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The Sabah State Elections 1994:

PROBING THE LARGER ISSUES

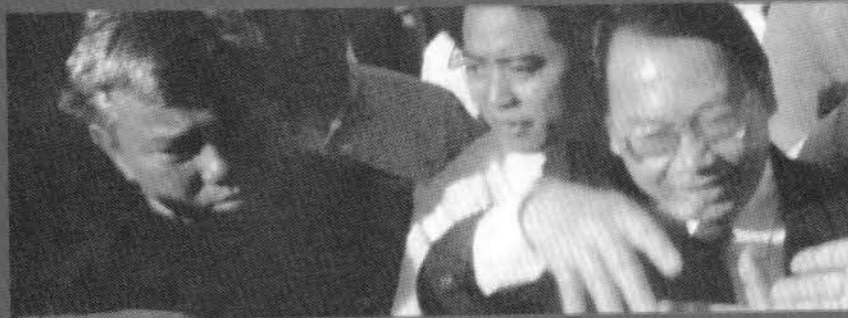


● ASIS CASH
WAS NOT FOR
OPPOSITION

● DETENTION
WITHOUT TRIAL

● BBC
INTERVIEW
WITH
RAFIDAH AZIZ

The Sabah State Elections 1994: **PROBING THE LARGER ISSUES**



The PBS win: Slim but multi-ethnic

Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) emerged as the first political party ever to win a fourth mandate from the people of Sabah following the 18-19 February 1994 elections. This mandate will allow it the opportunity to become the first party to govern the state beyond 9 years, until now unprecedented. But can it do so successfully with such a slim majority?

Another first was also created when 18 candidates representing the New United Malays National Organisation (UMNO Baru), the major political party in the country, were successful in the Sabah polls. What are the reasons behind UMNO Baru's success? FRANCIS LOH analyses the electoral results and explores some of the larger issues surrounding the elections and its outcome.

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As expected, the Sabah state elections was a keenly contested affair. Compared to its performance in 1990 when it won 36 seats, the PBS performed poorly. It ended up with 25 seats while the Barisan Nasional (BN) won 23 seats. Apart from UMNO Baru's 18 seats, the newly-formed Sabah Progressive Party won 3 seats, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) one, and Akar one.

POORER PERFORMANCE BUT STILL MULTI-ETHNIC SUPPORT

The electoral results reveal that the PBS gained some 49.5 percent of the votes cast (compared to some 53.9 percent in 1990) while the BN parties polled some 46 percent. The remaining votes went to candidates representing smaller parties or those contesting independently.

Of the 25 seats gained by PBS, 14 are non-Muslim bumiputera majority constituencies, 4 Chinese-majority constituencies, 2 "mixed" constituencies and 5 Muslim bumiputera majority constituencies. Except for Datuk Amir Kahar, eight other former USNO leaders lost, in some cases narrowly. On the other

hand, Barisan parties won 3 Chinese-majority seats and 20 Muslim bumiputera majority seats.

Consequently, it may be deduced that while the PBS did especially well in non-Muslim bumiputera areas, nonetheless, it also gained a majority of Chinese support, and some Muslim bumiputera support. Its spread of support was certainly more multi-ethnic than that of the Barisan's which failed to make any breakthrough in Kadazan-Dusun and Murut areas. This is the first important observation of the recent polls.

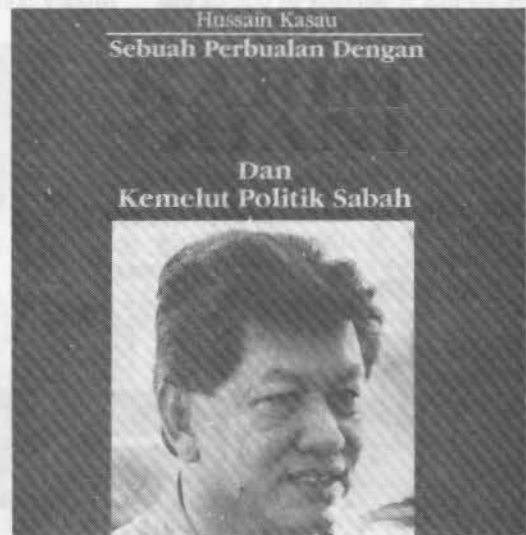
PAROCHIALISM

The PBS has been condemned for advocating "parochial" sentiments through its use of the slogan "Sabah for Sabahans" and its general "anti-federal" stance as in likening UMNO Baru to an outside "colonial" interest. The Information Minister further accused it of promoting "the politics of hatred".

However, the individual component parties of the BN were

equally, if not even more parochial, by harping on ethnic rights and other issues. For instance, the deputy Prime Minister and other UMNO leaders, as revealed in the numerous telecasts of their campaign speeches, never failed to mention the need for Muslims to unite behind UMNO in order to protect their rights. There were also numerous allegations of Muslims being discriminated by the PBS government.

The same appeal along ethnic lines underlined the campaigns of the Chinese-based Barisan component parties. SAPP's accusation



UMNO Baru Sabah information chief Karim Ghani: Muslim Bumiputera participation in the electoral process increased.



UMNO supporters going home to vote: Money and machine were efficiently employed by UMNO throughout the campaign.

that the Chinese were neglected and stood to lose even more under PBS rule is a case in point. Previously forced to eschew ethnic politics when they were in the PBS because of its multi-ethnic set-up, SAPP leaders like Yong Teck Lee and Tham Nyip Shen unabashedly campaigned along ethnic lines like their new UMNO Baru partners. Some of the pamphlets SAPP distributed in the Kota Kinabalu area were blatantly racist.

Such campaigning along ethnic lines is commonplace in peninsular Malaysia. But it should not be forgotten that it appeals to one of the

certainly a reason for its success. But the "3Ms" - media, money and machine - were also crucial. The blatant use of the government-controlled and BN-owned mainstream media for propaganda purposes is discussed in an accompanying story by Mustafa K Anuar. The focus here is on the latter two.

"Money politics" does not, as a recent article in the NST (26 Feb 1994) suggests, simply refer to the actual distribution of money to buy votes and support during elections. That is too narrow and literal an understanding of the phenomenon. Money politics is more. In essence,

mainstream media, and have access to large amounts of funds that allow them to finance extensive party machines, and intensive electoral campaigns readily.

The involvement of such party machines like UMNO Baru's, and their huge spendings in the recent elections were unprecedented in Sabah politics. Although the PBS boasts of the best party machine in the state, and the party and particular PBS politicians also expended large amounts of funds, nonetheless, they were no match for their peninsula counterparts. A salient point is how, according to the UMNO Sabah in-

formation chief Karim Ghani, the party was responsible for facilitating the registration of some 100,000 additional voters between the 1990 and 1994 elections, thereby resulting in an increase in the number of Muslim bumiputera majority constituencies.

But money and machine also ensured that the BN won the poster war throughout the state except in PBS strong-



Yong Teck Lee's campaign was unabashedly along ethnic lines.

basest of instincts. It is divisive of peoples, as the PBS has counteracted.

Indeed, while the PBS may stand accused of fanning parochialism by calling for a "Sabah for Sabahans", to its credit it did not campaign along ethnic lines. The Prime Minister's accusation on the last day of campaigning that the PBS was conducting an ethnic-based campaign was completely misplaced, if not untrue.

UMNO BARU AND THE "3Ms"

The remarkable electoral performance of UMNO Baru in its first showing in Sabah requires comment too. Its resort to ethnic politics was

it refers to the involvement of political parties and politicians (especially those in power) in corporate business activities. Inevitably, this leads to a blurring of the divide between public funds and interests on the one hand, and party and or personal funds and interests on the other. Corruption and cronyism often follow.

At any rate, money politics usually results in companies set up by politicians and political parties (via their proxies) having access to government loans, contracts, critical information, licenses, monopolies, etc. As a consequence of money politics in Malaysia, UMNO Baru and the other BN parties (via their proxies) have gained control of the

gholds; that its party workers, including hundreds from the peninsula (involved in the *anak angkat* scheme whereby different UMNO Baru state liaison committees adopted particular Sabah constituencies) were utilised efficiently and adequately provided for; that its sympathisers were fed at *ceramahs* and transported back to their hometowns for voting purposes; that adequate buses, taxis, 4-wheel drives, boats and helicopters were booked and paid for at hiked-up rates; that background information on particular settlements and villages were available, their residents contacted, their sympathies monitored by the day, and all such



Tun Mustapha: Sabah for Sabahans.

information put into the computer so as to be easily accessed; and so on.

There is yet another dimension to money and machine politics. Access to federal development funds allowed UMNO Baru and the Barisan leaders to promise as well as hand out on the spot, monies for a myriad of purposes: RM 30 million for Chinese schools in Sabah; RM 5.6 million for supply of electricity in 30 rural areas; a university; a free trade zone; grants for cooperatives, etc. Ultimately, they offered a "Sabah Baru" which they promised would usher in economic development and wealth for all. This is also money politics. And visiting federal ministers, *mentris besar*, chief ministers and other BN leaders utilised the facilities of federal departments and agencies even though they were engaged in campaigning activities.

The PBS too, indulged in the same game. The facilities of state departments and agencies were readily used by PBS ministers and other leaders while they campaigned. But having access only to state funds which were by com-

parison very limited, they could not match the BN in this game.

SABAH STATE RIGHTS AND FEDERAL-STATE RELATIONS

It appears, therefore, that the multi-ethnic support for the PBS is primarily a result of its championing of Sabah's rights and interests. Although such a stance has been viewed negatively by the BN leaders and projected as anti-federal, it remains a popular sentiment. Although PBS' campaigns in this and previous elections have given a fillip to this sentiment, it is not new. Previous Chief Ministers like Tun Fuad Stephens and Tun Mustapha and their governments have expressed similar concerns as those of the PBS'. (The issue has been explored on several occasions in the past: see *Aliran Monthly* 10(8) 1990 and 12(11) 1992). Concern for Sabah's interests and rights is the reason for Tun Mustapha's resignation from UMNO Baru and his joining PBS. There is a need, therefore, for federal Barisan leaders to understand the

basis of this sentiment, not merely wish it away, even less paint it as anti-federal. This is so especially since the 1994 Sabah elections are now over and the people's mandate, however slim, has been given to the PBS.

It is completely understandable why Barisan leaders remain distrustful of Pairin Kitingan and the PBS leaders after that "stab in the back" incident when PBS withdrew from the BN on the eve of the 1990 general elections. Not surprisingly, the Prime Minister announced on the eve of the 1994 polls, and immediately after the election results as well, that no coalition government would be formed with the PBS.

However, the newly re-elected Sabah Chief Minister's offer to meet Premier Dr Mahathir as soon as possible in order to patch up federal-state ties has been met with a rebuff too. The MCA leader has further remarked that "PBS must show its sincerity first". But surely a distinction needs to be made between the duly-elected PBS state government's wish to maintain cordial ties with the Barisan federal government, from the PBS' wish to join the BN (which is not the case in this instance). Put another way, there is a need for BN leaders in Kuala Lumpur in particular to distinguish between government-to-government relations from party-to-party relations.

DISCRIMINATING AGAINST SABAHANS?

In this regard, it is noteworthy that, since 1991, development allocations as provided under the Sixth Malaysia Plan have not been channelled by Kuala Lumpur to the Sabah state government directly but to the Federal Development Office (headed by the Federal Secretary for Sabah who in turn reported to Tun Mustapha when he was federal Minister of Sabah Affairs) instead. Only grants provided for in the Constitution are directly channelled to the state government. This by-passing



Anwar: Parochial throughout the campaign

of the state government also occurs in the case of Kelantan. In both places, quasi-state government apparatuses have been set up by the BN federal government so as to implement and monitor the development plans. Government officers have been seconded to the Prime Minister's department and then emplaced in the two states. As well, instead of relying solely on the existing district administrative system, the recognised third-tier of government, to implement the development plans at the local level, the BN federal government utilises party officials as well who, in turn, coordinate with federal departments and agencies working at the state level.

It is also significant that Sabah and Kelantan are the only two states whose development allocations were cut in the mid-term review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan, apparently because of "constraints in the implementation capacity in these states" (see accompanying story by KJ Khoo). Also noteworthy is that the chief minister of Sabah (and the Menteri Besar of Kelantan) do not automatically attend the meetings of the executives of the state governments on development matters that are called by the federal government.

All the above practices are contrary to a federal system of govern-

ment which practises competitive politics. The people of Sabah who have voted for the PBS (like the people of Kelantan who voted for the PAS-Semangat 46 coalition in 1990) should not be punished and discriminated against through development allocation cutbacks. The involvement of BN party officials to implement federal development projects at the local level will also lead to discrimination of those who voted for the PBS.

Yet these development funds do not belong to the BN, but to the rakyat. A need to distinguish between government-to-government ties from party-to-party ties is therefore crucial.

PRESERVING DEMOCRACY AND COMPETITIVE FEDERALISM

The principles of democracy must be upheld. This includes the recognition that in the competitive federal system we practise, there is always the likelihood that the federal government and the government of a particular state might not come from the same party. In fact, at a time when demands for democratic participation and greater autonomy are on the rise throughout the world - in western industrialised countries, former socialist countries as well as developing countries - the competitive federal system is seen as an important political mechanism for resolving conflict and preserving political stability. Seen from this perspective, the so-called parochial sentiments that exist in Sabah are not unique whatsoever. It is in fact a clamour for democratic participation and decentralisation.

The problems between Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu can be accommodated. The PBS must behave like a state government in power and act responsibly in its dealings with the federal government as well as with all Sabahans regardless of their ethnic origins or party affiliations. This is especially so since its victory was so narrow. On its part, the BN federal government must honour the principles of a competitive federal system. Apparently, that is not to be in the immediate future. There is a real danger that the PBS, with its wafer-thin majority, will not be allowed to get on with the business of government.

Already the first salvos have been fired. The PBS has been accused by Barisan leaders of "undemocratically" detaining its own elected assemblymen and preventing them from joining the BN during the first 30 hours after the elections when Pairin had not yet been sworn in as Chief Minister. Pressure has continued with the Barisan's questioning of the legality of the nomination of six additional assemblymen as provided for under the state constitution. It is likely that the matter will be taken to court.

Since Pairin still faces two more charges of corruption involving a timber land concession and a road project as well, much of his time will be spent in the courts. So too will his brother, Jeffrey Kitingan, beginning from May, for he is charged with eight counts of failing to declare his assets totalling RM84,059.45 in a sworn statement to the Anti-Corruption Agency in 1989.

With the anti-hopping law declared unconstitutional, it is not unlikely that some PBS assemblymen will voluntarily, or more likely be induced, to crossover to the BN, party-hopping being a common occurrence in previous post-elections scenarios in Sabah. But such pressures must not be allowed to develop into illegal demonstrations, and incidents of bombing and arson as they did during 1985-86. ■

Peninsular Mainstream Media's Coverage

The recent Sabah State Elections was covered by the Peninsular mainstream media. As expected, the media coverage was largely supportive of the Barisan Nasional. And yet such coverage did not, however, seem to have produced adequately the 'desired effect'.

MUSTAFA K ANUAR finds out how and why.

The recent Sabah State elections was the first occasion in which the incumbent Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) faced the Barisan Nasional (BN) not as an abiding ally (as before) but as a political foe. This change of political situation was brought about by the PBS's hurried withdrawal from the coalition just before the 1990 general elections, a pull-out that was seen by the BN leadership as a stab in the back. Since then relations between the Federal (i.e. BN) and Sabah State governments have been uneasy and uncomfortable.

To be sure, this elections promised to be very intense and crucial to the parties concerned, particularly BN's major component party, the New United Malays National Organisation (UMNO Baru), which has spread its wings in Sabah. This was the political context into which the mainstream media from the Peninsula made their plunge.

As expected, the mainstream media in the Peninsula gave

prominence not only to the Sabah State elections as a whole, but also and especially to the election campaigns run by the BN. Radio-Television Malaysia (RTM) and TV3, for instance, had set up their respective 'Kota Kinabalu studios' to monitor the election campaigns in Sabah. These studios brought live coverage of things that had happened in Sabah during this intense period.

Promises and media

From the TV screen, viewers saw the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, and his colleagues in the Federal Cabinet descending upon Sabah soil, and rushing from one corner of the land to another to meet and talk to the rakyat. It was here that not only did the BN leaders shake hands with the rakyat but also promised and gave financial assistance for development projects that were apparently needed sorely in many parts of the state.

In addition, certain heads of government agencies were reported to have declared their pious intention to help develop Sabah by promising to give development aid or set up training centres in the state. Some TV viewers and radio listeners, particularly those in Sabah, might be left to wonder whether this was a veiled attempt on the part of the Federal government leaders to 'polish' their somewhat crass form of bribery politics. (This is, of course, not to imply that the PBS leaders in general were immune to such 'tendencies' as a number of them also 'dished' out some election 'goodies'.)

As with the case of previous elections, Malaysian viewers were informed that a number of disgruntled members of the PBS had

left the party only to join UMNO (or other component parties of the BN). It is here that a few of these party members -- from some unknown places in Sabah (at least, to many of the Peninsular viewers) -- were suddenly given the short-lived media glare and glory. They were interviewed and given ample time to express, nation-wide, their dissatisfaction with the PBS and gratitude towards and confidence in UMNO Baru.

One problem with such political cross-overs, though, is that in a few cases the media tended to give conflicting numbers of people involved. For example, we might be told that 300 left a party on one particular day, but the next day would see the number of this very same group dwindling to say, 200. In other words, it is quite possible that these numbers were consciously inflated for media and, consequently, public consumption.

Again, just like the previous general elections, RTM had created and broadcast a song dedicated to Sabahans -- in English, Malay, Kadazan and Mandarin languages. On TV, we were -- via the song -- given the impression that a Sabahan deserved a better future in a 'New Sabah' within the Malaysian federation. Thus, the usual visual juxtaposition of a group of Sabahans with the Malaysian flag, the Malaysian nation. Together and united, 'we' (read Sabahans and BN), so went the message, can all make it.

On Saturday night (19/2/94) when election results started to trickle in, both RTM and TV3 were visibly 'agile', constantly updating the viewers with the latest election outcome. This 'excitement' on the part of both stations was by and

large, it seems, due to the rising expectation that the BN would eventually triumph.

The next day, Sunday, the TV (and also radio) stations were somewhat reticent about the election results. As it turned out, the PBS had gained 25 seats while the BN 23. It was as if nothing much had happened in Sabah in the last few hours. More than that, viewers, particularly those from the peninsula, were not told of the 'difficulties' faced by the leader of the winning PBS, Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, in getting sworn in as the new Chief Minister of Sabah that morning.

Latest in news and scoop of the day

Even TV3 failed to live up to its corporate image of being the first in news: its viewers were somehow kept in the dark until early Sunday evening when they were eventually informed of the 'air of uncertainty' gripping Sabah. The evening news showed Pairin keeping vigil in his Mercedes Benz outside the gates of the Istana (Sabah Governor's official residence at Signal Hill). He was later joined in by his former arch rival Tun Mustapha who appeared grim, puffing away a cigarette in the broad daylight of Ramadan, the Muslims' fasting month. In this instance, one could say that the BN-influenced TV stations had their 'scoop of the day'.

The mainstream press in the peninsula too played their part in highlighting, quite positively, the BN's election campaigns in Sabah. Almost always the BN managed to get the front page and prominent coverage, whilst contender PBS was often relegated to the inside pages.

Like the electronic media, the mainstream press reported the scurrying of the Federal Ministers in Sabah, pledging development projects

and financial assistance to Sabahans -- if voted in. For instance, the *New Straits Times* (10/2/94) reported that Land and Co-operative Development Minister, Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai, pledged more aid for co-operatives in Sabah if the BN won the election. In the *Sunday Star* (13/2/94), readers were told that Deputy Education Minister Dr Leo Michael Toyad gave away RM2 million in grants to the headmasters and representatives of 30 schools at the State Education Department.

The BN's message of socio-economic development and progress for fellow Sabahans was indeed prominent in the Peninsular papers. This is significant in the context of a Sabah that has been facing socio-economic problems since PBS's defection from the BN.

Thus, a headline in *The Star* on 15 February 1994, for example, screamed, 'Vote BN for progress, says Anwar'. On page 4 of the same issue of *The Star*, UMNO Baru vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was reported to have said that, 'The Chinese business community feels that only the Barisan Government can turn the economy around and inject a new spirit in Sabah'. And *The Star* on the next day reported of Dr Mahathir's personal letter to all Sabahans that was advertised in Sabah's local papers, which, among other things, said that 'their (Sabahans') votes could bring about another five years of economic stagnation or a future of economic dynamism'.

Crossing over in the limelight

Defections of certain people from the PBS also attracted the attention of the mainstream press as this had the effect of highlighting what was seen as the weaknesses of the PBS. For instance, the resignation of Yong Teck Lee from the PBS leadership and party, and consequently his setting up of the Chinese-based Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), gained media attention and prominence. Yong took the limelight, particularly after SAPP declared its desire to join the BN in its fight against the PBS.

Likewise, the quitting of founder-member Datuk Lee Sen from the PBS and his intention to join SAPP was fodder for the peninsular media. The *NST* on 17 February, for instance, ran a headline: 'Founder member Lee quits party to support Barisan'.

The press, when the occasion arose, also seemed inclined to highlight a split or problems -- imagined or real -- that appeared within or around the Kitingan family in particular and the PBS leadership in general. Hence, on the front page of the *Sunday Star* (13/2/94) ran the headline: 'Jeffrey ready to take over', giving the impression that Pairin's brother, Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, had some problems with Pairin and was ready to take over from him if the people elected him in the state election. Another example can be found in a headline in *The Star* (15/2/94): 'Pairin's wife has a lot of clout in PBS, says Yong'.

As mentioned earlier, the mainstream press did, however, give some coverage to the PBS. For example, in the *NST* (10/2/94), Pairin was reported to have explained -- although in the inside page -- his reasons for highlighting 'the need to protect the rights and in-



PBS billboard: Reflecting the sentiments of the Sabahans?

terests of the State as enshrined in the Malaysian Agreement', and he argued that this 'should not be misconstrued as an attempt to instigate anti-federal sentiments'. Views of the PBS on other matters were also reported in small quantities.

The political situation, after the election results were announced, was adequately recorded by *The Star*. The front page of the paper's 21 February issue

succinctly reflected the anxiety among Sabahans in particular and Malaysians in general: 'Sabah Waits', and this was accompanied by a picture of Pairin and Mustapha together waiting in the former's car outside the Istana. This contrasted



Jeffrey Kitingan: The press highlighted his problems with his brother

with the *NST*'s front page headline on the same day: 'PM: No coalition with PBS'; 'Next Government will be sworn in at 10 am today, says Yang di-Pertua'. A big picture of Pairin and Mustapha in the car accompanied the headline. In addition, another story on the same page was headlined, 'Parti Bersatu Sabah losing its grip'. The next day, both *The Star* and the *NST* reported the swearing-in ceremony that occurred in the Istana. This happy occasion (for the PBS, at least), however, was 'tempered' with reports that had headlines such as 'Sakaran: We will ensure power is not abused' (*NST*, 22/2/94); 'Sakaran leads Barisan winners to meet PM today' (*NST*, 22/2/94); 'Anwar: We'll fight deviation in Sabah' (*NST*, 22/2/94); 'Anwar: BN the people's champion' (*Star*, 22/2/94); 'Sakaran: PBS rule won't be easy' (*Star*, 22/2/94); 'More leaders laud BN's success' (*Star*, 22/2/94); 'Ling: MCA has gained faith of Sabah Chinese' (*Star*, 22/2/94); and 'Six reps to beef up

PBS margin' (*Star*, 22/2/94). In other words, the papers concerned were more inclined to project the 'moral victory' of the BN.

Some lessons arising from the media coverage

There are lessons to be learnt from this state elections and the media coverage. For one, the peninsular media could only do and influence people,

especially Sabahans, so much. This is particularly so when there are other important factors as well that came into play in this elections, namely heightened parochialism/state nationalism and 'siege mentality' in 'Fortress Sabah' -

- in the face of what is generally felt to be the 'abandonment' of the overall welfare of Sabahans by Federal government leaders since the PBS's withdrawal from the BN; and the active 'peninsular intervention' in local politics (like the involvement of UMNO Baru, MCA, and, to a lesser extent, Pas and DAP), among other things.

Secondly, the urban-bias and peninsular-centred nature of the mainstream media in the peninsula only isolated, if not alienated, themselves when they shifted their attention, albeit, and especially, for a fleeting moment, to Sabah. For under normal circumstances, most of the news reported in the mainstream media in the peninsula have often been about the peninsular people, particularly those in positions of political and economic power in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, it is quite likely that some Sabahans would view this sudden 'concern' for Sabah by the peninsular media with some degree of cynicism, if not

downright outrage. In short, the 'media marginality' of the Sabahans as a whole could not be simply wished away.

In addition, this 'Sabah focus' could also be interpreted as a mere political ploy especially to the Sabahans who have in the main considered themselves economically marginalised in the context of national development. Besides, that some coverage of the elections was biased towards the BN would only worsen this perception.

Thirdly, compared with their peninsular cousins, local papers in Sabah were a lot more vibrant. There were debates, and the contesting political parties received some fair amount of coverage. Besides, local political personalities -- as opposed to peninsular bigwigs -- were highlighted in a number of these papers, people who meant more to the ordinary Sabahans. In other words, in the eyes of the local Sabahans the credibility of their media is relatively higher than that of the peninsular media.

Finally, for as long as there is the perception that most of the peninsular's mainstream media are closely associated with some of the BN component parties or groups or individuals supportive of the BN, the journalistic credibility of these media as a whole would almost always be viewed with suspicion, particularly during political elections when the BN has its interests to protect and promote. It would help improve the situation to some degree if there are other mainstream media which are owned by independent groups or individuals in the peninsula.

And in the context of strained Federal-Sabah State relationships, some degree of unfair media coverage on the part of the Peninsula's mainstream media could only increase the number of (peninsular) media sceptics in Sabah and might also provoke further the 'Fortress Sabah' mentality. ■

Who's the poorest of us all?

THE POLITICS OF FACTS AND FIGURES

During the recent election campaign in Sabah, the Barisan Nasional made out Sabah to be the poorest and most backward state in the country. Further, the BN blamed Sabah's economic condition on the incompetence of the PBS government. The conclusion the BN wanted the Sabah voter to draw was: If you want progress and development, throw out the PBS, and vote in the Barisan Nasional. In this article K J KHOO probes into the use of economics statistics by the Barisan to woo the Sabah electorate.

RTM, TV3, and the BN's newspapers trotted out all kinds of 'facts' to 'prove' Sabah's alleged backwardness. Not to be outdone by them, a Senator from Gerakan, who was not so long ago an Associate Professor of Economics, wrote to the *Sabah Times* (16 Feb 1994) and bandied about 'figures' to 'demonstrate' Sabah's backwardness.

Yet what do official figures actually tell us about Sabah? Do they demonstrate Sabah's 'backwardness'? Can they prove the PBS's incompetence?

The wealth of a state is commonly measured in terms of its Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, per capita, that is, the total value of goods and services produced per person in the state. The rate of growth of the GDP per capita thus measures how things are progressing in the state. If we go by these measures, we will find that any claim that Sabah was the most backward state in Malaysia was patently false.

Let us look at the tables below which contain *official* state-by-state GDP per capita figures for 1990 and 1993.

In 1990, Sabah was better off than Perak, Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan. Sabah was in fact not far behind Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Pahang. (Indeed, as we shall soon see, it may have been better off than all the other states except for the Federal Territory, Terengganu, Selangor and Pulau Pinang if some other figures are considered as well.)

1990 was five years after the PBS first governed Sabah, so that one could even say that the PBS did rather well, especially considering that the state had a very serious, even critical problem involving illegal immigrants.

After 1990, however, Sabah stagnated, even deteriorated so that Sabah seemed to have performed

STATE	GDP per capita, 1990 (1978 prices)
Wilayah Persekutuan	8593
Terengganu	7025
Selangor	6363
Pulau Pinang	5274
Johor	4020
Sarawak	3963
Negri Sembilan	3810
Melaka	3723
Pahang	3661
Sabah (incl. Labuan)	3561
Perak	3528
Perlis	3076
Kedah	2653
Kelantan	1749
Average	4433

TABLE 1
Source: Mid-term Review, 6MP, Table 2-13

STATE	GDP per capita, 1993 (1978 prices)
Wilayah Persekutuan	10496
Terengganu	7837
Selangor	7698
Pulau Pinang	6728
Johor	4991
Melaka	4721
Negri Sembilan	4512
Sarawak	4450
Pahang	4274
Perak	4252
Sabah (incl. Labuan)	3677
Perlis	3588
Kedah	3327
Kelantan	1954
Average	5275

Table 2
Source: Mid-term Review, 6MP, Table 2-13

worse than Kelantan which has long been the poorest state in Malaysia. From 1990 to 1993, Sabah's GDP per capita reportedly grew by only 1.1 per cent per annum compared to Kelantan's which grew by 3.8 per cent.

PLAYING POLITICS?

What had happened? Had the PBS government suddenly collapsed into total incompetence? Or was it because PBS became an opposition party in October 1990 and therefore Sabahans were compelled to pay a price for exercising their constitutional right to elect a non-BN state government?

Even so, Sabah had a higher GDP per capita in 1993 than Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan. In fact, if one wants to play politics with 'facts' and 'figures' (like our Gerakan Senator, for example), one should conclude that the figures truly indict not the PBS's but the BN's incompetence.

Take Kelantan for a start. After nearly twenty years of BN rule, the state's GDP per capita was the lowest in the country, far behind every other state's. Perhaps the figures explain why the 'poorest' and 'most backward' Kelantanese voters whitewashed the BN in 1990.

And what can one say about poor but loyal Kedah after thirty years of uninterrupted BN rule - except that Kedah remains loyal but very poor? Its GDP per capita in 1993 was less than every other state's except Kelantan's.

Basically the same picture can be obtained by looking at the average monthly household income, another commonly accepted indicator of wealth and/or poverty. Let us refer to our third table which contains figures on the

average monthly household income on a state-by-state basis for 1990, the last year for which there are published figures.

In 1990, Sabah did better than the national average, and outperformed Johor, Sarawak, Melaka, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan. Indeed, Sabah's average monthly household income almost equalled Pulau Pinang's! Only the rich Federal Territory and Klang Valley had a larger average monthly household income.

It is true that these averages do not tell us much about how income is distributed. The poverty rate is a more important indicator of the people's welfare. Sabah performs poorly on this score. It had a poverty rate of 33.2 per cent in 1993. But its poverty rate was 34.3 per cent in 1990 and 35.3 per cent in 1987, suggesting a longstanding condition predating the PBS's opposition government. That the poverty rate in Sabah has been little reduced, even allowing for the illegal immigrant problem, calls for serious concern. It is something which the PBS government, or any government, must address if it is serious about helping the people.

But can the BN itself be smug over this issue? In 1987 - the last year for which published figures by individual states in Peninsular Malaysia are easily available - the poverty rate was 36 per cent in Terengganu, 32 per cent in Kelantan and 31 per cent in Kedah. One should not be too ready either to claim that the poverty rates for the 'BN states' have declined more than in Sabah. The poverty rate in petroleum-rich and BN-ruled Terengganu actually rose from 29 per cent in 1984 to 36 per cent in 1987.

FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY

Poverty is not just a state's burden. Financial allocations for development programmes to help reduce poverty are a prime responsibility of the Federal Government. What do the development allocations under the Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995 tell us in this regard? The *Mid-term Review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan* shows that allocations for all states were increased - except for Kelantan and Sabah, ostensibly because of 'constraints in the implementation capacity in these states' (MTR 6MP, p. 49).

How can one objectively measure 'implementation capacity'? One simple measure is provided by the proportion of the original allocation which has been committed to development projects. By this measure, 40 per cent of Sabah's allocation under the Sixth Malaysia Plan had been committed by 1993. Perhaps since 1993 was beyond the half-way mark of the Sixth Malaysia Plan, this was sufficient ground to reduce Sabah's allocation.

If that was the case, why were Johor, Perak and Negri Sembilan treated differently? These three states had committed 40 per cent, 38 per cent and 36 per cent of their

STATE	Average Monthly Household Income, 1990
Wilayah Persekutuan	2102
Selangor	1790
Pulau Pinang	1375
Sabah	1358
Johor	1220
Sarawak	1199
Melaka	1190
Negri Sembilan	1162
Pahang	1092
Perak	1067
Terengganu	905
Kedah	860
Perlis	852
Kelantan	726
National Average	1254

Table 3
Source: Sixth Malaysia Plan, Table 1-12

	1986*	1988*	1990 **	1990* **	1993* **
Sabah	3778	4091	4500	3561	3677
Malaysia	3551	3858	4392	4433	5275

TABLE 4

Sources:

* Mid-term Review, 5MP, Table 3 - 5

** 6MP, Table 1 - 12

*** Mid-term Review, 6MP, Table 2 - 13

respective allocations. By comparison, Kelantan had committed 33 per cent.

Apparently, Kelantan and Sabah have been discriminated against. Johor's 40 per cent commitment was rewarded with an additional allocation of RM1 million. Sabah's 40 per cent commitment was penalised with a cut of RM160 million. Kelantan's 33 per cent was branded as a 'constraint in implementation capacity' and punished with a cut of RM64 million, whereas Negri Sembilan's 36 per cent brought a bonus of an additional allocation of RM12 million.

Funnily - but also tragically for Kelantanese and Sabahans - the BN's figures are not the hard facts we take them to be. Those figures can become highly elastic when

applied to Sabah, as can be seen from our final table which compares Sabah's and Malaysia's GDP per capita figures (at constant prices for various years).

Look closely at the shaded columns. They refer to the critical year of 1990 but are derived from different sources published at different times. Normally, a later set of figures may differ slightly from an earlier set: hence the slight difference in the 1990 figures for Malaysia as a whole. But when it comes to Sabah, the difference exceeds 20 per cent - surely much too large to be a minor correction.

No doubt someone somewhere will be able to figure away this discrepancy. For now, take it as fun and frolic with facts and figures in the recent Sabah elections! ■

Twenty Something

In the land of 2020, leaders
took pride in their far-sightedness
& perfect vision of 20/20.

They become cockeyed on Feb 19
their visual acuity reduced to 23/25
short sightedness was the malady.

Distorted vision caused them
to believe that 23 plus extraneous
was bigger than 25.

Their sight dimmed on Saturday
total blindness set in on Sunday
miraculous restoration on Monday.

The optician corrected the myopia
once again their vision is 20/20
until the next election.

JAYA, KL.

What Hope For Multi-Ethnic Cooperation?

Surprising voting patterns surface in recent elections

The recent Sabah state election saw the Barisan Nasional, the governing coalition at the federal level, making significant inroads into the East Malaysian state despite its narrow 23-25 seat loss to the incumbent Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

Little did it matter to the Barisan that their "success" was achieved through the abuse of the media and the promise of "development" (which was actually a thinly disguised threat to withhold development funds from the state if the PBS was voted in).

ASTONISHING CONCLUSIONS

In the euphoria which followed their unexpectedly strong showing, Barisan component party leaders quickly arrived at several astonishing conclusions.

Their statements gave the impression that the ethnic Chinese in

Sabah were now solidly behind the Barisan.

It was also implied that the PBS had little Muslim support, despite the backing the party received from former Sabah UMNO Baru deputy head Tun Mustapha Harun.

Unfortunately, many Malaysians have readily accepted these views in the absence of a proper analysis.

INTERESTING PATTERNS

If we were to examine the results carefully, several interesting voting patterns will emerge:

** About two thirds of the non-Muslim indigenous community voted for the PBS.*

No one can dispute this as the PBS swept all 14 non-Muslim indigenous majority seats. For instance, in the Kadamaian constituency where the non-Muslim

indigenous voters comprised 81 per cent of the electorate, the winning PBS candidate, Baggai Basirun, secured 68 per cent of the votes.

Still, it would be a misconception to think that the Barisan has virtually no support among the non-Muslim indigenous folk. In Nabawan, for instance, where they comprised 80 per cent of the electorate, the losing Barisan candidate managed a creditable 42 per cent of the valid votes cast.

** Still significant Muslim support remains for the PBS.*

Take the Sukau seat for example. Although an overwhelming 92 per cent of the voters there were Muslim, the losing PBS candidate still managed to muster a significant 42 per cent of the votes cast.

At the end of the day, the PBS succeeded in preventing a clean sweep by the Barisan in predominantly Muslim areas by



Analysis of the results in Sabah showed that voting was not entirely along ethnic lines.

snatching five of the 24 Muslim majority seats. Thus, it would be wrong to say that the PBS has little Muslim support.

*** A clear majority of the ethnic Chinese backed the PBS.**

This is indisputable. The result at Api-Api, where 89 per cent of the voters are of Chinese origin, provides a revealing clue. The victorious PBS candidate there, Chau Tet Onn, chalked up 65 per cent of the votes cast proving that the majority of Chinese Sabahans still support the PBS.

We can see further evidence of the community's leaning towards the PBS from the party's success in bagging four of the seven ethnic Chinese majority seats. It is quite possible that the PBS could have picked up another such seat had the peninsula-based opposition Democratic Action Party not split the ethnic Chinese vote in the Tanjung Papat constituency.

Chinese Sabahans, though in the minority, have traditionally played the role of power brokers in previous state elections. This election was no different. Though we witnessed a swing in ethnic Chinese votes away from the PBS, the majority of Chinese Sabahans remained loyal to the PBS thus powering the party to the slimmest of victories over the Barisan.

Notwithstanding their overall sentiment in favour of the PBS, the Chinese community in the state must have been sorely tempted like never before by the many "carrots" dangled before them by the Barisan. These included financial grants given to Chinese medium schools, the promise of a university in Sabah, the creation of a new Chinese-based Barisan component party (SAPP),

the pledge of increased economic development, a more conducive business climate and the prospect of an ethnic Chinese chief minister through the implementation of the rotational system.

All this contributed to the swing in ethnic Chinese votes towards the Barisan which resulted in three seats for SAPP. This would partly account for the drop in PBS' share of the popular vote from 54 per cent at the 1990 election to almost 50 per cent this time around (against the

is that, despite the searching test it received at the the hands of the Barisan's "machinery", media and money, hope still exists for multi-ethnic parties in Malaysia. This is especially true in Sabah where inter-marriage and commendable religious tolerance have blurred the dividing lines between ethnic and religious groups.

To the credit of the Sabah electorate, the support for both the Barisan and the PBS cut across both ethnic and religious lines. Although



PBS has little Muslim support? Analysis of the results reads otherwise.

Barisan's 46 per cent).

So, how can we be certain that the majority of Chinese Sabahans were still behind the PBS? With a large proportion of the Muslim vote going to the Barisan, it would have been impossible for the PBS to secure 25 seats without the majority support of the Chinese community (and a significant segment of the Muslim electorate). This is obvious because the non-Muslim indigenous constituencies, all strongholds of the PBS, account for only 14 of the 48 seats.

COMMUNAL SENTIMENTS

What the PBS has shown through its victory over the Barisan

each of the various communities - the Muslim indigenous, the non-Muslim indigenous and the ethnic Chinese - seemed to prefer one party over the other, the support given to each party was not overwhelming, except in certain areas where well-known personalities were contesting.

It follows that both the Barisan but especially the PBS seem to enjoy the confidence of significant segments of each of the various communities in Sabah. Hence although the trend in voting has been along communal lines, nonetheless, and fortunately for the future of ethnic relations in Malaysia it was not entirely so. ■

ANIL NETTO

THE PRIDE (AND SHAME) OF BEING A MALAYSIAN LIVING OVERSEAS

(... Conversation during the Earth Summit, 1992 ...)

Are you Malaysian?

YES I AM.

Wow, we are so impressed by your country and your Prime Minister. He is really just what we the peoples of the South need to challenge the growing arrogance and power of the West. Did you see how he criticised the Western countries for their hypocrisy towards environmental issues over CNN? Wow! You must be very proud to be Malaysian.

WELL, YES I AM!

(... Conversation during the on-going genocide of Bosnian Muslims in former Yugoslavia, 1991 till now ...)

Are you Malaysian?

YES, I AM.

Wow, we are so impressed by your country and your Prime Minister. He is so brave to take such a firm stand, to challenge the inactivity and murderous rhetoric of the hypocritical West. Wow! You must be very proud to be Malaysian.

WELL, YES I AM!

(... Conversation during Malaysia's on-going dispute with the USA over the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), 1991 till now ...)

Are you a Malaysian?

YES, I AM.

Wow, we are so impressed by your country and your Prime Minister. He has been a true champion of economic democracy for the South. He has shown his commitment towards promoting the economic welfare of Southern countries. He has so strongly opposed the economic domination by Western countries which merely promote the sham of protectionism and unfair trade under the guise of free enterprise via APEC. Wow! You must be very proud to be Malaysian.

WELL, YES I AM!

(... Conversation during the political drama in Kota Kinabalu, February 1994 culminating in the 36 hour GovernorGate (sic) political crisis of 19-21 February 1994 ...)

Are you Malaysian?

YES, I AM.

Wow, what kind of democracy do you come from? I mean I cannot understand how your ruling National Front party led by UMNO and your Prime Minister in particular can blatantly abuse government machinery to assist in its election efforts in Sabah. I mean, charges of phantom voters; your Prime Minister's claim that assemblymen were being detained; assemblymen being enticed to switch sides even before a government is formed; I mean why was all that GovernorGate drama necessary? After all, he did win a simple majority. I mean ... Wow! And to think that Malaysia has so painstakingly built up its reputation for being the champion of the South. Oh, dear, dear me ... maybe it is! You must be pretty ashamed!

WELL, YES I AM!

PERONDA BANGKOK

HEART TO HEART

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

In rural Java, death comes to a fighter and a dreamer

Goenawan Mohamad

JAKARTA - The story of Marsinah shows the ugly side of economic growth in Indonesia. She was brutally murdered, apparently for having dared to press for improvement in workers' rights. Her mutilated body was found in May near Jegong, a village on Java, the main island of Indonesia.

Marsinah is a shining symbol of the fight for human rights. She demonstrated that such rights are not a luxury, nor are they something that those with power willingly confer.

Marsinah was only 23 when she died. Although she lived in poverty, she was determined to better her own life and the lives of those around her. She was an adopted child of a poor farming family. Even as a child, she worked hard to make ends meet, selling snacks. When it rained, she used banana leaves as an umbrella. Her family lacked the money for her to continue her education beyond high school.

But she had dreams. She believed that there would always be opportunity for any Indonesian to find a decent place. She attended computer and English classes. To learn more, she read newspapers and watched television at a neighbour's place. She once told an acquaintance, "Knowledge will change one's destiny."

Marsinah was determined to change her lot and escape from poverty. She worked at a shoe factory for a year. Then she got a job with a watch-making company. Her daily wage was 1,700 rupiahs (about 80 cents), plus a meal allowance of

"...Marsinah dared to be part of a liberating tidal force for stronger rights..."

550 rupiahs, which was payable only if an employee showed up for work.

This, of course, was not enough to live on. Marsinah and some of her fellow workers joined to demand that the daily meal allowance be built into the regular wage.

Making such a demand took courage - the workers had created a disturbance. They had disrupted the "peace," "harmony," "order" and "unity" that are the watchwords of Indonesian industrialization and development.

In Indonesia, owners of capital accumulate wealth by all possible means. Managers and executives can multiply their incomes. But workers should never ask for more. Indonesia's economic progress, investment in manufacturing and rising export earnings have hinged on meagre labour wages.

So at Marsinah's company not only the bosses and foremen but the security apparatus, acting on behalf of the state authorities, immediately took action to silence the rebellious workers. Some were fired. Marsinah was murdered.

We do not know just who was responsible for her death, but it seems clear why she was killed. The horrible wounds to her abdomen showed that she had been sexually assaulted and stabbed. Her pelvic bones were shattered. Marsinah was victimized both because she was an

activist and because she was a woman.

As part of an overflowing labour force in the world's fourth most populous nation, women in Indonesia find themselves in a weak position.

They are also vulnerable in today's cultural environment. This is a world that has only winners and losers. It is a world obsessed with violent verbs such as *ganyang* (crush), *bunuh* (kill) and *gebuk* (clobber). These are the metaphors of fighting and male virility, but also of despotism.

Whoever murdered Marsinah must have thought that the death of a village woman worker would not stir much attention. They must have thought that the body dumped on the roadside would instill fear among others who challenged local order.

Fortunately, Marsinah's case has attracted wide attention. In their arrogance, the killers failed to realize that the moment she and her colleagues went on strike to demand better wages, workers could no longer be ignored in Indonesia. And because Marsinah dared to be part of a liberating tidal force for stronger rights that is gathering strength in Indonesia, women have ceased to be marginal. ■

The writer, a former editor in chief of the newsweekly Tempo, is chairman of the Council of Founders of the Foundation for the Center for Human Rights Study, in Jakarta. He contributed this comment to the International Herald Tribune: 13 January 1994

Majalah Aliran BIDS FAREWELL

About three years ago, the permission granted by the government to our application to publish *Majalah Aliran (MA)* was received with a sense of great happiness. This is because the opportunity given was indeed the moment we'd been waiting for (about eight years) to enable us to achieve what we had set out to do.

The primary objective of publishing the *MA* was to gain rapport with the Malay-speaking readers by spreading to them our ideas and thinking. We believed the readers we were aiming at were humans who craved for serious topics, ideas, opinions and alternative discussions, that is, intellectual substance which was scarcely available in our society. We also assumed that our readers required a platform (via articles and letters to editors, for instance) to voice their feelings. We felt that we had the capacity to play this role in order to fill this vacuum.

Unfortunately, what we hoped for could not be achieved until this day. Even though we had received a few written contributions, we feel that on the whole we had failed in our effort to propagate our ideas as well as to create a discursive environment amongst our readers. This is based on one main factor - the lack of reaction among the readers to what was published in our magazine. Financially, this meant that the *MA*, since its birth, had been operating at a loss which accumulated over time. Our failure also raises a few questions: isn't there a space in our society to allow for a serious magazine like the *MA* to develop? Is the reading culture (of serious materials) amongst Malaysians in general still at an unsatisfactory level?

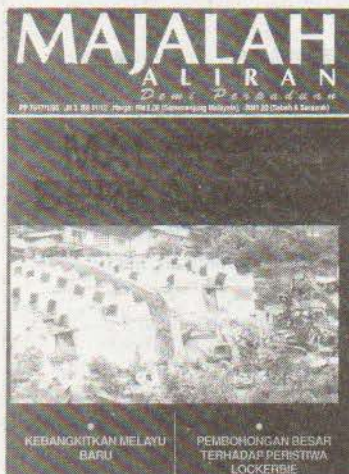
We feel that the situation and factors mentioned above have compelled us to take a decision that is not only bitter and difficult, but also very saddening: We have no other alternative but to cease the publication of the *MA*. To those who have made contributions and have given intellectual, material and moral support to us, we thank you. Goodbye.

Editorial Board

(Translated version of the Editorial as published in MA Vol 3, No 11 & 12)



Inaugural issue



Farewell issue

A few excerpts from the letters received in response to the reported closure of the Majalah Aliran

Terharu dengan penutupan *Majalah Aliran*

“ Saya telah membaca dengan perasaan amat terharu akan keputusan Aliran (Lidah Pengarang, *MA* Jil 3, Bil 11/12) untuk memberhentikan penerbitan *MA* atas alasan kurang mendapat sambutan yang mengakibatkan pihak Aliran mengalami kerugian. Sungguhpun saya dapat memahami akan tujuan dan rasionalnya, pihak Tuan mengambil tindakan sedemikian rupa, namun, rasanya tindakan ini adalah suatu yang menyedihkan dan menyayatkan.

Sesungguhnya, saya secara peribadi, semenjak *MA* mula-mula diterbitkan, merupakan salah seorang pembaca setia yang mendapat manfaat yang bukan sedikit daripada *MA*, walaupun tidak bermakna saya sentiasa menyetujui idea dan pandangan Aliran. Saya percaya begitu juga dengan ribuan rakyat marhaen yang lain...

Komitmen Tuan dalam memperjuangkan kebenaran yang terpancar melalui aktiviti dan semestinya, melalui *MA* atau *Aliran Monthly*, seharusnya dipuji. Bukan sedikit masyarakat yang dapat menimba pengetahuan di samping 'menjentik' dan 'mencelikkan' minda mereka; pengalaman teman-teman seperjuangan (kalau boleh saya gunakan perkataan tsb) menunjukkan *MA* dan *AM* menjadi 'kawan' atau tidak berlebihan dikatakan sebagai rujukan, terutama dalam keadaan aliran maklumat yang tidak adil di kalangan media cetak aliran perdana.

Tulisan dan pandangan alternatif yang diterbitkan di dalam *MA* banyak membantu membentuk dan mewarnakan lagi cara berfikir, bukan sahaja di kalangan mahasiswa, tetapi pada setiap rakyat yang prihatin...

... Sesungguhnya terhentinya penerbitan *MA* merupakan kehilangan besar yang sukar dicari ganti. Ini juga satu tamparan kepada cita-cita mengujudkan tanahair yang lebih demokratik dan aman sentosa. Kalau pihak Tuan menganggap tragedi Highland Towers sebagai insiden yang seluruh Malaysia berkabung, maka kehilangan *MA* juga suatu tragedi yang seluruh rakyat yang prihatin perlu berkabung.

”
Sekian, terima kasih.

t.t. Ahmad Nizam Hamid
Timbalan Presiden
Persatuan Mahasiswa Universiti Malaya

Penutupan *Majalah Aliran*: Mengurangkan lagi bahan bacaan adil

“ Saya merasakan amat sedih dengan pengumuman saudara bahawa *Majalah Aliran* (*MA*) Jilid 3 Bil 11/12 adalah naskah yang terakhir. Pengumuman penutupan keluaran majalah ini dibuat ketika kita kekurangan teramat sangat bahan bacaan yang memberi liputan dan ulasan yang adil mengenai keadaan politik, sosial, ekonomi di negara ini, terutama dalam bahasa Melayu.

Selepas satu demi satu bahan bacaan yang cuba memberi liputan yang adil ditutup. Pengumuman penutupan *MA* menambahkan lagi keparahan itu.

Ternyata usia *MA* terlalu pendek jika dibanding dengan proses kelulusan penerbitannya yang memakan masa hampir lapan tahun selepas campur tangan mahkamah...

Saudara, saya adalah pelanggan tetap majalah ini. Bagi saya *MA* adalah bahan rujukan yang terbaik dalam usaha menambahkan pengetahuan... Saya hairan bagaimana masyarakat kita tidak berupaya untuk menilai sesuatu yang terbaik untuk diri mereka...

Sekarang sudah tidak ada lagi majalah, makalah maupun suratkhbar yang cuba mengajak masyarakat untuk mengupas persoalan yang berkait dengan politik, ekonomi dan sosial secara lebih profesional di negara ini...

Semoga Aliran terus berusaha untuk mengeluarkan masyarakat dari penyakit itu dan Insyallah kami akan membantu-mu.

Sesuai dengan tajuk *MA* yang terakhir, 'Malaysia Berkabung', bagi saya berkabung di atas kematian satu lagi bahan bacaan dalam bahasa ibunda tercinta...

”
Salam hormat.

t.t. Kamsarl Mohamad
Pendang
Kedah

Thinking allowed

I SPY ...

Allegations that opposition politicians had leaked state secrets to the Australian secret service was one of the more intriguing bits of news in the local press which had lifted the report from *The Sunday Telegraph* of Australia. Intriguing, because what could opposition politicians possibly offer the Australian intelligence?

A common thought running through most Malaysian minds at the report was: If the Aussie intelligence chaps were truly intelligent, they would have saved their bribes for top government servants, who would surely know much more than the average politician, whether opposition or ruling party.

As expected, media houses connected to the ruling paper highlighted the story with great glee and much insinuation - on their front pages. And as though in an orchestra, government figures and leaders came out loudly demanding names and details. That was, until *The Canberra Times*, also of Australia, pointed out that there had been a mistake.

The recipients of the financial largesse from the Aussie secret service were apparently not opposition politicians as initially reported (or should we say misreported), but government politicians. Not surprisingly, both the print and electronic media which had reported the "misreports" with such abandon, were much more restrained about this.

At the same time, those who had earlier demanded more details and explanation from the Australian government have also fallen somewhat silent. One of them was UMNO Baru Youth, who for reasons they have yet to divulge, have

found it convenient to sing one of our popular bogey tunes. The youth movement claimed a Zionist hand in this I Spy episode. We can't wait to know who the Zionist-sympathisers in government are.

The double-standard attitudes on the part of our leaders and the media are really quite disgusting. Does that mean that what is treachery for the opposition is not so for the ruling party? Surely secrets for money, whether by a politician from the opposition or the ruling party, or by any Malaysian for that matter, is equally treacherous?

Such attitudes on the part of our leaders and the media are really quite deplorable. The latter is supposed to be a watchdog, to bark when public interest is being encroached upon or abused. But if it barks only when it suits the interest of the powers-that-be, then it does not deserve the title of watchdog. It might as well be a songbird in a cage, singing tunes as coached by its owner.

The newly-appointed IGP had promised an investigation when it was still thought that these international hawkers of government secrets were from the opposition. Let's hope that the police too, will not change their tune.

Actually, this would not be the first time that government politicians

have been implicated in espionage activities. The Prime Minister himself was victim to not unsimilar accusations when he was Minister of Trade and Industry. In that incident, the foreign country involved was Russia.

The allegations were eventually found to be baseless for they were politically motivated, the figment of an ambitious imagination of one man whose political career, incidentally, nosedived shortly after a plane crash. The same ambitious person was said to have also tried to implicate both Mahathir



The PM: Not unfamiliar with accusations of espionage.

and Musa Hitam with the bogey-of-the-time, the Communists.

This was revealed by Dr Syed Husin Ali, the Parti Rakyat Malaysia politician, shortly after he was released from detention under the ISA. It seemed that during his interrogation, the Special Branch had tried to use Syed Husin to finger Mahathir and Musa as Communist sympathisers. Again, it was sheer fabrication and Syed Husin refused to do what they wanted.

WE'VE GOT IT ALL?

It appears that RTM2, which used to broadcast a catchy jingle boasting that "we've got it all", has not quite got it all at all. One of the things it has not quite got all of seems to be audience, according to a recent report on TV audience share released recently. RTM2 loses out not only to TV3, but even to its duller sister, RTM1.

In terms of overall viewing time, TV3 commanded 38 per cent of the audience, RTM1 37 per cent and RTM2 only 25 per cent. During primetime, from 8pm to 10.30pm - the slot that advertisers elbow one another for - RTM1 came up tops with 48 per cent of the audience, followed by TV3 with 36 per cent. RTM2 had a miserable 16 per cent of viewers.

To be fair to RTM2, its programmes have been slightly more entertaining - that is if you enjoy the Hollywood sort of movies and silly gameshows - since TV3 came into being though it is still very much a copycat of the private network. Try harder RTM2.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET ...

The professionals do it, businessmen do it, hawkers do it, housewives do it. Almost everyone seems to be doing it. We are talking, of course, of the craze over playing the stock market. Social commentators have described the new craze over the stock market as yet another indication of the materialism that has descended on the post-NEP society.

The mania seems to cut across ethnic lines, so perhaps Voltaire was right when he said that, "when it is a question of money, everybody is of the same religion". And most disturbing of all is the attitude that comes with playing the stock market - making money for doing nothing.

Is this why government servants are among some of the most fervent speculators? After all, they have perfected "doing nothing" into an art, so why not make some money from it? It appears that some of them have been so active in the market that the Chief Secretary to the Government has found it necessary to warn them against using office time for this pursuit.

Some of them are so obsessed with making money from shares speculation that they have borrowed money or secured overdrafts from banks for capital. They were also spending a large part of their office hours calling their remisiers and checking on shares prices on the office phones.

Obviously none of them are aware (if they are, they obviously couldn't care less) about Rule 16 of the Government Officers regulations (Behaviour and Discipline) 1993, which disallows them from speculating in either the commodities or futures markets whether as a buyer or seller. The Chief Secretary's nagging is a case of too little, too late. Government servants are in this too deep and too big to care much about what he has said.

Teachers, for instance, have been long famous for their love, not for teaching, but for playing the market. Before the crazy nineties, it was said that the stock market would be unusually active and brokering firms unusually crowded during school holidays thanks to the presence of teachers. It would appear that some teachers nowadays, do not bother to wait till the school holidays for parents of students have complained that these teachers play truant by frequenting securities firms during school hours.

It is likely that this is happening so openly in so many government departments because those in charge are also playing the market. And why not, when national leaders from MPs to Ministers are among some of the biggest players in this fast road to material gain.

THE GODS MUST BE ANGRY

First an earthquake of 5.0 on the Richter scale hit the state. Then came severe floods that dislocated several thousand people living along one of the state's biggest river systems. All acts of God as some Malaysian Ministers will tell you and occurring in the state of Sarawak.

To the tradition-bound and superstitious groups in Sarawak's interior, these natural calamities can only mean one thing - the gods must be angry. The floods which destroyed homes and fields along the Belega, Balui and Linau river systems were attributed to heavy rains coinciding with high tides that locals refer to as the King Tide.

Another likely reason that was, however, not mentioned is excessive deforestation that had taken place in these parts. Large tracts bared through logging are no longer capable of retaining run-off and as a result, the lowest lying areas, namely, the valleys through which the rivers flow, become the unfortunate repository of such run-off.

But far more serious than grumpy gods is the implication of earthquakes occurring in an area where one of the largest dams in the world is to be built. Even a mild quake would have dire consequences for a dam the magnitude of the proposed Bakun. Would this not suggest a rethink on the proposal to site such a massive dam in this particular part of

the country? Or do we need to wait until the gods are truly furious before we come to our senses?

SENT TO PRISONS

Hard as it may be to believe, Malaysia's flamboyant crime-buster, Datuk Zaman Khan, only learnt that his appointment as the chief of Malaysia's prisons was official from a cartoon done by Lat. His colleagues were probably



Zaman Khan: Sent to 'Siberia'

too embarrassed to tell him. The prisons job, after all, is considered to be a sort of Siberia among top law enforcers. The job is tough, unglamorous and one gets attention only when something scandalous or stupid happens.

Zaman's career prospects, it is said, collapsed together with Block A of

Highland Towers. The powers-that-be were said to be displeased with his allegedly *kelam kabut* command of the rescue operations and replaced him midway through the rescue which, come to think of it, was not much of a rescue at all. Anyway, like the sport that he is, Zaman has said that he is accepting the post with "considerable zest and enthusiasm".

MAO, THE TOURIST PRODUCT

The Chinese in the People's Republic of China may be Communists, but they know a good business opportunity when they see one. And the chance of the moment this time was none other than their deceased supreme leader, Chairman Mao who, together with the similarly embalmed Lenin, must be two of the most famous presevations in the world.

Mao's centenary - he was born on 26 December 1893 - is being celebrated in a commercialised frenzy that would bring a deep blush to the cheeks of any Hong Kong

businessman. All kinds of artifacts - from keychains bearing his face to books on his life and accomplishments - are being hawked in China.

At the same time, the event has invoked among certain segments of the populace, deep national pride. But the older generation would surely not forget Mao's role in the Cultural Revolution which saw the persecution and death of millions of Chinese nor the famine and starvation that resulted from that foolhardy economic policy of his, the Great Leap Forward.

It is for these reasons that the older Chinese would not wish to celebrate the memory of Mao whom some have compared to Stalin for his cruel treatment of those he considered his rivals or adversaries. And every Russian in his right mind would prefer to forget Stalin for good.

However, what appears to have seized the imagination of those outside China was the fuss kicked up by the Chinese government over a BBC documentary on Mao that suggested that he was partial to young girls and loved Western dancing - with the young girls, naturally.

Actually many biographies on Mao have pointed to the fact and besides, why should Mao have been different from any other man in power? He enjoyed, in his time, absolute power of quite an unchecked and unchallenged nature, and that, as they say, tends to corrupt absolutely.

I EXIST?

Lending a hand to the poor and helpless is something to be lauded. One of the dailies recently carried a front page story of an elderly gentlemen who had forgotten where he lived and how a local politician helped him find his way home. The story was accompanied by a colour photograph showing the elderly person being carried home in the arms of two others, including the politician.

The incident, while admirable, somehow came across as choreographed and self-serving. One does not doubt the sincerity of those helping the lost gentlemen, but must it be performed in the glare of a flashing camera? Why is it that good deeds nowadays, whether it is to reach out to the old and neglected or the orphaned and unloved, become a media event?

Does a kind gesture acquire additional value when reported by the press? That politicians do it is understandable for most of them do not believe that they exist unless they see themselves on TV or read about themselves in the papers.

But this appetite to publicise one's good deeds seems to have engulfed a host of other individuals and groups. This is particularly evident during festive seasons when banks, hotels and well-known individuals will insist that their generosity and charity be made known to all and sundry through the media. It really makes one doubt their motives.

by NNP

Government target of largesse
**ASIS CASH WAS NOT
 FOR OPPOSITION**

By **NORMAN ABJOESEN**

Malaysia and Singapore have been looking in the wrong places for recipients of financial largesse from the Australian secret service, ASIS.

A newspaper report last month said Opposition politicians from both countries had been paid by ASIS - but the recipients were in fact government politicians, according to highly placed diplomatic and intelligence sources.

"What would be the point of cultivating people out of power with little hope of winning power? It doesn't make sense," a source told *The Canberra Times*.

The object of the exercise, long since abandoned, had been to acquire a degree of leverage within the ruling elites by "sponsoring" politicians who were seen as potential contenders for power.

In Malaysia, the focus of the operation, in which tens of thousands of dollars was spent, was on politicians from the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) - seen as less than enthusiastic about the leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose distinctly anti-Australian views are well known.

"If you like, they were opposition politicians in the loose sense - oppositionists within the ruling parties, not the formal capital-O opposition," said a source.

The revelations last month in the *Sunday Telegraph* brought an angry reaction from the Malaysian Government as well as denials from both the opposition Democratic Action Party in Malaysia and the opposition Singapore Democratic Party.

The Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, refused yesterday to confirm or deny the newspaper report.

Senator Evans said he would continue to abide by a long-standing principle not to comment on the supposed activities of the ASIS.

His answer - in response to a question from Democrat Senator Vicki Boume - is unlikely to satisfy the Malaysian Government, which has sought Canberra's verification of the claim.

According to sources, ASIS abandoned its payments four years ago after they had continued for many years, unknown to the Australian Government.

The payments had been halted when it was decided that little of value was being achieved through their continuation.

But ASIS-controlled funds continued to be channelled until quite recently to sections of the resistance in Cambodia.

Meanwhile, ASIS has won a protracted battle with its nominal departmental host, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to expand significantly its operations overseas.

Two new posts have been opened and some key existing posts have been strengthened in an exercise that has seen a 25 per cent increase in the number of ASIS agents posted abroad, according to sources.

Senior DFAT officials argued that any sudden increase in the ASIS presence overseas would be too visible and thus counter-productive, but strong support for the secret service from key ministers enabled the expansion to go ahead. ■

SOURCE: CANBERRA TIMES, 3 February 1994

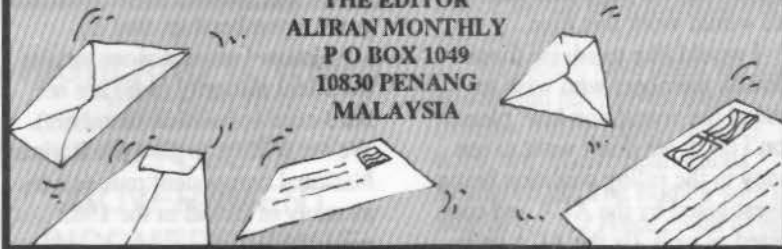


"...the focus of the operation, in which tens of thousands of dollars was spent, was on politicians from the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) - seen as less than enthusiastic about the leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohamad"

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



SABAH RESULTS FROM BBC!

The climax of any elections must surely be the announcement of the results.

It was indeed most disgusting and disturbing to note that the Sabah elections results were deliberately delayed due to the defeat of Barisan Nasional! Poor losers indeed!



Datuk Rahmat: No results because Barisan lost?

Fortunately, I could rely on the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and the BBC. Isn't it sad that you have to tune in to foreign radio stations to get the latest Sabah elections results which were held in your own country?

Datuk Rahmat should be responsible and accountable for

such deeds. Perhaps he has failed to realize that communication link to the mass media is a dynamic area and we need capable leaders at the helm.

Harban Singh
SELANGOR

RACE TO THE ISTANA GATES

It looks like an essential ingredient to state elections in Sabah seems to be the tense moments waiting outside the Istana gate which are guaranteed to grab the attention of the world's media.

Apparently, it is not enough winning a majority of seats in the election to be sure of forming the new government. The winners have to dash to the Istana gate for fear that some other parties might steal a march on them by being at the Istana gate first and using their influence to deprive the winners of their right to form the next government.

It is also interesting to observe that the same three parties were involved in the drama at the Istana ground in 1985 - the Governor, Pairin and Mustapha. In 1985, Mustapha raced to the Istana to in-

stall himself as Chief Minister over the rightful winner, Joseph Pairin. This time around, he more than made amends to Pairin for his "misdeed" by turning up not once but twice at the Istana gate to give Pairin a much-needed moral boost.

He even tried to persuade the guards at the Istana gate to let Pairin in but whatever influence he held over the guards in 1985 seemed to have long since vanished.

Well, it was a long wait outside the Istana gate and just when the main protagonists were about to throw in the towel and return home, someone had a bright idea - bring a mobile toilet to the Istana gates to ease the situation

Lina Otten
PENANG

THE PAIRIN CASE: BARISAN'S REACTION STRANGE

I was impressed by our Barisan Nasional leaders' intention to improve the existing laws pertaining to corruption. The intention arose after the verdict by the Sabah High Court on Pairin Kitingan's corruption trial, where he was found "guilty" and subsequently fined only RM1,800. It is worth noting that some of the Barisan leaders were "disappointed" over the verdict and started indirectly questioning the "credibility" of the Court as an independent body and the prosecution's handling of the case.

The dissatisfaction was brought to public notice by one of the top Barisan leaders and it was aired on TV3 the same day. The following were the statements made by the super leader: "Kalau dulu UMNO seluruh parti di bawa ke mahkamah dan parti diharamkan oleh kerana kita tersilap register ahli-ahli UMNO di Johor

tetapi kes rasuah yang melibatkan ahli parti pembangkang, kita ingin tahu apakah kes rasuah melibatkan ahli pembangkang harus dibawa ke mahkamah atau sebaliknya ...".

Let's look at the reason why UMNO was dissolved. It was the brainwave of a few key masterminds to dissolve the party so that a new party could be formed. Applications from Tengku Razaleigh's "gang" could then be rejected. This would allow these key members to have a peaceful life in UMNO Baru without any challengers especially for the top post. If UMNO was not deregistered and elections were held again, I think the chances of these key UMNO leaders retaining their post would be nil. Knowing this fact, these UMNO leaders could not afford to allow the old UMNO to continue. And they now claim that the old UMNO was



Pairin: Fined only RM1,800 for corruption, which disappointed some quarters

punished unjustifiably compared to other cases involving opposition parties. Who are they kidding?

Now let's look at Pairin's case, he was brought to "justice" for alleged corruption (after the party left the Barisan) and finally convicted and fined RM1,800, not RM2,000 which would have disqualified him from politics for a period of five years. UMNO Baru leaders are playing a safe "hit and run" game. They smear Pairin's name but dare not do more, fear-

ing that their action might backfire on them and cause more damage to their new-born party in Sabah. As it is, Mustapha has put UMNO Baru in a dilemma.

By releasing Jeffrey Kitingan, the Barisan is trying to impress Sabahans with its "good guy" image with the hope that their tactics would work this time.

I would like to advise those Barisan members who wish to amend the corruption law: please don't do it, we don't want to see many in the ruling coalition being investigated by the ACA and convicted as well. (Is the ACA an independent body?)

If this is the government which plans to rule Sabah, God save politics in Sabah.

Mani
BUTTERWORTH

SABAH ELECTION: BLATANT ABUSE OF MEDIA

The people of Sabah have spoken. I take my hat off to those who have stood their ground in the face of the Barisan onslaught. I have searched my own heart in the run-up to the election day and I know I would have voted on the promise of development and progress.

Yes, it's a reduced majority - Buletin Akhir (TV3) just announced it's 25 for PBS-plus and 23 for Barisan. But didn't I read somewhere that in a democracy it's the 49 per cent following the wishes of the 51 per cent and not the other way round.

Seeing the blatant abuse of the electronic and print media, I can fathom better now the government's reluctance to permit the use of satellite dishes. So what is this talk about the nation march-

ing towards developed nation status and Vision 2020?

It is this lack of fair-play and the impotence of the other component parties of the Barisan Nasional towards their Big Brother that really puts me off. I read with disdain their attempts to match Big Brother in the numbers game (membership, that is).

I know I am not alone among the silent minority (who are not hard-core opposition members). We are willing to give the Barisan Nasional component parties a try as many of us did in the 1982 general election.

We do not need to sign up as members to give you a shot at it. Just convince us that you can stand your ground on matters of principle. Don't toe Big Brother's line every time.

Loyal Malaysian
PENANG

WHAT ABOUT SUDAN AND EAST TIMOR?

Our Prime Minister Dr Mahathir has been very eloquent and forthright in his speeches in international forums and assemblies, speaking in support of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He condemns in no uncertain terms the lukewarm responses of the Western powers, their insincerity and hypocrisy, downright selfishness and cowardice in dealing with the need to help the Bosnian Muslims.

As Malaysians we are proud of him for speaking up against the powerful and rich nations on behalf of the unfortunate Muslims of Bosnia.

Now I want to plead with him to raise his voice in indignation at the injustices and brutalities meted out to the poor Christian peoples

of Southern Sudan and East Timor. In these two countries, the atrocities and injustices have been far worse than those in the former republic of Yugoslavia.

T K Tan
IPOH

HIGHLAND TOWERS "RESCUE" REFLECTS GOVERNMENT INCOMPETENCE

The Highland Towers tragic fiasco will go down in history as how incompetent a government could have been in the face of a crisis. The onus of the tragedy should be solely borne by the government. The government should publicly apologise to the victims' families to show that it is a caring government, otherwise it is a careless government.

Why did it take eight days before the bodies could be dug up? The victims should have been dug up the first day itself. Common sense will dictate that the residents were on their way out. They knew that the building was going to collapse and they were on their way down. So if at all they all died on impact, they ought to be found from the third or fourth floor downwards to the basement. That's where the authorities should have dug, not burrowing tunnels here and there.

Who were the first to arrive at the site? The Police, the Bomba? Zaman Khan chivalrously held up a child and that was all he could do, nothing more. When the child was brought out, there was clapping all around. A task accomplished, it may have seemed, but far from it.

The talk that the search and rescue operation should have been

done slowly and carefully, according to the experts, was all rubbish. The fact the Malaysians listened to these experts showed that the Malaysians were seriously lacking in direction and leadership. In an operation like this, the Bomba should have taken command. The Police should have taken care of law and order.

We should have taken the lead and should have given them (foreign rescue teams) instructions, not receive instructions. Shame on us! The Bomba with the help of the Air Force could have brought in helicopters to lift the huge concrete slabs out of the rubble and thereafter slowly dig out the victims. Even if this were to injure any victims (supposedly alive) that would have been more worthwhile than to let them die because of inaction from us.

The first thing they should have done was to sit down and plan what to do. Common sense will dictate this in any crisis. Only when there was an impasse did they have a brain-storming session. By that time it was too late.

Why were rumours spread that there were people still alive in the rubble? Was it to justify the government's incompetence? If at all there were victims still alive after the fifth or sixth day, why then did the pathologist's report (press conference) state that all the victims died on the first day? Why? The government here clearly contradicts its own stance.

Where was the Prime Minister when the tragedy struck? He went to India! Trade matters were apparently more important to him than the *rakyat's* sorrow. He could have cancelled the trip to show that he is a caring Premier, to be with the *rakyat* at their hour of grief. The G-15 summit was not much of a summit anyway with most of the leaders of the South absent.

It's high time the *rakyat* replaced the Barisan government of Prime Minister Mahathir. It's not a caring government, as it often claims to be, rather a callous, incompetent government.

S Muthu Pillai
TRONG

THE TRAGEDY IN BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA

Would the crisis in Bosnia be different if Hammarskjold was the UN Secretary-General instead of Boutros Boutros Ghali. This is because when Hammarskjold was the Secretary-General he handled the crisis in Congo (now Zaire) with full determination and decisiveness.

He was never influenced by or frightened of powers like the United States or Russia, unlike Boutros Boutros Ghali who is not decisive and cannot make decisions that are forceful. For example, recently he threatened the Serbs that he would start having NATO air strikes if the Serbs did not allow the Tuzla Airport to be opened and if they stopped the food aid to the people of Bosnia.

But what happened when the Serbs still had things going their way? Were there any air strikes? The NATO air planes just flew low in Bosnia! What was the motive of this? Maybe they wanted to have a closer look at the tragedy in Bosnia which has been going on for about 22 months!

I pity the Bosnian President and the Prime Minister (Alija Izetbegovic and Haris Siladjic) because it looks like the UN with its so-called Security Council are taking them for a "joy ride". I feel Boutros Boutros Ghali as the Secretary General of the UN

should take full responsibility for what is going on in Bosnia.

The first step he should take is to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia so that the people of Bosnia can defend themselves.

Secondly, Zhirinovsky who is a Russian ultra national should be prosecuted for creating war propaganda in the West. Just because in the recent elections in the Soviet Union he managed to win one seventh of the Russian seats in Parliament doesn't mean he can go round spreading propaganda.

Lastly, being a human being himself, Boutros Boutros Ghali should have some pity and some conscience of his own to stop the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia.

If the crisis in Bosnia doesn't stop, the people of Bosnia would definitely lose their country as it's just a matter of time before the Serbs conquer the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

G Ravindran
PENANG

DRUG REHAB CENTRE PLAGUED BY AIDS

I was introduced to your magazine by a reader in Johor Baru. I am glad he did.

I am impressed with your publication and wish you the best in all your undertakings.

The letter below was sent to both the *New Straits Times* and *The Star* for publication, but for reasons best known to them, it was not published in either paper until now.

However dear Sir, would it be possible for the contents of the attached finding a small space in your publication please.

I thank you for your co-operation and I wish you, your staff and

all Aliran members the best of everything.

The letter to the Press:

"I sincerely implore the Ministry of Health, the Home Ministry's Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre and other relevant authorities concerned, to take a very serious view on what I am reproducing here. These facts and figures were gathered from *The Star*, 19 October 1993:

- * The number of cases tested positive for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) at this centre has doubled over the past few years.

- * 27 of the 100 cases admitted since January 1993 were tested positive for the virus which causes AIDS.

- * 86 of the 539 inmates are HIV patients.

- * This centre has no facilities whatsoever to treat or care for HIV inmates.

- * No doctors since 1991. Not even hospital assistants. Shockingly, the medical unit of this centre is being manned by hospital attendants.

- * Shockingly, this centre happens to be a drug counselling training centre for senior officers from Asian countries.

I truly dread to think of the impressions they might have carried home, leave alone the negative manner they must have exploited the issue at hand in their mass-media to stun the rest of the world, with the aim of ridiculing our country in its earnest efforts to control the disease.

Name of Centre: Pusat Serenti Drug Rehabilitation Centre, Sungei Petani, Kedah.

If the above is true, the authorities most certainly owe the parents of the inmates in particular and we the tax-paying public at large an immediate explanation. Please remember we are talking about lives here. We are talking

about millions of dollars, as this is not the only centre in the whole of East and West Malaysia.

Most of all we are talking about our brothers and sisters who have only a very short span of life to be lived in pain and anguish. Aren't we supposed to be a caring society?

Lastly, we should salute Ambara Singh, the commandant of this centre for speaking out without fear or favour, a bit belated though - I am certain his mouth must have been gagged by so-called *Perintahs*. Indeed he has the interest of the inmates at heart. The country needs more people like him. He might face the wrath of some over-zealous officers for bringing these shocking matters to the press and, subsequently, to the public. The Government shouldn't let anything happen to Ambara Singh. On the contrary, he should be rewarded. He has done what is right.

Ex-Commandant
JOHOR BARU

WE ARE HUMAN, TOO

We all know that Bosnians, I mean, the Bosnian Muslims, have come here to Malaysia looking for safety and guidance under the Malaysian Government. We can see from here that our Government is caring towards their neighbour.

But, I've always wondered why do they (Malaysian Government) care for Bosnian Muslims only and not for Christians as well? Leave aside religion, aren't they human too? I was really taken aback when I heard the news over the radio. Our Prime Minister was saying, "What is the UN doing for our Muslim people in Bosnia?" What has happened to the sensi-

tive heart that Malaysians used to have?

Don't be so insensitive to human cries, Mr Prime Minister, because they are all human - Muslims and Christians alike. This is the perfect situation to show we are a caring society, and this goes for you too, Mr Prime Minister.

But from what I see, all I can say is that, there is no caring society at all!

Carmelita Xavier
PENANG

CONGRATULATIONS, TERENCE!

I sincerely congratulate Terence Gomez for having answered Khalid Jaafar's letter so well that it left no doubt in the minds of the readers about his sincerity and fairness in dealing with the topic of money politics in UMNO Baru. [AM 1993:13(12)]

I also wish to add that what was said by Terence Gomez that certain corporate figures are mere proxies of UMNO Baru is true, by their own admission to their close associates.

Dato' Hishamuddin bin Haji
Yahaya
KUALA LUMPUR

MISLEADING VIEWS ON HUDUD

I refer to your article on human rights in AM 1993:13(11). What did you mean when you said that, "the report's discussion of freedom of religion ignores efforts by the state government in Kelantan, ruled by Malaysia's Islamic Party (PAS), to introduce an Islamic Criminal Code (ICC)"?

Are you trying to say that the ICC violates the freedom of

religion? Your statement gives a negative view on the Islamic Hudud Law. "There was no compulsion in religion"; this was quoted from the Qu'ran. If the Kelantan government was given a permit to establish an ICC, it would only enforce it on the Muslims, not on the non-Muslims. There is nothing to get scared or panicked about. Non-Muslims should try to understand this!

Your second statement really hurts me. "This would mandate the amputation of limbs of convicted persons for certain offences". I wish that you had not just stopped there. You should have given your readers a further explanation as to what kind of offences would require such punishment. Without this further explanation, non-Muslims and, perhaps uneducated Muslims would view the Hudud Law as a primitive and barbaric law, even though it is not true. Amputation of limbs is only required for "serious crimes".

I am a law student and I learned the Sharia in a religious school. As far as I can remember, we were never required by our teacher and the Holy Qu'ran to compel non-Muslims to convert to Islam or to follow our way of life. Does this constitute a violation of the freedom of religion?

Khairul Anuar bin Abdul Halim
BUKIT MERTAJAM,
PENANG

[The article you referred to was not written by Aliran or its writers. It was reproduced from Critique, a report prepared by the Law Committee for Human Rights, New York which reviews and analyses the US State Departments' Country Report for accuracy, completeness and objectivity. We felt that the article was topical and would be of interest to our readers, besides encouraging healthy discussion and debate on the human rights situation in Malaysia. - Editor]

IT'S RUDE!

I do feel that Aliran should not use the term "The Great One", "The Great One-to-be" because it seems rude and even smacks of polytheism.

F W
PETALING JAYA

HIGHLAND TOWERS: A SAD STORY

The disaster that befell the residents of Highland Towers, Kuala Lumpur is a sad story. The inability of the authorities concerned in supervising the building and construction of such apartment blocks. It is tragic that families lost their loved ones within minutes before their eyes. The



Highland Towers: Pronouncements on strict regulations are always an after-thought.

authorities say they are going to be strict from now on - obviously an after thought! What use is this to the dead and those in grief? The situation at the scene of sorrow can be described as follows:

"There standing, they looked horrified and pale,

The young stood stiff, the old held the rail,

The well built building guaranteed to last,

Crumbled to dust with no outside blast,

Loved ones, friends all gone,
They did no wrong, had no guilt,

Buried under the "strong"
building the builders built.'

Kael Singh Hans
JOHOR BARU

RELIGION: A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHOICE

In response to Mrs Ferida Choudhary's letter published in *Aliran Monthly* 1993:13(11), I welcome her view that religion is personal and should not be forced upon any person marrying a Muslim in our country. How nice it would be if the majority of Muslims, if not all, share this view - UMNO Baru, Semangat 46 or even PAS would not be able to exploit religion to gain political mileage from the Muslim majority.

I hope one day all state laws which restrict conversion of Muslims to other religions will be repealed and religion would become a personal choice for every citizen. We have already witnessed how the white minority government of South Africa has started to dismantle apartheid and is giving equal rights to all its citizens.

Islam is a universal religion, for that matter all religions are universal. Let's take Buddhism for example. Buddhism is not only practised by the majority of Sri Lankans but also the Thais and the Japanese.

As we all know, the Thais, the Japanese and the Sri Lankans do not talk the same language neither do they practise the same culture. But they all share the same doctrine of the Buddhist religion which is considered universal.

It is also the same with Hinduism, Christianity and other major religions. As far as I know, all religions are universally accepted because they welcome new converts and do not restrict them based on race, country or colour of the skin.

In Malaysia, we are led by the local mainstream media controlled by UMNO Baru to believe that only Islam is universal and not the other religions.

Any conversion to Islam by foreigners is highlighted by the local Press. In reality, more foreigners especially westerners are attracted to Buddhism but this is never mentioned in the local Press. All this is done with the intention of encouraging more non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Muslims who embrace other religions in foreign countries are not mentioned in the local Press for fear that locals might imitate their actions.

This is the reality in our country today.

Hari Krishnan
KUANTAN

HOW CARING ARE WE?

I wish to comment on the report in the *Star* (12 November 1993) that all foreigners in Malaysia, whether on work permit or on a social visit pass, will be charged double the first-class rates when admitted to government hospitals. This decision, if implemented, will affect immigrant workers in Malaysia adversely.

Even now, without these double first-class charges, employers are already reluctant to send their immigrant workers to hospital. Time away from work represents a large opportunity cost for the employer who is short of labour. As a result, government hospitals are already seeing instan-

ces where foreign workers only come to hospital when their illness become serious or even life-threatening. If the government decides to enforce the grossly higher rates, this tendency among employers to resist bringing their workers for treatment will increase.

Foreign workers are already in a disadvantaged position. Their work-permit ties them to a particular employer. They are expressly forbidden from joining trade unions and from setting up their own associations. They have little social support, and many are not fluent in Bahasa Malaysia or English. Restricting access to health will certainly only worsen their situation.

According to the *Star* article, this decision was taken because many patients from neighbouring countries fly in to take advantage of our radiotherapy and other similarly expensive services. If this is so, surely charging first-class rates to foreigners on social visit passes or on business visits will suffice. If, in addition, the government wishes to pass on the costs of health care of foreign workers to their employers, this could be done by means of a health levy that every employer has to pay to the Health Ministry upon employing a foreign worker.

Compulsory payments of a health levy which is not linked to actual requests for health care by particular workers is far less likely to lead to denial or delay in treatment of foreign workers. Furthermore, it is also a form of insurance for the employers as the costs of caring for sick immigrant workers are then spread out among all employers.

We pride ourselves on being a "caring" society. The manner in which we resolve this issue of proper health care of a large but relatively disadvantaged and powerless sector of our society will show how genuine all our

pronouncements regarding "caring" really are.

*R Veerasenan
TELUK INTAN*

CLP'S ENTRY REQUIREMENTS DISCRIMINATORY

The criticism by our Law Minister against the discrimination practised by the Council of Legal Education is viewed as a brave attack against an establishment which is not only historical and traditional but which has been criticised by British society itself as discriminatory. The conspicuous classes in Britain: upper, upper middle, middle, working class, punks, blacks, gypsies and so on continue to exist in a society which preaches all sorts of so-called liberal thoughts to the rest of the world.

The Ox-Bridge graduates and upper class are seen as potential material for the Barristers profession thus hindering lesser groups on its doorsteps, and creating a sub-culture of its own.

Antiquated system of legal training have been wiped out in the United States and elsewhere. Even the Solicitors branch of the profession in England has changed its course structure and, for the first time, potential Solicitors will be sitting for the legal practice course (LPC) in 1994. A significant element is the importance given to skills training to local and foreign students. All prospective students of the LPC can say with brevity the change will see them through the best of the lawyers' training.

Just as charity begins at home, everything else must. Our Law Minister should now re-route his criticisms towards the trustees of the local Certificate in Legal Prac-

tice (CLP) rather than against the CLE. If the CLE has closed its doors to foreign students and blacks to the better part of its training, the CLP is in no better position with slightly open doors only to LLB holders. The CLP has structured only one narrow step to its examination but there are many ways to the legal profession in England.

It's high time the Law Minister calls for the review of the CLP's policy of entry qualifications to enable other law degree holders to take its course.

If we have a group of racists in the CLE then the people so closely

guarding the CLP are discriminators of the worst kind.

The CLP can restructure its policies of entry so that students who travel more than 15,000 miles to do a degree can return home and rest assured that they can do the Bar examinations at home without any feeling of humiliation.

Sada Sivam

KOTA KINABALU

P.S. The above letter was sent to the New Straits Time but was not published.

ARTICLE ON HOTEL METROPOLE IN ALIRAN MONTHLY 1994:14(1)

In your article at page 18, a statement reads 'Land Office records show that BHL Bank provided the required financing to Dolphin Square.'

This is to put on record that BHL Bank has never lent to a borrower of that name. Factually, your article was erroneous in that Dolphin Square was never at any point of time the bank's customer. Consequently, the other parts of the article in reference to the purported loan to Dolphin Square are therefore incorrect, including the subjective conclusions derived.

We would appreciate it if the error is rectified as we are certain that notwithstanding this, your esteemed publication is very careful about the accuracy of its reporting.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

*for BAN HIN LEE BANK BERHAD
(IDRUS BIN ISMAIL)
Secretary*

[Aliran Monthly stands corrected. We apologise for this error - Editor]

DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL

Detained without details and denied the right of defence

In what appears to be a travesty of justice, two worker leaders were detained without specific charges being preferred against them under the Emergency Ordinance 1969.

THOLILALIYIN THOLAR provides the background to this episode and raises the possibility whether these two worker leaders could be innocent victims of a plot to cow the workers.

On 25 January 1994, two worker leaders, Mr Dharmakoundar a/l Munisamy and Mr Nadesan a/l Munisamy were detained by the Temerloh Police under Section 3(1) of the Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) Ordinance 1969. They are presently being detained at the Balai Polis Temerloh.

Section 3(1) of the Emergency Ordinance empowers a police officer to detain a person for investigation purposes for a period of up to 60 days. During this period, the person may be served with either a two year detention order or a restriction order signed by the Minister of Home Affairs. There is no provision under this law for a detainee to be brought before a magistrate or to be charged formally in any court, to enable him to make his defence and prove his innocence.

What distinguishes the detention of Mr Dharmakoundar and Mr Nadesan from many other detentions under the Emergency Ordinance, is that their detention appears to be closely related to the worker-management dispute that has been ongoing in Ladang Sungei Kawang since early 1992.

Ladang Sungei Kawang

Ladang Sungei Kawang is situated near the town of Lanchang in Pahang. It is a rubber estate owned by the plantation agency Kuala Lumpur Kepong (KLK) and managed by its subsidiary Taiko Plantation. Some 250 workers live and work in Ladang Sungei Kawang. The manager is Mr Tan Tian Sang while the assistant

manager is Mr Suresh A/L Unni Nambiar.

Harassment and Interference

Tension and discord between workers and management commenced in early 1992, when the management began to interfere with the internal affairs and running of the Temple Committee.

Initially, it appears that the management went out of its way and interfered in Temple Committee elections by trying to replace the existing Committee with its own slate. When this attempt failed, management retaliated by giving numerous problems to the Temple Committee, inter alia the refusal to deduct temple dues from the wages of consenting workers, a practice of many years.

Management also demolished the house in which the temple equipment was stored and accused the Temple Committee of being involved in gangsterism.

Management, it was claimed, also visited and harassed workers while they worked. Taking advantage of their position as staff, it was further alleged, they would try to undermine support for the Temple Committee by visiting workers at their work place. Those who gave in and agreed to "cooperate" were allegedly rewarded with contracts and high-yielding tapping blocks while those who resisted and resented such interferen-



Mr Dharmakoundar (right) talking to Mr Baradan of the Star, on 11 September 1993



The wives of the detainees and some of their children

ces were harassed and victimized.

It appears that threats and assaults on the workers were instigated, encouraged and became a common occurrence in the estate. Several of these assaults were conducted in full view of the estate auxiliary police and several staff.

The Chairman of the Temple Committee was assaulted in April 1993 - punched and kicked as he lay on the ground, he lost his two front teeth.

The Chairman of the local NUPW committee has also been assaulted and in another incident, threatened with assault by the assistant manager. During this second incident, the assistant manager and another staff also threatened and reportedly exposed themselves to a female worker.

Workers Seek Justice

In order to address the problems that they were faced with the workers undertook various actions.

Between November 1992 and September 1993 no less than seven letters and telegrams were sent by the Temple and local NUPW Committees to Taiko Plantation headquarters in Ipoh, calling on senior management to address the problem. Taiko however did not see it fit to reply even one of these letters. Instead, it appears that several of these letters were sent back to the Ladang Sungei Kawang management resulting in further harassment and bullying.

The workers also sought the help of both, local and national politicians. They first approached the local MIC leaders as well as the state assemblyman for the area Mr Sinnathamby. They then sought the assistance of Dato M Mahalingam who visited the estate on 23 February 1993.

Further to this in May 1993, 78 workers went to meet Dato Seri Dr S Samy Vellu in Kuala Lumpur. Following this meeting, many of the workers who formed part of this delegation were victimized.

The Secretary of the Temple Committee, for example, was transferred the very day after he returned from the meeting with Dato Seri Dr S Samy Vellu. This transfer coupled with being unfairly denied Sunday work opportunities meant that his salary dropped from \$600/month to \$350/month.

Each attempt to address the issue was met with more victimization and sometimes assaults. More than 25 police reports had been lodged by workers alleging victimization, harassment and assault.

In September 1993, the workers decided to take their grievances to the press. They complained to the *Star* that they were the victims of persistent harassment and victimization by the management. Following the publicizing of the issue in the press, calm descended on the estate. The management assured the workers that there would be no further problems in the estate. The threats and assaults on the workers stopped and workers who had been victimized, had their entitlement returned to them by the management. These past four months the estate has been calm and peaceful until the sudden detention of the two workers.

The Role of Dharmakoundar and Nadesan

The management of Ladang Sungei Kawang resents and blames these two persons for assisting the workers. Because of this it appears that the management has gone out of its way to defame and cause problems for the two brothers.

Mr Dharmakoundar

Mr Dharmakoundar was the Secretary of the Temple Committee when Mr Tan first came to Ladang Sungei Kawang. He subsequently became the secretary of the local NUPW committee till he suffered a heart attack and resigned as a worker at the end of April, 1993. He is presently employed as a conductor

in a bus company. However since his wife is still a worker on the estate, he resides together with her and their three children in Ladang Sungei Kawang.

According to reports Mr Tan has openly referred to him as "kurang ajar" to the Temple Committee. Mr Dharmakoundar further claims that Mr Tan has referred to him, as a trouble maker and as someone who should not be employed, in a circular letter issued to the managers of surrounding estates.

Mr Dharmakoundar has thus initiated legal proceedings against Mr Tan for defamation in the Magistrates Court in Temerloh. The case that has already come up for mention is to be heard on 15 March 1994.

Mr Nadesan

Mr Nadesan the older brother of Mr Dharmakoundar is employed as a staff of TNB Temerloh. His wife was employed as a rubber tapper in Ladang Sungei Kawang and both he and his wife resided on the estate till May 1993 when she resigned on account of alleged management harassment. They are presently residing in Mentakab with their five children.

It appears that while Mr Nadesan, was residing in Ladang Sungei Kawang, several petitions and complaints were sent to TNB by the Management of the estate. It was alleged that Mr Nadesan had misused his authority as an employee of TNB. This led to an internal investigation within TNB which however cleared Mr Nadesan of all the charges.

The Plight of the Families

The wives and children of the detainees are under considerable stress and anxiety awaiting the result of the police investigation. The detention has caused considerable financial difficulties for the two wives. They have had to struggle to maintain their present employment while having to also travel frequent-

ly in order to visit their husbands as well as to lobby for their release.

A Travesty of Justice

Section 3(1) of the Emergency Ordinance 1969 permits a police officer to detain a person for 60 days, when he has reason to believe that the person is acting in any manner prejudicial to public order or that it is necessary for the suppression of violence or the prevention of crimes involving violence.

One wonders why the Emergency Ordinance, enacted during the turbulent May 13, 1969 period is being used against worker-leaders involved in what is essentially a management-worker conflict. The use of the Emergency Ordinance means that the allegations that have been made against the two brothers will not have to be proved in an open court of law - where strict rules of evidence apply. Neither will either of the brothers, their families or lawyers, have the right to know the specific details of these allegations or the identity of the person/persons who have made these allegations.

One wonders why the police department apparently complacent in the face of more than 25 police reports, can now after almost 4 months of peace and quiet in the area see it fit to arrest these two persons under the Emergency Ordinance.

One further wonders whether this detention is linked to the civil suit which has been filed against Mr Tan by Mr Dharmakoundar. Mr Dharmakoundar may conveniently be under "preventive detention" when his case is heard on 15 March, 1994.

The actions of the workers of Ladang Sungei Kawang have always been both moderate and within the confines of the law. The workers have restricted their actions to petitions and memorandums to Taiko Plantation and to national politicians, meetings with MIC leaders and national politicians, the lodging of police reports and labour complaints to the Temerloh Labour

Office and finally the making of a statement to the Press. It is difficult to understand how these actions can in any way be construed as being violent or detrimental to national security.

It is a measure of the maturity of worker leaders in Ladang Sungei Kawang, and in particular Mr Dharmakoundar and Mr Nadesan, that in the face of physical violence, victimizations and harassments, they have managed to keep a cool head and respond in a responsible and rational manner.

It is a great miscarriage of justice, and an appalling state of affairs, that moderate and responsible persons are detained in such a manner and treated like violent criminals!

Immediate Release

In the dawn of the era of a caring society and vision 2020, the detention of Mr Dharmakoundar and Mr

Nadesan broods ill for the honest effort of workers to protect their rights and struggle for better working and living conditions.

Large corporations which understand the importance of and have consented to partake in the building of a caring society should not restrict such participation to only monetary donation but should also be sensitive to the concerns of their employees and strive to see to it that they are given a hearing and treated fairly!

It is for these reasons that we make a call:

1. that Mr Dharmakoundar and Mr Nadesan be released immediately and unconditionally;
2. that Taiko Plantation undertake a serious investigation as to the causes and reasons for the discord that has been part and parcel of Ladang Sungei Kawang for the past two years. ■

Endeavours to secure the release of the detainees

In order to secure the release of the two detainees, the wives have written and sought meetings with several persons including:

- * The Deputy Minister of Home Affairs
- * The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs
- * The Inspector General of Police
- * The Ketua Polis Daerah Temerloh
- * The Ketua Polis Pahang
- * Dato Seri Dr S Samy Vellu
- * Dato Dr Siti Zaharah, MP Kawasan Mentakab

In response to these requests for meetings, the Timbalan Ketua Polis Negeri Pahang agreed to and met the wives in Temerloh on 4 February, 1994. The wives also managed to arrange a meeting with Dato Seri Dr S Samy Vellu on 22 February 1994.

It is the belief of the wives, that the detention of their husbands is related to the ongoing management-worker dispute in Ladang Sungei Kawang and the result of false reports made to the police. They thus believe that intervention of persons in authority could secure the release of the two detainees.

Friends of the detainees, members of the Temple Committee, the local NUPW committee and local MIC leaders have been working closely with the wives by collecting signatures calling for the release of the two detainees. They have also sent letters to the authorities, attesting to the good character of the two detainees.

“I’m not amused by all this nonsense”

PRESENTER: Well, the political storm over the Pergau Dam has got markedly worse in the last few hours. Relations between the British government and the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad started to deteriorate last month after a British Parliamentary committee investigated the dam project.

First, there were allegations that British aid for the dam project was linked to arms sales; then, British Press reports alleged there were also bribes to Malaysian politicians accompanying those deals.

Well, so angry has the Malaysian government become that it has revived the punitive policy of ‘Buy British Last’ that operated in the early 1980s. Anwar Ibrahim, the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, announced that measure today along with the reasons for reimposing it.

(Recording of Anwar’s statement:) “We believe the foreign media must learn the fact that many developing countries, including a country led by a brown Muslim, have the ability to manage their own affairs successfully.

In the light of these developments, that almost any deal with British companies is presumed to have its shady undertones and thus may result in scurrilous attack, the Cabinet has decided not to entertain any new contracts with British companies particularly involving government aid or assistance.”

PRESENTER: But even before that trade ban, there was no mistaking official Malaysian government anger and concern over the Pergau dam story and the way it was being covered in the British Press. My colleague Oliver Scott called Kuala Lumpur earlier today (25 February) and spoke to a member of Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s Cabinet, the Trade Minister, Rafidah Aziz, who left him in no doubt that feelings in the Malaysian capital are running high.

RAFIDAH AZIZ: Well, I would like to put things right. We are not happy with the recent Press reports that have come out in London pertaining to an accusation and allegations of corruption in this government and ... corruption and allegations...the Prime Minister... pertaining to some contracts that British companies bid for.

OLIVER SCOTT: In what way are you not happy? Are you saying that these reports are all false?

RAFIDAH: Well, it accused the Prime Minister and accused Ministers and members of the Cabinet of corruption in dealing with some tender bids of British companies. That’s not nice.

OLIVER: Are you also saying these reports are entirely untrue?

RAFIDAH: (pause) Definitely they are not true. I mean, how can some people do that, you know? And you expect us to be pleased?

OLIVER: Why, though, are you apparently targetting British firms or British trade if what you are really angry about is the British Press?

RAFIDAH: Now, let me put it this way. We are not targetting British firms or British trade; but if it has anything to do with the Malaysian government, the British will not get it... okay?

OLIVER: That almost amounts to...

RAFIDAH: ...The private sector trade is not affected. The private sector connections are not affected. It’s the government.

OLIVER: So, in other words British interests, private corporations, whatever....

RAFIDAH: That’s not affected at all...

OLIVER: But they are not going to be able to do trade with the Malaysian government or its agents...

RAFIDAH: Not with the government. They’ve accused the government ...or rather the Press have accused the government. Somebody had better put it right.

OLIVER: Could I just ask why you are adopting this attitude considering it’s the British Press...

RAFIDAH: ...I’ve just explained to you...accused the Malaysian government, members, leaders, of corruption and... you know, these are all very, very serious allegations. I’m a member of the Cabinet. I’m not amused by

all this nonsense... you know...so I would want to put this right.

OLIVER: Well, I understand your point that serious allegations are being made but they're also being made by a free and independent Press. They're not being made by the British government.

RAFIDAH: No, I wouldn't want to talk about this free and independent Press. I mean, nobody is free and independent to accuse people, least of all the government of Malaysia, members of government, of which I'm a member...nobody is free to do anything so blatant as all that...right?

So we have a right to do what we want. Anyway, as I said, it's our prerogative to deal with anybody we like...British companies, American companies...In this case, we don't want to deal with British companies as far as government dealings are concerned. The private sector dealings can go on. That is not of contention at all.

OLIVER: And how long will these sanctions be applied for?

RAFIDAH: Well, we...Don't use the word sanctions. I did not use the word sanctions. Please. It is just saying that where there are government bids that you want to come into... well, please remember that the British will not get it.

OLIVER: I'm just trying to get the time-scale clear...are you saying this policy will remain in force until further notice?

RAFIDAH: (pause) Possibly.

OLIVER: How would you like to see the present position rescinded? What would it take to make you lift or change this policy?

RAFIDAH: I would like to see... personally, I would like to see amends being made... you know... please stop doing this and somebody had better put all things right. That's all that we're saying... I'm saying that.

OLIVER: But wouldn't the most appropriate course of action in the circumstances be for the Malaysian government to sue the newspapers that you're concerned with for libel in court?

RAFIDAH: No, we're not interested in suing. Come on, we are not in the business of suing and libel. This is not (inaudible) We've got the business to run the country. There're more important things to do than to sue the newspapers who so blatantly accuse us...

The first thing is to get people to see things right: do not make such accusations. Period. Now, I'm not going to teach the British newspapers and the British government what to do. They should know for themselves what they need to do...I mean, you know. I don't know...people do have some wisdom...so please do the needful. ■

Legitimate matter for investigation

Nothing will stop us continuing investigations, vows British newspaper editor.

PRESENTER: Well, the Malaysian government took particular exception, of course, to a report in last week's *Sunday Times* making the allegation that British firms seeking contracts in Malaysia had offered bribes to a group of Malaysian politicians. The Malaysian government minister you heard earlier (Rafidah Aziz) clearly felt that it was the British government's responsibility to stop the Press here in Britain from publishing that sort of story.

I've the Editor of *The Sunday Times* Andrew Neil on the line with me... Now, Andrew, you've just heard Alistair (the British Foreign Office Minister) saying everyone knows the government can't stop the Press. Why do you think these implications that it can are floating about?

ANDREW: Because I think the Malaysian Prime Minister thinks that the British government can act in the way that he acts. I mean, there is bound to be some kind of cultural conflict between a democratic society, which is

PROJEK HIDRO ELEKTRIK

PERGAU

PROJEK DAN ALAM SEKITARNYA
THE PROJECT AND ITS ENVIRONMENT



Pergau: The deal is said to have cost the British taxpayers one quarter of a billion pounds.

what Britain is, and an authoritarian society, which is what Malaysia is.

And he really wants John Major, the British Prime Minister, to call up the editors of newspapers and television and radio programmes and tell them to back off, tell them not to cover this story. That's how he runs his Press in Malaysia. But it's not how it's going to happen in Britain. I'm sure John Major often wishes he did have the power to do it.

PRESENTER: So, you haven't been called, and no other editors you know have been called, even unofficially, by the Foreign Office to say "lay off"?

ANDREW: No, I haven't, but I think he knows that will be counterproductive. If he attempted to do that it will only be another story. We would write a story saying the British government was trying to put pressure on us.

You see, I think the thing is that although Malaysia has been caught up in the back-wash of this, the thrust of our investigation is into the British government - and there are major British interests at stake here. A quarter of a billion pounds of British taxpayers' money was spent on a dam which nobody wants, which has been said to be of immense environmental damage to Malaysia... but was spent in that way in order to secure an arms deal between Malaysia and Britain.

Now, that is a matter of legitimate investigation, not just for the Press...But the Select Affairs and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons is also

investigating this. And indeed, the Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd will appear before that Committee this coming Wednesday (2 March).

PRESENTER: Of course, some people, and I mentioned those Conservative MPs earlier, have been saying, "Don't raise this over because British jobs are at stake. You often need bribes to get arms deals (whether they were made in this case or not, I don't know) ...but you often need them, so don't make a fuss about it."

ANDREW: Well, that's...where is the logic of that? You see, that's true in the harsh world particularly if you're dealing with authoritarian regimes which often live on back handouts. It may well be that that's the case.

But is anybody seriously saying that simply because it is custom and practice, we shouldn't write about it or investigate it for people to make up their own minds whether it has to be done or not? Where do you stop with that? Do you say then that we should not have been investigating the decision to sell arms to Iraq in the run-up to the Gulf War? I'm sure that embarrassed the government too.

I mean, I remember in my history classes the record of the Press in this country in the 1930s in dealing with Nazi Germany. Essentially, the Press in this country did not report what was really happening in Nazi Germany; and look where that led to. So there you see it for yourself.

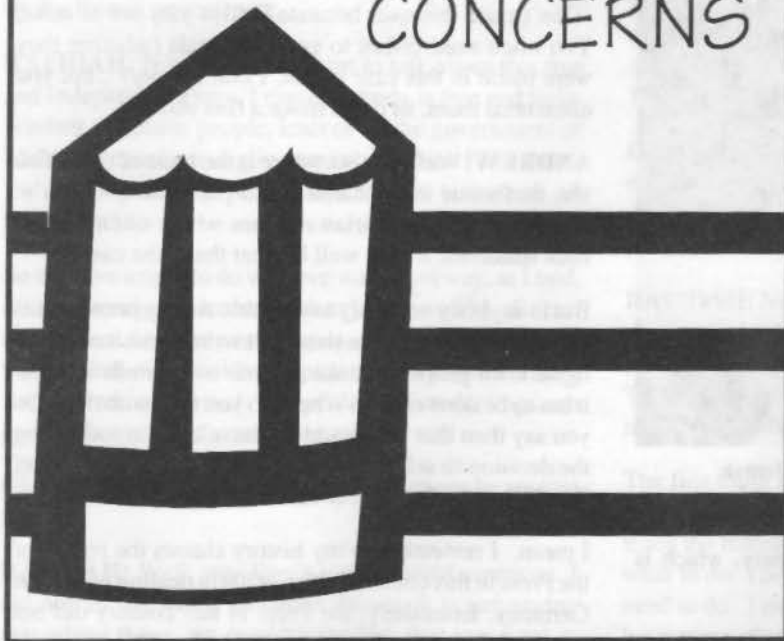
The problem is...with a free Press you take the rough with the smooth. And since there are major British interests involved, this is a legitimate matter of investigation; and neither the British Foreign Office nor the Malaysian government will stop us continuing.

PRESENTER: Now what about the record of the Press with patronising Third World countries and racism? Because we heard the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister saying, "Ah, you're only doing this because we're brown and Muslim." And briefly, why do you think he said that?

ANDREW: Well, that's absolute nonsense. The problem is that this is a regime in Malaysia with a colonial chip on its shoulders and it's fundamentally anti-British. I mean, they've already banned Australia from doing anything in Malaysia and now...

It's nothing to do with colour at all; I resent that altogether because, as I say again, the thrust of our investigation is not into Malaysia, which is, frankly, of second interest to us. It is about a government in London which is entirely white and almost all male. That's the one we're really investigating; that's what we're out to expose; not the Malaysian government - that is simply a by-product of our investigations. ■

CURRENT CONCERNS



CLINTON IS DILLYDALLYING

It is most disappointing that US President has been persuaded to believe that the Bosnian conflict constitutes a civil war and continues to dil-

lydally with regard to using air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs on account of disagreements among NATO allies.

The whole world is aware that the Serbian aggression against the Muslims which has lasted for several years



Double standards: Nato air power over Iraq was swift and decisive.

now is nothing short of a genocide. The Bosnian Muslims have been subjected to one of the most barbaric and harrowing experiences ever witnessed by the civilised world. Innocent children, women and men have been killed, butchered, raped, dispossessed and displaced from the sanctuary of their homes.

This is the reason why a peaceful solution, which we in Aliran would normally support, is no longer tenable. It is the same reason why we have previously supported the call for the lifting of the arms embargo which has made it impossible for the Bosnian Muslims to defend themselves effectively and made them so vulnerable to the Serbian aggression.

We recall not so long ago, the swiftness with which the US and its NATO allies struck back at the Iraqis for its "aggression" against Kuwait.

Not to act with the same expediency, in this case, especially against an aggressor who is involved in deliberate, systematic ethnic cleansing, exposes the double standards practised by the so-called champions of democracy.

Even if its NATO allies refuse to support the air strikes, the US has the capacity to act on its own. In fact, many peoples and governments of the world would applaud the US for being courageous if it went ahead and acted unilaterally.

For, given the circumstances, air strikes would show the Serbian aggres-

sors that the world would not only condemn their aggression but they would not go unpunished for their dastardly deed. Indeed it is the only way left to achieve a long-lasting peaceful solution which is just and does not benefit the aggressor.

We urge President Clinton to use the air force against the Serbs immediately. Failure to do so would reveal not only that it practices hypocrisy and double standards but it would suggest that deep down, perhaps, there is no sympathy for the dying Bosnians because they are Muslims.

*P Ramakrishnan
President*

26 January 1994

ACID TEST FOR DEMOCRACY

Now that the Sabah state elections are over, the acid test for democracy begins.

The people of Sabah were given a chance to express their choice of government and they have made that choice in keeping with the democratic process.

The question now is whether the democratic decision exercised through the ballot box by the Sabahans will be respected and honoured.

Or whether that democratic choice will be subverted and democracy demeaned by frustrating the will of the people, only time will tell.

It is not uncommon, when the victory is not overwhelming, for money politics to rear its ugly head once again to entice elected representatives to party-hop and make a mockery of the electoral process.

In a sense, it is not democracy that is on trial but the individual integrity and character of each elected representative which is being tested. Will they remain true to their vowed principles and policies or will they succumb to the temptation of money and position and betray their electorates?

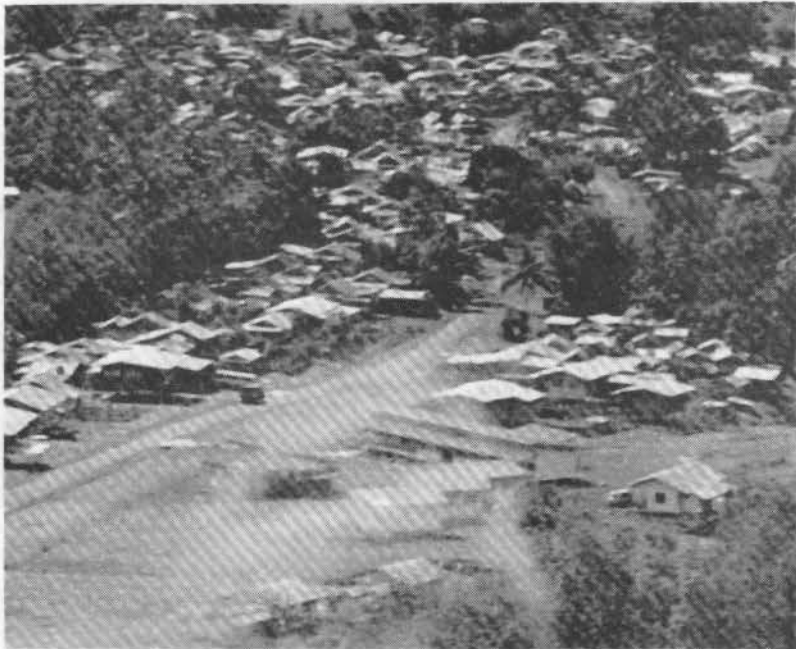
Politics need not be deemed as merely a contest for power and position but should be regarded as a challenge and an opportunity to serve and safeguard the interests of the people.

By remaining true to their declared principles and upholding the policies that

not to betray the trust and mandate given by their electorates.

* ALIRAN urges that the due process of the law should take its course and in keeping with the democratic tradition the leader of the party with a clear majority should be sworn in to head the new state government. Any delay will only contribute to further confusion and unnecessary tension in the state.

* ALIRAN suggests that the Federal Constitution be amended to make it a punishable offence for party-hopping. Lately there has been talk about politics and morality. What better way to infuse



Sabah: Will the powers-that-be allow democracy to thrive?

they had espoused during the recent election campaign for which they had been elected, elected representatives can enable politics.

In view of the prevailing circumstances in Sabah,

* ALIRAN calls upon all the elected representatives to remain honourable and true to their declared principles and

morality into politics than to deprive elected representatives of their seats when they betray the trust of their electorates and switch parties.

* ALIRAN also proposes that it be made mandatory for all elected representatives to declare their assets publicly as soon as they had been elected. This will help to keep politics

clean and will serve as a reminder to politicians that they had been elected to look after the welfare of the people rather than their own.

By and large politicians should be accountable to the people. Any legislation that will strengthen this democratic principle will undoubtedly receive the whole-hearted support of all the Malaysians.

*P Ramakrishnan
President*

20 February 1994

RESPECT TIME-HONOURED DEMOCRATIC NORMS

ALIRAN is perturbed by the statement quoting the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that the elected representatives from PBS must publicly express their open support for Datuk Pairin in order to establish the fact that he enjoys majority support before he could be sworn in as the Chief Minister of Sabah.

This is an absurd and needless requirement. This is not a prerequisite under any written law.

Moreover, this is something that he himself has never put into practice. Did he ever demand that all the BN MPs should gather publicly to express their confidence in him before allowing himself to be sworn in as the Prime Minister of Malaysia? Was this the case in all the other states before the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers took their oath of office?

It is not necessary for Dr Mahathir to be convinced

whether Datuk Pairin enjoys the support of his elected representatives or not. Datuk Pairin is not obliged to provide any such proof.



The PM: Requiring PBS elected reps to publicly declare support for Pairin is absurd

The only proof that is required under our system of parliamentary democracy to convince anyone that a party leader enjoys majority support is the will of the people expressed through the ballot box in the democratic process.

The Sabahans have expressed their political will through the ballot box. At the end of the day, and as confirmed by the Chairman of the Election Commission, Datuk Pairin had secured a mandate through a simple majority to run the government of Sabah for the next five years. This is an indisputable fact, clearly understood by the vast majority of Malaysians who subscribe to the parliamentary democracy that we have been practising all these years.

The due process of the law requires the swearing in of the leader of whichever party that had won the majority of the seats contested as the Chief

Minister of Sabah. That is all. The moment the oath of office is administered, the leader of that party becomes the legitimate chief executive of the state.

If Dr Mahathir requires any further proof as to whether Datuk Pairin enjoys the confidence of the State Assembly, then he has to be a little patient and wait for the next sitting of the Sabah State Assembly to be convened. It is at this point in time that

the Barisan can call for a vote of confidence in the Chief Minister to determine whether he has the majority support of his party colleagues.

If Datuk Pairin survives such a vote of confidence he will continue as the Chief Minister of Sabah. Otherwise he will be voted out of office.

In the meantime we should refrain from resorting to political chicanery to subvert the democratic process. Time-honoured democratic norms should not be sacrificed for political expediency.

*P Ramakrishnan
President*

21 February 1994

OBSERVING A DAY OF NONVIOLENCE & FORGIVENESS

The moment babies leave the womb, they enter a world that is strangling itself with greed, arrogance and anger. As they learn to speak and read, they discover how promises can be empty, how words can be hollow and how colour and creed are often used to divide and cause great harm to innocent people.

As they grow, they discover how politics, religion and culture and the search for wealth divide people. There appears to be no refuge from the problems created by humankind. It is as if human beings are bent on destroying themselves.



"Soon, they learn, as we have learnt, ... to make a statement, one throws a bomb..."

Soon they learn, as we have learnt, that this is the way of the world. To make a statement, one throws a bomb rather than choose a dialogue with all parties concerned; to show the depth of one's sorrow, entire communities are torched; to seek redress, one resorts to violence rather than reconciliation.

We must find ways to teach ourselves that violence can only lead to more violence and that, in the final analysis, no one wins when blood is spilt.

As events have shown the people who suffer most are the women and children, the young and the infirm. Yet we have it within our power to change all this. As women, and as nurturers, we should take the lead. We should come together to remind ourselves and the world of the love and compassion in our hearts. We must

promote peace and understanding between peoples.

Because of this and more, let us join hands across the ocean and observe, as a start, a day of non-violence. With this, we must strive to forgive. We must try to return to the beginning to make a fresh start of our existence on earth. Only then can we create a safe world for those we love.

And what better day to celebrate this than on International Women's Day which falls on March 8.

SISTERS IN ISLAM
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

January 1994

Alleged bribes to Malaysian politicians:

“I’M NOT AMUSED BY ALL THIS NONSENSE”

Rafidah Aziz

BBC interview with International Trade Minister
Rafidah Aziz on 25 February

Full account on page 33

LEGITIMATE
MATTER FOR
INVESTIGATION

Full account on page 34

