims of the Balkans as a stumbling-block. Way back in 1941, Serbs massacred Muslims in the infamous Foca incident. This was followed by widespread rampages directed against entire

Muslim villages. According to some sources, at least 100,000 Muslim peasants were killed in those rampages. During the Balkan wars between 1912 and 1914 a lot of Muslims were also slaughtered. In fact, as Ottoman (Turkish Muslim) rule declined in the Balkans during the 19th century, Serbs began to vent their wrath against the Muslims.

It has been said that Serbian resentment towards the Muslims has been conditioned - to some extent at least - by the Turkish conquest of the Balkans which began with the battle of Kosovo of 1389. In that battle, the Turks defeated the Serbs.

But though the Ottoman Turks came as conquerors, Turkish rule over the Balkans was, by and large, benevolent. For almost five centuries - notwithstanding intermittent conflicts - there was tremendous ethnic harmony and religious amity. Huge communities of Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Jews maintained, and even strengthened their religious and cultural identities, in the midst of a Muslim empire. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire has been described as one of the most successful experiments in multi-faith living.

It was this legacy which was partly responsible for the multi-ethnic harmony in Bosnia, and its historic capital of Sarajevo, until recent times. Bosnia - 50 per cent of its population Muslim, another 30 per cent Serbian (Orthodox Christian) and the remaining 20 per cent Croatian (Catholic) - was for decades free of any form of ethnic chauvinism or religious extremism.

In the last few years however, ultra Serbian chauvinism in the guise of Communist orthodoxy, emanating from Belgrade, the capital of the demised Yugoslavia, has ruptured relations between Muslims and Croats, on the one hand, and Serbs, on the other. The champion of Serbian chauvinism is the present President of Serbia Slobodan Milosevic who is backed by the Serbian dominated Yugoslav army. It is this army acting



Displaced Bosnians have created a horrendous refugee problem unprecedented in modern times.

through the many vigilante groups it has established among the Serbs of Bosnia which is the main culprit behind the slaughter. It has been estimated that about 6,000 helpless, defenceless Bosnians have been killed since the state declared its independence in a referendum on 1 March 1992. More than a million Bosnians have been forced to flee their homeland - thus creating one of the most horrendous refugee problems in modern history.

Though the majority of those who have been forced to pay the price for freedom in Bosnia-Herzegovina are Muslims, Catholic Croats, it must be stressed, have not been spared either. Indeed, Catholics and Muslims had worked together to ensure a 65 per cent vote for independence in the referendum. As punishment, the Serbian army and vigilantes have attacked Catholic churches inasmuch as they have destroyed Muslim mosques. The St. Vincent Church, the oldest in

Sarajevo, was shelled; so was the Begova Mosque, the largest in the capital.

Perhaps the death, the destruction and the dislocation which threaten the very survival of Bosnia today could have been averted if the West, which has some leverage over the Serbian leadership, and the international community, as a whole, had acted with a greater sense of urgency and determination a few months ago. It was obvious two years ago, as the Yugoslav Federation began to crack up, that Serbian chauvinism would rear its ugly head. The military moves of the Serbian leadership against Croatia when it declared its independence last year should have convinced the European community and the United States that decisive action was needed to protect the independent states that were emerging from the collapsing Federation. As soon as Serbia and the Serbs within Bosnia challenged, militarily, the voice of the majority of Bosnians

expressed through the March referendum, the United Nations should have been asked to impose economic sanctions against Serbia. If the Western powers want a New World Order founded upon human rights and democratic principles, Bosnia - rather than Kuwait - could have provided them with the best opportunity to demonstrate their sincerity. For the people of Bosnia had expressed their choice - for independence - in the most democratic manner possible: through a referendum. But the West did not adopt any firm measures to protect Bosnia in the initial period. It was only when the senseless slaughter of unarmed civilians became totally scandalous that Europe and the US began to move. The reason is simple. Bosnia, unlike Kuwait, is of no strategic value to the West.

It is not just the Western attitude which is disappointing. The Organization of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) response to the Bosnian tragedy is even more shameful. It is only now, after months of murder and mayhem, that the OIC is asking for UN military action against Serbia, if economic sanctions fail. The non-aligned movement's response has been so ambivalent that it has been ignored by all and sundry.

The agony and anguish of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina whose only "crime" is their cry for freedom is a grim reminder to all of us of the pathetic character of present international organizations. It is a dire warning to all of us about the orientation and direction of the present global system. The message is clear: expect no justice from a system which emphasises selfish national, regional and big power interests at the expense of human life and human dignity. □

Challenge To The Conscience Of Europe

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a challenge to Europe's conscience. It puts to the test Europe's - and indeed the West's - much professed commitment to freedom and human rights, to multi-culturalism and ethnic harmony.

Now is the time to prove that Europe's word is Europe's deed. Sarajevo is the place where the sincerity - or the hypocrisy - of all those lofty ideals, of all those sublime values, which Western civilization claims to represent



Europe faces a challenge to its human rights stand even as atrocities are played out in Bosnia.

would be established once and for all.

There are many, many reasons why Europe's ability to put an end to Serbian aggression against the helpless, defenceless people of Bosnia-Herzegovina will determine the character and integrity of that civilization.

One, from all accounts, what is taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina is 'ethnic cleansing', a euphemism, as it were, for an ethnic pogrom of the vilest kind. More than two generations ago, Europe went through another

ethnic pogrom. 6 million Jews, 5 million Protestants, 3 million Catholics and half a million gypsies were slaughtered. Today, it is the turn of Catholics and Muslims. What sort of civilization is it which can allow such a merciless massacre to happen again? And, as in the past, Europe dithers, it vacillates when faced with such a colossal crime against humanity.

Two, it is an irrefutable fact that in terms of its sheer magnitude alone - 20,000 killed in Croatia earlier, now 50,000 killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina - the Serbian slaughter is the worst human rights violation in Europe since the Second World War. What is at stake is the most precious of all human rights - the right to life. It is not just lives which have been lost. Thousands and thousands of women and even young girls have been raped and ravaged. Tens of thousands of others have been maimed and mutilated. Homes have been destroyed; properties confiscated; entire communities wiped out. It is an ethnocide which has created the biggest refugee exodus in Europe in recent decades. About 2 million Croats and Bosnians are now homeless.

Though governments and human rights groups in Europe have tried to address specific aspects of this terrible assault on human dignity, their response somehow does not equal the enormity of the tragedy. For countries which regard respect for human rights as the fundamental criterion of civilized conduct, they have failed to rise to the occasion. Human rights groups whose anger and indignation

know no bounds when some dissident is executed in Rwanda or some critic is tortured in Lesotho, have not translated their moral outrage into concrete action in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. (There are, of course, some notable exceptions whose courage and humanity are exemplary). Is it because the culprits this time are Europeans that there is some reluctance to mobilise the masses in the name of human rights and human freedom?

Three, Europe should act with vigour and determination because Bosnia-Herzegovina involves yet another principle so important to human rights and democracy. Serbian aggression is an attempt to negate by force the will of the majority of the people. The use of force to resolve conflicts is a repudiation of all the values and principles that democracy stands for. European governments have often condemned the use of force in other situations. When it happens within Europe, in such a crude, vulgar manner, one would expect ardent advocates of democracy to act swiftly and decisively.

Four, if anything, there is an added reason for acting decisively in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. For 65 per cent of the voting population of the state expressed their desire for independence through one of the most democratic modes of expression conceivable - a referendum. It was such a referendum that the European Community (EC) itself demanded as a condition for recognising Bosnia-Herzegovina's independence.

And yet the EC, with all its hallowed democratic traditions, is not prepared to stop the brutal suppression of that voice of freedom.

Five, that voice of freedom from Bosnia-Herzegovina has a special resonance to it because of what it means to ethnic relations in Europe. It is, to a large extent, the voice of a community which is emerging as the most significant ethnic minority in most European countries. That is why how Europe treats Bosnia-Herzegovina with a Muslim population at its core, is going to be a crucial factor in setting the tone and temper of majority-minority ties all over the continent. After Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslim minorities in other parts of Europe may lose whatever little faith they had in the ability of their governments to ensure justice and fairplay. Indeed, since many of these minorities have non-European origins, they may come to the conclusion that there is no hope for them, when even an ethnic European Muslim community like the Bosnians can be subjected to such horrendous indignities.

Six, the urgent need to demonstrate to the Muslims of Europe and the world, through Bosnia-Herzegovina, that Europe is capable of justice is underscored by a certain phenomenon associated with European history. For more than 1,200 years, the most influential and authoritative sections of European society, have displayed tremendous antagonism towards Islam and the Muslims. As the scholar-diplomat Erskine B. Childers puts it in a recent essay, "the Western 'view' of Islam and the Arabs in the late twentieth century still consists of little more than fear, antagonism, stereotypes and deep prejudice." If, right from the outset, Europe and the West had adopted a prin-



Serb militia: Europe has the power to stop the carnage, but has it enough will?

cipled approach to Bosnia-Herzegovina, they would have convinced a lot of people that they are beginning to overcome some of their hatred and bias towards a religious civilization to which they owe such an immense intellectual debt.

Seven, attempting to liberate Europe from prejudice against Islam is vital to the larger process of freeing the European mind from ethnocentrism and racism. Bosnia-Herzegovina is, in a sense, an indication of how influential such attitudes still are in conditioning the European response to "the other". Since the Muslim has always been perceived as "the other", important segments of Europe have remained ambivalent about how Muslim culture and identity should be accommodated within the continent. This ambivalence is partly responsible for the continuing agony of ethnic European Muslims in not only Bosnia-Herzegovina but also in the rest of the Balkans.

But to change the European attitude towards the Muslim in their midst, one has to transform

their more general outlook on 'the other'. This is no easy task. For long centuries of colonial domination - perpetuated in newer forms in the contemporary world - have created in the European psyche a certain notion of superiority. This feeling of superiority is always accompanied by the view that the cultures and civilizations of "the other" are invariably inferior. It is this notion of superiority clothed in theories about biological links between appearance and ability, physiognomy and culture, which laid the basis of racism. This is why racism, as a 1989 United Nations study on racism and racial discrimination shows "is a European invention dating less than 300 years back. It coincided with the European explorations of other continents of the world, and their encounter with peoples which differed from themselves both in appearance and in culture."

Herein lies the significance of Bosnia-Herzegovina. A just solution to its sufferings is important for Europe itself. It is a way of cleansing its polluted soul. It would be a catharsis of sorts, a chance of getting rid of at least a bit of the ethnic prejudice and racism accumulated through the subjugation and subordination of the rest of humankind.

For all these reasons then Europe must move on Bosnia-Herzegovina. What this means is that Europe should use force to bring to an end the barbaric Serbian ethnocide. There appears to be no other way. Europe has the legitimate authority to do so since everyone acknowledges that Bosnia-Herzegovina is first and foremost a European problem. It is therefore the region's responsibility to stop the carnage. Europe has also the means to do so. But does it have the will? □

LETTERS

We welcome letters from readers. These letters may be edited for purposes of space and clarity. The views may not be those of Aliran Monthly. Pseudonyms are accepted but all letters should include the writer's name and address. Letters should preferably be typewritten with double spacing; if handwritten they should be legible.

Letters should be addressed to:

THE EDITOR
ALIRAN MONTHLY
P O BOX 1049
10830 PENANG
MALAYSIA

DOUBLE STANDARDS

The irony of the immediate closure of the Matan Maju (fireworks factory) and the legal tussle over the ARE's operations disturbs me deeply. (*Star* 6.8.92) But in the case of the Bukit Merah's folks - just because they are facing an undramatic and not immediately obvious danger - no such relief is forthcoming. The government appears to be taking a hands-off attitude

...in the case of the Bukit Merah's folks - just because they are facing an undramatic and not immediately obvious danger - no such relief is forthcoming.

allowing the laborious process of the legal tussle to take its course. No one can deny the danger and threat caused by the radiation. Tell this to those children who are now suffering from leukemia, those who have died from cancer, etc - "Be patient, justice will prevail in the end". Yes, I too sincerely hope justice will prevail but won't it be a hollow and meaningless victory? Each day the plant is in operation, each day the folks of Bukit Merah will be exposed to increased radiation. No one can predict how many in the long run will suffer the consequences. Is this the caring society our government is trying to foster - caring when it serves the interest and purposes of the powers that

be? In this case I can only pray that those who are in a position to demonstrate their promise of creating a caring society will feel the prick to their conscience soon and take the necessary action immediately.

Caring Malaysian
BAYAN LEPAS

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK, I'LL SCRATCH YOURS

May I be allowed to pen a few lines and offer an opinion. It is quite often we hear of leaders/heads proclaiming how much they have done when confronted by allegations of wrong-doings. One cannot help but gather from the rhetoric that the alleged wrong-doer is saying: "Haven't I done this and haven't I carried out that, so what's the noise about?" I think if we pride ourselves as a progressive society, it is about time we accept and understand the following universal truths:

- a. That power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- b. No leader who understands what true leadership is should ever demand blind loyalty from his followers - certainly not in this time and day.
- c. No one person is indispensable - unless he alone has the absolute truth; and who on earth has the absolute truth?
- d. Nobody may expect to be excused his one wrong because he has

done 5 to 10 rights! He may plead for mitigation/mercy but he certainly cannot demand that his one act of selfishness or greed be overlooked on account: "Haven't I in the past" One may be involved directly in expanding one's shareholders' worth ten-folds, but they should still sack him if he stole "only a million".

We as followers or members of the pack should be better educated and be aware of our rights as members and that we will be good and loyal members only because our leaders serve our interests and not their personal interests and are therefore also good and loyal leaders. And this mutual trust and honesty is the only acceptable foundation for a meaningful and sound leader-follower relationship! Only dogs wag their tails when their masters take the prime pieces and throw them bones and leftovers!

Nobody's Dog
KUCHING

CHINESE SCHOOLS: THE REAL PROBLEM

A number of Grade A primary Chinese schools in Pahang have been left without headmasters since early this year due to a shortage of category B1 Chinese-educated teachers to fill the vacancies with the implementation of the two-tiered scheme. I believe this problem also prevails in the other states to the detriment of Chinese schools in general.

I agree, that preference should be given to the Chinese educated teachers to head Chinese schools but if this current policy were to adversely affect Chinese schools for want of qualified candidates, I urge both the MCA and the Education Ministry to view this matter in the right perspective.

For some years now the general performance of Chinese Schools has dropped and many quarters have voiced their concern over this state of affairs. One of the contributing factors is the lack of qualified Chinese-educated teachers to head Chinese schools. Some schools have had no headmaster for more than six months. A school without a headmaster is like

a ship floundering without its captain. It is chaotic and ineffective.

I believe the MCA and Deputy Education Minister, Dr Fong Chan Onn, are taking the necessary steps to address this serious problem that has put tremendous strain on Chinese schools. The appointment of category B1 Chinese teachers (English educated) to fill the post of HM can help overcome the problem. These teachers should be given a chance to prove their worth. After all they are very experienced teachers currently serving as Senior Assistants or Supervisors in secondary schools. They can assist the schools in many ways when given the chance. The present contention that a non-Chinese educated teacher is unsuitable for the post of HM and that he cannot be effective is merely a presumption - or, a political ploy to perpetuate Chinese headship in Chinese schools. I urge the MCA not to mix politics with education to the detriment of our children. MCA can still insist on Chinese headship even with the appointment of B1 Chinese teachers (English educated) to head Grade A primary Chinese schools now. This is a reasonable stand to take considering that headship in sekolah kebangsaan schools is still closed to the non-Malays. Ideally merit, not politics, should be taken into consideration when filling vacancies in schools. I doubt this can be achieved even beyond the year 2020.

If the MCA and Dr Fong Chan Onn are serious and honestly concerned, then they should face reality, be pragmatic and initiate a change of policy to alleviate the shortage of headmasters in Chinese schools. This problem is real and urgent. It will persist, if not deteriorate, over a period of time if bold action is not promptly taken to check it. It would be very unimaginative and irresponsible not to tackle this concrete problem in view of changing situations and needs. MCA should be honest about the well-being of Chinese schools. All mature Chinese educationists, ethnic Chinese organizations and concerned citizens should support this bold move for the good of our children.

Lee Kim Kin
PENANG

BE FAIR TO THE MIC

I wish to refer to the write-up under the heading "Another Type of Title Chasing" in page 19 of your last issue.

It is most unfair on your part to belittle Datin Indrani Samy Vellu on the award or awards conferred upon her. Datin Indrani serves her community exceptionally well; members of the MIC and the Indian community know this well.

You are sarcastic about the integrity of those foreign organizations that decorated Datin Indrani. You seem to imply that organizations, national and international, should award prizes and decorations only to those who have contributed outstanding service to the people!

Well, I would submit that this is neither the rule nor the practice. Take the Nobel Prize. It is awarded to the Americans year after year because they have the money and power. How could the Nobel Prize for peace have been awarded to Meenachem Begin of Israel when in actual fact he was the cause of strife in the Middle East?

You write quite often about double standards but when it is the MIC or its leaders you abandon your "noble" principle. The members of the MIC are solidly behind Dato Samy Vellu and the other MIC leaders and they are capable of handling their problems. You and the opposition treat the MIC as a sitting duck for your target always.

Be fair and reasonable in your criticism of the MIC; so as to be fair to your readers, too.

V Thillainathan
KUALA LUMPUR

DEATH PENALTY - A CRIME IN ITSELF?

I was horrified to read the following headlines in the *Star* (8 May) "Gallows for man who murdered two-year-old". The case in reference was that of driver K Sinnasamy convicted of murder for causing the death of two-year-old Balasundram, a child in his keeping, found still alive but with severe bodily injuries abandoned in the corridors of the general hospital in Kuala Lumpur. The torture and abuse

of a defenceless and innocent child is a heinous crime that I unequivocally condemn. I would like to see a stop put to such acts. But I can never buy the argument that the only way of doing it is by putting an end to the perpetrator of the crime. That would seem to me equally vindictive.

To use another perspective, that Malaysian law carries with it the death penalty for drug trafficking is a well known fact both locally and internationally. But the deterrent effect this law is supposed to have on drug traffickers is not evident if one were to judge by the continuing rise in the number of drug trafficking cases. Can the death penalty ever really be justified hence? We all need to ponder on the issue, for it is a serious matter, to condemn another human being to death, whatever the nature of his crime. Personally, always having opposed the death penalty, I was horrified to see it now being extended to a case of child-abuse or murder as it was judged.

Child abuse like drug trafficking is a social-economic problem and as such, it is the social, economic and educational structures that need to be redressed. Economic development has brought about material advancement and attendant comforts, but it has also spawned many social problems. In the mad chase after the modern day mythical dragon of easy money and quick returns, basic human values have been lost sight of. Self-advancement has become the chief motivating factor, and any means becomes acceptable. People work under a great deal of stress to get more and more money and no longer have time for family or for others. This is the great scourge of our times. Balance and harmony need to be restored. Basic human values need to be upheld. Any future planning whether in the field of education, economics or politics would need to take a wider perspective of the world and life as a whole.

The individual cannot exist on his own; we need others to provide the infrastructure, we are all interdependent. And so it follows, that we need to care for one another, just as we need to care for our environment too as we are finding out to our great chagrin. We cannot upset the forces of nature without having to face the

consequences. Development has to be sustainable and economic profits need to be scaled down to moderate margins. These are not laws to be imposed on subjects but rather values to be inculcated from young through our educational system. Our eastern spiritual traditions have always promoted this sense of balance and harmony. It is time we take corrective measures to restore balance and harmony in our world. We need to re-educate and rehabilitate the errant, not send them to the gallows. We condemn the murder but we cannot condemn the murderer without ourselves being condemned in turn. We seriously need to review the validity of capital punishment.

Human Being
PENANG

ON BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Events after the Gulf War show that the New World Order is the old product with new labelling and packaging. For it is the Old World Disorder where the law of the jungle prevails:

"Might is always right"

"Power comes from the barrel of guns - cannons and missile launchers"

"Bullets speak louder than words"

The great United States of America now says it is not the world's policeman. Whatever America says is always right for America is the single most powerful nation on earth today. In its eyes, world peace is not threatened in Bosnia i.e. the American applecart is under no threat. Unlike Kuwait, Bosnia has neither oil nor minerals or anything of interest to America.

For the past twelve months or more the mad Serbs have been busy with their ethnic cleansing. The UN has yet to consider the matter and the superpowers are deaf and dumb and pretend that no atrocities exist.

What did the Soviets give to the superpowers to be accepted as good guys? Iraqi and Libyan military secrets? Will America and its stooges get a "walk over" win over Libya? Was there a pact with the new good guys as to who the new bad guys

would be? So far the list appears as follows:

1. Saddam Hussein
2. Gadaffi
3. Ayatollahs of Iran
4. Not identified yet (We could speculate leaders of Pakistan? Yemen? Jordan?)

The first order of business was and still is Saddam Hussein. Contrary to their expectation, the Iraqi did not revolt against him. So the superpowers apply the death chokehold - economic embargo. Also, the so-called inspection team has no time limit to carry out its inspection. The superpowers can move in any time to apply the coup de grace on Saddam Hussein.

The superpowers want to be seen as humane. So they stage a humanitarian aid programme for Sarajevo - and other cities under siege by the mad Serbs. Mitterand made world headlines and "braved rockets in Sarajevo". The Bosnians cannot fight the Serbs who are armed to the teeth and have stocks of arms and ammunitions of the former Yugoslavian army, enough for decades.

Under the Old World Disorder it was all right for Whites to seize lands from weak natives such as the likes of American natives, Australian aborigines, Moaris and Palestinians.

However after Bush's announcement the target appears to be Muslim leaders. Now we are horrified to see the Muslim Slavs and Bosnians added to the list. Which other Muslim minority is marked next?

Why are Third World and Muslim leaders so naive as to believe what the great Uncle Sam says? Is it all right for ex-communists to carry out a systematic campaign against Muslims?

Matt Rossi
PETALING JAYA

MANILA WOOS ETHNIC CHINESE INVESTORS

I was astonished to find the following in *The New Straits Times* (4 August 1992):

Manila: President Fidel Ramos yesterday called on ethnic Chinese to invest in the Philippines, saying the investment climate here was better

than in other Asian nations where they were discriminated against.

"The assimilation of Chinese here is better than in other Asian countries," he told a group of Taiwan and Filipino-Chinese businessmen. "Here, you can be sure there will be no discrimination, no undue interference of government in your business dealings."

He was apparently referring to neighbours like Malaysia, where Malay businessmen are seen as having built-in advantages over ethnic Chinese and Indians.

I really hope that the Malaysian government could publish full statistics to prove whether the statement by President Fidel Ramos is wrong, partially correct or totally correct.

Lee Hoo Eng
JOHORE

HUDUD: ANOTHER VIEW

With reference to Dr Chandra Muzaffar's *Hudud: Central to Islam?*, AM 12:6, 1992, I wish to touch upon some major discrepancies in his article.

1. The Tartars after conquering Baghdad became stern Muslims and carried out the Hudud law.

[Al-Quran (V: 54, IX: 38 & 39) (XLVII: 38)]

2. The Muslims after the post-colonial period are not trying to re-assert their identity. They are undergoing a revolution to revive the teachings of the Sunnah and Quran in totality which their forefathers were denied by the colonials.

[Al-Quran (II: 85 & 208)]

3. As for the rights of the non-Muslim minorities in an Islamic state [Al-Quran (VIII: 61, IX: 6 & 7) (II: 256)]

4. He quotes 'Shah WaliUllah' (translation: King of all Muslim saints) - a name/title cursed by Allah SWT.

A Muslim who takes the name of Allah MUST have the prefix Abdul (humble servant) as in Abdullah, Abdul Rahman, Abdul Razak, etc. How can he quote from such a blasphemous person?

Now I quote from Goethe, p. 529 - T.P. Hughes Dictionary of Islam.

"Its style, in accordance with its contents and aim, is stern, grand, terrible - ever and anon truly sublime. Thus this book (Al-Quran) will go on exercising through all ages a most potent influence."

5. It is not the ulama (theologians) who label those who question the Hudud law as 'murtad' (apostates) but Allah (SWT) labels them as 'kafir' (infidels).

[Al-Quran (V: 44)]

6. As for *Sukr* (intoxication) and apostasy, they are not laws laid down by Ulama but by the Prophet (SAW) Himself.

Hadiths

a. From Anas (r.a.) that the Prophet (SAW) whipped those who took alcohol with the branches from a date tree.

(R. Bukhari and Muslim)

b. From Ibnu Abbas (r.a.): The Prophet (SAW) said, "Whoever switches His religion, kill him."

(R. Bukhari)

Haji Salleh Abood
Director, Perpustakaan Amal
Makruf
PENANG

IF THE BOSNIANS WERE BLACK?

The brutality committed against the Bosnians is a barbaric reflection on humanity. The pain and death inflicted on them, unnecessarily and senselessly, must move any decent human being.

As such, I am not at all surprised that ABIM, the Muslim Youth Movement, has been moved to play a leading role in this tragedy on humanitarian grounds.

Their attempt to adopt these poor, pathetic Bosnian children is a commendable effort and deserves support.

But what is surprising is this: when ABIM can be moved by the tragedy in Bosnia, how could it remain stoic to another equally agonising tragedy that is taking place in Somalia?

Hundreds of thousands of people have died and are dying of starvation. It is reported that about 500 babies die every week for want of nutrition and medical attention.

The heart-wrenching pictures of these living skeletons, with sunken forlorn looks, reduced to bones and skins, hardly able to walk or move, dying daily in their thousands must also move and haunt the conscience of decent human beings everywhere.

But why doesn't this horrendous tragedy prick the conscience of ABIM and propel it to act in the name of humanity?

ABIM can be vocal and vociferous in the case of Bosnia. But why is it silent, and shamelessly too, in the case of Somalia? Why doesn't it propose to adopt Somalian babies as well?

Is it because, as someone put it, Bosnians are white but the Somalians are black? We may have attained independence as a nation, but the colonised mind in all of us has not been liberated yet. It still sees white as pretty and black as dirty.

If the Bosnians were black, would ABIM be in the forefront of this campaign? Would it have acted on humanitarian grounds? Would its compassion have compelled it to act in the name of humanity?

Let it never be forgotten that humanity has no boundary.

Abdul Rahim Bin Hamid
KEDAH

"ANOTHER TYPE OF TITLE-CHASING"

1992-12(6) - PAGE 19

After reading the above nauseating comments, my advice is that *Aliran Monthly* should not stoop so low to express some unknown person's jealousy and personal animosity towards Dato Samy Vellu and Datin Indrani Samy Vellu.

R Ganesan
GOMBAK

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The resignation of Kuala Lumpur's Datuk Bandar, Tan Sri Elyas Omar deserves to be applauded. Tan Sri Elyas set a marvellous example in Malaysian history as to what government office-bearers should do in

the event of public scandals involving abuse of public funds or executive powers.

He took the brave stand to step down as Datuk Bandar following the alleged discrepancies when DBKL purchased the 22 Volvos totalling more than 2 million ringgit. He accepted full blame and decided to step down even though the ACA has not completed its investigations in the matter. This is something that we have never seen among local politicians.

How about Datuk Seri Samy Vellu emulating this fine example and stepping down - at least until the ACA clears him? Is it expecting too much from a man who has been questioned for some 13 hours on three occasions?

Chan Kok Nung
KUALA LUMPUR

JUSTICE

When a person steals a couple of eggs from the supermarket he gets 3 months jail for the offence.

When a person steals some plastic bags he gets 3 years jail for the offence.

But our Dato Bandar who misused public funds amounting to more than two million ringgit, merely resigns and the matter is settled.

Have we two sets of justice?

One for the rich and powerful?

One for the poor and helpless?

Jack
KUALA LUMPUR

THANK YOU FRANCE

The taxi drivers are denied their application for a fare increase. But the Prime Minister comes out fully in support of PLUS for an increase of 50% in toll charges. None, perhaps, except it is common knowledge who the beneficiaries of the PLUS increase will be.

Being a wage earner myself, I can sympathise with the taxi drivers in trying to make ends meet. The employer gives us an 8% increase but price increase of necessity items ranges from 10% - 50%.

The irony of the gifted Ti Chiang Ming's search for a scholarship can't be lost on any thinking individual. It is a glaring example of one having all the qualifications and yet not being recognised and rewarded as a Malaysian. This is an instance when one can't help feeling disgusted when one hears our leaders trying to impress on us ordinary rakyat the impartiality of our political system. Isn't it ridiculous that it takes the French government to recognise his genius and offer him a scholarship?

Loyal Malaysian
PENANG

SHARE THE ECONOMIC CAKE

It is becoming fashionable among our MPs to criticize several international issues seen as discriminating at international platforms. Issues such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Democracy in Thailand, Apartheid in South Africa, the US Control of the Arab World and certain Police States have become favourite topics for criticism.

These champions of true democratic principles should also speak up on the several discriminating policies at home in order to be seen as being fair and consistent.

At the recent Dewan sitting (NST July 31, 1992) it was revealed by the International Trade and Industry Ministry Parliamentary Secretary that 14,709 approved permits (APs) for 1991 and another 6,285 APs during the first six months of this year (1992) were issued for the import of cars solely to Bumiputra companies. For the non-Bumis, however, APs were issued to import cars only for personal use.

In the home front the BN Government must be seen to be fair to the non-Bumis in order to sound credible in the international scene. It must cast aside ethnicity, and discriminating policies in stages and thus create a just society in line with the Government's 2020 Vision.

Our MPs should fight to abolish all policies that divide us as a nation and fight for policies that will unite us as Malaysians. Such endeavour will

win for them a deserving place in history and help to project Malaysians as a true democracy.

Karuppan
JOHOR

*As long as the trunk is firm,
worry not over the branches
swaying in the wind.*

Chinese proverb

UNTO A *Lonely* *Place*

by Alan Chanier

The night is brimming with stars above the dry lands of the Great Karoo in South Africa. They say there are as many stars in the sky as grains of sand on all the beaches. But if God has scattered the stars over limitless distances, can he also have intentions for the microscopic details of our lives?

Heeding the call to 'Go unto a lonely place and rest awhile', we gathered in a Karoo farmhouse: with walls two feet thick and bats in the roof, with hay bales for chairs and oil drums for table legs. There, in the lilac twilight, we sang 'Jabulani, Jabulani Africal' - 'Oh Africa, rejoice!'

We came to deepen the co-mingling of our selves and God's spirit within us, certain that spiritual strength and moral change will be necessary to a South Africa at peace with itself. No one felt equipped for the task ahead; and yet, from the enveloping uncertainty, grew a sense that God meets us in our darkest needs, if we relinquish ourselves at the particular altar of his asking. Then the greatest barrier to faith falls away.

In that farmhouse, alone in a vastness of veld and sky, people of different race and background stepped towards a transcending joy at God's limitless intentions for our lives; and convictions were struck that the essence of great solutions lies, now, in us all.

FOR A CHANGE, July 1991

THINKING ALLOWED

TAN SRI VOLVO

He had initially thought of changing his name to Tan Sri Thomas, but now it looks like he may, against his will, be known as Tan Sri Volvo. Or should it be Tan Sri Volvo-Volvo in view of the number of vehicles? But let's not be petty and mean, as this column frequently (or is it always?) is, and move on to how the affair has developed into an offence under the Official Secrets Act.

It appears that several journalists from the newspaper that followed up the story to everyone's (with one exception) delight will be interviewed by the police for having possibly divulged a government secret. Malaysians (also with one exception) find the idea of the use of the OSA here quite appalling. The newspaper, they think, has done the right thing in exposing a government malpractice. This is what newspapers should do apart from mouthing government propaganda in between huge advertisements. City Hall had, after all, acted out of line in purchasing those Volvos with public money.

Indeed, if the OSA is eventually used against the journalists - and it will mean a

mandatory jail term for them as a result of the controversial 1986 amendment to the Act - the government would be going against its word that the amendment would not be used to cover up any government malpractice. It was a pledge repeated by one Minister after another when trying to fend off widespread public protest. It appears that this will be yet another breach of public trust on the part of the Barisan Nasional government.

Moreover, exposing City Hall's act of purchasing the Volvos against Treasury regulations has nothing to do with national security (it only affects one man's security) hence there is no need to resort to the OSA. If the government persists in doing so, then it is clearly trying to suppress information which the citizen and the taxpayer has every right to have. And it will only give all of us more reason to press for an abolition of such an oppressive piece of legislation.

• • •

FAT CATS IN THE HEAT

The power games have begun. I'm referring to the

politicking preceding the UMNO Baru general assembly, which although still several months off, has begun in less-than-subtle ways. UMNO Baru leaders have since last month been trying their darndest to get into the newspapers and TV, preferably mouthing something or other on the Malay community. As a result, a rather silly statement by Tengku Razaleigh that the Malays would not benefit from the country's industrialization drew angry denials from virtually every UMNO Baru big shot worth his Mercedes Benz.

So impassioned were some of the denials and condemnation of Ku Li's remark that one is inclined to think there was some truth in it. *Siapa makan cabai rasa pedas*, they say. Perhaps what Ku Li meant was that industrialization had benefitted only the Fat Cats among the Malay community hence the resulting commotion that has come to resemble the din of cats in heat. (Moreover, surveys have revealed that cats in western households eat better than refugees.)

One of the more interesting incidents thus far was the gaffe involving the UMNO Baru president and his deputy. Mahathir had been earlier reported as advising UMNO Baru aspirants to be patient and wait their turn. Nothing unusual. Just the UMNO Baru brand of democracy - "You Are Ready When I Say You Are Ready". He reminded party members of how an impatient prince, grown restless of waiting for the coveted crown, had gone against convention and in the process, split the kingdom into two halves.

Several weeks later, Ghafar announced that anyone could

contest any post - including the top posts. The deputy president's statement can be read two ways. One is that he believes the party elections should be run in a truly democratic fashion without people being prevented from contesting. The other is that Ghafar may be paving the way for his men to make inroads to the top posts. The Team A-Team B stuff may have passed only to be replaced by Anwar's boys and Ghafar's men.

Far more interesting though was Part Two of the pseudo tussle between the two camps. It was a tussle that had involved the issue of who (or rather whose man) should head the powerful City Hall. Anwar's boys, who had sought to replace Tan Sri Volvo with someone they could "work more closely with", had apparently lost out to Ghafar's men who much preferred the present man, badminton mania and all.

As such, there are many UMNO Baru watchers who tend to see the hand of Anwar And His Boys in the current controversies that had finally brought Elyas down from his heady orbit around the Thomas Cup. First there was the (allegedly) \$2 million Casablanca junket, then the fleet of illegal Volkswagens and as it never rains, but pours, the court judgement reversing City Hall's decision to allow condo projects to be built amidst the super-rich.

Casablanca (the movie) may have bestowed immortality on Humphrey Bogart of Hollywood, but the Moroccan city may just bring to light what a mere mortal the Mayor of Kuala Lumpur is. What has happened is only the teaser. I am sure the best parts have yet to come.

• • •

PARADISE LOST

Scientists are meeting in New Zealand to debate the Eve theory, a theory that if proven, could render ethnicity largely irrelevant - something that should be most gratifying to all those who abhor racism. The Eve theory was formulated by the late American scientist Allan Wilson who claimed that all humans today can be traced along maternal lines of descent to a woman who lived about 200,000 years ago, probably in Africa.

Would that more or less mean that we are all brothers and sisters? Would it also mean that paradise lay in Africa with its present devastating drought and all? In that case, Africa must truly be paradise lost, and poor Eve, how she would weep if she could see how far off from paradise many of her children now are. Well, it is said that the poor, and not the rich, shall be the ones to inherit the earth. It sounds like a dirty trick, if you ask me. Who in his or her right mind would wish to inherit the earth and its denuded forests, polluted seas and even more polluted skies.

• • •

HANDS OFF

It seems that women officers and wives of officers in our foreign missions are refusing to shake hands with menfolk at official functions overseas. The reason for their reticence was not stated, but it could be a carry over of what is happening back home. Many big shots and these include Ministers have, over the

past few years of increasing "decorum" that is erroneously interpreted as religiosity, abandoned the practice of shaking hands with the female sex. As such, if any action is to be taken against these overseas officers, then similar action ought to be taken against those at home, including Ministers, who carry on with the practice.

• • •

THANK GOD FOR SPORTS!

First we went about muttering "Thank God for tourists!" Now we shall be going about mumbling "Thank God for sports!" It would appear that one can hardly get anything done nowadays, and done well and good, unless it involves tourism or sports. The latest illustration of this sad fact of our pathetic lives comes with Malaysia's successful bid for the Commonwealth Games. No sooner was the news out than announcements were made about improving the state of taxis and other public transport and completing the Sepang Airport in extra quick time. It would seem that the welfare of strangers are much more important to our political leaders than that of ours.

The MB of Selangor has pledged to cut all red tape so that the Sepang Airport can be completed before 1998. I shudder to think what cutting red tape actually means here since it is at the tender and plan approval stages that the red tape allegedly is most entangled. Would that mean that decent tender procedures would fly out of the window and the plan approved

with as many corners cut as possible?

Anyway, friends who have seen the televised boasts of the new airport and its high-tech accompaniments now dread having to spend the rest of their lives in Selangor. They are frightened out of their wits by the prospect of planes zooming over their heads, multiple-lane highways, MRT railcars and other high-tech stuff. It would be as bad as living in Tokyo which is probably where those blokes who cooked up the TV bit got their kooky ideas from.

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HOME IS WHERE THE PRISON IS

Fortune hunters are said to be heading south of the border, namely to Central America, in the hope of collecting the one billion pesos reward (excluding the US\$2 million offered by the United States) of the fugitive drug baron Pablo Escobar. The colourful Escobar certainly lives up to his name - he surrendered himself to the authorities a year ago under the most dramatic of circumstances and he has now escaped in an equally dramatic way.

Salvadoreans on the whole were puzzled why he would wish to abandon his prison. From the photographs of his prison cell following his escape, there was little doubt that he enjoyed all the creature comforts one could wish for - his cell resembled a luxury apartment where it was said that parties were frequent, drinks flowed like a fountain and there was no shortage of pretty girls to amuse the VIP cellbird.

The average Salvadorean, living in shanty towns with neither water nor electricity, much less parties and pretty girls, would have given a foot and an arm to take his place in prison. Fortune hunters would be advised to try wrangling invitations to those high society parties for that is where their bounty is most likely to be - tossing tequila with the high-powered, rich and famous.

After all, that was exactly what an equally notorious former Malaysian jailbird was doing mere weeks after completing his jail term much of which was spent working in his family firm. The chap, whose connections at one time stretched all the way to the top, was photographed rubbing shoulders with high society in Genting Highlands shortly after his release. One would think that high society would be more discriminating than that. Well, perhaps it has something to do with being birds of a feather.

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NO STANDARD-MAN!

UMNO Baru's own Super-woman Rafidah Aziz was with some friends in a shop in Kota Baru recently when she was eyewitness to a "shocking" (her own words) incident. A bare-headed woman helping out her stallholder husband was rudely reprimanded by a Kota Baru municipal council official for exposing her hair. He also threatened not to renew her licence. If that was true, then one can only say that the official was practising double standards. He should also have scolded the Minister for baring her head or not reprimanded anyone at all.

Officialdom, as we know, can be so selective. It tends to tread on the weak and powerless, while side-stepping wealth and status.

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HOOLIGANS AND POLITICIANS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Several months ago, Italian MPs, divided over their inability to elect a president for the country, traded blows and insults shortly before voting began. The incident was carried live on Italian TV - no wonder our government is reluctant to live telecast our parliamentary proceedings. The day before that, neo-Facist MPs had screamed "Thieves! Thieves!" at their Christian Democrat colleagues while the Speaker was hit in the eye by a wet paper pellet flung by an MP.

Even the generally reserved Japanese are not above a bit of raucous brawling in the Japanese Diet as evident in a recent session when punches were traded and unidentified items flung about. Meanwhile in Islamabad, the Pakistan National Assembly erupted into a yelling match and the religious affairs minister was branded an infidel - the ultimate Muslim insult - by the opposition. Their behaviour would have won the approval of MIC politicians who have been known to throw chairs and brief-cases just to make a point.

Compared to them, our own MPs appear almost well-behaved. I am beginning to wonder whether I have been too harsh in my opinion of them. However, I am sure my kind thoughts will evaporate by the time Parliament resumes for its

Budget session. Anyway, our MPs ought to be grateful that their deplorable performances as people's representatives are met with mere brickbats and insults from the disrespectful like yours truly. In Sri Lanka, they stone their Ministers and even strip and beat them up.

• • •

STAND BY YOUR MAN

A busy Thai porno actress who had campaigned on behalf of the Thai authorities to get people out to vote lost 6kg in weight much of which appears to have gone from the area above her waist. She has petulantly complained that the result may affect her chances of securing future roles in blue movies. She must have definitely worked harder than another local actress who helped campaign for Gerakan's Alex Lee in the Batu constituency during the last general election. I don't quite recall our local star campaigner complaining about any loss in personal assets. All I recall was her possessive cries of "He's My Man!".

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MCA MINSTRELS

One would never suspect the abundance of karaoke talents in the MCA - from the MCA president (and his wife) right down the ranks. Those chaps have been singing their hearts out the past few months to raise the odd ringgit here and there for TAR College. The purpose is lofty, that is undeniable. The only worrying thing is that after days of frying *char-keow teow* and tossing *roti canai* and

nights of karaoke singing (and goodness knows what else), would these guys still have any energy left for work the next day.

The other frightening prospect is that the MCA chaps, having seen how a song (however lousily rendered) can raise cheers, claps and MONEY, may decide to incorporate karaoke as a fixture during general elections - to raise votes. As it is, we have been tortured enough listening to the drivel that pour out of their mouths during electioneering. The thought of having to hear them sing as well is enough to trigger off a nervous breakdown.

It is frightening how the karaoke, which some of us now view as the second Japanese invasion, have come to dominate the leisure and recreation of so many Malaysians - regardless of ethnicity and creed (I correct myself on the latter - there are some sects who regard the karaoke as the devil disguised as a Sony microphone - cool!). Even the PM has done the karaoke bit. One of those flattering books on Sarawak chief minister Taib Mahmud shows the two of them and their spouses crooning away on an East Malaysian stage. Knowing the Number One, he is probably singing his favourite, "We'll do it MY way!"

Nowadays, any politician who does not wish to come across as unsociable or dull, feels compelled to sing a tune here or there. It shouldn't be that difficult since most of them have been singing (and dancing) to their master's tune for donkey's years.

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VIJANDRAN'S LOOSE UNDERTHINGS

The Home Ministry was recently reported to be cracking down hard on pornographic material being smuggled in from abroad through the Kuching and Bayan Lepas airports. It seems Malaysians have an insatiable appetite for such entertainment as the volume of pornographic magazines, largely from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan, has increased tremendously over the past year, slipping through in the form of cargo.

The Deputy Home Minister, who revealed this, was recently photographed wearing a silly grin while fondling several copies of the seized pornographic magazines. However, the hot potato in the less-than-wholesome entertainment market is still the videotapes of Malaysian Stud D.P. Vijandran. His enduring performances, said to be contained in some 16 tapes, have stunned the men and titillated the women.

The only drawback, they said, was his underthings (I mean his suspenders-lah!). It seems that those things of his are in a deplorable state. In one tape, they said the elastic in his suspenders had gone so slack that he did not even have to pull them off (how convenient!). One would think that knowing he would be on screen (albeit the small screen), he'd have bothered to get some decent underwear - but then again, decency is not something that someone like him would be familiar with. □

by NNP

"What comes from the lips reaches the ear, what comes from the heart reaches the heart." -Arab Proverb

Heart to Heart

Being Malaysians, naturally

Recently, the Persatuan Wanita, USM, held a food fair.

Members of various ethnic origins contributed money, time and effort to produce various types of food which testify to Malaysia's rich culinary heritage.

There were "ayam percik," "gado-gado," "ketupat sotong," "kuih nyonya," "nasi himpit," "nasi bokhari," chicken tandoori, fried mee-hoon, "gulab jamun," capati, curry puffs, chocolate cake and pizza, among others.

We were all united for a cause - to raise money for our own "tabung" as well as for the students' loan fund.

The atmosphere at the foyer of Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra from 8 am to 2 pm that Saturday was a festive one punctuated with peals of laughter and lots of "gurau sanda."

My mind flashed back to the day when a number of us, Malaysian students in Eugene, Oregon, participated in the International Food Fair, in 1990.

A week before the festival, I had a call from the president of the Malaysian Students' Association at University of Oregon, a male of Punjabi origin.

He had obtained my number from a Malay student. He wanted to know if I would like to join one of the groups of Malaysian students, to cook something for the occasion.

I agreed and it was decided that I join two other Malaysian girls to prepare curry puffs.

One of the girls called me up soon afterwards to fix the time and to give directions to their house.

When I reached their place at the stipulated time, the two girls of Chinese origin greeted me and introduced themselves.

I asked them where they were from. Automatically, they replied, "We're Malaysians."

I said I knew that. What I meant was their hometown. I reflected later on this incident.

I realize that in an international context or environment, we identify ourselves as Malaysians: "Kita orang Malaysia" as opposed to "Mereka orang Amerika," or "We, Malaysians" vs "They, Americans."

However, in the national context, when all of us, as Malaysians, interact with one another, we identify ourselves as "Malays," "Chinese" or "Indians." We also specify our hometown when asked where we are from.

I guess if, in the international context, we were to say "We are Chinese" or "We are Indians," there would arise some confusion. Non-Malaysians would think that "Chinese" meant "Citizens of China" not "Malaysian of Chinese origin." The same could be said of "Indians."

Anyway, it was a heartwarming experience to be speaking Malaysian-English while savouring the mouth-watering aroma of the Malaysian curry powder being "tumis-ed."

We exchanged so much information regarding our hometowns, states, schools, friends, familiar food, ways of life and music.

The hours spent rolling the dough, cutting the pastry and

shaping it and the time spent cutting the vegetables and standing to fry them whizzed by as we chatted and laughed together.

The following morning, we went to the community hall to set up our stall. The Malaysian flag hung proudly over our two tables. Posters of scenic spots in Malaysia as well as batik sarongs and tablecloths provided an attractive backdrop. Handwoven baskets from Sabah, Sarawak and the East Coast of Peninsula Malaysia enhanced our stall. These items were pooled from all of us who had brought them from HOME, i.e. Malaysia.

The boys wore batik shirts and the girls put on their sarong kebaya. The best adornment was the smile that graced their faces as they answered questions from fellow-students and friends from various countries who thronged our stall.

The food was snatched as soon as it was lifted from the "kuali." Besides curry puffs, there were fried chicken, "nasi goreng" (prepared by the boys) and "mee-hoon."

The vice-president of the Malaysian Students' Association, a male of Chinese origin, participated in a cooking demonstration near the hall's entrance. He showed the visitors how to cook "nasi goreng" complete with paper-thin omellete. He did his mom proud.

When the day came to an end all of us were immensely satisfied that we, as Malaysians, regardless of ethnic origins, had shared our Malaysian heritage, complete with our "budi bahasa" and "ramah-tamah" with our fellow human beings from all over the world gathered under the roof of an American community hall.

We were just being Malaysians, naturally. ♦

Hamima Dona Mustafa

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Mattityahu Peled's Call "STOP GIVING MONEY TO ISRAEL"

BY MARK A. BRUZONSKY

Mattityahu Peled - everyone in Israel knows him simply as "Mattl" - stands out as a unique personality on the Israel Left. From an army career in which he rose to serve on the general staff during the 1967 War and then to be the first military governor of the Gaza Strip, Peled turned at mid-life to the study of Arabic literature and the practice of peace politics.

Peled still teaches at Tel Aviv University, but it is his political evolution - in and out of the Knesset, advocating a Palestinian state, championing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and leading the formation of Israel's first non-communist Jewish-Arab party - for which he is best known and often harshly challenged.

Peled is one of the most experienced, well-travelled, and well-seasoned senior analysts in the Middle East today. He is also a personal friend whom I have known for some fifteen years.

This conversation took place late last spring at the outdoor terrace of Jerusalem's Notre Dame Hotel, just across from the Old City walls. We spoke almost exactly on the old Green Line that still divides the city between Jewish and Palestinian parts.



Q: You've said that there isn't a chance of Israel making any real concessions in the so-called peace process unless the Israeli government is really forced to do so. So what is your vision of what is to come in the months ahead?

Mattityahu Peled: Well, for Israel to change its policy, it must be coerced in a brutal way - cutting off aid, limiting commercial relations, and the like. I don't see who is going to apply that kind of pressure.

I don't think the US is going to move to change the situation. In my view, the US would like a continuing low-level conflict - one that can be controlled. This is the best situation from Washington's point of view. Everybody appeals to the US for help, for financial help, for political help. The US is welcome everywhere because of the existence of this continuing conflict.

But the US would like the conflict to be controllable, kept on a level that doesn't create too many

difficulties. And therefore I do not believe the US will really pressure anyone in the region to agree to a genuine solution.

Q: Please expand on that. Doesn't the US alliance in this region now go through Riyadh and then Tel Aviv? Because the Saudis want the status quo, and the Americans want to continue to control the power and the money of the region, aren't all three allies now, even if for totally different reasons?



Israeli soldiers prevent the building of a mosque in Gaza: "I think it is our duty to call upon the United States to stop giving money to Israel."

Peled: Yes, right. They are allies, but that doesn't interfere with the basic attitude, which is, "OK, let's cooperate in keeping the conflict unresolved."

Q: *But I was suggesting that the Palestinian issue is not really the central question anymore, but rather a sub-issue that has to be contained, kept from exploding. None of these major parties really expect it to be resolved, largely because nobody can get the Israelis to agree.*

Peled: I'm not sure that they would like to get the Israelis to agree. As long as it is getting \$3 billion a year from the United States, Egypt has an excuse to ask for a similar amount, and Saudi Arabia can ask for all these huge arms deals. The fact that the conflict is unresolved serves so many important interests, particularly the American, that I don't see anyone who really wants to eliminate the conflict.

Q: *So, you're suggesting that the Palestinians will have to do something to make American and other interests suffer before anyone will seriously want to resolve this problem?*

Peled: Exactly. I'm sure that at a certain point, if there is no change

in the Arab attitude towards the Palestinians, if the Palestinians remain so rejected by the other Arabs, we'll start seeing terrorism and oilfields on fire just to remind everybody of the Palestinians' existence. In the 1960s, the Arab countries decided to contribute money to the PLO not because of love for the Palestinians but because the Palestinians were a threat.

Q: *But after the war against Iraq, and after all the false threats, who believes that the nationalist or radical Arabs have such power?*

Peled: Well, when the pipelines start burning, everybody will believe the PLO will do it willingly, but if they are pushed into a corner, they will have no choice.

Q: *But the American game is not to push them into a corner, but to keep them dangling on a string.*

Peled: OK, keep them on a string, keep the problem unresolved, but keep everybody expecting that something is going to happen. First there was (US Secretary of State) William Rogers, then Henry Kissinger, then Cyrus Vance, then George Shultz, then Jim Baker - all of them going through the same motions of trying to find a solution, but failing.

These are people who enjoy success, and yet they allowed themselves to be seen as unsuccessful, as failures. So this is a system, a method, of keeping the conflict alive but controlled. The great crime by Saddam Hussein was that he went beyond certain limits that the US would not accept, so he had to pay the price.

Q: *Do you believe the Saudis and the Egyptians, whatever they say in public, think it's also in their interest to keep things a little bit hot in this*

region because that means for the Egyptians that they get money and for the Saudis that the Americans need them and will arm them and protect them?

Peled: And the money they pay for the arms comes from what the US spends on oil.

Q: *But there's always been the other theory that the ruling Arab parties would get tremendous credit historically from the Arab peoples if they could bring about a just peace.*

Peled: But if there were peace, the Saudi government would have no justification for spending so much money on armaments, and who would keep it in power?

New elements would gain power, a new bourgeois class would develop, and like all bourgeois classes it would ask, "Why do we need a king, why do we need an aristocracy? We can do it ourselves." This is a problem for all the other little pricedoms in the Gulf, so they have a vested interest in not seeing the conflict resolved.

They are spending now, combined, about \$20 billion a year on armaments, and they need this to maintain power. It would be unacceptable to continue spending \$20 billion yearly on armaments if there were peace. And if they don't spend

it on armaments, then who will keep them in power?

Q: And the Americans need a way to get back the money we spend on oil. How are we going to get the money back if we don't have them buying all these arms?

Peled: Exactly. The "investment" in Israel of close to \$2 billion a year in arms sales generates orders for ten times that amount. So I don't see any real interest in solving the problem.

Objectively, Israel has an interest in solving the problem, because of the immigrants coming from the Soviet Union. But (former Prime Minister Yitzhak) Shamir hopes that when all things are considered properly, the US will find it in its own interest to lend Israel another \$25 billion to absorb these Jews.

Q: \$25 billion! They are only asking for \$10 billion.

Peled: But the calculations have already been made that it will cost \$25 billion.

Q: And the US Congress will agree to this?

Peled: Well, given that the alternative is to coerce Israel to agree to a final settlement of the conflict, maybe yes.

Q: And to get this money you think Shamir might make what he would call a tremendous concession and suspend settlements in the territories?

Peled: No. His scenario is that the money will come without his having to make all these concessions because the greater interest of the US is to keep the conflict going.

Q: But in the worst case he'd make that concession, as (former Prime Minister) Menachem Begin did at Camp David?

Peled: Yes, but he's not likely to have to do that. I don't see any sign that he's ready to do that. He reads the American interests very clearly. He knows that the Americans will not use their

tremendous power to force a settlement.

Q: But there's another angle to this - public opinion.

Peled: Public opinion is so easily manipulated. American public opinion is only now beginning to ask whether it was justified to demolish the entire civilian infrastructure in Iraq. Militarily, it was unnecessary.

Q: And why do you think Iraq had to be destroyed? Wasn't it really the US and Israel together that decided to do this?

Peled: Well, of course Israel wanted it very much, and Israel even wanted to participate in it. The great frustration in Israel is that we weren't allowed to participate in Iraq's destruction.

Q: Why didn't Saddam, at least by last January, see this coming?

Peled: I think he's a man with very limited intellectual capabilities.

Q: Do you think the Americans purposefully misled him? Do you think he was tricked into Kuwait in the first place?

Peled: Maybe. But the crisis developed over two years, between August 1988 and August 1990. The American policy was to hear nothing and say nothing. But the Americans must have known the conflict was developing, because Iraq ended the war (against Iran) with a tremendous debt to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and they wouldn't give up their claim to the money.

Q: Was Israel manipulating the American involvement?

Peled: No doubt. Israel wanted the US to demolish Iraq, to eliminate Iraq. And now the big difference between Israel and the US is that the US realized at the last moment that to eliminate Iraq is too dangerous for the entire region and for the interests of the US.

Q: Isn't Israel's influence in Washington extreme?

Peled: Maybe. But I think the US makes its own decisions.

Militarily, of course, the whole operation was a farce, a joke. First they built up the image of the Iraqi army as invincible, and then they compared (General Norman) Schwarzkopf to Hannibal because he managed to defeat an army which we all saw fighting for eight years and everybody knew that it was a poorly trained and a poorly led army. All of a sudden we started hearing that it was an invincible army and that the Republican Guard ... Goodness, what did they do with the Republican Guard? When the Republican Guard kneeled at the feet of the American soldiers, the reality was finally revealed.

Q: Did the Israelis also exaggerate the threat of gas warfare?

Peled: Oh, yes. The whole decision to distribute gas masks was a political decision that had absolutely no justification in reality. We knew, and they knew, that Iraq did not have a chemical warhead for the Scud missiles. Of course they knew. You can't have such a weapon without testing it. And you cannot test such a weapon secretly; you have to test it in the open for everybody to see. No one today can test ballistic missiles secretly. And there was no record of any test of this nature.

Secondly, particularly after all the experts left Iraq, and they were questioned by various governments, no one said that he was employed on developing a chemical warhead for the Scuds.

Q: So it was all a public-relations gimmick ...

Peled: Right.

Q: ... to scare the American public and propagandize the Israeli public. Did you put on a gas mask?

Peled: Well, I had a gas mask at home. My theory was that in the

first place there was no chance that a Scud would be aimed at Jerusalem because it might hit the Al Aksa mosque by chance and I was sure that Saddam Hussein wouldn't take that risk. And secondly I said that you first have to hear the boom and then to put ...

Q: Do you think it is important that American Jews speak up for sanctions and a clear suspension of aid to Israel?

Peled: It has become important now more than ever before. Until now, the assumption was that there is a division of opinion in Israel and that each side is trying to persuade the other side to listen to it and maybe accept its views. And this has been going on for about twenty years.

What is happening now is entirely different. The expansionists, the annexationists, are deliberately working against every possibility of solving the conflict.

So those of us who believe that this is an unacceptable development must think of radical and unprecedented steps. And since they cannot go on implementing their annexationist policies without American money, I think it is our duty to call upon the US to stop giving money to Israel.

Q: And to try to build up public pressure for this, starting with American Jews?

Peled: But let me tell you this: People talk, and I think justifiably, of the tremendous power of the Jewish lobby in Washington. I believe that if the Jewish lobby did not exist, the US would have created it; it is such a useful instrument to justify American policy in the Middle East. I don't know what they would do without it. Whenever the American Administration wants to do something that is unacceptable to the lobby, they do it all the same.

Q: But how does one explain that the people who knew the region

best were not listened to in Washington?

Peled: I came to the conclusion some time ago that America has the greatest experts on just about everything, certainly on the Middle East. But when it comes to political decisions, the experts have little influence. Political decisions are not taken on the basis of expertise.

When Jimmy Carter ran for office, he sent Zbigniew Brzezinski as an expert to study the situation and report to him. One day I was invited by the director-general of the Foreign Office to meet secretly with Brzezinski, so I went to Tel Aviv and met him in a hotel. We sat for three hours. He accepted my analysis. He told me it was the only cogent point of view he had come across in Israel. And then, before I left him, I said, "Well, I wish you success. I know you are working with Carter, and if he wins you will probably be Secretary of State or head of the National Security Council."

He said, "When you come again to the US, be sure to look me up." After Carter won the election, I happened to be in Washington and I called Brzezinski. He wouldn't see me. I tried several times, but he wouldn't even allow me to get near the White House.

When he was here, he was an "expert"; when he went into the White House, he became a politician. And there is absolutely no relationship between the two.

So when you talk with the experts, they are wonderful, they really know what they are talking about, they are very thorough. But all this has absolutely no effect on political decisions. Political decisions are taken on an entirely different level, with operating factors that have absolutely nothing to do with reality: Who pays for your re-election? How many votes can you bring me? And therefore the political decisions don't reflect

what you would expect to be the recommendation of the experts.

Q: But still you said you consider it important that American Jews try to start raising these issues in a public way to force a debate that the politicians don't want to have.

Peled: Yes. Public pressure is probably the only way left.

Q: And do you agree that calling for sanctions against Israel is the most effective means we have at this time to raise these issues, even though we know that this policy will not be implemented any time soon?

Peled: Right.

Q: Do you see no hope at all?

Peled: No. The fact that the Soviet Union has been eliminated as a world power really leaves the United States the sole arbiter in this region.

Q: What about the Palestinians? Why are some of their leaders trying to cooperate with the Americans in the "peace process"?

Peled: I think it is really very unfortunate. But maybe one explanation is that they are getting tired and fed up with the situation. Their sacrifices are tremendous. Economically, things are very bad. Internally, the Palestinians have tremendous problems - killing each other, assassinating each other, for whatever reasons. So maybe, out of exhaustion, they don't see any way of getting out of this terrible situation.

Q: And the right policy for the Palestinians would be?

Peled: The right policy would be, first of all, not to accept any of the Israeli promises, the 1989 "peace initiative" or anything else. Adhere to the position that an international peace conference based on UN Resolution 242 and 338, with the PLO officially representing the Palestinians, is the only way of dealing with the situation. And nothing else. And that if Israel

doesn't accept this, nothing is going forward.

Q: *Do you think a second Camp David accord is coming - an arrangement that buys more time? You can't just leave the region tense.*

Peled: No. Shamir has made it very clear that he is not going to make any concessions in any upcoming talks. And if pressured, he will call general elections. General elections means that for eight months nothing will be done. And from a general election the Likud will come back to power strengthened. Even if Labour came to power, so what? They would attempt to appear nicer. But no, I don't think they would make any fundamental changes; just changes in appearance.

Q: *What about the Peace Now movement in Israel?*

Peled: It's one of the worst things that has happened to us.

Q: *Why?*

Peled: Well, you see, nice people in Israel who feel unhappy with the situation but are not prepared to do anything about it, they get together twice or three times a year and, as the saying goes here, they give their conscience to the laundry. They get it back cleaned up, and they go back home happy and satisfied. There's nothing more to it than that. They stand in a demonstration. They shout a few slogans. They go home satisfied that they have done the job, but they are not prepared to shake the system. So this is a substitute for real action.

Q: *Is Shamir right in thinking that if he can purchase ten or fifteen more years of time the Palestinian issue will be unsolvable?*

Peled: This is certainly the aim. If the US goes on financing unlimited settlements that have no economic foundation except American money, then there will eventually be half a million Jews in

the West Bank, and it may be an irretrievable situation.

Q: *When you say irretrievable, you don't mean the Palestinians will give up, do you? You just mean the conflict will go on indefinitely in different forms?*

Peled: Well, a strong argument for the Palestinians is that in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip they are now an overwhelming majority. When they are just 60 per cent of the population, it will require a different attitude because nobody will evict half a million Israelis just to make the Palestinians happy. And Shamir is aiming at that. In his heart he knows that this can be done because American money is available.

Q: *So the only hope here, if I understand you correctly, is if the politics of America changes and the US says to Israel, "We've had enough of this, and pay for it yourself if you want to continue." And you see no chance of this happening*

unless there is a groundswell of public opinion.

Peled: Right. For a long time I thought it would be sufficient for the United States to pressure Israel politically by limiting the rate of increase in military aid. But I see now that this doesn't happen, and the situation is getting worse. We are now faced with such an aggressive annexationist policy that unless we do something soon, it may be too late.

I think we've come to the point where, unless we advocate very radical steps, we have, in fact, given up the struggle. ♦

Mark A. Bruzonsky is chairman of the Jewish Committee on the Middle East in Washington, and former Washington representative of the World Jewish Congress.

Source: The Progressive (October 1991), 55(10)

THE FIST

*"Don't think my tears
are for fear
My tears are for my country
For the pigeons back home
Hungry
Who is to feed them
when I am gone
And my brothers -
two of them...
In the battle were spent..."*

*A section from a Palestinian song
written with blood on the wall
of a prison in Acre.*



Tourism And Human Rights

Tourism is widely touted as a money-spinning industry. But, CECIL RAJENDRA points out, the moral and spiritual fibre of the host country and the dignity of its people and culture is often sacrificed in the name of tourism.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

Article 12 says:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home etc ... Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."

Article 13 says:

"Everyone has the right of freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State."

And Article 17 states:

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

So much for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, now let us take a look at what some other international instruments on human rights have to say on this matter.

Let us first look at the UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development. This Declaration was proclaimed some twenty years later in 1969 subsequent to the pledge by Members of the United Nations to promote higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and developments.

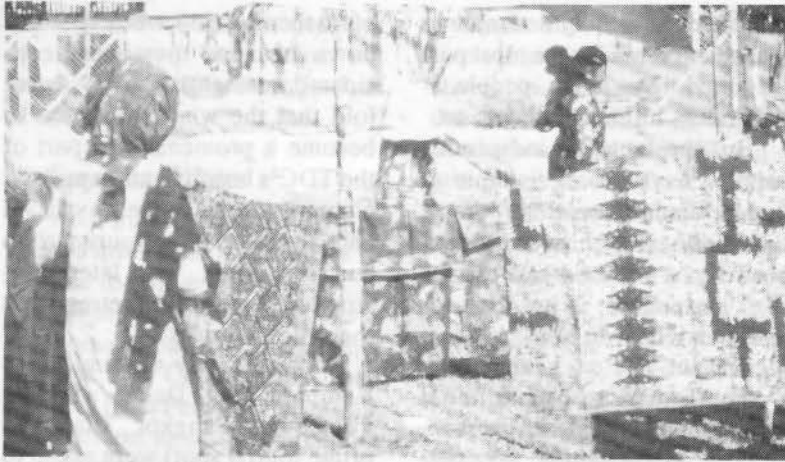
Article 2 of this Declaration states categorically that social progress and developments shall be founded on respect for the dignity and value of the human person and shall ensure the promotion of human rights and social justice which requires, inter alia, the recognition and effective implementation of economic, social and cultural rights without any discrimination.

Article 5 goes to say 'Social progress and development require the full utilization of human resources, including, in particular: (d). The assurance to disadvantaged or marginal sectors of the population of equal opportunities for social and economic advancement in order to achieve an effectively integrated society.'

Article 12 and 13 grandly proclaim that social progress and development shall among other things aim at (i) The elimination of all forms of foreign economic exploitation, particularly that practised by international monopolies, in order to enable the people of every country to enjoy in full the benefits of their national resources; (ii) The establishment of a harmonious balance between scientific, technological and material progress



Kuah, Langkawi poised for massive development: What tourism wants, tourism gets.



Batik in the sun: Art is sacrificed on the altar of the tourist dollar.

and the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of humanity; and (iii) The protection and improvement of the human environment.

So much for the pious proclamation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

Now let us move ahead another 17 years from 1969 right up to 1986 and look at what the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) has to say.

In the preamble we learn that the Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly as a result of their concern over the existence of serious obstacles to development as well as to the complete fulfilment of human beings and of peoples constituted by the denial of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; and, that in order to promote development, equal and urgent attention should be given to the implementation, promotion and protection of those rights, for the enjoyment of certain human rights and fundamental freedoms cannot justify the denial of other human rights and fundamental freedoms.

And so, recognizing that the human person is the central subject of the development process and that development policy should therefore make the human

being the main participant and beneficiary of development, Article 2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development proclaims, *inter alia*, that (a) The human being is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development and (b) States have a duty to formulate development policies that aim at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefit resulting therefrom.

And Article 8 further emphasizes that all States should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realization of all human rights.

I have taken considerable pains to draw your attention to the various UN instruments on human rights and development as I do not think there can be any meaningful discussion on the subject of Tourism and Human Rights without a careful and sober examination of the tourist industry's track record when measured against the requirements and recommendations of these urgent declarations.

Tourism is a business

I do not have to tell you that tourism today is nothing more than an industry; albeit romanticized and 'prettified' but nevertheless a hard-nosed dollars and deutchemark business that has mushroomed into the twentieth century's fastest growing industry.

In fact the world's tourism industry generates US\$3 trillion in trade each year and accounts for 3.7 per cent of all employment.

But tourists today, though they may travel by land, by air and sea to exotic corners of this planet, are as far removed from bygone travellers such as Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, as chalk is from cheese!

For today's tourist is more a 'consumer' than a 'traveller'. I repeat, no matter what the posters say, no matter how glamorously it is packaged, today tourism is nothing more than a business and the tourist nothing more than a consumer.

And like all businesses, tourism is based on buying and selling, exploitation of market resources, profit and loss.

Travelling, visiting exotic places, meeting interesting people, broadening your horizons, experiencing new experiences ... all this has very little, in fact, to do with organized tourism.

The bottom line is how much will the industry rake in - to the tour operators, the hotel manager, the host country ...

With one important exception, however, for what is marketed, what is exploited, what is bought and sold in the tourist trade is not rubber or tin, cocoa or soya but peoples and cultures.

And because the raw material of the tourism industry is flesh and blood, people and their cultures, its long-term effect on a

country whose main income is derived from tourism can be devastating.

For unlike primary products like coffee or cocoa, tin or rubber, or even oil, that can be replaced in the event of depletion with synthetic substitutes, a people or a culture once exploited and subverted to the needs of the tourism industry, can never be replaced.

And because the heart of the tourism industry is the exploitation and selling of 'exotic' peoples and cultures, I shall now endeavour to prove by concrete case-histories how tourism has breached almost all those UN covenants recounted earlier that were designed to protect our rights.

The tourism industry in Malaysia, thank God, is not fully developed. In the ASEAN region, for example, it is not yet on par with Thailand or the Philippines. So, for the purpose of this paper I shall not confine my example to Malaysia alone but shall be drawing from the collective experience of South-East Asia.

Land rights

Let us start with our fundamental birthright - LAND.

Land which is prerequisite to human existence everywhere. Land unfortunately is also a prerequisite of the tourism industry. For organized tourism cannot properly function without its infrastructure of hotels, beach resorts, condominiums, airports, golf courses etc.

So, the tourism industry is forever on the look out for land - or what they prefer to term 'choice locations' - on which they can put down their marinas, their beach resorts, their airstrips, their golf courses, *et cetera, et cetera*.

However, these 'choice locations' usually unspoilt and

therefore exquisitely desirable to the industry, are for the most part inhabited by local people - fishermen, hill tribes and so on.

But the fact that indigenous people have been inhabiting these 'choice locations' since time immemorial and are dependent on the land and sea for their sustenance, is but a minor inconvenience to the tourism juggernaut.

Tourism is inexorable. What tourism wants tourism gets ... and so governments are persuaded, bought or bribed, Ministers co-opted and the people are forced off their land.

Twenty years ago the whole eastern sea-board of Penang was inhabited by fishing communities. Unfortunately this coastal stretch also contained some of the most spectacular beaches found in Malaysia. So, the tourism industry staked its claim and today, twenty years on, this fishing stretch known as Batu Ferringhi is now synonymous with tourists and beach hotels.

The fishing folk, for the most part have been moved out or moved inland. What little pockets remain of the fishing community cater now exclusively to a tourist clientele.

And the cycle of land acquisition and deprivation continues. Today families in the island of Langkawi and Pangkor (off the West Coast of Malaysia) are being forcibly moved to make way for condos, hotels, runways etc.

In 1984, 70 families mainly involved in fishing were moved out of the Tanjung Rhu area in Langkawi to make way for a tourism-related project.

In March 1989, 29 shop owners situated on the coastal road between Kuah jetty and the town (also in Langkawi) were forced to move. Their shops and houses (many of which they had

built themselves) were knocked down because they were considered unsightly. They were told that the whole area was to become a promenade as part of the TDC's beautification project. Naturally they were mystified and angry when a tourist shop and restaurant was later constructed a mere 30 metres from their old premises!

More recently 45 families in Kampung Teluk Dalam, a fishing village in Pangkor Island (a prime tourist spot) were asked to move by the government to make way for a runway to service the tourist industry. I have recorded this incident in a poem called the Tourist-Terrorist Connection:

The Tourist-Terrorist Connection - Epigram

So what has happened to Article 12, 13 and 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that enshrine our right to residence within the borders of our State, our right to own property, our right to privacy without arbitrary interference etc.

And so much for Article 2 of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development which says that the human being is the central subject of development and should be its chief beneficiary.

The story is repeated a hundred times - from Colombo (Sri Lanka) to Baguio (the Philippines), from Bali (Indonesia) to Langkawi (Malaysia) from Honolulu to Hong Kong - and in all this one asks, where is the protection of the rights of the ordinary citizen when the heavy hand of tourism comes down on him?

The cases where natives have successfully resisted development in the name of tourism are minimal.

The reasons for this are legion. Tourism is seductive. It

promises something for nothing; it promises betterment; it promises a higher standard of living.

Indigenous Culture

And, ironic as it may seem, in many instances it promises a lifeline to native cultures.

Let me illustrate: Malaysia is the home of batik art. The father of batik art - Chuah Thean Teng - comes from Penang. He was the first person to successfully turn batik printing into an art form. However, artists in Malaysia, as in other Third World countries find it difficult to make a living from their art. And now because of the initial appeal of Teng's unique work to tourists - every other person who can draw two lines and knows a bit about printing churns out batik paintings by the hundreds. And they do not paint what they see but what they think the tourist wants to see.

So what could have been Malaysia's unique contribution to the world of art is now a desecration of art.

But more startling is the way native dances and private, sacred ceremonies have been subverted by the tourism industry.

In Malaysia, you can see traditional Indian, traditional Malay, traditional Nyonya Baba wedding ceremonies (suitably abbreviated and choreographed) staged in hotel lobbies for tourists to gape at.

In Bali, you can see sacred temple dances offered as dinner entertainment in hotels.

And everywhere, native dances, which once had their time and place in our cultures, have been uprooted, distorted and abbreviated for the tourist palate.

In many instances, these native dances have undergone such a hideous metamorphosis from what they originally were, to be today beyond all recognition.

From the tourist's perspective this is perfectly understandable. Perhaps the original dance was too long - so it had to be shortened; perhaps the music was too slow - so the tempo had to be quickened; perhaps the costumes covered up too much flesh - so they had to be made more revealing.

The more tourist destinations you visit in the Third World the more examples you will see of how we have prostituted our cultures for the tourism industry.

Isn't this a blatant violation of Article 2 of the UN Declaration for Social Progress and Development which emphatically states that social progress and development shall be founded on respect for the dignity and value of the human person and shall ensure the promotion and recognition of their social and cultural rights.

Doesn't this sort of debasement of native traditions and cultures run foul of Articles 12 and 13 of the same UN Declaration that proclaims that social progress and development shall aim at a harmonious balance between material progress and the spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of humanity?

A few years ago I was in the Philippines for a law conference. After the conference, our hosts thought that as we were visitors to their country they would treat us to a typical Filipino meal with typical Filipino dances. What we got, however, was a cultural shock of sorts. The dancers were Filipino alright, but they wore mock Hawaiian grass skirts, clicked Spanish castanets and, I haven't figured to this day what exactly was the dance they danced!

Foreign Dependence

Articles 12 and 13 of the UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development state also that

social progress and development should aim at the elimination of all forms of foreign economic exploitation and the protection of and improvement of the human environment.

But tourism under the guise of earning foreign exchange actually promotes foreign exploitation by

- * the encouragement of the building of hotel chains by Multinational Corporations such as Holiday Inn and Hilton International.

- * the importation of foreign foodstuffs such as US airflown steaks, French cheeses, German wines, Japanese Ajinomoto, soya sauce etc.

- * the utilization of foreign loans for the development of hotels, condos, airports etc. related to the tourism industry and

- * the importation of expatriate labour for 'skilled' positions in the tourism/hotel industry.

It is no exaggeration to say that the more reliant a Third World country's economy is on the tourism industry, the more vulnerable it is to foreign economic exploitation and the more dependant it is on external political and economic fluctuations. The effect of the Gulf War, last year, on the tourist trade, proves this point.

Environmental Degradation

In spite of several pious sentiments in the various UN instruments on human rights that say social progress and development should not be at the expense of our environment, I could cite you several case histories in Malaysia and South-East Asia where the tourism industry has been directly responsible for wreaking havoc on our environment.

But do not take my word for it; a 1990 Environment Quality Report of the Department of En-



In Thailand, 800,000 of its citizens below age 16 cater to the needs of the tourist in search of exotic flesh.

environment, Malaysia openly acknowledges that the coastal waters of Penang and Langkawi (two of Malaysia's premier tourist destinations) had intolerably high levels of faecal coliform. "Pantai Merdeka, Tanjung Lembang and Pulau Langkawi in Kedah and Pantai Tempoyak and Pantai Gertak Sanggul in Penang had high levels of faecal coliform according to an Environment Quality Report of the Department of Environment. The Report said the coastal waters off Penang ranged highest in terms of faecal contamination followed by Selangor and Sarawak. Faecal coliform is used as an indicator for human and animal waste." *The Star* (14.2.90).

And it is no secret that many hotels in these areas dump untreated sewage directly into the sea.

So much so that in place of the crystal clear waters that we had in Penang and Langkawi 20-25 years ago, before the advent of so-called development and tourism, we now have a murky, muddy pea-soup that no sane tourist or local would dare venture into!

Human Dignity

Finally, human rights mean nothing if it is not aimed at

upholding the dignity and the sacred individuality of the human being.

But tourism by its very nature breeds subservience and obsequiousness. It creates a nation of servants; of waiters and waitresses, of croupiers and cleaners, of bellhops and tour guides and yes, of pimps and prostitutes.

For what every tourist wants is to be pampered and served, to have his every need catered to, his every whim satisfied.

As a Japanese businessman recently told me, what he liked most about Malaysia was its 'sarbis' (service). He could get everything he wanted in Penang at a fraction of the price he had to pay in Tokyo, whether it was his *sashimi his sake* or his 'comfort lady'.

And this is the ultimate indignity that tourism visits on the host country - the destruction of its moral and spiritual fibre by the insidious desires and perversities of its visitors.

Who dares deny that a high percentage of tourists to the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka go there not for the beauty of its temples, or scenery, but merely to gratify their sexual appetites.

Yet still not content with the proliferation of massage parlours, 'model' agencies, go-go bars, brothels, strip joints, sex cabarets, sex tours etc. etc. *ad nauseam*, tourism in the last couple of decades has largely been responsible for yet another phenomenon which is perhaps the rankest of them all - child prostitution!

Having tried all the permutations and perversions of adult sex, the jaded tourist out for kicks is now offered yet another dish to whet his appetite - a child.

Whether we like it or not, in Sri Lanka, in the Philippines and in Thailand, child prostitution is a reality. And with the AIDS

scare, I am told, it is on the upswing - the market for virgin boys and girls has increased phenomenally.

Such is the demand, I am told, for young unsullied bodies today that an ETCWT Survey conducted recently in Thailand and the Philippines uncovered whole villages that had been emptied of their children!

And, I posit, it is tourism that has mainly contributed to the growth of child prostitution in the last couple of decades.

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states unequivocally "States Parties (to the Convention) shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse - including sexual abuse."

But because child prostitution is mainly endemic in countries heavily dependent on the tourist dollar, we find that other than official lip-service being paid to the eradication of child prostitution, very little is in fact being done to get rid of this evil.

And this has been the long sad history of tourism and human rights.

Whenever there has been a choice between the dignity of a people, the dignity of a culture, the dignity of a child, or the welfare and well-being of the tourist, governments have always voted for the tourism industry.

And until such a time as we wake up to the realities of what tourism is doing to the children and cultures of host countries, the tourism industry will continue to destroy and devastate those very countries whose economies it grandly promises to boost with its various masterplans and programmes. ♦

- POLITICS
- RELIGION
- ELECTIONS
- HUMAN RIGHTS
- MEDIA
- ENVIRONMENT
- ETHNIC RELATIONS
- UNITY

CURRENT CONCERNS

Women's Day

Women's Day marks the government's recognition of Malaysian women's contribution to the nation's development.

It is encouraging to note that there has been an increase in women's participation in the workforce: in the fields of agriculture, industry and services. There has also been an increase in the number of female



Malaysian women engaged in a successful self-help programme: Women's role in nation-building is given due recognition by the government this year.

students enrolled in the universities.

Unfortunately, women's activities outside the home seem to pose numerous problems. The dilemma of balancing a career and the home front is one such conflict.

On the one hand, women were told to participate actively in promoting national development. On the other, they were told to put the happiness and harmony of their family above everything else.

This dilemma stems from the way work is structured in the capitalist system which undermines traditional family values. The demands of so many hours of work from an individual, the competitiveness to achieve the widest profit margin and the separation of the work place and the family sphere impede the fostering of family happiness and harmony.

Furthermore, many people, especially men, still assume that family harmony rests in the hands of women. Is it not high time that men take on their responsibility as the other partner in raising and nurturing a family? If women were told to balance their career with their responsibility in the home, then the same advice should apply to men as well.

As for the increase in the number of women having a career, it would be illuminating to see where they are located. Are they at the top managerial level or are they at the bottom of the hierarchy?

Additionally, how many of those working women are actually doing it out of necessity, to earn a living to make ends meet because they are single mothers whose husbands or ex-husbands do not pay any maintenance?

Therefore, on the occasion of Women's Day which falls a few days before Malaysia's 35th Merdeka anniversary let us be steadfast and continue to implement the various resolutions that have been tabled at numerous women's gatherings to throw away the yoke that hinder

women's full participation in nation-building.

For the Malaysian men, let both these occasions mark their resolve to come to terms with their responsibility in ensuring a happy family life.

For every Malaysian, let us break away from the outmoded notion that the woman is to blame if the family unit breaks down. This is the first step to ensure justice. When we are ready to take off our blinkers then can we proudly say that we are MERDEKA.

Dr Hamima Dona Mustafa
Assistant Secretary

24 August 1992

"Official Secrets" and Public Accountability

Aliran is encouraged by the Government's assurance that it will take action if wrongdoings such as financial mismanagement are found in the administration.

On this score, Aliran and, we might add, other public interest groups and individuals, share the Government's concern for possible administrative abuses.

It is precisely because of this that we find it strange that certain conscientious civil servants were ticked off and, worse still, warned by the Government of the use of the Official Secrets Act (OSA) against them.

The Opposition was not spared either for having brought to the fore the issue of the planned purchase of Volvo cars by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

The buying of expensive cars, in this case, should not be regarded as an internal matter of a government department concerned for it involves the taxpayers' money, and therefore the people ought to know how their money is being spent. In short, public accountability is very much needed here.

It thus follows that matters such as purchase of vehicles, overseas trips, etc. must not be categorised by the authorities

concerned as "Official Secrets", for to do so would likely create suspicion in the public's mind that something is amiss.

Besides, history has shown that many of the financial scandals that involved a particular government were revealed and subsequently scrutinised not as a result of the government's eagerness to make known such scandals.

This is why all along we have been asking for a repeal of the all-encompassing and vague OSA, which should be replaced with a Freedom of Information Act.

Dr Mustafa K Anuar
Exco member

27 August 1992

Air Exclusion Zone territorial Violation

The air exclusion zone imposed upon Iraq is yet another example of the audacity of the United States, Britain and France to assume that they, and they alone, can determine and dictate the standards of behaviour and justice for and the independence of each nation. This is a frightening and unhealthy development for it poses a serious threat to the security, sovereignty and independence of the Third World countries.

Regretably, the recently held 10th Conference of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) in Jakarta failed to condemn the 3 western powers for the territorial violation of Iraq. The ending of the Cold War has resulted in a unipolar world. This would therefore mean that there is an urgent need for NAM, which has a membership of 108 countries representing two thirds of the world's population, to play the role of safe-guarding the legitimate rights and interests of the countries of the South.

Using the need to protect the Sh'ites in Southern Iraq from the violation of human rights as the jurisdiction of such imposition is seriously flawed. For the US

and its western allies have not given military protection to the Sh'ite Muslims in Lebanon where thousands of them have been massacred by the Israeli armed forces for more than 15 years. It is also significant to note that the US and its allies in the EEC did not consider it necessary and expedient to provide similar protection to the Muslims and Croats in Bosnia against the onslaught of the Serbs in their fascist campaign of "ethnic cleansing".

The air exclusion zone over Southern Iraq was not introduced out of love and concern for the Sh'ite Muslims or the Iraqis. Rather, it was carried out with the desire of completing the hidden agenda of the Gulf War which is to bring about the downfall of Saddam Hussein and the destruction of Iraq.

Another motive for the present exercise is to boost the sagging popularity of George Bush with his voters in order to improve the prospect of his reelection. It is evident from the scheme designed for the Middle East that with Iraq impoverished and devastated, there would not be any challenge to the power structure created to ensure that Israel remains the supreme power in West Asia and to perpetuate Western interests in and dominance over these oil-rich regions.

ALIRAN condemns the imposition of the air exclusion zone upon Iraq for the following reasons:

* This is a blatant violation of the integrity and sovereignty of an independent state.

* This is a total disregard of the right of Iraqi people to determine their own destiny - a basic right in a democracy which the three western powers profess to champion.

* It is arrogant and insensitive on their part to dismiss the fears and protests of Arab countries that such campaign would destabilise the region.

* It is a shameful and distressing fact that while the US

establishment is bent on toppling Saddam Hussein in order to enhance the chances of the re-election of George Bush, millions of Iraqis are allowed to suffer hardship as a result of the continued UN sanction against Iraq.

ALIRAN therefore calls on the United States, Britain and France to immediately cease the air exclusion zone operation against Iraq and to respect its integrity, sovereignty and independence.

*John Kim
Exco Member*

12 September 1992

Politics And Business Should Not Mix

ALIRAN welcomes and supports the statement by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad on September 12, 1992 that politics and business should not be allowed to mix.

Declaring open the 12th Annual General Meeting of Koperasi Usaha Bersatu that day, he declared that "if this is allowed to happen, the country's economy would be eventually destroyed because of widespread corruption."

In view of money politics and financial scandals, often involving the money of the rakyat, becoming so widespread over the past decade, the Prime Minister's call is most timely.

One of the causes of money politics is surely because, as Dr Mahathir himself indicated, many businessmen frequently ask politicians in power to help them. But an equally if not more important factor is that many leading politicians, and especially the major political parties, are themselves involved in business activities.

Although direct formal linkage between the two are often absent, nonetheless, it is very clear to the rakyat that the political parties and certain politicians own and/or control

some of the largest business conglomerates in Malaysia via their proxies. The MIC-Maika, MCA-MPH, UMNO Baru-Renong connections are all well known. The distinction between politics and business has therefore become completely unclear.

It is true as the Prime Minister says that there are no laws to prevent politics from being mixed with business and that to do so is not an offence. In view of this ALIRAN would like to reiterate calls it has made ever since its formation, namely:

* That the Anti-Corruption Agency should be made an independent, autonomous Commission protected by the Constitution and answerable solely to Parliament.

* The Commission should also be equipped with experts able to deal with the increasingly sophisticated ways in which corruption (and white-collar crime generally) is being practised.

* That all Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen declare their and their families' assets to the rakyat in a sworn statement to the Courts.

* Copies of the statement should then be made available at Parliament and the State As-

semblies, District Office, Local Councils and the JKKK offices.

* Members of the public should have access to these documents.

* The statements should be updated each year as long as the individuals concerned remain in Parliament or in the State Assembly.

Additionally, we call upon all political parties to divest themselves from all forms of business dealings. Amendments to existing laws should be made to ensure that this is done. Admittedly this second effort will take a longer time to achieve.

In conclusion we welcome the recent statement by the Prime Minister that politics and business should not be mixed. But we also believe that good sentiments alone are not enough. The government must adopt effective measures to convince the people that corruption, which the Prime Minister says can destroy the economy, indeed the nation, is being fought with sincerity.

*Dr Francis K W Loh
Secretary*

21 September 1992

Aliran's Latest!

PELINDUNG?

Chandra Muzaffar

Price: M\$12/-

continued from back page UNFAIR PRIVATIZATION...



The Jitra-Alor Setar Highway: Were the Kedah stretches given priority attention because they are in the PM's home state?

their estimates once there is no more competition?

MISJUDGEMENT

One suspects that the proposed increase in toll for the highway is the result of sheer incompetence on the part of UEM combined with gross misjudgement. Why did it construct unprofitable stretches of the highway first when it knew that the amount of toll that would be collected from these under-utilized stretches would be insufficient to finance the remaining, more urgent stretches of the highway?

Take, for instance, the Alor-Setar-Bukit Kayu Hitam and Sungai Petani-Alor Setar routes which were among the first to be completed. Everyone knows that the traffic volume on these stretches is nothing compared to,

say, Butterworth-Taiping or Ipoh-Kuala Lumpur which is not yet complete. Everyone, that is, except UEM/PLUS which spent huge sums of precious capital on sections which were not crucial. It is not surprising then that UEM is finding out the hard way that toll collection from these sections is proving to be insufficient to 'pay back' the amount already expended, much less to finance the remaining sections of the highway. My guess is that the Kedah stretches were completed first because they are in the Prime Minister's home state! And we all know that UEM is controlled by UMNO (lama or Baru?).

Well, PLUS is now paying the price ... or rather, the price has been passed on to the consumer without much fanfare. The argument that our toll rates are

still reasonable compared to, say, those in Japan becomes illogical when one considers the huge disparity in per capita incomes between the two countries.

INFLATION

There has been much talk about excessive consumer spending and a low savings rate being among the prime causes of inflation. Inflation is now, I think, well above 5 per cent although official sources insist that it is only 4-5 per cent.

My view is that inflation has been severely aggravated by the "privatization" of state-run monopolies and utilities. In almost every case, such privatization is accompanied with an increase in rates and prices. Of course, this is not mentioned in your Bank Negara reports, MIER surveys and newspaper analyses. But just take a look at the proposed privatization of the Postal Department. Already postal rates have gone up by a massive 50 per cent. Privatized MAS recently announced an increase in airfares. Telekom charges went up a few months ago. Tenaga Nasional is gradually withdrawing its 20% electricity discount to the manufacturing sector. (It is important to note that even without these hikes, all these bodies are already chalking up hefty profits). And now UEM is coming up with a 100 per cent increase in toll rates by 1996. (The journey from Penang to Kuala Lumpur will then cost over \$30, excluding petrol costs).

All these increases in rates represent a serious threat to inflation in the country, but, of course, this is never mentioned in any discussion on inflation.

MONOPOLIES

Why has privatization in the Malaysian context resulted in such increases in utility rates and

prices? Quite simple, really. This is how it works. Before a government-owned enterprise can be privatized, the government allows it to raise the rates or prices of its services, e.g. the recent increase in postal rates. This in turn makes them hugely profitable bodies on the eve of privatization. The poor and the underprivileged are forgotten. The investing public scrambles to apply for the shares in the privatized body. They realize that the stock market will value the shares much higher than the share application price based on the immense profitability of the privatized body following the increase in rates announced earlier.

Who is the main beneficiary when the shares are eventually listed, leaving aside the successful share applicants and those who were given special share allocations? The government, of course! The market value of its stake has now soared. It makes a neat profit from the sale of some of its stake in the privatized bodies.

Of course it still maintains a smaller but nevertheless still sizeable stake in the privatized body. This enables the government to control the management and influence decision-making in the newly privatized body. (Is this really privatization then?)

The government then becomes anxious to ensure that its remaining shares in the privatized body further increases in value. It gradually loses its sense of social responsibility. The overriding goal of the revamped privatized monopoly becomes profits, profits and more profits.



Providing a basic amenity like electricity is the government's social responsibility.

Again the government benefits for its stake increases in value with every increase in share prices. The government still will not allow competition to eat into the cake of these immensely profitable, protected, privatized monopolies, for that will affect the price of its shares.

Without competition, there is no incentive for the privatized monopoly to find ways and means to reduce costs and become more efficient. The privatized body is fully aware that it has no competition. It knows it can increase its profits by simply increasing its rates. This will not affect demand for its services simply because it is a monopoly.

It realizes that the government is there to bail it out in case it sails into troubled waters. There is no element of entrepreneurial risk involved. Its survival and profitability is guaranteed. Meanwhile, rates and utilities become more and more expensive. The ultimate losers are the poor, the marginal-

ized and, yes, even those who scrambled to apply for shares in the first place. The effect on inflation is disastrous.

Unlike increases in the prices of certain finished goods, increases in highway toll, postal rates, telephone charges and electricity costs have a 'multiplier' effect on the economy. They affect not only industrial consumers but also the manufacturing industry. When virtually all manufacturing companies find that their cost of production is on the rise, they will inevitably have to pass on the increased costs to their end-customers. The result is an increase in the price of almost every finished product. Now can you imagine the effect that will have on inflation?

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The government should seriously review this whole business of privatization. It's all very well to say leave it to market forces. But "market forces" can be very unfair or even non-existent especially when we are talking about dubious methods of awarding tenders, and privatized monopolies which operate in a protected market free from competition of any kind.

When such monopolies involve the supply of basic utilities and facilities like electricity and postal services, then the profit motive must always take second place to the larger social responsibility of ensuring cheap and adequate supplies and services for the entire population.

This is a responsibility which no government with a conscience can abdicate, privatization or no privatization. ♦

Unfair Privatization Takes Its Toll

Highway Robbery On The North-South Expressway

Privatization without competition has proved to be costly and disastrous for the consumers.

ANIL NETTO observes that the ultimate losers in this farce are the poor and the marginalized and calls upon the government to review this business of privatization.



Increased toll rates smack of sheer incompetence and gross misjudgement on the part of PLUS.

It's really sickening to hear that PLUS is increasing its toll charges by a whopping 50 per cent from 1993. A further 50 per cent increase is in store from 1 January 1996.

The whole thing becomes a total farce when one considers that the toll has been raised even before the North-South Expressway is even half-completed.

The main reason cited for the hike in toll rates is the increase in construction costs. Originally, the costs were estimated at \$3.4 billion. Now it has been revised to \$6.0 billion, an increase of nearly 100 per cent.

This revision in construction costs makes a mockery of the whole privatization exercise. On what basis was UEM awarded the tender for the construction of the highway? On the basis of its previous experience in handling such gigantic projects? That would be unlikely for it is doubtful whether UEM had managed projects of this scale previously.

On the basis of its ability to construct a highway at the lowest cost compared to other tender bidders? Perhaps. But now UEM

has revised its estimated construction costs by a mind-boggling 100 per cent within the space of a few years. Isn't this unfair to the other unsuccessful bidders who might have been able to construct the highway for much less than \$6.0 billion? (That is, if there was a proper tender exercise in the first place).

What is to stop bidders in future privatization tenders from quoting unrealistically low project costs in order to win the tenders and then later "revising"

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