The BMF Report:

Unanswered Questions!

The Committee of Inquiry into the BMF scandal comprising Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin, Chooi Man Sou and Ramli Ibrahim, has done a splendid job in preparing a detailed, meticulous report which is both revealing and shocking.

What is shocking is the extent of greed and avarice reflected in the crafty manipulations of established personalities in business, banking and government circles. The report shows that many of those directly and indirectly involved in the scandal have nothing but utter contempt for ethical conduct. There has been total disregard for professional values. There is also enough evidence in the report of negligence and incompetence on the part of important public figures.

A close study of the report reveals that there are at least six aspects of the scandal which must be of grave concern to every Malaysian.

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There is suggestion of massive, organised fraudulence and cheating. The 'Concerted Plan' hatched by certain personalities at the end of 1979 to use Bank Bumiputra funds to make money for themselves during the start of the property boom in Hong Kong epitomises this fraudulence. There is no other way of describing a plan that sought to inflate Carrian shares and re-sell Gammon House to the Malaysian government for a quick profit. It was through fraudulence of the highest order that BMF released US$292 million to a shell company with 2 dollars paid-up capital owned by an undischarged bankrupt.

There are hints of corruption in the scandal facilitated by the intimate relationship between the BMF directors and George Tan of Carrian. Payments were made and benefits given to a number of well-known Malaysians and Malaysian companies. The denials by many of them in the Government White Paper are unconvincing.

There is ample evidence too of total lack of proper supervision and regulation of BMF by both the parent bank in Kuala Lumpur and Bank Negara. Bank Negara's failure to supervise the loan activities of BMF especially between 1979 and 1982, was a crucial contributory factor in the mess that BMF got into.

At the same time, the report shows that various individuals in positions of great responsibility failed to act with earnest determination even when they knew that things were seriously wrong with BMF. The former Executive Chairman of Bank Bumiputra, Dr. Nawawi Amin, for instance, saw no reason to take action against a senior BMF official, allegedly involved in malpractices even when action was suggested by the Governor of Bank Negara, Aziz Taha. Similarly, the Prime Minister should have responded with greater vigour to the situation after his several meetings with Aziz Taha and after the latter's detailed letter to him emphasising the gravity of the scandal. This is what had prompted the authors of the report to observe, "But in the cases on which we have reported, the individuals involved including some at the very top of the system, failed to take the appropriate control measures when they had discovered at least a part of what was going wrong". (p. 937, BMF Final Report Vol. II).

There is some indication of a concerted attempt to cover up the scandal. The way in which 7 writs served on the solicitors of George Tan were allowed to lapse, the unwillingness to circulate the internal audit report on BMF lendings to Carrian to the board of Bank Bumiputra and the refusal of Bank Bumiputra to submit Special Brief part I to the police in Kuala Lumpur as recommended by the Committee of Inquiry, seem to suggest this. A cover-up may also be the explanation for the Bank Bumiputra decision to release through BMF "further sums (of money) to George Tan and the Carrian group to keep Carrian afloat. They were in fact protecting their own interests." (BMF Final Report Vol. II p. 871).

Though all these strong suspicions of cover-up, corruption and fraudulence have been aroused by the report, there isn't enough concrete evidence to establish the true nature of alleged malpractices. At the same time, a number of crucial questions remain unanswered in the report. For instance, how did BMF and Carrian develop such a close relationship? Was there some other person who may have been linked to powerful political personalities, a person who used George Tan as a mere agent? Was the government's dilly-dallying in the entire BMF scandal an attempt to protect the interests of these powerful political personalities? What was the extent and nature of the involvement of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Industry in the scandal?

These and other questions can only be answered through an independent Royal Commission of Inquiry. This is why right from the outset nearly every social group had appealed to the government to establish an independent commission of inquiry. If such a commission had been set up, there would have been a much more conclusive report. This is because the commission would have had the powers to probe the questions raised in the Committee of Inquiry's report in such a manner that the truth would have been known.

It is not too late. The 3 members of the former Committee of Inquiry and perhaps a couple of other independent, respected public personalities should now be appointed to a Royal Commission of Inquiry. Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin should be its Chairman. Using the valuable leads provided by the present report, the Commission would be able to answer the questions that the public is asking about BMF.

ALIRAN urges the government to respond positively to this proposal. At stake is its very credibility as a government that professes honesty and integrity.
Excerpt 1

0.5 MILLION PAYMENT TO DATO YUNUS SUDIN
(from pgs 436 - 437 Final Report Vol I)

"42.6 (2) Application for Bank Draft

On 24-12-81, Carrian Holdings Ltd. applied for a Bank Draft of $50,000 million to be paid to Dato Yunus Sudin. The name of the remitter was stated to be Gain Point Investments Ltd.

In the books of Carrian Holdings Ltd., this payment to Dato Yunus Sudin was debited to the account of Plessey Investments Ltd.

(3) Interview with Dato Yunus Sudin

On 9-10-84, at an interview with the Committee Dato Yunus Sudin was given copies of the Bank Draft and the application for the Bank Draft. He admitted that the name of the payee stated in these two documents was his name. He agreed to look into the matter and to revert to the Committee. However, at the interview, he made the following comment: "... This should not have been in Carrian's account ...."

On 23-1-85, Dato Yunus Sudin wrote to the Chairman of the Committee and stated that "... regret to advise that at this point of time I am unable to grant any further assistance to your committee ...

Dato Yunus Sudin's explanation was later given by letter dated 17th February 1986 (Lampiran XV White Paper 16/1986) as follows:--

Dear Tuan Syed,

The extracts which were enclosed in your letter refer to two matters which concern me, namely:

i) the receipt of $0.5(m) which was part of a total investment of $1.0 (m)

The receipt of $0.5(m)

The above money was received as part of a $1(m) which I invested for and on behalf of Gain Point Investments Ltd (GPI), a company registered in Hong Kong.

I enclose herewith the letter from GPI's solicitors, Messrs Deacons of Hong Kong dated 24.12.81 advising me that the remittance of the first $500,000 and the second $500,000 to my account are for capital investment for and on behalf of their client, GPI. (Copy of Deacons' letter dated 24.12.81 is enclosed as Appendix A).

At the meeting with BMF Committee on 9th October 1984, I was given the following documents which were executed in Hong Kong, bearing Carrian Holding Ltd's (CHL) letterhead:

i) Pay Order of $500,000 to me

ii) Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation ORA Form applying for $500,000 TT to me on behalf of GPI.

I told the Committee I was surprised that my name was mentioned in the Pay Order, as I know nothing about it. So far as I was concerned, this should not be in CHL's account as I was not accountable to CHL but to GPI, hence my remarks on this matter as contained in the extracts. Further, there was no indication that the money was transmitted by CHL nor did I have any reason to enquire where it originated from. I was therefore surprised during the meeting with the BMF Committee when I was shown a copy of the Pay Order and bank remittance application form made in Hong Kong indicating that the money was remitted by CHL. So far as I was concerned, the money was remitted by CPI (See bank advise slip as per Appendix B) and not CHL and that the money was to be invested for and on behalf of GPI, as per their lawyer's letter mentioned above. Thus I avoided giving the Committee details ..... I regret to note that my name has been included in the Reports of the Committee suggesting my involvement in the BMF affair, which I hereby categorically deny. I do not know nor did I have any connection with either Carrian or BMF, nor do I personally benefit from the above two transactions.

I hope the above rectifies the incorrect impression and puts the matter in its true perspective in so far as I am concerned.

Excerpt 2

THE ROLE OF BANK NEGARA
(from page 529 Final Report Vol II)

"51.5 (3) Bank Negara had been alerted to the serious defects in BMFL as a result of its inspection. This was a month before Carrian made its announcement of liquidity problems. According to the records made available to the Committee, Bank Negara then called for meetings with the directors and officers of BBMB and BMFL and requested for documents and reports. These meetings were held and the documents and reports requested were given.

Post-Inspection

Over this period of time BMFL released further sums to Carrian. BBMB also joined in and released a sum of US$76 million for the purchase of the very same US Assets which BMFL had failed to secure on its outstanding lendings. The final outcome, when Carrian collapsed, was further losses to BMFL and BBMB.

(4) What steps could Bank Negara have taken after it had completed its inspection on 30-9-82? It could have taken steps to cause the removal of the persons in control of BMFL and not merely rely on the assurances given by Dr. Nawawi that everything was under control and the statement of Dato Hashim that BMFL would not suffer any loss. There was no evidence that such steps were taken at that time."

P.M. Informed

We note however that the then Governor of Bank Negara, Tan Sri Aziz Taha had had several meetings with the Prime Minister and briefed him on the situation. He also wrote to the Prime Minister on 2-4-83 (warning that BMFL would incur a large loss for the year ended 31-12-82). Tan Sri Aziz Taha in his interview with the Committee on 2-12-85 stated that
Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin, flanked by the other committee members, Mr. Chooi Mun Sou (left) and Encik Ramli Ibrahim.

In the circumstances then prevailing Bank Negara was not in a position to intervene any more than what had been done. It had done all that was possible in reporting the matter to the Government, for the Government is the ultimate shareholder of BBMB and it had been briefed on the serious situation. The chairman of BBMB (Dr. Nawawi) was also in direct contact with the Government.”

Excerpt 3

JALIL IBRAHIM
(from pgs 569/570 & Final Report Vol. II)

"54.6(1) It is clear from the above report that Jalil was sent to Hong Kong to be the personal representative of the Group Chairman, Dr. Nawawi. He was told to and he reported directly to Dr. Nawawi. His main function was in relation to the Carrian Loans.

(2) Jalil soon found out after his arrival in Hong Kong that the US$40 million given to Bank of Communication Ltd was in fact a loan for the use of Carrian. He knew that the sum of US$3 million requested by George Tan could not be given directly to George Tan. It had to be given to a bank and for such bank to on-lend to George Tan.

Non-existent Party

(3) Jalil tried unsuccessfully to obtain additional securities for BMFL in relation to the outstanding Carrian Loans. He ended up in arranging for the acquisition of the US Assets at US$76 million from Carrian for a non-existent 3rd Party financed by BBMB. Carrian therefore succeeded in obtaining a further sum of US$76 million without having to provide the securities to BMFL which George Tan promised that Carrian would do. George Tan succeeded in this with the full co-operation of BMFL and BBMB.

Murder & Release

(4) After the acquisition of the US Assets, Jalil expressed his frustration in his unfinished letter to his wife and family. He then went on leave to Malaysia during the Hari Raya holidays. On the first day at work after his return to Hong Kong, Jalil was presented with the request for the release of the US$4 million to Fittedge. He was called away to the Regent Hotel purportedly by a Tan Sri Ibrahim and later that afternoon he was murdered, while the sum of US$4 million was being released on the instructions of Lorrain Osman to Fittedge.”

Excerpt 4

KEEPING CARRIAN AFOIL (from pg 871 Final Report Vol. II)

"75.36 In the light of all these circumstances we ask ourselves this question. Why would BMFL with the knowledge and consent of BBMB behave in an apparent contradictory manner: attempting to secure its own position as against the other creditors, while at the same time, disbursing further sums without security thereby further exposing itself.

False Loans

To answer this question we looked at the several allegations made by George Tan, namely, that a greater portion of the substantial releases of “Loans” were in fact made to “the overseas investors” who were customers of the merchant banking arm of BBMB. If these allegations are acceptable then the conclusion would be that these releases were not genuine loans. This would explain why BBMB through BMFL was releasing further sums to George Tan and the Carrian Group to keep Carrian afloat. They were in fact protecting their own interests.
Inaugural Environmental Awardees 1985

EPISM takes pleasure in announcing the inaugural of awards entitled Protector And Polluter Of The Malaysian Environment on this occasion of the 11th Anniversary of the founding of EPISM.

1. For 1985 there would only be 2 awards out of the possible 6;

2. The award for Protector Of The Malaysian Environment 1985 for the Category of Organisations be conferred on The People's Movement for Consumer Rights, Merah "for its valiant efforts in mobilising and fighting the environmental hazards of nuclear radiation generated by Asian Rare Earth Sdn. Bhd. during the year. We salute them for the example that they have set in grassroots concern about environmental quality and the tenacity that they have shown in taking the dispute to the Courts from where they have won an inter-loctory injunction against the polluter.

All concerned Malaysians appreciate the spirit shown by these ordinary Malaysians in standing up for their rights of consultation and for a safe environment for themselves as well as their descendants. We value their spirit of co-operation with EPISM and other concerned organisations that were mobilised within the Papan Support Group and their sacrifices in paying for foreign experts to counter those paid for by the Government”.

3. The award for Polluter Of The Malaysian Environment 1985 be given jointly for the category of firms to (a) ASIAN RARE EARTH SDN. BHD. “for its polluting activities which gave rise to the Papan Controversy and forced the Bt. Merah residents to seek an injunction from the High Court against the firm producing and storing radioactive waste. We deplore the firm's silence and unwillingness to engage in open discussion with the residents and environmentalists during the year. All concerned Malaysians regret the lack of public accountability and public insensitivity to the environmental hazards of the firm's operations. Even when confronted with the findings of Prof. Sadao Ichikawa, the firm continued its stony silence. Neither did its Japanese principal answer queries raised in Tokyo by Japanese activists and EPISM.”

and (b) The Malaysian Pesticide Industry "for failing to respond positively to the International Dirty Dozen Campaign which was launched on 5 June 1985 and being unable to curb the proliferation of the very toxic paraquat. We regret that the industry has so far not produced publicly a definite programme of action to monitor continuously the impact of pesticides on the human environment and to minimise occupational hazards associated with the use of these chemicals. All concerned Malaysians are worried by the deaths and diseases caused by pesticide application and occasional misuse and wonder why safer methods, including Integrated Pest Management are not more extensively used. EPISM remains concerned with the hazardous disposal of pesticide containers, which includes their use for storing drinking water in some rural areas. We are disappointed that the industry has not given adequate priority to environmental quality during the year.”

Gurmit Singh K.S.
President
Environmental Protection Society
Malaysia
Petaling Jaya

Elections & Cutlery Candidates

With our elections drawing close we will hear news of more and more people switching parties under many flimsy excuses. There will be groups and even some less known politicians who would be releasing press statements to publicise as to why they have resigned from the old party to align themselves with a new party.

I hope the electorate would not be hoodwinked by all the political chameleons. We will have to weigh seriously the integrity of these politicians as to their true, motives. Sometimes I wonder whether these people have been planted by some outside forces just to discredit some political party around election time.

Let us not be deceived by statements such as “We are disillusioned with the party leadership”, “The party has strayed from its original objectives”, “The party has betrayed the people” and so forth.

I feel all these are just attempts to subtly influence public opinion in favour of some other party. To make things worse certain newspapers would magnify these unimportant resignations to make it appear that the betrayed party is doomed! One needs neither much intelligence nor imagination to identify politicians who are prepared to sell their souls for money and political self-advancement.

I have an inkling that the DAP would again be plagued by such resignations, particularly from amongst its Malay members, as it happened just before the previous elections. They would give all sorts of excuses to run down the party. This is obviously done to discredit the party in the eyes of the Malay community. DAP would be made to appear as a chauvinistic and racialistic party while parties wallowing in communalism, in accordance with party objectives, would suddenly appear to promote multi-racialism and display more tolerance and brotherhood.

I hope the people would not be influenced by the activities of all these political grasshoppers just around election time. It should not be difficult for the Malaysian voter to identify the “cutlery” candidates — those who are born with silver spoons in their mouths, speak with forked tongues and stab the opponents in the back with knives!

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P Rashahugan
Ipoh

The Papan Trenches: an expensive development project that is anti-people.
Kepimpinan

Dari segi sajarah – punca kejayaan sesebuah kerajaan yang memerintah itu adalah kerana adanya pemimpin-pemimpin yang kental serta semangat yang tinggi untuk memperjuangkan misinya. Ini diakui oleh semua pihak, sama ada partai kerajaan maupun partai oposisi. Dan keruntuh kejayaan kerajaan pula banyak disebabkan oleh kegilaan pemimpin kepada pangkat, kedudukan, status, kecetakan pemikiran, lemah semangat, rasuah, pentingkan diri dan tipu helah yang melampau.

Kegusuran dan kekacauan dalam partai kerajaan di negara kita kini adalah disebabkan oleh sikap rakus kuasa oleh seorang pemimpin partai. Tanpa mengira akta dan undang-undang mereka terus berjuang untuk kekuasaan. Pasport kekuasaan adalah kesenangan bust mereka meskipun kecakapan itu dari titik penutupan dan penyelenggaraan besar.

Satu kenaikan yang dibuat oleh Dato Perdana Menteri dalam satu perumpama khas dengan ahli-ahli parliment di rumah UMNO Malaysia pada 13th November yang lalu adalah patut diterima oleh semua kalangan pemimpin


Dalam usapan khas itu juga Dato Perdana Menteri mencenderahkan bahawa pemimpin UMNO kini terlalu gairah dengan kuasa dan kemewahan yang menurunkan imej kepimpinan mereka dan keruwetan pimpinan. Ini tanda-tanda kekosongan dalam UMNO yang perlu diberi perhatian serius. Sengetka sesama kita — berbebuk sesama kita — hasad-dengki, prasangka, dan lobi melobi melulu adalah kerja rutin UMNO sekaran yang amat dicemaskan oleh Dato Perdana dalam pertemuan itu. Oleh itu mengertiah sedikit walaupun pemimpin rakyat.

Dalam sebuah negara — pemimpinan yang menjadi tungsuk keutuhan, kejayaan, kemajuan dan keberjuhaan. Kalau pemimpin tak betul maka rakyat akan kucer. Itu hakikat yang mesti dimengerti.

**Dr. Ali Mahmood Ali El-Jufri
Pasir Mas, Kelantan**

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**Police Rehabilitation Centre**

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**Secret Cell K.L.**

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**Notes:**

* Spelling of name unconfirmed
+ Woman

**INSAN calls on the Malaysian government to release all political detainees immediately and unconditionally to mark Human Rights Day on 10 December 1985, and on all freedom and justice loving people — individuals and groups — to work for their release and for the abolition of anti-democratic laws, policies and institutions which violates our basic human rights, freedom and justices.**

**Dr. Jomo K.S.**
Director INSAN
Pertalang Jaya

**Berani Berfikir**


Kalau mahu maju dan selamat ja l akan way we relate to one another. This was the cry of the prophets of old behaviour. Of itself with prayer and piety, with all the late we have come to realise that religion cannot simply concern ity with prayer and piety, with all the system and techniques are the best and the sense of tolerance and sensitivity to appreciate and expand. Out hearts get purified and our minds become ennobled.

But the sad fact is that we are devoted to our dogmas and rituals. We tend to think that it is the beginning and end of religion. We are deluded by the misguided zeal that we must fiercely defend our dogmas and perpetuate, its cause to prove our faith and religion. We become bigotized, if not rigid in word and deed. Our visions become narrow. We lose our ability to understand and lose our sense of tolerance and sensitivity to appreciate and accommodate virtues and truth from other sources.

Only devotion to God and righteousness will liberate our hearts of greed, egoism, and passion. Blind adherence to dogmas and rituals will only inhibit the spiritual. They are mere guidelines and symbols of assurance to help us worship God. But we have taken the symbols and signposts as the ultimate in religion. We pay too much attention to rituals and remain convinced that we have practised our religion in its totality. We keep quivering as to whose system and techniques are the best and the ultimate. We have not moved forward in spirit because religion has become the love of dogmas and the need for symbols. Some people keep insisting that man must belong to a religion based upon revelation and certainty to attain spirituality and salvation. They simply categorise all others outside the orbit of their faith as heathens and infidels. By such arguments men like Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore will be classified as infidels because they did not embrace or come within the confines of a religion based upon revelation and certainty in the strictest sense of the

Of late we have come to realise that religion cannot simply concern itself with prayer and piety, with all the so-called formal religious behaviour. It must have a direct impact on human behaviour and the way we relate to one another. This was the cry of the prophets of old and it has taken us a long time to catch on.

We need to promote behaviour that enhances life — to develop a consistent ethic of life, individually, societal.

Father Thomas Oddo, C.S.C., President University of Portland

Evolution Of Material Man

Kartini Muhd Dahlan Rantau Panjang, Kelantan

Of Faith And Dogmas

Social service should become an integral part of our cultural and spiritual life. There can be no devotion in isolation. The pious devotion to God must ultimately result in an expanding consciousness that begins to feel a closer kinship with humanity.

Whatever service we render to the less fortunate in our society must begin from a spontaneous love in our hearts to give a helping hand to someone in dire need of help and thereby bring solace. It is such good deeds and service that can bring spiritual love to blossom and expand. Our hearts get purified and our minds become ennobled.

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word. What rationality and justice is there in the realm of spirituality if men of such nobility of mind and purity of heart be classified under such mean terms as a dogmatic necessity?

In the area of social service we must admit that there are groups who serve society and perform some admirable work do so not out of much love and sympathy but with other ulterior motives. Some people render service with a political motive. Others consider it some form of pre-requisite to reach the heavenly kingdom. Then there is this service rendered under such mean terms as a dogmatic necessity if men of such nobility of mind and purity of heart be classified under such mean terms as a dogmatic necessity?

May be all these are part of our materialistic culture but it must be a cause of concern to all of us. If service to fellow human beings is accompanied by publicity stunts, it depicts the lack of love and compassion in our hearts. All our loud rhetoric and altruism is of little significance if it is just part of a scheme to pamper our ego. We must not just seek to become some “do gooders” but venture to live by the deeper principles of our faith. We must discard this hypocrisy and strive to become spiritually motivated human beings.

P Rassuhan
Ipoih

Adopt an M.P.

The recent article in the Allian monthly (January/February 1986) by Lim Kit Siang highlighting the present deplorable state of affairs in the Malaysian parliament should be taken seriously by all concerned citizens of this country. It is obvious that something has to be done immediately to save the parliamentary democracy in this country deteriorates further and perhaps beyond a point of no return. I therefore agree with Lim Kit Siang that there is an urgent need to restore the standing and credibility of our parliament. How ever, I do not share Lim Kit Siang’s assertion that there should be far reaching parliamentary reform to redeem the standing and credibility of our parliament. My view is that there is little or nothing wrong with the system. The culprits responsible for the present “third rate coffee-shop” status enjoyed by our parliament are none other than our pampered Members of Parliament.

The recent Human Rights convention a prominent member of the Bar Council suggested that all MPs should attend a compulsory course on the Malaysian Constitution. This is a good move. Perhaps we should all start thinking in this connection, I would like to propose two modifications to it.

Firstly, I do not think the course should be limited to the study of the Malaysian Constitution. The frequent “parliamentary show” call for a wider syllabus. It should possibly include other subjects like, The Rukun Negara, Universal Religious Values, Parliamentary practice and ethics and general knowledge pertinent to the promotion of parliamentary democracy. The emphasis of the course should be on the 3R’s: READING, REASONING AND REACTING.

Secondly, the problem of getting the MPs to attend a formal course is out of the question for I cannot envisage any possibility of getting them to attend the course, when they are unable to present themselves regularly when parliament sits. A possible solution to this problem which I have in mind is to promote an “MP for a year” campaign at Padang Terbau.

Suhaimi Said Detention

I learned from a report of Amnesty International that Haji Suhaimi Said, a citizen and lawyer of your country, was arrested on March 4, 1985. It is reported that Suhaimi Said was held in prison for a period of 90 days without any access to his family or lawyer. At present he is detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for two years without having been charged or sentenced. Besides, the ISA empowers the authorities of your country to renew the two-year-detention period indefinitely.

According to the mentioned report there is no reason for arresting Suhaimi Said. He just published a report on clashes between support ers of PAS (Partai Islam SeMalaysia) and UMNO (United Malays National Organization) during a by-election campaign at Padang Terbau in January 1985. Neither did he call for violence nor did he approve of it.

Being a lawyer myself, I have to express my concern at the arrest of Suhaimi Said under these circumstances. Article 9 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile”. Therefore I am asking the Malaysian government to grant Suhaimi Said full access to his family and lawyer. Furthermore it should release Suhaimi Said immediately and unconditionally, if as it appears — he is being detained for the non-violent expression of his beliefs only.

Wolf-Dieter Albrecht
West Germany
Malaysians Are Not Fools

Datuk Abdullah the Education Minister appealed to what he regarded as a small number of businessmen and politicians to stop talking bad about the PM (Star, 19 Jan, 1986). I regard this as childish and unnecessary. The people have the right to discuss the performance and character of the PM and other ministers including that of the Education Minister. The people have the right to inform others whether the PM and other ministers ought to be re-elected in the next election or be thrown out.

Those who don't want the people to assess their characters and performance ought not to remain in politics. Please resign because there are others very eager to take your place. The general election will witness the people telling what is good for them. They know what is good for them. They know what is good for them.

The existence of some disgracefully unfit and filthy politicians makes us sick. The next general election will witness the exit of these politicians. Malaysians are not fools.

Serong Pimpannel
Kuala Lumpur

PM's Statement Unjustified

Naturally EPSM is shocked by the PM's description of environmental groups as "crypto-socialists trying to prevent development in the country". This is certainly amazing when the Government itself has a Department of Environment which is publicly committed to "Development without Destruction" - the very basic theme which EPSM has advocated over since its inception in 1974. What are we to make of the Government's various promises in the Third Malaysia Plan and Subsequent Plans?

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir has still not answered the 12 fundamental questions which we raised once again at our press conference of 6.2.86 on the Bakun issue. Instead he has made sweeping accusations about our motives. Surely there should be no problem in making public the feasibility reports if the Bakun project is so positive and essential to national development. That has been EPSM's basic stand all this while!

As regards all the other accusations uttered in Kuantan, we invite the Prime Minister to prove them and to define what 'crypto-socialists' are. As far as EPSM is concerned, we are our own masters, owe allegiance only to Malaysia, and have a clear conscience on Bakun and other environmental issues. We take orders from no one! No EPSM member went around instigating anyone to ask for $1 million per acre compensation. The PM should ignore such rumours since we too could repeat a rumour that one of the Bakun youths was offered a $85,000 bribe to stop opposing the Dam.

Why has the PM been harping on the foreign bogey? Is it part of the runup to the General Elections?

We know that the PM is very powerful and has the full power of the State behind him. We hope that he will not misuse it to crush honest critics like us for having the temerity to call for public accountability and open debate on national issues. Because we believe that Malaysia is a democratic country, we shall continue to articulate our honest convictions and invite the PM and Government to participate in open debate, which will also help enlighten the general public.

We remain unshaken in our convictions and reject the PM's charges.

Gurmit Singh K.S.
President
Environmental Protection Society Malaysia
Petaling Jaya

Pan-EI Affair & Misplaced Loyalty

I would like to comment on the letter (The Star, 1/2/86) purportedly signed by 35 Malaysian students at the National University of Singapore.

Reference was made to my statement on the detention of Tan Koon Swan by the Singapore authorities. According to 'Malaysian Students', "His statement too is being played up by the Singapore Press, which tarnished the issue of Malaysian Chinese," Further on, they declared: "We do not believe his policy of 'betraying' our fellow countrymen merely for his selfish means." (sic). Presumably, they mean 'ends' rather than 'means'? Significantly, perhaps, this confusion between 'means' and 'ends' is symptomatic of the pathetic state of mind of 'Malaysian Students'.

Now, what is the statement of mine which, according to 'Malaysian Students' has "tarnished the image of Malaysian Chinese" and 'betrayed' our fellow countrymen?

Throughout the Pan-Electric Industries saga, I have only made two statements - one in the form of a speech at a SDP ceramah in Gopeng, Perak on 11.1.86, and the other in the form of a press statement on 22.1.86, a day after Tan Koon Swan was detained by the Singapore authorities. The following is the full text of my Gopeng speech:

"The financial troubles of Pan-Electric Industries (Pan-EI) which caused the collapse of the Singapore and Malaysian Stock Exchanges on December 2 to 4 had sent shockwaves through the financial circles of both countries. More importantly and sadly, thousands of small investors in both countries were badly hit with big losses.

The Pan-EI saga was the direct result of the company's forward share-purchase contracts, amounting to $140 million, and its debts of about $400 million.

The Pan-EI saga has raised questions about the nature of capital formation in capitalist
countries through the Stock Exchange. The proclaimed purpose of a Stock Exchange is to play the role of a channel of long term capital into industry and trade, where the real wealth is created. The Stock Exchange in a capitalist system is therefore the agency by which capital is raised for productive use, with the aim of raising the level of output, employment and income.

However, the Stock Markets of Singapore and Malaysia have become almost like casinos dominated by big-time market operators and manipulators. These big business and financial operators, including some businessmen-cum-politicians, seem to be more and more money-makers rather than thing-makers. These people, rather than putting industrial assets to better use, have in reality been removing capital to make quick fortunes on the stock market, so that the stock market itself has stopped to fulfill the function of channeling money into productive industry and trade. As a result, share dealing — including forward share-purchase contracts — has become a growth industry by itself.

Thus, the stock market circus is dominated by financial whizkids and marauders using financial gimmickry to manipulate share prices. The stock market has become a mechanism for making money for a privileged group, with a top-heavy capital in share dealing and other financial activities of questionable social and economic value. The Pan-El saga reveals the “go-go” years of Malaysian business.

The problems facing Pan-El and some other companies today are not the result of some bad luck or bad business judgement, but are inherent in the activities of share value manipulation.

The Singapore and Malaysian authorities owe a duty to the industry and trade in both countries as well as thousands of small but genuine investors, to mount a joint comprehensive investigation into the recent stock market debacle to find out:

1. whether there was any fraud in Pan-El;
2. who were all these individuals, companies and securities firms involved in forward share-purchase contracts;
3. the extent to which Malaysian businessmen-cum-politicians Tan Koon Swan; Singapore stockbroker Peter Tham Wing Fun; and the Malaysian Securities, a major brokerage company in Singapore; and J Ballas & Co., a Singapore stockbroking company of which Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s brother Freddie Kuan was partner; were involved with forward share-purchase contracts;
4. the banks which gave loans for forward share-purchase contracts;
5. to what extent the Monetary Authority of Singapore had failed in its duty to supervise and scrutinise the books of bankers and stockbrokers, especially with regard to forward share-purchase contracts;
6. to what extent the Stock Exchange of Singapore Committee had failed to monitor and supervise the securities industry;
7. whether criminal charges can be made against individuals, banks, securities firms and companies for activities which led directly or indirectly to the stock market crisis in both countries.

In 1975-76 the Singapore authorities made charges of "serious wrong-doing" against the conduct of Haw-Pan-Slater Walker, a series of investigations being due under the Companies Act, followed. The Stock Exchange of Singapore subsequently released five volumes of their findings. Later, Richard Tarling, chairman of Haw Par, was extradited from England.

It is by now common public knowledge that I have many differences with the Singapore government with regard to human rights violations, detention without trial, control of the press, students and the media. As a matter of fact, I was one of those instrumental in forming the People’s Action Party out of the Socialist International in 1976. And my condemnation of the PAP’s record of human rights violations was the main reason I resigned from the DAP in 1978. However, on this issue of possible commercial fraud which has adversely affected the interests of thousands of small investors, I am in agreement with them. In the final analysis, we must always judge an issue not by who is involved but by the criterion of what is involved. That is the ultimate test of maturity, responsibility and political health.

It is of course the prerogative of "Malaysian Students" to Singapore for criminal prosecution. The Singapore government should be just as tough with the culprits in the present Stock market crisis, whoever or however highly placed they may be. There should be no protection and secret deals — whether political or business — behind the people’s backs.

In my press statement of 22.1.86, I welcomed "the detention of Tan Koon Swan by the Singapore authorities in connection with the Pan-Electric Industries affair”. I also renewed my call on the Malaysian and Singapore authorities to take action against all other individuals and other parties involved in commercial fraud.

I stand by every word in my speech of 11.1.86 and my statement of 22.1.86. Your readers can surely judge for themselves whether the arguments in them are valid or otherwise.

Students’ support to the MCA in general and the Tan Koon Swan faction in particular. No one can deny them the basic human right of their political preference and choice. However, whether the MCA is the only party which can represent the Chinese community in Malaysia and whether Tan is in fact "a capable leader, a hope for Chinese unity, a hope for a better future, . . . .” are arguable and essentially subjective interpretations and perceptions of issues, events and personalities.

Moreover, and more importantly, we must remember that Tan Koon Swan is being prosecuted as an individual and a businessman, and not as MCA leader or as a claimed leader of the Chinese community in Malaysia. To insist otherwise is to do the MCA and the Chinese community in Malaysia a disservice. ‘Malaysian Students’ have peculiar notions of ‘loyalty’, ‘betrayal’ and on how to uphold the good name and image of Malaysia that could have been acceptable only during the Stone Age.

Were all the British people who did not speak up against the extradition of Richard Tarling to Singapore in the 1970s, being disloyal to Britain, betraying a fellow countryman, and guilty of not upholding the good name and image of Britain?

Are all Malaysians who are in support of the Hong Kong authorities’ effort to extradite two former BMF officials from London to Hong Kong for trial in connection with the $2.5 billion BMF loans scandal being disloyal to their country, and guilty of not upholding the good name and image of Malaysia abroad?

Are the thousands of small investors whose monies were virtually wiped out in the recent stock exchange crisis in Malaysia and Singapore...
being guilty of ‘disloyalty’ ‘betrayal’ and of not upholding the good name and image of Malaysia if and when they complain?

Which is more important – to ensure that the truth and justice are upheld, or to protect, defend and save one’s ‘friend’, ‘fellow countryman’ or ‘leader’, right or wrong?

For all their incoherent hot air and misplaced sense of loyalty and patriotism, have ‘Malaysian Students’ started talking to the ordinary men and women in the streets to find out what they think and say about the whole affair?

If the upside down logic of ‘Malaysian Students’ is any reliable indication of the true nature of maturity and sense of responsibility of future Malaysian and MCA leaders, then we would indeed have good reason to be sorry for Malaysia in general and the MCA in particular. Foreigners may well have cause to make fun of us for a long time to come.

The Press and the Government say we are now in the throes of slow down or recession. It’s more a slump than a mere recession. Huge numbers of Malaysians are being and have been retrenched and remain jobless. The Government should be the first to reduce expenditure but, no – ministers are still going overseas for seminars, forums, and what not, which are of no value to the country. We just cannot afford such expenditure in these hard times.

The decision of the USM Disciplinary Board to dismiss its Academic & Administrative Staff Association’s President and to cut the salary of its Vice-President has been rightly condemned by many groups of concerned Malaysians. SGS wishes to express its total support to this condemnation and the appeal by PKAPUSM at this hour of challenge. SGS has been one of the staunchest critics of the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) especially since its amendments in 1975. We maintain that university autonomy was effectively killed by these and academic freedom has been severely declining since then. This decision of the USM Board traumatically proves our point. But it will be a greater calamity if the decision remains unaltered by the University Council for it will eliminate the last vestiges of the freedom of expression on its campus.

As its former Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr. Kamal Salih put it in a press interview on 8 February, this action is a dangerous precedent which all the other 5 Universities are likely to follow. The consequences for the country can be disastrous since the country is already having doubts about the extent of public accountability practised in the nation. The University administrators will have a heyday if they can completely silence even the officials of the staff and student associations. We hope is there for democracy when it is killed even in our institutions of higher learning?

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Article 10 of our own Constitution assures citizens the freedom of speech. In the light of these, we deplore, in the strongest possible terms, the decision of the USM and we suggest the University Council to re-consider.

In the meantime, we urge the entire academic community in Malaysia to shake off its apathy and take a stand on academic freedom and the freedom of expression NOW. We assure them of our support and that of like-minded Malaysians. They cannot isolate themselves from fundamental issues in their ivory towers or hide behind the skirts of the UUCA. After all, they are not the only ones who have their livelihoods to worry about!

PM Told: Declare Your Assets

The Prime Minister goes round the country telling the gullible rural folk that people are spreading malicious rumours about his wealth and corrupt practices. I am sure if he declares publicly his assets both in the country and overseas, the problem can be settled. Nepotism is so rampant in the world today that I wonder if it is a crime anymore. Corruption, through proxies, is also impossible to prove.

USM & Academic Freedom

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Chayong is 45. She is a Filipina but she could come from any part of Asia. She looks at you with such intensity that you wonder how her laughter comes so easily. But, the calloused hands, cracked soles of her feet, the black hair now browned by the sun, the wrinkled sunburned skin, all speak of the violence with which she struggles for survival.

A migrant from the province, she moved to another province with her family and a throng of relatives seeking a better life. They settled in a long untended agricultural land and began the process of production. When the absentee landlords arrived a year later and found the small settlement there, arrangements were made so that the land was divided equally among the settlers. Chayong and her family received two hectares. The tenancy sharing system was established at 70-30.

Chayong has an all work routine. She gets up at 4:00 in the morning, brews a pot of roasted corn to warm her stomach. She and her husband Lauro then leave for the ricefields – weeding, cleaning, transplanting, spraying, harvesting, gleaning – depending on the season. At 10:00, sometimes 9:00 when the sun becomes unbearable, they go home. Chayong takes her breakfast, quickly tidies the kitchen, checks on the children and then leaves again for the adjoining middle class village looking for work.

She does laundry most of the time, sometimes cleaning backyards, tending orchid or rose gardens, running errands, doing odd jobs. When there are parties in the big houses, she helps in the kitchen, washing dishes and carrying big pots of steaming meals. She goes home in the evening with M$1.50 or M$2.00, depending on her work input, and bits of food. At home, she whips a dish out of the bits and takes supper with her children. Later in the night, Lauro comes home smelling of tuba (a local alcoholic drink).

Sunday morning she goes to church and joins her women’s group, something other women never did because of shame. During big meetings, she is much too busy in the background to participate, fetching water, gathering fuel, doing dishes, washing pots, serving meals, running errands. She is constantly on the run.

Chayong is a woman bound.

She is bound by cultural traditions that expect women to be docile, nurture children, assume domestic responsibilities, take on the additional burden of economic activity and accept their husbands’ occasional promiscuity.

Cultural traditions do not change quickly without tension. In Chayong’s community, tensions exist because of her ability to think and work differently, in her ability to cope with the great physical demands of her work and with the uncertainties of her own family life. While in the process she learns to develop the resources within herself, husbands warn their wives not to be like her.

Chayong is bound by class interests. Chayong, unlike the other peasant women, joins the middle-class women in church; but the nature of relationships does not change. The landlord in the farm is the power in the church and therefore Chayong maintains her tenant role even as they pray together. Class consciousness allows the church women relative influence and authority to ask Chayong to do the peripheral, seemingly unimportant but actually indispensable chores.

Chayong is bound economically. In a society dependent on money as the medium of exchange, she needs access to income that will enable her and her family to subsist as well as to fulfill obligations. In an effort to improve the quality of their family life, her workload increases and the exploitation heightens. Because work opportunities are unpredictable and few, for a miserable wage and a few crumbs, women can make her work for them and do things they would be doing themselves if they did not have money. As a poor, married woman, she spends most other time in productive activities and has no time for herself.

Chayong is bound politically. From the tedious monotonity of work and compromise, a process of conscientization evolved and it is now time to decide. From a critical consciousness of her class and the forces of oppression and exploitation around her, emerges the decision to struggle and be free from the chains of power and domination, from the poverty that is so widespread, from the bondage of tradition. She participates in this whole process of transformation by helping develop a critical consciousness and organizing her fellow peasant women.

Today, there is a glow in Chayong’s eyes. She speaks of people coming some days — people whom she articulates her deepest aspirations. Most nights they spend sharing, analyzing, reflecting on the family’s situation and the structures that make it virtually impossible for millions of people to survive. She speaks of courage, of power, of hope, of freedom. Maybe, tomorrow, soon, they will come true for her, she says.
Towards Cultural Integration In Malaysia

Mohamed Ghous Nasuruddin

In Malaysia, culture is a mercurial word. It elicits a variety of responses and reactions, ranging from utter disinterest to highly emotional ones. To the layman it merely refers to the traditional dances and music which is not material in his quest to eke out a living for his family. The academics probe and analyse the various facets of culture trying to understand its structure and workings. In the political arena, politicians twist, hack and mutilate culture to champion their partisan interests.

Except for those involved in the teaching and research of culture, the majority of people have a myopic view of what it means: most focus on the arts. Thus, dance, music, and theatre have held the mainstage in most cultural polemics. In fact it is much more than the arts.

Simply put, culture is the way of life, it encompasses the whole gamut of one’s life. It includes the way humans eke out their livelihood through agriculture, fishing, industry, trading, their social organisations, leisure-time activities, language, religion, norms and values; and the arts.

Thus each ethnic group has its own distinctive cultural characteristics, is proud of its heritage, and will resist attempts to artificially manipulate or erode it. However, acculturation and intra-cultural exchanges have created a repertoire of common cultural norms among the major ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Inter-cultural problems exist because of the tendency to emphasise and exaggerate the differences rather than the similarities. Differences, in fact, should exist because they enrich the cultural milieu. The fact that the major ethnic groups have co-existed and interacted with one another suggests the existence of norms and values which transcend ethnic boundaries.

Let us, therefore, look at the positive aspects of cultural integration and communication that already exist and which could be developed into a truly Malaysian identity.

Foremost among them is the close family unit, which is a coalesing force: a source of comfort, joy as well as sorrow. It is most visible during Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali when members of the family, wherever they are, make every effort to return home to celebrate these occasions with the family. And in this respect family ties are renewed and respect for elders are strengthened. In this regard all Malaysians share similar values.

The clothes we wear is another common ground. National dresses which identify the various ethnic groups are only worn on special or religious occasions. Our daily garb is the common western mode. The majority wears shirts and trousers while the elite and businessmen wear suits. Bush jacket is now popular among all Malaysians. Jeans, T-Shirts and mode shirts are favoured by the younger generation irrespective of ethnic background.

Entertainment is another area of commonality. Western-based music is enjoyed by all as is evident by the popularity of Michael Jackson, Dire Straits, Sheena Easton, over, for example, Makyong, Chinese opera, or classical Tamil songs. Even the so-called Malay songs by Sharifah Aini, Sudirman, D.J. Dave and others are based on the western tempered scale. Only the lyrics is Malay: likewise, for popular Chinese and Indian songs. In short, western music has supplanted traditional ones. Although this is an acquired cultural base, it has filtered down to the masses. Thus as far as music is concerned, Malaysians from all walks of life and different ethnic backgrounds prefer western music to their traditional ones.

Popular western dances, too, have been accepted as a common form of expression in Malaysia. Break-dance for example is performed in towns and cities as well as out of the way rural areas such as Keningau in Sabah. Youths from all ethnic backgrounds write to disco, rock and punk music in night clubs and private parties.

Food is another common denominator. The Chinese and Indians are very much at home with Malay dishes. Certain Chinese dishes such as chicken rice are heartily devoured by most Malaysians. In fact there are Malay restaurants serving that dish. The Indian Tosai is another popular food. In the towns and countryside, Malays and Chinese
Opportunities should be created to enable children of all races to mix and learn of each other’s cultural traits.

Jostle with their Indian counterparts for their “Masala, Nei, or Rava” tossi. Chapati too is enjoyed by most Malaysians.

Of course, western food is enjoyed by all. Just take a look at the burger culture: from the posh MacDonald’s restaurants to the road-side stands. Malaysians patiently queue up to buy their burgers. The upper and middle class on the other hand slice away their beef steaks, chicken and fish chops, etc.

Leisure time activities, especially sports, is another activity that transcends cultural boundaries. The major contact and non-contact sports such as soccer, hockey, and badminton are regarded as national games. Malaysians of diverse ethnic backgrounds participate as players and spectators. Racial discrimination does not exist on the soccer fields or on the badminton courts. We only have partisan crowds cheering for their home teams. Even sepak takraw, traditionally a Malay game, is now played by Chinese and Indians. Similar integration exists when it comes to athletics. Thus, a truly Malaysian identity has emerged in games and sports.

In spite of the existence of many common denominators certain partisan sectors because of their own vested interests highlight the cultural differences rather than the similarities. Dance is a case in point. Thus it is stigmatised into rigid compartments viz Malay, Chinese, Indian, and western dances. Most dancers do not have prejudices against any type of dance: in fact they regard each as different expressions of movements with its own form and styles. It is the officials who tend to view them as separate entities. This does not augur well for the art of dance and tends to segregate the practitioners. Some people would like to gel them artificially into a single entity without understanding their forms and characteristics: this would be an exercise in futility. It is better to let time mould these dances into a new plane of movement of expressions which is at the same time homogeneous as well as heterogeneous.

Painting does not have this kind of ethnic stigma as in dance. In fact there is no quarrel as to which is truly representative of Malaysian style of painting — be it water colour, batik, oil, or acrylic medium to abstract, realistic, or impressionistic images. These different mediums and images transcend racial boundaries, and all are accepted as the work of Malaysians. There is liberalism in the expression of the fine arts. The same attitude goes for sculpture, photography, and graphics. There is therefore a need to develop further this inter-cultural understanding and communication. Whether or not we achieve this cultural integration in the future will depend on how the present children are brought up.

In Malaysia, children of different races are usually brought up within their own cultural environment. Whether they grow up to be enlightened individuals or ones with prejudices and misconceptions of other ethnic groups will depend on the family and community environment. Those living in exclusive ethnic environments will have only minimal opportunities of learning about other cultures. So too if the children attend vernacular or religious or residential schools where they only come into contact with their own kind. Additionally, because of the ethnic residential pattern that exists in Malaysia, many of the same race end up in the same school. Thus schools in Malay communities will have predominantly Malay students. Only urban schools tend to have an equitable distribution of students from various races. It is only here that some kind of cultural integration occurs.

The existence of vernacular, religious and mono-ethnic residential schools does not encourage cultural integration. In fact segregation is perpetuated. Students can become parochial in the larger plural cultural context.

This is a sensitive issue; for any discussion will arouse emotional reactions and usually the parties concerned will misconstrue the issue as attempts to subvert or even erode the respective culture. As long as such reactions and resistance exist, the path towards cultural integration will be a long and never-ending one.

There is no easy solution to this issue. But efforts should be made and opportunities created to enable children of all races to mix and learn of each other’s cultural traits. If they are guided to learn, trust and respect for another, the future augurs well for Malaysia.

Towards this end the educational system should teach the children:

- A common language
- Love for the country
- Peaceful co-existence
- Respect for one’s fellowmen
- Appreciation of freedom and its attendant responsibilities
- Civic consciousness
- Truth and justice

With these attributes the future citizens of Malaysia would evolve a matrix of cultural integration; one that is based on universal values combined with the common cultural values of the major ethnic groups. This should foster the development of a peaceful and prosperous Malaysia.

Guest writer, Associated Professor Dr. Mohamed Ghouse Nasranuddin, is the Director of the Centre of Fine Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
Identiti negara
dan penguasaan asing

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

RISIS budaya di dunia membangun selalu juga dilihat mengikut tradisi dan kemonaden, kawasan desa dan kawasan bandar, dan konflik budaya membawa akit pesan yang ditimbalkan oleh dikotomi demikian. Mengikut skema ini, pihak bandar (industri, teknologi, elektronik) dikenal dengan kemonaden manakala pihak desa (pertanian saradiri, kemudian ekonomi) dikenal pula dengan tradisi.


Andalan yang lain pula ialah bahawa kawasan desa dan kawasan bandar memupuk dua buah pula yang boleh menyokong dirinya sendiri, dan suatu watak yang berjalan dari satu kawasan ke kawasan lain adalah sebenaranya berjalan merentasi dua entiti yang tidak berhubungan. Tetapi kedua-duanya adalah hasil yang diwujudkan antara satu sama lain. Kawasan bandar terhasil daripada kawasan desa sama seperti kawasan desa yang terhasil daripada kawasan bandar. Golongan petani terpaksa dipindahkan daripada ladang ke kawasan bandar, iaitu mereka terpaksa menjadi golongan pro-letar sebelum sebuah kota boleh diwujudkan. Tetapi, di bawah sistem feudal dan separa-feudal, bandar telah dipengaruhi oleh kawasan desa. Kota moden yang muncul dengan kapitalisme dan bandaraya emas, berkuasa pula ke atas kawasan desa yang darinya ia telah diwujudkan serta diperluaskan.

Marx menulis tentang benua Eropah pada zaman abad kesembilan belas: "Golongan borjuis telah menguasai negara dengan memerintahnya daripada bandar. Ia telah memuaskan kota yang besar, ia telah menambah dengan banyaknya penduduk bandar jika dibandingkan dengan penduduk desa. Jadi, ia telah menyelamatkan sebagalian besar penduduk daripada kekuduhan tidak ada yang ia membuatkan kawasan desa bergantung kepada bandar,
ia juga membuatkan negara-negara yang tidak bertamadun dan separa-tamadun bergantung kepada negara-negara bertamadun, iaitu negara petani bergantung kepada negara borjuis. Timur bergantung kepada Barat." Dengan meresapnya evolusi kapitalisme ke dalam tahap imperialism yang lebih tinggi, sektor desa dan sektor bandar petani negara menjadi lebih lagi tertakluk kepada pemerintah negara golongan borjuis, dan dengannya ia membuahkan hasil: rakyat negara — majoriti penduduk — kini diperkaksa menjadi hebat kebodohan kehidupan bandar dan desa yang baru.

Negara petani yang tertakluk kepada negara borjuis merupakan teras masalah apabila kita membincangkan masalah-masalah negara membangun — ekonomi, politik atau budaya.

Tetapi, dengan mengemukakan masalah budaya di dunia membangun mengikut konflik antara kemodenan dengan tradisi dan antara kawasan desa dengan kawasan bandar, dan dengan itu kita memusnahkan kepada pertentangan kedua dan kita mengelakkan isu sebenar di sebalik krisis. Apakah daya sebenar yang bukan mencapainya bukan sahaja melalui eksplorasi ekonomi dan penaklukan politik, tetapi apa yang lebih penting lagi ialah melalui penguasaan budaya.

Tetapi prosis ini menghasilkan sifat yang bertentangan: iaitu perjuangan ekonomi, politik dan budaya bagi mempertahankan hak mereka dan menentang pembahagian negara kecil yang menyeluruh. Di tanah jajahan dan di tanah jajahan bentuk baru, sebabnya muncul dua bentuk budaya yang berkonflik secara berleluasa: budaya imperialis asing dan budaya patriotik negara. Jadi, daripada bangsa yang berlanda, dan selainnya tinggal di sebuah Negara geografi, muncullah sastera, muzik, tarian, teater, kesenian rakyat yang berjuang menentang secara habis-habisan terhadap sastera, teater, muzik, kesenian asing yang dikenakan kepada tanah jajahan, separa-jahan dan jahan bentuk baru.

Bagi saya, hakikat begini masih merupakan konflik budaya sebenar dan penting: budaya patriotik negara yang berjuang melawan budaya imperialis asing. Pertentangan-pertentangan lain seperti pertentangan antara kawasan bandar dengan kawasan desa dan pertentangan antara bangsa-bangsa yang berlanda merupakan perkara kedua, dan ia hanya boleh dengan sebenarnya dilalui mengikut konteks pertentangan asas yang lebih besar.


Golongan petani yang sudah pun miskin dan diekspolitaskan pula tinggal di kawasan luar bandar. Inilah sebabnya mengapa perjuangan antara budaya kebangsaan dengan budaya asing kelihatannya pada permukaannya sebagai konflik antara kawasan desa dengan kawasan bandar, atau antara tradisi dengan kemodenan.

Tetapi, apa yang sebenarnya moden ialah budaya nasional yang baru, dan ia muncul daripada perjuangan bagi mendapatkan kebajikan yang menyeluruh, iaitu suatu budaya yang berakar-umbukan tradisi rakyat yang berjuang patriotik dan keperwiraan. Ini lebih boleh diilhami pada pusi, lagu dan teater penentang di kalangan pekerja di kawasan bandar di negara membangun. Ia adalah budaya perjuangan, budaya penentangan, dan walauapun berbagai unsur menyerap masa ke depannya, ia adalah secara dasarnya berharmoni dengan budaya penentangan di kawasan luar bandar. Perjuangan bandar dan perjuangan desa mempunyai harmoni begini dalam usaha menentang ekspolitasi dan penguasaan imperialis asing, dan juga ekspolitasi dan penerapan dalam negeri. Pekerja bandar dan petani desa merupakan asas dan pencipta budaya nasional yang sebenar di dunia membangun.

Jadi, apakah krisis budaya di Afrika dan di dunia membangun secara menyeluruh?

Krisis sebenar menangani budaya di Afrika masih lagi merupakan penguasaan imperialis terhadap ekonomi, politik dan budaya kita — tidak ada negara yang boleh menganggap dirinya bebas selagi ekonomi dan budayanya dikusai oleh pihak-pihak asing.

Jadi, syarat mutlak perkebaman budaya Afrika ialah bagi meneruskan perjuangan untuk membubarkan ekonomi dan politik daripada semua kesan pengaruh imperialis. Ia juga perlu memerangi yang berterusan terhadap kompador-kalaya yang memerintah, dan melalui budaya mereka terus menguasai kehidupan berjuta-juta petani dan pekerja di dunia membangun.

Dengan adanya peraturan ekonomi dan politik dunia yang baru, ia bermakna bahawa akan wujud pula suatu peraturan budaya dunia yang baru, dan ia akan memperlihatkan pemanfaat budaya moden yang terbesar di Afrika dan di dunia membangun yang lain. Ia adalah budaya yang berakar-umbukan aspek-aspek yang dinamik dan progresif mengenai tradisi kebangsaan, tetapi ia tetap terbuka kepada unsur budaya progresif dan berasal kemanusiaan di seluruh dunia.
The Small-time Shareholder

While leaders and groups continue to express sympathy and support for tycoon-politician Tan Koon Swan, arrested for criminal breach of trust, cheating and fraud, in connection with the Pan-El affair, ALIRAN feels that the Malaysian public should give even more attention to the plight of more than 4,500 small-time shareholders of the Pan-El company.

With the winding up of the company, these small-time shareholders will get nothing back. Many of them would have lost a considerable sum of money. Those ordinary shareholders were not aware of what was happening to Pan-El.

This is why ALIRAN calls upon the government to introduce a new law into existing stock-exchange rules which would require listed companies to provide as much information as is possible to their shareholders about their operations. After all, these shareholders are the true owners of the companies. They are the real risk-takers.

The government should also modify stock-exchange rules in such a way that a portion of the investments of small-time shareholders are protected in case a company goes into receivership. At the same time, certain share-market practices which are obviously unhealthy should be prohibited. There should be a tightening up of the rules.

ALIRAN calls upon the government to present a Bill at the next session of Parliament incorporating various amendments to stock-exchange rules aimed at protecting small-time shareholders.

Dr. Mohamed Kadir
Executive Committee Member
6 February 1986

The truth about the allegations made by the authorities against the Memali detainees will never be known.

This suppression of the truth through the instrument of the ISA will only create greater hostility towards the government. The anger that the detention has already generated in Kedah and other parts of the country is bound to have an adverse impact upon the electoral fortunes of the Barisan.

This is why ALIRAN feels that it is in the government's own interest to put the Memali detainees on trial in an open court of law. If it is not prepared to do this, the government should release all the 36 detainees unconditionally.

Chandra Musafir
President

The Industrial Master Plan

ALIRAN is pleased to observe that the government's 10-year Industrial Master Plan (1986-1995) provides the right emphasis to the development of resource-based industries. It has identified a number of industries related to rubber, palm oil, food, timber and metals which will play strategic roles in the manufacturing sector as a whole. At the same time, the Plan recognises the importance of research and development in almost every sphere of industrialisation.

The Plan is also quite candid about various weaknesses in the present industrialisation policy. The over-dependence on foreign investments and on the electronics and textile industries has been criticised. There is the prolonged protection of certain domestic industries that results in less efficiency and a decline in motivation to upgrade products.

Memali Detainees

ALIRAN regrets the detention of 36 persons under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in connection with the Memali incident.

The detention which took place on 22 January 1986 contravenes the assurances given earlier by the authorities themselves that those held by the police for investigations would be charged in open court.

The detention is unfair and unjust since those involved will not able to defend themselves in a public trial.
do for this country". This is why, the Plan has recommended a limited and selective approach to heavy industry.

These are the very points which groups outside government have been making for a number of years now. And yet their criticisms and comments have been contemptuously dismissed by the government. If these dissident views had been given some attention, it is quite possible that some costly mistakes would have been avoided.

Even as it is, there are still some major shortcomings in the Industrial Master Plan. The Plan is based on the assumption that there would be a 6.4 per cent growth over the next 10 years. This is totally unrealistic given the economic situation. The present decline in commodity prices, including petroleum, is expected to continue into the 1990s.

A more serious flaw is the Plan's obsession with exports. While the export of manufactured products is important from the point of view of national revenue, it is wrong to orientate our entire industrialisation programme towards the external market. For the world market is dictated by forces beyond our control. Protectionism, technological competitiveness, production costs and world trading patterns are all against countries like ours making important inroads into the international market. This does not mean, it must be stressed, that there should not be a significant export component in our industrial drive. In fact, we should select certain products for export and develop them in such a way that we become world masters in those fields. This can be done. Neither our present technological level nor the world economic situation would be obstacles if we adopted a selective approach to export industrialisation.

However, as an overall policy, Aliran advocates industrialisation that emphasises the basic consumption needs of the majority of our people. Manufacturing activities would be directed towards catering for these needs. Technologies appropriate for the production of these manufactured goods in the context of a small market like ours, would have to be developed on a systematic basis.

There are at least three prerequisites in such an industrial plan. First, there must be a more equitable distribution of wealth and incomes so that the majority of the population would be in a position to afford goods and services. Second, there must be a serious endeavour to strengthen the basic sciences through the establishment of a number of basic science institutes doing fundamental research. The basic sciences constitute the foundation for technological development. How successful we are in adapting and integrating technology from outside depends upon the viability of our scientific base. Third, our school and university syllabi should be re-designed in such a way that the basic sciences become prominent. Without effective reform of the educational curriculum, it will not be possible to harness science and technology for industrial growth.

Finally, Aliran hopes that the publication of the Industrial Master Plan will lead to extensive discussions between the government and the people on the type of industrialisation policy the country should pursue. The government should be responsive to the views of groups outside the establishment for industrialisation will have an even more significant impact upon the lives of our people in the future.

The Executive Committee
Aliran

10 February 1986

P. Minister's Rally: If he cannot substantiate his allegations, he should refrain from repeating them at future rallies. It would only tarnish the dignity of the high office he occupies. The Prime Minister's Allegations

In all his public rallies so far the Prime Minister has warned against critics of the government who are acting as "stooges" and "slaves" of foreign groups and foreign countries. Their aim, he alleges, is to "create chaos" and "sow discord among the people."

Since these allegations have serious implications it is only proper that the Prime Minister specifies who these critics are, who the foreign groups and countries are, how they are linked to one another and how they are trying to create chaos in the country. Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Muhammad should provide concrete evidence of how local groups and individuals serve the interests of foreign powers.

If he cannot substantiate his allegations, he should refrain from repeating them at future rallies. It would only tarnish the dignity of the high office he occupies. After all he is supposed to be defending himself against a smear campaign; he should not smear others in the process.

Otherwise people may get the impression that he is raising the bogey of a foreign-local conspiracy to divert public attention from serious shortcomings in his own leadership. It may be seen as an attempt to camouflage the real nature of the issues confronting the nation.

And indeed, an objective appraisal of these issues, whether it is BMF or Pan-El or Memali or Sabah, would reveal that the underlying causes are related to morality and justice. A lot of our people now know that it is our own leaders who have failed to adhere to ethical standards. There is a growing gap between what they profess and what they practise. It is this that has resulted in a crisis of credibility with all its adverse consequences for the image of the Prime Minister. If anything, the situation has been aggravated by gross violations of the rights of the rakyat in a number of episodes in the last few years.

There is no point blaming foreigners or getting angry with local critics for the way things have developed in the country. Our leaders must have the honesty to examine themselves. They must have the integrity to admit their mistakes. Most of all, they must have the courage to rectify their errors.

Whether foreigners have ulterior motives or not is another matter. Whatever their designs, we have a sacred responsibility to remain steadfast in our commitment to the spiritual values that we preach all the while. Just because others may have evil intentions, wrong does not become right. An act of deceit does not become a deed to valour. Venality does not become virtue. The ability to distinguish right from wrong is fundamental to human existence.
It is this simple truth that the Prime Minister should uphold in his speeches during his rallies. Instead he is trying to make critics look like culprits. The real culprits, on the other hand, are allowed to parade as paragons of truth. No one who loves this country should acquiesce with this sort of situation. For the greatest danger to the well-being of any nation is when those entrusted with the responsibility of protecting its honour are in fact subverting its dignity through their passion for wealth and power. They are the real enemies of the people.

It is these anti-national hypocrites that the Prime Minister should expose. That would be an act of genuine patriotism.

12 February 1986

Chandra Muzaffar
President

Islam: No Compulsion

In the last 2 or 3 years, a few cases have come to light of non-Muslim girls in largely Muslim environments being persuaded to embrace Islam in circumstances which raise many questions.

Without going into the details of each case, Aliran feels that the process of embracing Islam should be such that the dignity and honour of the religion is not compromised in any way. There should not be any suggestion of the slightest compulsion. Compulsion can take many forms. A teacher making use of his or her position to influence a student under his or her care to embrace a particular religion would be guilty of applying subtle pressure. In the past, during the colonial period, there were instances of Christian teachers in mission schools using their positions for the propagation of their faith. Pressure upon a member of a minority religion to conform to the dominant religion in a school or hostel or some such institution would also be a form of compulsion.

At the same time, when a person is still a minor, below 18 years of age, the consent of the parents should be obtained if the person concerned is desirous of becoming a Muslim. The clearest basis for embracing Islam then, would be consent given freely by a person who has attained majority status. Free consent given after one has been persuaded of the goodness of the religion through example was the manner in which Islam spread in the past. Rather than emphasizing proselytization, Muslims should be more concerned about setting a good example.
Free consent and majority status should be emphasized so that the process of embracing Islam does not give rise to adverse consequences which have a negative impact upon the religion. It should not, for instance, destroy the family unit or estrange children from their parents. For Islam values the family unit as the basis of society. It expects children to love and respect their parents even if they are of another religion.

Aliran feels that some of the problems that have now emerged in regard to conversion of minors, would not have developed this way if the relevant authorities had acted firmly and decisively right at the outset.

Religious zealots should not be allowed to take advantage of the young. In this connection, the Prime Minister's recent reprimand to government servants not to use force in the propagation of Islamic values is most timely.

More important, Aliran calls upon the Prime Minister to revive the Inter-religious Committee under the Department of National Unity with the aim of working out rules and principles which will guide the interaction between religious communities. In a multi-religious society like ours there is a great need to establish clear, unambiguous guidelines which will govern inter-religious relationships.

Dr. Hamima Dena Mustafa
Assistant Secretary

13 February 1986

Allocation to Barisan MPs & Ministers

Aliran notes with regret that the government continues to allocate money exclusively to Barisan Nasional Members of Parliament for so-called development projects in their constituencies.

According to the Finance Minister, Daim Zainuddin, each MP receives $200,000 while each Cabinet Minister receives $500,000. The allocation for this purpose has been increased by 240 million to 380 million at the beginning of this year.

It is wrong to allocate money only to Barisan legislators for the money involved comes from the people. It should not be used in the pursuit of partisan aims. It is significant that the allocation has been increased this year which is an election year. It shows that the government has no scruples about using public funds for party purposes.

As a government that preaches the concept of a clean and trustworthy administration, it should not abuse its
Deny Recognition to Marcos' Regime

From the reports of the various concerned groups — including the Philippine Catholic Bishops’ Conference, the U.S. Congressional Observer Team and the Citizens’ Watchdog Movement, Namfrel — it is clear that the “re-election” of President Marcos for another six years has the legitimacy of only the suspect vote-count of the Philippine National Assembly, which he controls. The wishes of the people have been blatantly ignored in a controversial election flawed by violence and fraud.

The Marcos regime in its obsession for power, has shown that it has no qualms in resorting to tactics which smack of criminality and which makes a farce of the principle of democracy. The moral and ethical basis of his rule no longer exists. Perhaps, it is the absence of such basis that has led him to put his personal interests before those of the Filipino people in an election that is anything but clean and fair.

In the light of such gross contravention of democratic values and practices, Aliran calls on the government, which has repeatedly stressed the importance of ethics and morality in the conduct of its leaders, to withhold recognition of the fraudulently-elected and immorally-reinstated Marcos regime. Aliran also makes an appeal to countries in the non-aligned bloc to summarily deny the Marcos regime any official recognition of its undemocratic rule.

M. Syed Mustafa
Executive Committee Member

18 February 1986
The above statement did not appear in any newspaper — editor.

Abrogate the UUCA

Rather than amend some of the provisions of the Universities & University Colleges Act, the Government should give serious consideration to abrogating the Act altogether.

For the Act as a whole is designed to enable university authorities and government bureaucrats to exercise maximum control over students and academias. As a result, the Act has been partly responsible for retarding the intellectual development of our society.

This is why the real solution is to replace the Act with a University Charter laying out the rights and responsibilities of students and academias as proposed by various academic staff associations in 1978. The Charter incorporates the idea of a University Commission which would be the overall governing body.

The Charter and the Commission would go a long way towards restoring academic freedom and university autonomy. They would therefore help to check the erosion of academic values and scholastic norms in the university community. The public would also renew its faith and confidence in our universities.

Chandra Muzaffar
President

19 February 1986

Alliran’s Latest Book:

CABARAN-CABARAN SEMASA

A book in Bahasa Malaysia dealing with human rights, democracy, the economy, labour, ethnic relations, education, moral values and international affairs.

A book that every concerned Malaysian should possess. A book that opens your eyes to the situation in our country.

Price: $7.00

Aliran Monthly March/April 1986

18 February 1986
The above statement did not appear in any newspaper — editor.

Malayandy
Treasurer

18 February 1986
The above statement did not appear in any newspaper — editor.

Tun Hussein’s Advice

Aliran hopes that government leaders would give serious attention to the sound advice offered by former Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn.

Tun Hussein is right in asking the government “to concentrate on finding solutions to the country’s economic problems which need immediate attention”. Launching vicious attacks upon political opponents and social critics will not help create jobs for the jobless or check the rapid decline of the economy. Similarly, by denouncing all those who hold differing views on development, government leaders will not be able to prevent the appalling moral degeneration of our society.

What is needed is a sober, rational assessment of the present situation. This is the time for government leaders to undertake an honest evaluation of their own policies and their own attitudes. As Tun Hussein has suggested they “should be more open and listen to the opinions of others even though the opinions may differ”. Some of the ideas put forward by individuals and groups outside government may be useful in meeting the grave challenges facing the nation.

Aliran for its part will continue to propound solutions to our problems aimed at achieving a more just and
Discrepancy: Malaysia is against Arms Race but stages a massive arms exhibition.

The Marcos’ Monument: A massive reminder that corrupt leadership causes pain, poverty and chaos.

It is a matter of concern that Asean member countries are increasingly into arms acquisition and weapons production. Singapore in particular seems well on the way to becoming a sizeable centre for the sale and manufacture of small and medium range arms. This unhealthy trend developing within Asean needs to be checked, if the world is going to be convinced that Asean is serious about Zone of Peace, Freedom & Neutrality (Zopfan). It would be tragic if through carelessness on our part, the whole Asia-Pacific region is plunged into a mini-arms race – a situation which could only mean hardship and suffering for the people.

Acquiring arms on a large scale can only serve to heighten tension among neighbouring states and destabilizes international politics. But, perhaps, the most insidious effect of the arms build-up, especially in third world countries, is the emergence of a new dependency on the supplier nations. While seeming to fortify national resilience, the purchasing nations become the victims of a new form of domination by the arms producing countries of the West.

Chandra Muzaffar
President
19 February 1986

Arms Exhibition In Federal Capital

Alliran commends the Prime Minister for his words of assurance that Malaysia would not become a military power or an arms supplier to the outside world. We fully agree that the limited funds available would be better spent on social and economic development. The stand is unequivocal and clear and worthy of support by all peace-loving people in the country.

However, what remains puzzling is the holding of the Asian Defence Exhibition and Conference 1986 at Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur. How do we reconcile the fact that we are against an arms race occurring in our part of the world, while at the same time allowing an arms exhibition on such a massive scale to be held in the nation’s capital?

The weapons on display are not just for show but are also for sale to countries invited to the exhibition. In allowing the display to be staged, our government may inadvertently have encouraged the proliferation of arms in the Asian-Pacific region.

Ang Boon Chong
Executive Committee Member
20 February 1986

The Philippines, the United States & the People’s Power

Although Corazon Aquino’s installation as President of the Republic of the Philippines is a great moral victory for democracy, it is quite obvious that some of the reactionary forces responsible for robbing the Filipino people of their freedom and dignity are still very much in control of the situation.

This is clearly reflected in the manipulative role played by the United States on the one hand, and Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, on the other, in ensuring that mass feelings against Ferdinand Marcos would not develop into an effective challenge of American military, political and economic dominance of the Philippines. This, the United States succeeded in doing by getting a faction in the military supportive of its interests, to intervene in the political process before the mass civil disobedience struggle launched by Corazon Aquino could grow into a genuine people’s movement for freedom and sovereignty.

Blatant American interference of this sort aimed at thwarting the full expression of the democratic will of the
Filipino people, is an affront to the position of the Philippines as an independent, sovereign nation.

Nonetheless, Aliran hopes that President Aquino will endeavour to steer the Philippine nation in the direction of genuine independence, autonomy and sovereignty. She should try to make the Philippines a non-aligned nation which is not beholden to any super-power. She should be prepared to strain every sinew, forge every fibre in the quest to evolve a more just and humane social order which guarantees freedom, dignity and equality to every Filipino. If she fails to strive for this goal, the Filipino people would feel betrayed. The democratic struggle of the Filipino masses would have been in vain. There could well be chaos and instability if President Aquino does not live up to the aspirations of the people. In this connection, President Aquino should remember that if she becomes a captive of the reactionary victim to the dogmatic left.

Finally, for the world at large, the Philippine drama of the last few weeks holds some valuable lessons. First, it has demonstrated the power of the people. Second, it has shown how that power can be manipulated by vested interests inside and outside the country. Third, the Philippine drama has proven once again that corrupt despots who exploit and oppress their people will be destroyed in the end - however adept they may be in deceiving the people and holding on to power.

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar
President

Dissolution of the Sabah Assembly

Given the situation that has developed in the Sabah State Assembly, Datuk Pairin Kittingan had no choice but to ask the Yang Di Pertua Negeri to dissolve the House. It is a shame that events in Sabah have taken this turn.

There would have been no need to dissolve the Assembly and call for fresh elections, if all the important political actors in Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur had, from the outset, respected the electoral verdict of April 1985 which brought the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) to power. Instead, there were all sorts of covert and overt attempts to undermine the democratically-elected government of the day. Some powerful politicians in Kuala Lumpur were even reluctant to acknowledge the legitimacy of the PBS government of Datuk Pairin Kittingan. It is because of all these unscrupulous manipulations that the PBS is now forced to go to the polls again.

There has never been any State government in any Federal System in any part of the world that has been subjected to so much harassment and persecution by totally unethical elements who have utter contempt for the democratic will of the people. Aliran hopes that these elements would be exposed before long and their pernicious activities condemned by the people.

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar
President

Datuk Musa Hitam's Resignation

Datuk Musa Hitam's resignation as Deputy President of UMNO and Deputy Prime Minister, indicates that there is a serious leadership crisis in UMNO and the government.

For Datuk Musa to take such a drastic step, his conflict with the policies and style of leadership of UMNO President and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, must be of a fundamental nature.

The fundamental issues involved in the conflict between Datuk Musa and Dr. Mahathir should be resolved in the interest of UMNO, the Barisan and the government. Any attempt to gloss over the differences and achieve consensus and compromise for the sake of some superficial party unity, will do more harm than good in the long run.

This is why Aliran hopes that Datuk Musa's resignation will now jolt UMNO and the government into serious and examination of the weaknesses in present leadership and its policies.

Based on this reflection, UMNO and the government should opt for a more open and democratic approach to the challenges facing the nation. It is this approach that has characterised Datuk Musa's leadership. He is one of the more sober and rational leaders in power today. It would be a pity if as a result of this conflict, his services are lost to the nation.

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar
President

26 February 1986

27 February 1986
The above statement did not appear in any major newspaper - editor.
There is a rumour going on in this apparently information-starved land that the authorities have decided to set up a committee of inquiry to investigate the causes of rumour-mongering amongst the people. However, there is a likelihood — so the rumour goes — that the committee’s findings, if any, will not be made known to the general public. This seeming hesitation is based on the fear that the findings might be too sensitive that they can damage the harmony and security of the country. Besides, so goes the rumour, this publication can only trigger off more rumours.

So perhaps one way out of this dilemma is to institute a Rumour Act so as to enable the authorities to ascertain the validity of certain rumours, to sieve the true rumours from the false ones.

In the meantime, the rumour mill is still abuzz with activities. For instance, someone heard from the grapevine that there are certain groups in the country which are working towards installing a full democracy in Malaysia. This, so it goes, would mean that there will be a greater flow of information, more freedom of speech, opinion, the press, association and (physical) movement. It was also said that laws like the Internal Security Act, Official Secrets Act, Sedition Act, Printing Presses and Publications Act and even Universities and University Colleges Act will be repealed — features that, some assert, are prominent enough to attract curious tourists from abroad. However, there seems to be certain groups which are disturbed because they fear this “development” would erode Malaysia’s “uniqueness”.

There is also a rumour that certain foreign elements are working hand in hand with their local partners in certain economic activities that could jeopardise the economic progress and independence of the country. The foreign quarters referred to are in the form of the multinational corporations.

Rumour also has it that there are certain groups in the country (whose main concern is fighting corruption) that can create disunity and unnecessary suspicion among the people. This is because, so goes the rumour, members of these groups have never indulged themselves in real corruption, and thus rendered themselves incapable of identifying and quashing corrupt practices.

But the story about Malaysia’s Tourist Development Corporation’s (TDC) plan to bring in American comedian-entertainer Bob Hope for the April Pacific Area Travel Association (Pata) conference is no rumour. Newspaper reports had it that the TDC was willing to pay some M$1.2 million for Hope’s jokes and antics — whether he eventually comes or not.

And just in case the reader feels that he or she is being taken for a ride, it needs to be emphasised here that this is no laughing matter — especially in the midst of Malaysia pursuing a concerted campaign of Buy Malaysian and experiencing a domestic economic hardship. Nevertheless, to look at things on a brighter — if not lighter — side, this all goes to show that there are at least certain Malaysians who do have the capability of opening this year’s Pata conference with a bang, even without a foreigner’s help.

Signs are that the TDC is dropping this Hope plan — after some complaints from certain individuals and groups. This TDC move would also avoid itself the otherwise embarrassing and difficult situation of trying to reconcile with the theme of this year’s Pata conference, “Gearing for Profits”. For if the TDC still insists on having imported entertainment, it would only have fat hopes about acquiring profits.

Press freedom seems to be close to the hearts of many people, including political leaders. So, recently, one such leader argued that press freedom is a relative thing: One can go naked in one’s bathroom (if not bedroom) without hurting anyone or breaking the law. On the other hand, he added, one can court trouble if one decides to walk in the altogether in a busy street.

But the freedom to undress isn’t really the same as the freedom to bare social injustice and corruption. It is not enough, for example, for a politician or high official to display his/her ill-gotten assets only in the confines of his/her bedroom (perhaps in the company of his/her wife, husband, lover, or accomplice — whichever is applicable). The person concerned ought to be compelled to expose publicly the amassed wealth, especially if public funds are involved.

This freedom to press for such disclosure is the one that many of us are talking about.

Women themselves can change the philosophy which regulates women to a subservient position — “who must walk in their husbands’ shadows”, so said Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim, President of the National Council of Women’s Organisations at the closing of the second general assembly and seminar of the Asean Confederation of Women’s Organisations. She added, “In our hands, therefore, lie the future hopes and aspirations of the many millions of women in our countries who, because of numerous limitations, depend on our efforts and dedicated commitment to find a better life”.

This call, however, seemed to have fallen on the deaf ears of the Philippines’ President Marcos, who, in the heat of a presidential campaign against rival Corazon Aquino, asserted that a woman’s place is in the bedroom. Model women, he continued, should confine their preachings to “inside the bedroom”.

In the wake of the Marcos remark, women, especially those in the Asean region, have all the more reason now to assume a high profile in and outside their bedrooms as to ensure themselves of a better position in life.

Mustafa K Anuar