Strange things are happening in Malaysia as the world marks the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights this month. More and more Malaysians are shedding their apathy and starting to assert their rights. In the process, the country's political and social landscape is being irreversibly transformed.

Lawyers go shopping?

On 4 December, for instance, heads turned in downtown Kuala Lumpur as some 300 lawyers, in solemn legal attire, marched to the Federal Court chanting "We want Justice!" Donning 'white ribbons for justice' on their black jackets, the lawyers defied a law on illegal public assemblies and poured out into the streets - without waiting for the Bar Council to decide if it should hold an extraordinary general meeting.

It was an unprecedented public display of support for a colleague, Zainur Zakaria, a member of sacked deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim's nine-member defence team. Zainur was sentenced to three months' jail for 'contempt of court' after he applied to the court to bar two prosecutors in the Anwar case for allegedly acting improperly.

The significance of the event was not lost. "These were not activist lawyers," observed
On Good And Evil
So, What Do You Think Of Anwar's Case?
Poised To Recover - Again
A Nation Awakens
The Mahathir Dilemma
The Fear Is Gone
On Good And Evil
So, What Do You Think Of Anwar's Case?
Poised To Recover - Again
A Nation Awakens
The Mahathir Dilemma
The Fear Is Gone

REGULARS

Letters 11
Current Concerns 16
Heart To Heart: Open Letter To Guan Eng 23

OTHERS

Subscription Form 18
Chua Detained - Again 24
Dr Munawar's Statutory Declaration 26
Aliran AGM Resolutions 38

Published by Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN)
103, Medan Penaga,
11600 Jelutong,
Penang, Malaysia.
Tel : (04) 658 5251
Fax : (04) 658 5197

Printed by RP Printers Sdn Bhd
66, 68 & 70 Jalan AIE Jalan Ipoh,
10660 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Tel : 604 - 2265548
Fax: 604 - 2271164

ALIRAN is a Reform Movement dedicated to
Justice, Freedom & Solidarity and listed on the
roster of the Economic and Social Council of the
United Nations. Guided by universal spiritual
values, Aliran has been striving for genuine unity
by promoting social justice and human dignity
since 1977. Membership is open to all Malaysians
above 21. If you are interested in joining Aliran,
please contact the Hon Secretary at the address
shown in this page.
one social activist, of the unusual procession. "The lawyers who were out there marching were mainstream lawyers from some of the leading legal firms in Kuala Lumpur." Perhaps they were taking their cue from other Malaysians who had started going shopping in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman on Saturdays. Or perhaps they had been surfing the web and visiting the numerous websites created by Malaysians calling for reforms and change. Yes, something is definitely stirring in Malaysian society. Call it an awakening.

**Trials and Tribulations**

We are barred from commenting on the Anwar trial. Still, the lawyers are holding their own in court. What we can say is that, more than any other recent event, the bombshells from the Anwar trial - and from the Nallakarupan and Munawar cases - have rocked the nation. The reverberations have made Malaysians sit up and wonder about the state of our nation, the integrity of our leaders, and the independence of our institutions of government. Many, many disturbing questions are being raised - and people are quickly learning about their rights, about “turning over” operations and how certain departments professed commitment to democracy, our government has not yet ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Why?

Instead, undemocratic laws such as the notorious Internal Security Act, the Sedition Act and the Printing Presses and Publications Act hang like so many Swords of Damocles over anyone who dares to speak up for justice and human rights.

Let’s remember those detained without trial under the ISA. Remember those denied bail or held in remand for months as they wait for their trial dates. Remember innocent Malaysians who have been subjected to “turning over” and “neutralising” operations and who have had their basic rights trampled upon. Remember those arrested - and assaulted - during peaceful demonstrations in the capital. Remember Lim Guan Eng, who languishes in jail after trying to help a rape victim.

All this may make us feel morose, but at the same time we have much to be optimistic about. If anything good has come out of the Anwar trial, it is the emerging widespread realisation that our nation is in desperate need of reform, change and renewal. Politics will never be the same again.

**Far beyond a mere flag**

We are urged to “raise our flag”, to “come together for Malaysia.” But “come together” for what? to do what? Our nationhood goes far beyond a mere flag. We have nothing against flags; but a flag must symbolise far greater, deeper values on which the foundation for any civilised nation should be built - values such as justice and integrity and respect for basic human rights.

But then again, many of us are “coming together for Malaysia,” perhaps not in the way...
that MBf, the finance company sponsoring those ads over the media, had in mind. In recent weeks, Malaysians have been raising the flag, calling for justice and for true freedom.

"What does being Malaysian mean to you?" MBf asks, before saying "there's no straightforward answer." The firm goes on to say that some of us are proud of winning Commonwealth gold medals, of having the world's tallest buildings, of "chattering in different languages." How superficial!

No straightforward answer? There is. And it comes in a silent, universal language that can be heard deep within our beings, not in mindless chattering. Being Malaysian - or, for that matter, any nationality - should mean being passionately committed to justice, to human rights and dignity, to integrity in public life, to democracy. This is the stuff that really matters and this is what we should come together for. So, the next time MBf tells us to come together for Malaysia, consider it a public service reminder of the real reasons for coming together. Let us raise and re-claim our flag as a proud symbol of our deep commitment to justice and human dignity.

More than a person

There has been a concerted counter-effort to neutralise this awakening for justice by diverting our attention to Al Gore's and George Soros' comments on Malaysian politics. We agree no one should tell us how to run our country - after all, we are an independent nation. But we should not equate criticisms directed at certain individuals with attacks on our sovereignty. A person does not a nation make.

Besides, the Gores and the Soroses have a right to express their opinions - no matter how unpalatable they may be to us - just as we have the right to speak out against superpower belligerence or against injustice and human rights violations in Bosnia or Palestine.

The real issue

Let no one divert our attention from the real issue confronting us: how are we going to get our nation back on track, not just economically but also politically, socially, and ethically; how are we going to introduce meaningful reforms in all aspects of public life?

The calls for reformasi and justice are nothing new. Many individuals and groups such as the Bar Council, Hakam, Suaram, Aliran and women's groups have been calling for wide-ranging reforms at all levels of society for years.

But in the wake of recent disturbing events and revelations, that call takes on an added urgency. Two new coalitions have been set up to promote justice and greater democracy: the Malaysian People's Justice Movement (Gerak) and the Coalition for People's Democracy (Gagasan). Another movement, Adil, was also launched on World Human Rights Day on 10 Dec.

At Aliran's annual general assembly recently, members felt the time had come to take an unequivocal stand on the side of justice and voted overwhelmingly to join these two movements.

As we stand at a critical point in our nation's history, each of us must ask: What should be my response, my stand, to what's happening in Malaysia?
The Mahathir Dilemma

Do we want to be dodos living under a dictatorship or self-respecting citizens?

by D. J. Muzaffar Tate

By the time these words appear, the great Malaysian moment of truth will probably have arrived - for it is not only our former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who is on trial, but also the Malaysian Government.

From the point of view of judicial procedure and impartiality, whether Anwar is found innocent or guilty is virtually irrelevant: what is relevant is whether the court hearing the case in particular, the judiciary as a whole, the police, and the executive itself in the person of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is both prime minister and home affairs minister, can be cleared of the very grave doubts regarding the propriety of their conduct in the handling of this case.

It is a moment of truth for all Malaysians because this trial confronts us with the stark reality of standing at the cross-roads between a dictatorial and a democratic form of government. The danger is that many of us will opt for the path of the former, because a dictatorship offers a quiet life and does our thinking for us. The Boss knows best what is good for all of us, so just listen and obey. In the long run, however, this would prove a fatal choice.

Without doubt, the authoritarian state - assuming it to be benevolent and wise - has many obvious advantages. It offers peace, order and stability. All these form essential ingredients, as the prime minister (our Boss) never tires of reminding us, for creating a suitable climate for promoting business and commerce and for attracting investors - essential for the success and progress of a trading nation such as we are.

A dictatorship can take effective measures fast, plan objectively, and provide efficient administration and social organisation without being hassled by opposition parties seeking power or being distracted by NGOs, each with its own particular agenda. A controlled media can guide the thinking of its citizens along the preferred lines, screening them from the disruptive effect of alternative ideas.

Authoritarian states

There have been plenty of examples in the twentieth century and at the present time of the authoritarian state at work. If Nazi Germany was a ghastly aberration inspired by extreme racism (which certainly could not work in our country) and Communist Russia a tragic example of how a blind commitment to a particular ideology can breed disaster, there is only just across the Causeway the supreme example of the authoritarian state at its most pragmatic and efficient.

The PAP Government of Singapore has performed miracles for its people. Singapore has been transformed from a stereotyped colonial economy into the highly sophisticated, specialised and diverse one that we see today. Its inhabitants, once housed in slums, now live in carefully planned and well de-
signed housing estates. Singapore's squeaky clean and highly organised society, once so seditious and unruly, is now quite thoroughly tamed and can boast the highest per capita income, after Japan, in Asia. And the opposition, of course, has been well taken care of.

Compare this with what democracy can offer. A quick look around the world will show that despite the current vogue for democracy, most newly democratic countries are not making out well. They are riddled with factionalism, corruption and an inability to get things done. Even the older, well-established democracies of the West are plagued with serious, endemic social problems and often enough suffer from bouts of political paralysis as well. Oh, for the security and stability of the well-ordered, progressive, if conformist, authoritarian state!

But authoritarianism has its downside too. The successful dictatorship is one which possesses a charismatic and resourceful leader, one who not only has the gift of the gab but is also a skilled political manipulator able to size up the odds and call the shots - a Bismarck, a Kemal Ataturk, a Hitler, a Franco, a Stalin, a Ho Chi Minh or a Kim Il Sung. But what happens when the great man passes on? Very rarely is his successor a man of the same stature and calibre. And the system starts to falter.

But the drawbacks to authoritarianism go far deeper than that. In order to succeed an authoritarian regime must stifle all opposition and dissent. Its very existence is based on the premise that the Boss knows best. Therefore anyone who disagrees with the Boss must be wrong, and not only wrong but traitorous - for the Boss is identified with the nation, so that to question the Boss or to adhere to an alternative point of view is not merely misguided, but dangerous, subversive and unpatriotic. All must pull together. To oppose is to threaten national unity and undermine national solidarity - acts of high treason.

As a consequence, under any authoritarian system, all expressions of opinion are monitored and controlled. They are controlled in the first place by the media, which either does not air dissenting views or if it does, ridicules them. For those stubborn and foolhardy individuals who fail to see things as the Boss sees them, it will be harassment, trial and imprisonment, torture and confession, exile or death - and not necessarily in that order. Those who do not accept the system have no place in it.

There are also, sadly enough, plenty of examples of the kind of tyranny which various authoritarian states have exercised over their subjects - Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Idi Amin in Uganda, Mobutu 'in Zaire, Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge, Pinochet's Chile, Milosevic's Serbia, and a good few more.

**ISA, OSA ...**

We have not quite reached this stage yet in Malaysia. Of course, we have the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and a Press which has no choice but to toe the party line and exercise a rigid self-censorship in order not to lose the licence to publish. We also have the Special Branch to ferret out the secrets of people's private lives, and our Federal Reserve Unit, replete with knuckle-dusters, to put an unarmed but vociferous demonstrator in his (or her) place. There are also a weakened judiciary, and the Bukit Aman police headquarters and Pudu and Kamunting as resthouses for the politically

*Disagreeing with the Boss*
delinquent.

But we also have some room for dissent. There are NGOs whose members simply refuse to follow the Government in calling white black and black white. There are still professional bodies such as the Bar Council which doggedly uphold the tenets of their respective professions and boldly speak up - with timing which is invariably politically incorrect - when the Government encroaches on basic human rights. We still have regular parliamentary and State Council elections and the secrecy of the ballot, and we still have our Constitution in which the basic democratic freedoms are enshrined, however battered they have become as a result of constant amendment.

There are still certain publications such as Harakah and The Rocket (though both are now restricted to their respective party members), as well as this eminent journal, which present an alternative point of view, and which in moments of political crisis such as the present one increase their circulations phenomenally. And most basic of all there is a large and growing number of people, citizens of this country, of all races and backgrounds, who are intensely aware of their democratic rights and of the gross abuses of power that are taking place.

Perilously close to dictatorship

Yes, indeed, we have not quite reached the stage of having a full-blown dictatorship imposed upon us in this country. Nevertheless, we are getting perilously close to it. Ever since the Peninsula achieved Merdeka in 1957, there has been a steady erosion of democratic institutions. To begin with, we started off on the wrong foot by inheriting the notorious (but probably necessary in the circumstances of the time) Emergency Regulations, which were soon enough transformed into the ISA.

In addition, a glance at the frequent amendments passed into law over the years to parliamentary procedure (standing rules, question time, length of sessions and debate, etc.) as well as to the Federal Constitution itself will reveal how basic democratic safeguards have been steadily whittled away, reducing the authority of the people's representatives in Parliament and boosting the authority of the executive.

The Constitutional Amendment Bill of 1983, in particular, which was ostensibly aimed at curbing certain prerogatives of the King, as they existed then under the Constitution, came within an ace of conferring upon the prime minister (our Boss) the sole right (without even having to consult his colleagues in the cabinet, let alone Parliament) of proclaiming a state of emergency - a power hitherto reserved to the King.

Fortunately enough, this particular gambit was checked and the move defeated. Where would we all be now if it had succeeded? Then there followed in 1988 the notorious episode of the removal of Salleh Abas from his post as Lord President of the Supreme Court of Malaysia, an action which has effectively undermined the independence of the Judiciary and laid it bare to political pressure. A number of judgements by the courts since that date, especially the recent one involving the case of Lim Guan Eng, merely go to confirm the worst fears of all democrats regarding the consequences which were likely to come in its wake.

All Malaysians are familiar with what happens to the media at election time, when the points of view of opposition parties if cited at all are presented in such a way as to open them to ridicule or contempt. At the same, during the election season, we are invariably treated to a series of inspired stage-interviews and talks over TV and radio and articles in the Press by a handful of carefully selected academics, professionals, experts and 'observers', etc., all of whose opinions happen to coincide with those of the Government.

Of course, we have seen all of this repeated on an intensified scale in connection with the Anwar affair. Which is why rumours nowadays are so rife and why 'unpatriotic' people have resorted to the foreign media in order to find out what is happening in their own country. By doing so, they obtain, if not the whole truth, at least something of the other side of the story.

ISA a stumbling block

As for the ISA, which is the real stumbling block in our democracy, forty years later, when the Emergency and the Communist threat which was the excuse for its imposition, have long since...
passed away, what justification can there be for retaining such a repressive piece of legislation? Those who want it repealed are not proposing that there should be no law against those who incite political violence and unrest. It is the extravagant powers which the ISA gives to the executive not only to indefinitely detain a citizen without trial, but also to prevent him or her from seeing any outside person - even if a member of his (her) own family or his (her) lawyer, essential to his (her) defence - during that period, which they want to see removed.

The opportunity that this gives for those in authority to impose their will without let or hindrance on the unfortunate detainee is obvious. Unhappily enough, ample testimony that the authorities have made full use of such powers from time to time is only too well documented. The events associated with the arrest of Anwar have merely provided fresh examples, if more were needed, of the point and have also afforded a striking illustration of how the ISA can be used simply for the purpose of those in power to silence their political opponents.

None of the points recited above is exactly news to most of us. But they need to be repeated and repeated and repeated so that we do not lose sight of what the Anwar affair is really all about. It is not about personal morality in a formal sense (it could with justice, however, be argued that it is about political morality) but about politics and the exercise of political power. And the sum of it all is that today Malaysian democracy is truly threatened to an extent that it has never been before.

**Moment of Truth**

This, then, is where the 'Reformasi' movement, and 'Gerakan' and other ad hoc organisations that have sprung into being as a result of the Anwar affair, fit in. They have come into existence simply to demand as of right the reinstatement of basic democratic principles and values in our polity and in the processes of government. Their campaign has received the whole-hearted support of Peninsular Malaysia's two main opposition parties, despite their being separated from one another by ethnic composition and religious persuasion, because when it comes to the basic principles of the democratic process they stand on common ground.

The same reason applies to the broad range of NGOs, who despite their own different programmes, are also committed in principle to the democratic way of doing things.

The reform movement and its associates are not launching a political party programme. Its leaders are not standing for election, nor are they inciting riots or violent revolution. They are simply campaigning for the unequivocal recognition by the Government of its democratic duty to preserve and uphold the basic rights of the individual citizen in terms of his or her freedom of expression and of his (her) right to dissent; of his (her) freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment; of his (her) entitlement to enjoy a fair and impartial system of justice; of the repeal of unjust laws which deprive him (her) of his (her) natural right to defend him(her)self against charges brought against him (her); and last and not least, of his (her) right to unrestricted access to sources of information, which is the only means to ensure transparency in government and without which no system of democracy can ever function properly.

We need to keep these issues clear in our minds at all times, and never more than today when we are confronted by the political implications of the Anwar affair. If we do not stand up and be counted now in defence of our democratic rights and freedoms as Malaysians, then we deserve to become the dupes and lackeys of an authoritarian state which will do all our thinking for us.

Indeed, never have the words of an 18th century Irish politician rung more meaningfully in our ears - *The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance*.

In the final countdown, it all comes down to choosing between being comfortable (or uncomfortable) dodos living under a dictatorship where the Boss knows what is best and tells us what to do, and asserting ourselves as truly self-respecting human beings and citizens who insist on our right to have a proper say in the running of the affairs of our nation.

This is the choice that Mahathir's actions have so rudely put before us. This is the dilemma which he has forced upon us, and which only we can and must resolve. This is our moment of truth.
Mr Chairman and Friends

I'm particularly happy to welcome all of you to this 22nd Annual General Meeting which is coincidentally being held on 22 November.

I'm especially happy because today Aliran has reached adulthood. We are 21 years old and by legal definition we are a mature entity. When you are 21 years old you acquire a certain aura of legitimacy, a certain right to hold views in an adult world. There is justification to expect that you be heard for better or worse.

We have reached that point in our existence.

Last year, in touching on the economy, I maintained that the doom may not be in sight but the gloom was certainly going to be part of our scenario for some time to come.

I wished one year down the road things could be better. But it is not. We are not out of the woods yet and all that brave talk of our special remedy, our own home-brewed antidote has not cured our economic problem.

Our economy continues to be sluggish, our stockmarket is still floundering and our cash rich ‘cows’ like the EPF and Tabung Haji risk being milked dry to salvage tottering business corporations of cronies.

Last year, I also touched upon the uncritical and lethargic attitude of Malaysians in general and of our members in particular. I lamented whether the ten good years of uninterrupted and unprecedented economic growth had so dulled us that unthinkingly we echoed the leader. And I alluded to the fact that the ‘leader is accepted as the all-seeing, the all-unerring, the all-knowing, the reservoir of truth - the epitome of wisdom’. I’m happy all that has changed for the better.

The one crucial thing that has contributed to this change is undoubtedly the saga of Anwar’s sacking. His unceremonious sacking and his vilification through the media has lit a spark in the souls of caring Malaysians. No single act in recent history has outraged hundreds of thousands of Malaysians as this shameful episode that was perpetuated so shamelessly.

Two significant things have emerged from the Anwar episode.

One, the reverence for the leader is gone. For a Malay to be called ‘anjin’ is the ultimate insult. That was what Mahathir was called on the night of 3 September as he was leaving the UMNO building after the UMNO Supreme Council Meeting which sacked Anwar from the party. A much revered and feared leader lost his aura that night. Politics
Letters should preferably be no more than 250 words and must include the writer’s name and address. Shorter letters will be preferred and pseudonyms may be used. Letters should be addressed to The Editor, ALIRAN MONTHLY, P.O. Box 1049, 10830 Penang, Malaysia. Views expressed need not necessarily reflect those of Aliran.

Unbiased News and Freedom of Speech

I am a foreigner who has resided in Kuala Lumpur for several years. Please forgive me for saying that, during my stay here, I have tried to find answers to questions about many things that I felt might not be right about this society. However, I could seldom get straight and sincere answers or comments, and I even found myself becoming unpopular in many circles. I learnt that there are matters that one should not or cannot talk about. Coming from a ‘democratic’ country in the West, I found it strange that people here had to accept and live with such restrictions.

When I was desperate to find unbiased news about Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim, I discovered your Aliran Monthly which has helped to free my mind from ‘poison’ accumulated over many years. It helped me understand, too, that my own, rather ‘muddled’, views were shared by many Malaysians.

I am impressed by the immense courage and sacrifice of your former DPM and disgusted that he is refused his right to speak out. I am also impressed by Malaysians who have dared to do what they are doing, who have set aside many differences to express a unified and clear disagreement with what has been happening.

Nural
Kuala Lumpur

Who is unpatriotic?

Most Malaysians tend to forget things. Yet I think some of us remember how our citizens, politicians and ministers criticised Singapore. Dr Mahathir criticised Singapore during his visit to Japan and on his home tour of Johor Baru. But what happened after he visited Brunei recently? He invited Goh Chok Tong to Malaysia to discuss various issues, including how to raise funds for Malaysia. I believe your readers will know what this implies, and feel uneasy that this government, which was elected by the citizens, should have labelled some people in this country unpatriotic or called them traitors. I think one word can simply describe the government’s attitude in this matter: Shame!

WSC
Senai, Johor

Pseudo-nationalist tirade rings false

I would like to register my disgust at the pseudo-nationalist tirade espoused by obsolete Barisan Nasional leaders.

As predicted by Chandra Muzaffar, the BN camp exploited Al Gore’s remarks to its advantage, or so it thought. While Mahathir can garner votes on the pretext of encouraging ‘national pride’, it remains to be seen if Malaysia can actually benefit from anti-Gore sentiments.

The government’s stance is that only praise should be expected from Malaysians and foreigners alike. This is evident from a BN parrot’s claim that ‘Singapore is a true neighbour’ for not commenting on the Anwar case. Is this the same Singapore that was ‘very difficult for us to be friendly with’ just a few months ago?

It is very confusing and disturbing to thinking Malaysians that accolades from foreigners
warrant three pages of newspaper coverage, but criticisms are regarded as 'outside interference'. Most alarmingly, any Malaysian who might see truth in those criticisms can be branded a 'traitor'.

It is also contemptible for the government to brand the *reformasi* demonstrators as 'trouble makers' and 'law breakers' while encouraging other Malaysians to take to the streets, chant anti-USA slogans, and burn effigies of Al Gore! The government has also issued vicious threats against civil servants and students for attending demonstrations, and even threatened to take children of demonstrators into state custody. And then the pro-government media happily proclaim that *reformasi* demonstrations are losing support.

The government stooges keep telling us to air our grouses through 'proper channels'. But I don't see any sign of ballot boxes or election posters. My point is that our government is doing a great job of discrediting Malaysia in the eyes of the world. But this matters little because world opinion is 'outside interference'.

The (government-controlled) mass media gave biased reports and made premature judgements of Anwar even before he was charged in court. Didn't they remember that Mahathir said, 'A man is innocent until proven guilty' when Rahim Tamby Chik's case was raised? Our PM talks about democracy, human rights and so on, but is he practising what he preaches? How can the public trust media that are controlled by certain politicians? No wonder Mahathir is annoyed whenever the foreign media give a fair coverage of recent events.

Demonstrations held by Anwar's supporters or opposition parties were considered illegal gatherings. If the police refuse to give permission for such gatherings, how can these people voice their opinions or demands? But the ruling party leaders need no permits for their gatherings and are free to say whatever they want.

Previously, corruption cases against some politicians were closed without trial. Anwar's alleged misconduct starting in 1992 and 1993 has only now been brought up. Why did the authorities wait for six years before taking action? Is it because Anwar was in Mahathir's good books then but has now become a threat?

The public condemns the use of the ISA to detain Anwar and others. Doesn't the PM believe in the judicial system, or is it because he couldn't find concrete evidence to charge Anwar? If Anwar was arrested for causing riots, what about the gatherings Mahathir attended? Did he have permits to hold such gatherings?

And, finally, a message to Mahathir: 17 years is enough. It is wiser to step down before you lose support.

**Anwar = Good, Mahathir = Bad?**

It has been two years since I have been home. Like many Malaysians living overseas, I have tried to keep abreast of the events surrounding Anwar Ibrahim's arrest. While I find it reassuring to see so many Malaysians debating the state of democracy at home and protesting against the ISA, I find it ironic that it took the deputy PM's arrest to spark off such political fervour.

I have never been a big Anwar fan because he never came across as a particularly trustworthy character. His days as a student firebrand and his overzealous spell as acting Prime Minister in 1997 did little to convince me that Malaysia was moving towards an 'Asian Renaissance' – more like moving towards the Middle Ages.

For a man of such reforming spirit, Anwar kept his blueprint for a new Malaysia close to his chest. Anwar was part of a system that imprisoned the courageous Lim Guan Eng and other opposition politicians for merely trying to do their jobs. Now that Anwar is on the receiving end of the ISA, he feels resentful. Yet this is the man many Malaysians have chosen to represent the spirit (if not the leadership) of the *reformasi* movement.

If we truly want reform we need to open our eyes and look beyond the simple equation, Anwar = Good and Mahathir = Bad.

**Rosalind Chua**

**London**

**Comments on manipulation**

I'm really sad to see how the government has handled Anwar's case. I would like to comment on how people in power manipulate the system according to their needs.

The (government-controlled) mass media gave biased reports and made premature judgements of Anwar even before he was charged in court. Didn't they remember that Mahathir said, 'A man is innocent until proven guilty' when Rahim Tamby Chik's case was raised? Our PM talks about democracy, human rights and so on, but is he practising what he preaches? How can the public trust media that are controlled by certain politicians? No wonder Mahathir is annoyed whenever the foreign media give a fair coverage of recent events.

Demonstrations held by Anwar's supporters or opposition parties were considered illegal gatherings. If the police refuse to give permission for such gatherings, how can these people voice their opinions or demands? But the ruling party leaders need no permits for their gatherings and are free to say whatever they want.

Previously, corruption cases against some politicians were closed without trial. Anwar's alleged misconduct starting in 1992 and 1993 has only now been brought up. Why did the authorities wait for six years before taking action? Is it because Anwar was in Mahathir's good books then but has now become a threat?

The public condemns the use of the ISA to detain Anwar and others. Doesn't the PM believe in the judicial system, or is it because he couldn't find concrete evidence to charge Anwar? If Anwar was arrested for causing riots, what about the gatherings Mahathir attended? Did he have permits to hold such gatherings?

And, finally, a message to Mahathir: 17 years is enough. It is wiser to step down before you lose support.

**Concerned citizen**

**Batu Pahat, Johor**

---

On Good and Evil

From human experience, we know that certain fundamental beliefs and values are eternal and will ultimately prevail against all odds.

By Gan Teik Chee

Following the dramatic dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim from the Cabinet and his expulsion from UMNO, we have witnessed some tumultuous protests and widespread expressions of discontent with Dr. Mahathir’s leadership. Thinking people throughout the land are therefore pondering on the significance of the ongoing political conflict in a broader context.

Social scientists and political analysts may engage in dissection and disputation over this crisis, but ordinary Malaysians of various religious persuasions tend to view the scenario in basic moral terms. As our plural society comprises some venerable Asian cultures, the unfolding of the human drama tends to be seen in terms of the age-old struggle between good and evil. And who can say that with this approach, one will not arrive at a better understanding of the social reality?

Duality of Human Existence

The first aspect of the political conflict that comes to mind concerns the nature of good and evil. In most of our religious traditions, e.g. Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, good and evil are seen as part of the duality of human existence. There can be no good without evil, just as there can be no white without black. Each category is in fact defined by the other. In this sense, good and evil are the positive and negative expression of the Universal Absolute or God. Moreover, in the flux of human affairs, they exist in a dialectic with each other.

According to our religious traditions, this constant dialectic ensures that human beings can be in turn inspired by good and tested by evil. It is further believed in our major traditions that God will test us to the full measure of our fortitude, but God will not send us tests that we cannot endure. Since good and evil are a duality like opposite sides of a coin, these categories exist together in the same communities and the same individual. In other words no human society and no human being is entirely good or entirely bad, but rather a mixture of both.

For practical purposes however, one recognises that certain groups and certain individuals are mainly good or mainly bad. Even Mao Tse Tung, who was a Marxist materialist philosopher, believed that if a man is 70 per cent good, he should be treated as good. Conversely, if a prominent political leader, despite his many achievements for the nation, is found to be 70 per cent bad, he should be treated as bad.

In the field of political struggle, with its fierce polemics and ruthless contestation for power, the dialectic of good and evil finds a perfect setting. One important dictum concerning right and wrong generally is the saying that wrongdoing cannot always be defeated, but it can always be absorbed. This is a statement of a basic truth which is also a practical guide to action.

Suppose A allows the front lawn of his padlocked house to go to seed while he and his family are staying in another town on long leave. The lawn, being overgrown with thick weeds, becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other pests. Suppose that B his neighbour, reports the nuisance to the Majlis Perbandaran which then directs A to clear the nuisance, failing which it would do so at A’s expense.

In normal circumstances, A would just comply with the directive. But if A has a selfish men-
tality or an ego problem, he might remain outstation without clearing the nuisance. Then B would have to wait perhaps a long time for relief, because the Majlis Perbandaran has no right to forcibly enter into A’s premises to clear the nuisance. In the meantime the nuisance would continue.

But suppose B, after making enquiries, contacts A and requests him to attend to the nuisance. Probably A would do so. If A does not co-operate, B may then either complain to the Majlis Perbandaran or put up with the nuisance till A's return. All things being equal, B is more likely to do away with the nuisance by adopting the second course of action i.e. by absorbing A’s wrongdoing while mentally disapproving it. In the long term, B would also in this way be maintaining good neighbourly relations with A. In this regard, perhaps the supporters of Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim will achieve better results by eschewing violence in the streets. They should not forget that the final arbiters of the nation are the silent majority.

Historical and Spiritual Orders
The above discussion brings us to the larger question of the relationship between the historical order and the spiritual order. At the height of their achievements, many modern Western societies came to believe that the divine order is embodied in the worldly order. It seemed that humankind could attain security in its own finite existence, for tragedy and suffering appeared to have been overcome. But since the First World War, the horrors and disasters of modern civilisation have brought back the realisation that no life and no period of history are exempt from finiteness and tragedy.

We should note however that the spiritual order is not separated from the historical order, for the Infinite reveals itself in history. In fact, the weak and the oppressed in all historical periods finally come to transform history.

The material world then is the existential stage on which the karmic forces in respect of entire peoples are played out. This does not mean that individuals living within the communities concerned have no free will. While human individuals do exist within a fixed framework, they may yet exercise free will within the limits thereof. This framework comprises the physical environment, the family, the society, and the epoch of history which the individuals are living in. Of course over a long period of time and with supreme effort, some individuals may also effect changes in the material framework that they find themselves in, for instance, through political struggle or humanitarian projects.

While the nation is in the throes of impending political change, those with a religious commitment may recall the basic duty of human beings to participate in the fulfilment of Divine Will. Muslims for example are enjoined by the Qur’an to co-operate with one another in promoting *makruf* and in prohibiting *munkar*. If however an oppressed populace, for various reasons, do not even condemn oppression in their hearts, they will prolong the reign of darkness.

As the turning point in a political conflict is approached, one sees a rough equality of strength between the agent and agencies supporting the status quo compared to the opposing forces advocating change. The pace of change accelerates dramatically when human agencies switch their support from the status quo to the opposing forces. President Marcos, for example, was doomed when General Ramos his erstwhile supporter went over to Cory Aquino’s side. Similarly, President Suharto’s downfall became inevitable once Harmoko, Speaker of the Indonesian Parliament (or Secretary-General of Golkar) called for Suharto’s resignation.

**Tragic Heroes**

The personality leading and representing the status quo is sometimes a figure of larger-than-life proportions, caught up in the interplay of elemental social forces. Students of English literature may be reminded of the tragic hero in Shakespearean drama. The tragic hero is the protagonist in a Shakespearean tragedy, a sort of superhuman personality who by birth and achievement stands well above the common multitude. The tragic hero cannot however rest at peace with his achievements and his place in the world because of an inherent tragic flaw.

In “King Lear”, for example, the tragic flaw is vanity together with the love of flattery, while Macbeth’s tragic flaw is “vaulting ambition”, all of which flaws are found in real life national heroes. As the play draws to its climax, the flaw in the tragic hero’s character comes to play a major
influence on his course of conduct and final downfall. In some Shakespearean plays, the tragic hero can see the coming disasters; in others, it is predicted by supernatural agencies. Thus, the hero tries his best to forestall or avert the dreaded happenings, but every step and manoeuvre he adopts to avert defeat serves to hasten his downfall.

In Greek tragedy, which is the antecedent of Shakespearean tragedy, the audience is expressly told in advance of the tragic hero’s vicissitudes and eventual fate. The audience therefore anticipates the progression of actions and events that leads inexorably to the tragic end. Any resemblance in this description to any living hero is of course coincidental.

What guidance or comfort can we consider our role in these changing times. Do we become part of this struggle or do we remain bystanders. Can we be neutral in this high drama? Is it possible to be unaffected? These are serious questions that need to be answered if we are worth our salt as a reform movement.

Already some of our members are involved either deliberately or inadvertently. Rajen and wife were arrested and are out on bail; Hector and Sharan are in the thick of the struggle through their legal work. There are others providing support.

In the midst of all this, we are confronted with the existence of Gerak and Gagasan and we are being challenged to make a decision. Our absence in these organisations is becoming too glaring and difficult to justify. We need to address this issue urgently.

While it may not be easy for many of us for various reasons to be out there marching for justice or demanding change, we can still be part of that larger struggle in smaller ways too.

We can put on the white ribbon which symbolises justice on a daily basis. We can encourage others to do the same.

In a long term struggle little deeds are not insignificant. Every thing matters. Every act is honourable in the pursuit of justice.

There is a stirring in the air, my friends, and an awakening among a certain section of the Malaysian society. Do we grasp this opportunity or let it pass by?

It is written:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our Ventures.

We cannot allow this moment in history to pass us by. □
Televise Anwar Court Proceedings

Aliran regrets that the requests of many observers who wanted to witness the trial of Anwar Ibrahim were not accommodated. The reason for the refusal is totally unacceptable to thinking Malaysians.

Justice Augustine Paul had said that the presence of foreign organisations was not only insulting but implied that they have supervisory power over Malaysia’s judiciary and this amounts to interference in the independence of the judiciary.

But in previous important cases, the courts had allowed representatives from both foreign and local groups to be present during court proceedings. No one accused them then of ‘supervising’ or interfering with the judiciary. Our judicial system did not suffer any adverse consequences by their presence.

“Why should we allow outsiders to come here and supervise us?” asked Justice Paul. If that is the case, why then did we invite Commonwealth observers to monitor the 1990 general election?

In any case, it is difficult to understand how foreign observers could interfere in the independence of the judiciary by their presence. How is it possible for them to influence the court verdict or intimidate the presiding judge?

If limited space is another reason for barring observers and the public from witnessing what should be an open trial, then Aliran suggests that the proceedings be televised ‘live’. A live telecast would have the added advantage of discouraging anxious Malaysians from gathering outside the court in their vain attempt to follow the proceedings of Malaysia’s most important legal case.

P Ramakrishnan
President
3 November 1998

Practise before you Preach

Aliran is upset with MCA Youth chairman Chan Kong Choy’s puerile statement challenging “non-governmental organisations which have been critical of the government to make public their sources of income.” (The Star, 24 November 1998)

He was quoted as saying that “some NGOs were said to be receiving funds from foreign groups.” “Malaysians have a right to know,” he contends, “who these foreign backers and what their motives are.”

Chan conveniently forgets that these very Malaysians also have a right to expect him to disclose the names of the NGOs who have received foreign funds and the identities of the foreign donors. He has no moral right to make irresponsible and unsubstantiated sweeping claims that “some NGOs were said to be receiving funds from foreign groups.”

Aliran challenges him to disclose details about his allegations failing which he should hang down his head in shame and never again broach this subject. We regret the nauseous tendency among petty politicians to pick up a dirty brush and tar everybody with one swipe - without a second thought as to ethics and morality - instead of be-
By law, registered societies are required to submit annual reports and statements of accounts to the Registrar of Societies within 30 days of holding their annual general meetings. The NGOs that fulfil the provisions of the Societies Act are being transparent and accountable. The fact that the Registrar of Societies has not found fault with any NGO over foreign funding confirms that Chan is flogging a dead horse.

Since Chan is projecting himself as a man very concerned about transparency and accountability, we call upon him to live up to the values he champions by disclosing to the public all the political contributions that the MCA has received. To paraphrase Chan, Malaysians have a right to know what the motives of these political contributors are.

P Ramakrishnan
President
26 November 1998

Stop Police Abuse

Aliran is perturbed to learn that Tian Chua, the chairman of the Coalition for People’s Democracy (Gagasan) who was detained on 21 November 1998, has been allegedly assaulted while in police custody.

Aliran has received a copy of a sworn declaration from someone who witnessed Tian being assaulted when he was arrested.

Aliran understands that Tian, who was taken to his residence by police when they carried out a search there, bore marks of assault. He had, in fact, confirmed that he was assaulted yesterday before being brought to his residence.

Aliran is appalled by what is said to be taking place in the privacy of police detention. Stories of horror and torture, shame and humiliation, degradation and demigation seem to be the order of the day. Affidavits filed by S. Nallakaruppan and Dr Munawar Anees, revelations during court proceedings, and Anwar’s black eye have revealed horrendous abuse of human rights and shocking degradation of human dignity.

These abuses are totally unacceptable in any civilised society and any democratic government worth its salt will have to set up a truly independent Commission of Inquiry - independent of the police - to identify and bring to book the perpetrators of these criminal acts.

The credibility of the government is at its nadir. Aliran calls upon Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as the Home Minister, to respond to this call and set up such a Commission of Inquiry.

Executive Committee
26 November 1998

Release Tian Chua immediately

Aliran strongly condemns the re-arrest of Tian Chua, coordinator of Gagasan, immediately after his release from Court on bail on 30 November 1998.

Tian’s re-arrest after his earlier nine-day detention is clearly contemptuous of the rule of law and due process. Indeed, it is tantamount to “contempt of court” especially since the police offered no specific reasons for his re-arrest.

Whatever police investigations necessary should have been completed during his nine-day detention period and whatever charges deemed necessary should have been submitted to the Court when Tian was produced on 30 November. As such, his re-arrest appears to be an attempt to intimidate him and others who have been critical of the government and of the questionable conduct of the police in recent months.

Aliran is also deeply concerned about Tian’s health, safety and well-being. According to Suaram sources, Tian had communicated that he had been beaten by the police during detention.

Aliran therefore calls for Tian’s immediate release. We further call upon the Home Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and the Inspector-General of Police, Rahim Noor, to investigate Tian’s and other victims’ allegations of police brutality, and to ensure that the police respect the rule of law and due process in the country.

Executive Committee
1 December 1998
ALIRAN MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Mr./Ms. __________________________
Address _________________________________________________________

Subscription for 11 issues

1 year    AIR    RM __________
2 years    SEA    RM __________

Donation for Aliran ________________________________________________ RM __________

TOTAL Enclosed: Money Order / Postal Order / Cheque (No. __________) payable to Aliran RM __________

AM 1998: 18(11/12)

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>ONE YEAR</th>
<th>TWO YEARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALAYSIA</td>
<td>RM25.00</td>
<td>RM50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGAPORE &amp; BRUNEI</td>
<td>US28</td>
<td>US50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA &amp; THE PACIFIC</td>
<td>US25</td>
<td>US44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE &amp; EGYPT</td>
<td>US28</td>
<td>US50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA, NORTH AMERICA,</td>
<td>US30</td>
<td>US54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH AMERICA, HAWAII</td>
<td></td>
<td>US38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Please send this gift subscription to: AM 1998: 18(11/12)

Mr./Ms. __________________________
Address _________________________________________________________

Subscription for 11 issues

1 year    AIR    RM __________
2 years    SEA    RM __________

I enclose money order / postal order / cheque for the above order amounting to RM __________ payable to Aliran.

This gift subscription is paid for and presented by:

Mr./Ms. __________________________
Address _________________________________________________________

Date __________ Signature __________

AM 1998: 18(11/12)
So, What Do You Think of Anwar’s Case?

A personal view of many issues
by Saliha Hassan

What do I think of Anwar’s case ... ? Me? A middle-class Malay makcik (‘aunt’) living in PJ, an NEP product who grew up during the Islamic revivalism of the 1970s, a local UI graduate with a career that surpassed my kampong parents’ expectations?

I respect every socio-political activist or ‘NGO person’, and my family’s idea of keeping abreast of political happenings is to ‘ask mak’. But most social scientists think of people like me as wanting in political activism. So, perhaps I should articulate some of my opinions about Anwar’s case for social researchers, and ‘concerned individuals’ who think that everyone should be in one reform mode or another.

All round exposure

For the proverbial tidak-apa (couldn’t-care-less) Malaysian and the curious international onlooker (with or without conspiratorial intent), Anwar’s case has exposed every aspect of current Malaysian politics: UMNO, the resurrection of Anwar’s alleged political victims, democratic awareness, the judicial process, executive dominance, the power of the Attorney-General, police professionalism, corporate battles, civil society, a political opposition, gender, the non-Malays’ non-reaction, reformasi, and international opinion.

As far as I know, people interested in politics and those who had access to the internet were already talking about the MAD (Mahathir-Anwar-Daim) relationship, and Anwar’s imminent fall weeks before 2 September. What they didn’t expect, I believe, was the ferocity with which events unfolded.

Just witness Anwar’s Jebat mengamuk (Jebat goes amok) response and roadshow, the FRU’s baton-wielding, teargas-shooting and water-jetting, the black balaclava-clad special unit’s door-kicking and window-crashing, the transfer of judges to legal Siberias, and the formation of the Coalition for Peoples Democracy (Gagasan) and the Malaysian People’s Justice Movement (Gerak).

Liberties, agitation and violence

Maybe all this showed that the authorities didn’t know how much more aware of their democratic rights Malaysians had become since the liberal days of the 1980s.

Since those days, fundamental
liberties and the abolition of the Internal Security Act (ISA) have been the focus of Malaysian social movements. As an unintended result of Anwar’s case, his supporters and activists clamour for a more vigorous civil society and greater democratization.

Many people now say that fundamental liberties can only be won through ‘agitation’. Yes, but does agitation have to be violent? I thought democracy and civil society should mean that people work out their differences and negotiate peacefully as part of social development for the ‘greater good’. After all, our history is full of peaceful negotiations, non-violent marches, and a native art of settling domestic conflicts.

Were agent provocateurs responsible for the violence which erupted during some recent demonstrations, as alleged by Anwar’s wife, Dr Wan Azizah? If so, the violence has drawn greater attention to Anwar’s case which has affected grassroots sentiment in so many ways.

There has been a surge in agitation for more reliable guarantees for fundamental liberties. In Kuala Lumpur, especially, people attend rallies, forums, talks, and exchange opinions (and abuse!) via the Internet. Those outside urban centres participate in PAS’s GERAK activities and discuss viewpoints contrary to UMNO’s and the Barisan Nasional’s. (I suspect there is as much thought on votes and elections as on a struggle for democratic rights and guarantees.)

**Lights and white**

Others responded to such calls as ‘Lights off every Tuesday from 8pm to 8.10 pm’ and ‘Headlights on all day on Wednesday’. Yet others supported the JUST-initiated ‘white ribbon for justice’ campaign, among other things, to show that people must defy the ‘culture of fear’. A family friend who was too bashful about wearing a white ribbon pinned it on her curtain! Some other friends wore white attire to spread a similar message. In these ways they showed their awareness of the fundamental principles of democracy: government by the people and for the people, equality before the law, accountable government, and constitutional rights.

Hence Anwar’s case has galvanized the political imagination of whole generations of Malaysians living on the eve of a new millennium. It is a watershed in our nation’s attempt at living democracy. Hopefully this awakening will move Malaysians closer to thinking democracy and civil rights before ethnic politics.

**Nurul Izzah Anwar and Dr Wan Azizah**

The Permatang Pauh Declaration said nothing about parity between men and women in politics or women in leadership and decision-making. But I was inspired by the public demeanour, words and actions of Anwar’s daughter and his wife.

Who were we to say that they should remain at home, look after the little ones, and let others handle Anwar’s case? They reminded me so much of the Malay world of the hikayat, Sejarah Melayu, and Inderaputra, in which the women of the istana (palace) donned the mantles of their fallen fathers or husbands to continue the fight for truth, justice, and honour.

I knew young people, ‘shopping at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman’, who felt that the sight of Izzah and Azizah in their midst was ‘worth dying for’! I thought that if I were Anwar I would feel proud but also humbled before God for such loved ones.

**The young ones**

Speaking of the young, many of those chanting Reformasi! (Reforms!), Keadilan! (Justice!) and Undur Mahathir (Mahathir, Resign!) were students and young professionals, supposedly members of PAS, the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM), or Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM). While some opposed the participation of the young in the marches, UMNO itself was proposing to lower its minimum membership age to 16 years.

The presence of the young, for me, showed that they understood, no less than anyone else, that democracy and fundamental liberties must be marked
by a sense of law and order but also of responsibility to the good of society at large.

How do our political science lecturers in the universities ‘teach’ their students about what is happening, I wonder? How do they interpret Anwar’s case for impressionable minds newly released from the cocoons of secondary schools? Why have the authorities, threatening to use the Universities and University Colleges Act, been warning the young, the future leaders of our nation, against involvement in the reformasi movement, the demonstrations, and ‘illegal’ assemblies?

As a concerned citizen and mother of five children, I ask: How can we expect quality leadership from our bright and young people if they cannot even be allowed to observe the reformasi crowds at first hand? Can people learn to swim without gulping some water, learn to cycle without grazing their knees?

No one, young or old, wants to see riots, violence and anarchy. Street action, in my opinion, is a

sign that we have yet to achieve a balanced citizen-government relationship crucial to the development of a responsible civil society. But, maybe, the authorities and the police have taken too many things for granted and overlooked that the political development of the rakyat (people) has progressed to a new phase.

**Personal tragedy or national issue?**

Anwar’s case is a personal tragedy having national implications. The role of the mass media highlighted this. Throughout the country, the media provided what many believed to be updates and real happenings. Many found it difficult not to believe what their eyes beheld.

As a makcik (possibly a member of a political party) said, ‘Dulu kita tak berapa kenal dia (Anwar). Sekarang dah tengok kat TV semua, barulah kita tahu yang sebenar’ (We didn’t quite know him [Anwar] before. Now that we’ve seen it all on TV, we know what’s true). Talk about a media trial!

However, many who thought the media channels were manipulated chose to believe and act upon the words of those they regarded as sincere leaders, or what they regarded as believable grassroots sources of information. I think, though, all sides have their own political agenda.

**Malay and non-Malay non-reaction**

Some quarters have tried to contain or isolate Anwar’s case. There are Melayu who have tried to steer away from it. For example, the President of the Malaysian Ulamas’ Association (PUM) stated that PUM was concerned with the Anwar case only as a ‘matter of justice from the Islamic perspective’, not for its UMNO politics or its ties to reformasi. The MIC President warned the Indian community to stay clear from the reformasi movement.

Joceline Tan (New Sunday Times, 18 October 1998) said she detected a ‘loud silence from Chinese non-governmental organizations and associations’. Maybe they remember May 1969 and Operation Lalang in 1987 and prefer to treat the Anwar case as ‘an internal UMNO matter and entirely Malay issue’. Maybe the Chinese community is being pragmatic, anxious for business to continue unthreatened and mindful that ‘when elephants tussle, the grass is trampled’. (Yet, not long ago, Anwar was the darling of the Chinese community because of his Mandarin phrases and Islam-Confucianism dialogues.)

**No such thing as non-reaction?**

When Anwar’s case has exposed the cracks in the mosaic of Malaysian public life can any Malaysian truly stand aloof? Everyone should realize that non-reaction is itself a form of strategic reaction.

The supposed non-reaction of the corporate world, including the influential non-Malay sector, is only a facade. I have no experience with wheeling and dealing. But, reading Lords of the Rim and The Asian Mind Game, I’m conscious that the corporate shoguns have been warring behind the scenes. For one thing, control of
the Finance Ministry now will 'make or break' many corporations, tycoons and politicians.

But the clearest examples of the non-Malay response to the Anwar case has come from those who have tried to extend the parameters of democracy in Malaysia -- the non-Malay activists in NGOs such as ALIRAN, SUARAM, HAKAM and JUST, and the DAP politicians. There has also been a group of 59 Chinese professionals whose spokesman said that the Chinese community had to be concerned with Anwar's case and the future of democracy.

Non-Malay politicians, especially the non-Malay Barisan Nasional ones who depend on Malay voter support, are very concerned about how Malay voters in their constituencies will react to the Anwar case and specifically how they will vote in the next election.

**Life without DPM**

The PM said that he had planned, without telling anyone, to retire after this year's APEC Summit, but then thought that Anwar could not handle the economic crisis (this was before Anwar became 'unsuitable' in other ways).

I wonder: Would it have been catastrophic if Anwar had been given the reins? Were there no (domestic) economic advisers and (foreign) financial consultants (like Salomon Smith & Barney)? Weren't there Tun Daim and the NEAC to give guidance?

Or is there truth in the rumours that Anwar's case was actually a crony war? Is there more than a mere grain of truth in talk of selective bailouts using the Employees Provident Fund and the Pilgrimage Fund savings of ordinary people? (Personally, I'm concerned because one fund is for my *hari tua* [old age], the other to allow me to fulfill the fifth Islamic commandment.) Could it be, as one smart child asked his smart father, if corporate bailouts were 'like Robin Hood terbalik -- robbing the people to give to the rich?'

It is suddenly unsettling for me to realize that Anwar's case may not be about morality, the PM's prerogative, or the national interest, that it may be, as rumoured, a conspiracy to protect vested interests which don't represent the best interest of ordinary Malaysians.

It is also unsettling to know that some of our national leaders were effective only during good times. And what has happened to the Cabinet's *modus operandi* supposedly based on collective talent, collective leadership, collective decision-making, and collective responsibility? I begin to think that there is a point in the transparency demanded by the reformasi movement.

**Which Reformasi? What to reform?**

According to my secondary school history book, *reformasi* has been with us since the *gerakan islah* of the 1920s. This was a social movement of progressive ulamas aimed at the modernization of the Malay Muslim community. Since then other *gagasan* (fronts) have been attempted, and diverse *reformasi* slogans have been heard.

The present *reformasi* activities are just as diverse, and reflect the objectives and goals of the groupings involved. The goals include *Bebaskan Anwar* (Free Anwar) and *Undur Mahathir* (Mahathir, resign) (for Anwar loyalists), reform of the judicial process (for the legal fraternity), reform of political values (for Gerak), and reform of the single coalition system (for Gagasan).

There appears to be no common *reformasi* platform as yet. To illustrate, when questioned, a Gerak panelist at a recent forum remarked, *'itu reformasi dia, reformasi saya ialah...'* ("that's his idea of reform, my reform is..."), while another panelist insisted he did not represent the 'Anwar-centred gerakan reformasi' (reform movement).

Hence, how many of those thousands who went 'shopping at Jalan Tunanku Abdul Rahman' during the past weekends really understood the meaning of their participation? 'Wisegal', a KL political analyst, thinks 'there is life beyond Anwar's case', that the 'movement' has shifted from Anwar's personal fate to fundamental issues of democracy and popular participation.

If her view is correct, then we can all be hopeful that our politics of the next millenium will be more mature than those of the past decades. After all, white (as in the white ribbon) is the universal colour of purity, and the 'thumbs-up' the universal sign that everything is well.

Salihah Hassan lectures in Political Science at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
An Open Letter to Lim Guan Eng:

God works in mysterious ways

Dear Guan Eng

As you languish in prison, I have had plenty of time to reflect on you and your idealism.

Rightly or wrongly, the Democratic Action Party has long tried to have a 'Malaysian' character when the vast majority in the country still perceive it to be essentially a political party for the ethnic Chinese.

I realise that recently people like you have tried hard to attract Malaysians, especially Malays, to make the DAP truly Malaysian, but not too successfully in my view. Then came an explosive event - the Rahim Tamby Chik case - which made a lot of Malays sit up and change their perceptions of the DAP. That case rocked Malay society to its very foundation.

Your conduct and role in pursuit of truth in that scandal earned my deepest admiration. The series of events following that scandal, culminating in the judicial proceedings against you, have turned out to be a classic example of how the verdict in a 'court of law' has become subordinate to the 'court of public opinion'.

Ask any Malay mother anywhere. Few would agree that the famous grandmother in that scandal should have been abandoned by UMNO, and the underaged girl should have been so blatantly violated and her family silenced.

By your words and deeds, you challenged the government, police, media, and the judiciary, and exposed yourself to certain incarceration and vindictive punishment by Dr Mahathir and the political elite.

I have always believed that God works in mysterious ways. Inexplicably, He chose you to put the DAP into sharp focus. He chose you to force Malaysians to look at themselves and reflect on the abuse of basic values in our society.

To that extent, God in His wisdom made the DAP no longer just a Chinese political party but, overnight, into a truly Malaysian one which fights for the deprived.

I am a Malay with a family of my own. I shall remember you as a Chinese father who fought for the rights of a Malay grandmother and her sexually abused grand-daughter. I know that when you decided to take on the case, you knew the price for your action would be heavy for you and your family, personally and politically.

Today, you are still paying the price. You languish alone in prison. Ironically, as in Nelson Mandela's case, the longer they lock you up, the greater will be your stature, the more powerful the focus on the issues you fought for.

I also know that, all through this, you can look into the eyes of your wife, children and parents, and say, with deserved pride and honour, that 'Guan Eng has not prostituted his dignity, decency and self-respect in the face of oppression and tyranny'.

You have truly given new meaning to the maxim, 'Politics With Honour'. More importantly, you have made me look in the mirror and ask, 'Who am I? What have I done to speak out against the evil forces which confronted two Malay kampong women? Why have I remained silent? Have I lost my decency and self-respect?'

In all honesty, I cannot say I have the guts to look into the eyes of my family members and say I have done them proud. I have kept silent. I owe it to you, Guan Eng, for opening my eyes and stirring my conscience.

Our inaction and apathy have allowed oppression, tyranny and injustice to continue. We have to search our hearts and souls to find ways to make up for our negligence and ineptitude.

To you, Guan Eng, I offer prayers from my family. May the blessings of the Almighty continue to give you strength, courage and tenacity to do what is right and just for all Malaysians.

Yours sincerely

Narni Saila
Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Chua Detained... Again

"I was horrified to see a tall man, with a vest, punching Chua on the side of his right stomach."

by Elizabeth Wong

A Statutory Declaration

I, Wong Keat Ping, (Elizabeth) (K/P700309-08-6306) of 11, Jalan 1A/71E, Jalan Carey, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, hereby solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:

I met up with Mr. Chua Tian Chang (Chua) and Mr. Tang Siong Ying (Tang) along Jalan Raja Alang, near the 7-11 store at around 11 pm on the evening of Saturday, 21 November. We walked up Jalan Alang to the intersection of Jalan Raja Abdullah, that led us to a group of journalists and friends. It was close to the Kampung Baru mosque. When we arrived there, most of the journalists were getting ready to leave. I chatted with my housemate, Ms. Mages, and decided that I should go back together with her.

I saw Chua, Tang and Michael Kourdeff from the Australian High Commission walk away. I yelled out to ask where they were going. One of them answered they would be back shortly. That was about 11.45 pm.

I sat on the ground and continued chatting with my friends when suddenly I saw Chua pushed and pulled by a group of men. I saw one of them holding and dragging him by his T-shirt collar. I walked towards Chua in order to find out what was happening. I heard Chua shouting, "Am I under arrest?"

I was prevented from going near him by one man who pushed me. There was also a long-haired woman who grabbed my left arm. She screamed at me, "Go away, or they will arrest you." I wa...
I replied, "What do you mean nothing to see; that man just punched my friend!" He tried to push me away.

By this time, Chua had already left in the van. A bespectacled man came up to me and said "F*** you."

I asked, "What was that?"

He replied, "Nothing." And walked towards the police truck.

I yelled out and said, "How dare you swear at me?"

The man, who was now about a metre away, shouted "F*** you." He repeated it loudly several times.

I saw there were at least a dozen men between me and the man who was swearing. None of them did anything.

Again the woman tugged my arm. I yelled back, "Who are you? I don't take kindly to people swearing at me."

Tang who was next to me now, asked "Who are you? Identify yourself." Tang pulled me aside.

A man on my left side, came out, and yelled at that man, "Who are you? Gangster-ka?"

Tang pulled me away. As there was nothing left to do, I left with Tang and Mike to check if Chua was brought to Jalan Stadium Dang Wangi police station.

At the police station, I saw Chua, handcuffed and led to a building. I waited with several of his friends for a while.

In time, I saw Chua taken into a police van and Tang went forward and spoke to him. I heard Tang ask Chua, if he had been beaten. I did not hear Chua's answer. Tang then shouted out to me, "Take down this name, Syed Fadil."

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Statutory Declaration Act 1960.

Kuala Lumpur
23 November 1998

Elizabeth Wong is coordinator of the Petaling Jaya-based human rights group, Suaram. Both Suaram and Aliran are among the NGOs in Gagasan.

WHO IS TIAN CHUA?

Chua Tian Chang, a Suaram activist, is the chairperson of the Coalition for People's Democracy (Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat). Before his second arrest on 21 November, he had lodged a police report on 1 October 1998 complaining about alleged police brutality that he and other detainees were subjected to during his first detention on 28 September 1998, a day after Gagasan was launched.

Tian was born in Malacca in 1963. He studied in the Malacca Catholic High School and Gajah Berang High School. He was the Catholic High School's Head Prefect and president of the Chinese language society in school and had exemplary academic records when he graduated.

In the 1980s, he studied and graduated in Philosophy at the University of New South Wales, Australia. During his time in Sydney, he was involved in fighting for the rights of foreign students in Australia on issues of fees, racism, students' rights, welfare, etc.

He later studied for his Masters in Labour Studies at the Institute for International Studies in The Hague, The Netherlands. He came back to Malaysia in 1996 and has been working at the Labour Resource Centre, which runs training and research programmes on labour issues. He is also an active member in the Institute for Social Analysis (INSAN) and SUARAM, and an Exco member of the Malaysian Social Science Society.

Tian was released on bail on 5 December 1998 and has to report at the police station on 19 December to find out if he will be formally charged. □
Dr. Munawar's Statutory Declaration (excerpts)

I had no idea where I was... I was finally pushed through a door and when my blindfold was removed and my eyes adjusted to the light I saw that I was in a cell of approximately 8 feet square... The room was brightly lit by an overhead light that was never switched off throughout my stay there....

Before my captors left the cell I was told, rudely and in a dismissive style, that I had henceforth no name or identity, that I was number 26. About 10 to 15 minutes later the door of the cell was slammed open and a man walked in and shouted out '26'. I was slow to respond and was severely reprimanded for that....

I was forced to sit... and, against my will, shaved bald. I was then given a dustpan and a small broom and asked to sweep up my hair....

'Mr Nice Guy'

This ritual of a loud knock and the door being violently opened was followed each time I was taken out of my cell.... I was now directed to take a bath.... As I got ready to take a bath the guard yelled at me to get on and to hurry up.... I started my bath but when I was halfway through it and while still having soap on my body he stopped me and then got me to dress and to get out of the bathroom. I forgot to switch off the light and the guard became angry and screamed at me that he wasn't there to serve me. I was rushed back to my cell with my clothes still damp....

I was tired, dazed and disoriented, still having very heavy palpitations and laboured breathing and intensely worried about my family. The heavy feeling in my legs and light-headedness had returned after the rice meal and I felt very lethargic....

Once again there was the now familiar bang on the door and my number '26' was shouted out. The door opened and this time two guards walked in.... They first handcuffed and then blindfolded me.... They led me out of my cell. They held me for a short distance and from then on gave directions and allowed me to grope my way.... We went up a flight of stairs - there were 50 steps over five landings.... After the 50th step I was asked to stop. One of the two swung me around and punched me in the stomach and said that he was 'Mr. Nice Guy' and that I was 'Dr. Feel Good'....

My handcuffs were now taken off. A moment later one of the guards took my blindfold off. I saw I was facing an open room. It was brightly lit. When I was finally able to focus I saw four stone-faced expressionless men seated on chairs behind a table. The two men on either side looked Chinese, the one in the middle... Indian and the other Malay. My guards left me standing in front of the table. There was silence in the room.

Suddenly the Malay man thumped the table and shouted at me in Bahasa Malaysia. I did not understand him and...
apologised in English for not being fluent in Bahasa. The Malay man then switched to a mixture of Malay and English and abused me for not speaking the language. He repeatedly kept saying ‘f**k, f**king’ as he abused me. The other three joined in as well....

After about 30 minutes or so the four of them stopped and the Malay officer suddenly slammed the table again and shouted at me in English that I had no manners, that I had entered a place where there were four seated officers and I had not greeted them.... From then on my interrogators abused and assaulted me mainly in English....

There was then suddenly a barrage of questions directed at me. One interrogator would ask a question, I would be in the middle of my answer when another would cut in with a second question. I would turn to the second officer and the third would attack me with a different question. I would turn to the third and the first would yell at me demanding his answer....

The questions were never related, there was no link between them though they were all directed at my personal particulars, about my work, something about everything but nothing indicative of any subversive or criminal activities. This style of questioning was consistently followed throughout my interrogation there though at times some of the interrogators would leave the room leaving behind two and, at times, one interrogator. I can only guess they went to rest but they never let me rest....

While this was going on I heard the door behind me being violently kicked open. I turned and saw a man walk in. The four behind the table stood up. The man who walked in was carrying a thick heavy file. He walked up to me and hit the back of my head with the file and then shouted at me that they knew everything and that there was no need for me to misguide them or to hide. He said that they knew everything I did with Anwar.

When I tried to protest that I did nothing except help write speeches, this officer menacingly said, “I am giving you 24 hours. Within that period come up with what we want or we will be very very nasty with you.”... He then hit the back of my head again with his file, thumped the floor with his shoes, shouted ‘Hidup Malaysia!’ (Long Live Malaysia), turned and left. The door was heavily slammed shut behind him.

When this officer left the room the Indian-looking man at the table pointed at me and warned me that the officer who had just left was the top-notch officer and added, ‘You know what he wants. He wants facts, information. We want facts.’ I again protested that I had done nothing irregular but they were not interested in my protestations and continued haranguing me....

A Chance

One or another of the four would always warn me that if I did not co-operate I would be sent to a detention centre for two years and that the detention would be further extended in two-year multiples. I was repeatedly told that I would never see my family again and that I should consider this opportunity a blessing since everyone was giving me a chance. I couldn’t understand what they wanted and what was this chance they were giving me. I would tell them this....

They would then emphasise, in turn, repeatedly, about how senior people had been arrested for their own rehabilitation. They warned me that my perception of no wrong was mine and not necessarily correct, that in someone else’s or his (the officer’s) mind I had done wrong. They warned me that the Internal Security Act was to retrain minds towards goodness, to offer me a chance to realise my mistakes and an opportunity to repent....

I had had just one small meal since my arrest early on the morning of the 14 September 1998. I had had no rest or sleep and had lost all track of time. I was sick. My interrogators did not care at all about my condition.... they began asking me whether I knew why I was there in their hands. I said I did not know and they would then tell me that it had to do with Anwar. When I would tell them that I was his English speech writer they would respond by saying that they knew. They would then ask me to think of my position and that I had to help them and the nation. They would tell me how....
Wrong Perception

... one of the four started on the interrogation. He asked if I had thought about things and about how I could help them and the country... I still could not understand what they wanted from me on Anwar and I asked them.

Finally one of them asked if I had read the affidavits that had been published in the papers about Anwar. I said yes but not in any great detail. One of them said that there were sexual allegations, particularly of a homosexual nature, against Anwar in those affidavits. I told them that so far as I knew Anwar was not involved in any such sexual activities and that in all the years I had known him he had always conducted himself with integrity. I told them that it was easy to make such allegations.

They said they would show me evidence. They asked me to think and concentrate on such homosexual activities. I asked if they were making allegations against me... I told them that I had never had a homosexual relationship in my entire life. They said they knew that that was my perception of things but that my perception of things was wrong, that they had to retrain my mind to see what was right and wrong, that they would show me how...

For the first time at this session they also introduced a threat involving the presence of US agents in Malaysia. They said that the US agents were here and were working with them and were already checking into my background with a view to cancelling my pending application for US citizenship and revoking my green card.

For hours the interrogation veered between my rehabilitation, the retraining of my mind, the position and well-being of my family, the possibility of my being put away in a detention centre, of losing everything I had, my wife, my children...

Vulgarity

As the interrogation progressed one or more of the four officers would, without warning, break into loose vulgar language. One would make statements like 'Anwar f**s, you f**s' and the rest would laugh. Another would then make derogatory remarks about the Punjabis being big f**kers and offer me a cigarette. I always felt light-headed after I smoked one of their cigarettes.

The interrogation would then switch back to my work, my vulnerability and then, just as suddenly, switch back to vulgarity and Anwar and homosexuality. They would make lewd remarks, asking me about the size of my penis using expressions like 'd**k', 'c**k'. They would ask me for its length, its diameter, asking me whether I would like to put it in someone's 'a**e'. They asked how I would feel if I had someone's meat 'shoved up my a**e'...

This switching in the interrogation continued unabated right throughout the time I was with them... Gradually they began to introduce Anwar's name more into the abuse and began to make him play a more active part in their lewd descriptions of homosexual and non-homosexual sex. They began to make suggestions that Anwar enjoyed homosexual sex. They asked me to think about homosexual sex, about 'f***ing' Anwar, about Anwar f**ing me. They asked me to groan as if I was being 'f**ed' and enjoying it.

Bullies

In that situation, in their hands, I had little choice but to groan and moan as my captors wanted me to. I acted as they wanted me to. They were bullies and I was in their hands... They asked me if I had seen Anwar's c**k and then asked me to pretend I was sucking the c**k of the 'DPM', as one officer crudely put it. As I acted out the demeaning, humiliating parts they gave me, they laughed and asked if it was good.

By the end of the second day the long hours of interrogation, the lack of sleep, and the lack of decent food had left me completely disoriented and exhausted.... I remember the second day's interrogation ending with my interrogators' warning to me to think about all they had said and that they would be seeing me again shortly... Their parting words, in unison, were 'f*** Anwar'. I was then handcuffed and blindfolded and led back to my cell.

I had no idea of time... Lying there curled up in that foetal position I could only replay in my mind what my captors had repeatedly drummed into me: the sex acts they asked me to act out, the vulnerable position that I was in.... In that silence, in that cell I was alone and very far from normalcy and truth and felt increas-
ingly that no one could help me or my family... I thought of all this and I thought of sleep and food and the love of my family and I cried....

Abuse

There was one man seated alone at a table. I had never seen him before. He asked me to sit. I did so and he then asked me for my personal history. I was too tired to resist or to ask why they were asking for the same information repeatedly. He wrote everything down. He questioned me on everything I had done...

Sometime during this interrogation the original four officers entered the room and joined this fifth officer. They then took over the interrogation while the fifth officer left the room. They kept on drumming into me that my perception of things was wrong, that I had forgotten, that I had to listen to them. The abuse centred around my penis, its length and size, human genitalia, vaginal and anal sex. They never stopped talking about sex, repeatedly stating that they had to fabricate an 'Andre'. There was again a momentary let-up in the interrogation, again a statement about my perceptions being wrong, that I had forgotten, that they were reminding me and correcting them, again a warning that if I concentrated the pattern would surface, that I had to have a tendency towards homosexuality. They nodded in agreement, smiled, gave me a cigarette, claimed to know about this fictitious 'Andre' and said that they had been told about 'Andre' by the US agents then in Kuala Lumpur.

The fifth officer came back into the room and joined the original four. He took over the questioning but this time went on a new and different line. He said that he had been to Pakistan, said that sex there was repressed and repressed. He said that homosexuality was a way of life in Pakistan and suggested that I should share my sex life details with them. It became apparent that this routine and the haranguing was going to go on for ever.

Truth and my denials were getting me nowhere. I was at the point of collapse and could not go on. I knew I had to play along with them. The fifth officer took out a cigarette from a pack that was in his pocket and offered it to me. I was always given a cigarette from a black pack. The officers when they smoked always seemed to take cigarettes from other packs. The cigarette tasted unusually but good. Every time I smoked one of their cigarettes I felt strangely light-headed and 'woozy'.

'Parvez'

He suggested that it was natural in Pakistan. I looked at him. He stared at me and then pointed at my anus. I was dead tired. I nodded my head. He smiled and said 'good'. It now became a sequence where they asked questions and I nodded in acquiescence and when they asked for details I made up whatever pleased them. Gradually they made up a story about a non-existent 'Parvez' and some University liaison. They wanted me to be the active partner and insisted on that feature in the Parvez story. I denied this but they would have it no other way stating that it was the Pakistani way of life.

The original four interrogators then repeated the fictional Parvez 'story' to me and made me repeat it to them, again and again.... At one point in their haranguing and their suggestions that I was a homosexual I asked if they knew biology and suggested a medical examination would confirm homosexuality. They ignored this and for a long time made me talk about the male and female sex organs. They wanted graphics and made me draw these, over and over. They talked incessantly about anal sex, giving me extensive biological details about the size and shape of the penis in relation to the male anus....

'Andre'

They asked for dates and times of sexual encounters. I had none to give. They became angry and abusive and threatening. They went back to sex in the US and asked for more names.

I fabricated an 'Andre'. There was again a momentary let-up in the interrogation, again a statement about my perceptions being wrong, that I had forgotten, that they were reminding me and correcting them, again a warning that if I concentrated the pattern would surface, that I had to have a tendency towards homosexuality. They nodded in agreement, smiled, gave me a cigarette, claimed to know about this fictitious 'Andre' and said that they had been told about 'Andre' by the US agents then in Kuala Lumpur.

'André' was someone created by me that morning in absolute desperation....

'Mior'

They then introduced the previous session's sexual scenario into the interrogation and started pressurising me for details. When I had none to give they asked that I think about them while they waited for their senior officer to come back. In the meantime they went into other details and descriptions of oral sex.

Then they reverted to their pattern of interrogation but now began to concentrate more on Anwar. They reminded me again
and again that Anwar was a homosexual, that I had '***ed' him, that they had proof of it. They opened a bag, took out some photographs and threw them on the table. These were normal, regular photographs. Two were of me, one alone and one with a person known as Khalid Jaffar. There was another photograph of a person they said was 'Mior'. I did not know this 'Mior'...

Suddenly one of the four screamed at me to stand up. I did so. All four came from behind the table and surrounded me in a very aggressive manner as if they were about to assault me. One of them literally had his face in mine. They all screamed at me, in my ears, loudly, again and again and again, that I had '***ed' Anwar, '***ed' Anwar, '***ed', Anwar, Anwar, Anwar. They screamed and screamed and screamed, in my ears, at my face, at me, again and again, over and over asking me to say 'yes' until I gave in and broke down saying yes, yes. They stopped screaming. That was what they wanted to hear. They were not interested that it was untrue. They gave me a cigarette and allowed me to smoke it.

Whenever it suited them I was made to lie on the floor and simulate anal sex with Anwar. I was asked to alternate as if I was on top of Anwar and then Anwar on top of me. All this was humiliating, and depressing and degrading. It descended into vulgarity in both their actions and in their words. But they never stopped...

They repeatedly drilled into my mind that my perceptions were wrong, that they were educating me, rehabilitating me, showing me how I was helping Malaysia and my family, that my only way out from there was to give them what the nation needed. They came back to the issue of sex and placed the photograph of 'Mior' on the table. They asked for details of the man. I told them that I did not know him. They said I had '***ed' Mior. I denied that.

Choosing a Month

They went back to Anwar and anal sex and my perceptions. Step by step, by alternately shouting and screaming and questioning, by cajoling and threatening, by warnings about detention and my family, they made me repeat after them again and again, that I had engaged in sexual misconduct with Anwar on several occasions. They made me say that I was sorry about it all, that I was ashamed and repented that all this had happened. At stages they would stop to ensure that the information had been drilled into me and would then continue.

They made me say that I was forced into it because I feared for my job and that if I refused Anwar's advances my employment would be in jeopardy, that I would lose important financial resources. They made me say that it hurt me a lot that this kind of behaviour was coming from a person who claimed to be a pious Muslim and that he had betrayed a lot of Muslims in this country and the whole Muslim world who had looked up to him as an inspiring leader. They made me say that every time I engaged in this act it was a disgusting experience for me. These were all lies made up by the ISA officers.

Emotional Speech

A little later another officer walked in. This was the person who eventually took me to see a magistrate for a statement to be recorded from me. He was very
stern. He shouted at me to stand up. I did so.... He said that they were cancelling my identity card, that steps had been taken to send me to the detention centre and then eventually to deport me. He declared that my US citizenship was in serious jeopardy and that the US agents in Malaysia looking into things had decided to revoke it. My family had been told to pack up.

He warned me that I had nothing left unless I agreed to serve the country, that I had only one option and that was to co-operate with them. He then started on a very emotional speech about loving Malaysia, about sacrifices, about fighting for and giving one's life in defence of Malaysia, about fighting for and giving sacrifices, about the country, that I was not to worry. They asked me to sit and I was stunned and didn’t know whether to laugh or cry because she was completely missing the point that I had been brought there by my captors and interrogators, that they were waiting outside her room and that I was being alone in her room. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry because she was completely missing the point that I had been brought there by my captors and interrogators, that they were waiting outside her room and that when I was finished I was going to be handed back to them and taken back to my small cell. My life and my freedom and that of my family were in the hands of the police....

The 'Dato'

A little later he returned and spoke privately to the four interrogators. Two of the four then left the room. At this point four new officers walked in.... The others addressed the man who sat in the middle as 'Dato'. This 'Dato' spoke first in a cold tone.... He assured me that they would liaise with the US agents to resolve my US citizenship status satisfactorily. He said that his officers had told him I had agreed to die for the nation but that he had no desire to punish me since I was a victim of Anwar’s lust and after all what was four to five months when compared to death....

I was numb from fear and worry. When he was finished the three seated officers stood up. The junior officers saluted, everyone of them shouted 'Hidup Malaysia' and they all left. This must have been very late into the night. I was left alone for a few minutes. Then all the four interrogators walked in. One came over and slapped me on my back and said that I had done a good job and that they could now 'f*** Anwar....

'Free Will'

They then transferred me to the back seat of a Proton car. I was wedged between two officers.... One of the officers pushed me down on the seat so that I could not be seen. When the car stopped I found that I was at Bukit Aman.... the senior officer once again started telling me that my family would be proud of me and that they were safe....

He then said it was time to take me for the statement to be recorded from me the way I had been briefed the night before and then added as an obvious warning that all my Internal Security Act detention problems would be resolved after I had given the statement.

They again put me in the car and hid me by making me bend forward. When the car finally stopped and I was taken out I noticed that I was in the Court complex. At the Court while we were walking I was constantly being reminded of what I had to say in my statement to the magistrate.... ASP Mazlan went into the Magistrate's room and took me in. The ISA officer waited outside.

The Magistrate talked to me in Malay.... At some point she asked if I was there of my own free will and made a remark about my being alone in her room. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry because she was completely missing the point that I had been brought there by my captors and interrogators, that they were waiting outside her room and that when I was finished I was going to be handed back to them and taken back to my small cell. My life and my freedom and that of my family were in the hands of the police....

The irony of her writing that I was making a statement of my own free will and reading back that statement to me and then asking me to sign it hit me very hard. She read back that statement to me. She signed. She asked me to sign. She repeated that only the three of us were
Don't Yacob and after telling me that I had been made to get me a light sentence. To every question that was asked him after that he gave me a stock answer - "Don't ask me. Ask the Police."... Yacob Karim never at any time spoke about fees or being retained by me or about informing my wife about my situation. I am now not surprised at the way he attended to me that afternoon since his conduct then and subsequently clearly showed that he was working together with the police in denying me my rights.

The lawyer

ASP Mazlan then asked me whether I had a lawyer. I said I did not. He said to me that I was not to worry and that he had one for me. ASP Mazlan never at this point of time, or before or after that, told me that my wife had already engaged a lawyer for me and that that lawyer had already been in contact with Police Headquarters right from the first day of my arrest.

He then made a telephone call and spoke to someone... He mentioned a name to me - Yacob Karim - and after telling me that he was to be my lawyer handed the phone to me.... All I can say is that it was a pre-arranged thing and that when ASP Mazlan spoke to Yacob Karim a little earlier this Yacob Karim was already there in the Police Headquarters....

Yacob Karim sat at the table across from me. His first statement to me was that he was sorry that it, the sodomy, had happened to me. I was shocked at this as it showed that he had been briefed by the police and even more shocked that he believed it.... Yacob Karim then proceeded to tell me that arrangements were being made and that I would be taken to a Sessions Court the next day and that I would have to plead guilty to a charge and to admit to the offence.

I asked him why...and he replied that otherwise they could not proceed with the case against Anwar. He said arrangements had been made to get me a light sentence. To every question that

Last Warnings

After Yacob Karim left, three of my previous interrogators came into the room.... They reminded me of the arrangements made for the next day and warned me of the consequences if things went wrong. I was reminded that my family was vulnerable... I was cautioned to be strong the next day and to plead guilty as the lawyer had told me to do.... They said that I had to be away for 5 to 6 months so that things would quieten down but that after I come out of prison there would be a job waiting for me. During these 5 to 6 months, they said, my family would be looked after and that they had already talked to my wife. My wife now tells me that no one from the Police Headquarters called her or gave her any information about my whereabouts.

After all these warnings I was locked up in a cell at Bukit Aman and left for the night. By next morning I was a wreck of a man with worry. I was asked to dress in the same clothes that I had worn when arrested. I had slippers on my feet and was given a skull cap to wear to hide my bald head.

Screaming in Court

I was taken to the Court complex by ASP Mazlan and several other police officers. They adopted various cloak and dagger tactics to initially keep me hidden and away from the hordes of photographers there. I was finally taken into a court.

I was shivering and my palpitations were very strong. My breathing was laboured and I had difficulty controlling my bladder. I remember at some stage somebody giving me something to wear to stop the shivering but it did not help. I remember at some point in the middle of the court proceedings being no more able to control my bladder and having to be allowed to go and urinate. I was then taken into a Court by ASP Mazlan and many other police officers.

Yacob Karim was in that Court. I saw ASP Mazlan and the other police officers spread themselves around the Court. Yacob Karim came to me and handed me two documents. He said it was the charge which I had to admit. I saw the documents for the first time that morning. Even in my condition I was shocked at the details. Yacob Karim told me not to question anything, just to plead guilty and then, when asked, to acknowledge that I knew I could be punished for the offence. He then showed me another sheet which he said were the facts of the case. He said that when the facts were read to me I was to admit them and say nothing else. He told me that he would attend to the rest and that everything had been taken care of.
At one point before the judge came into the Court I saw a man come near me. He said that he was a lawyer and that my wife had appointed him to act for me. This man pointed at Yacob Karim and asked who he was. Yacob Karim came to where I was and stood there. This man spoke to me rather abruptly and asked who appointed Yacob. I pointed at ASP Mazlan. ASP Mazlan appeared angry and immediately gestured that I shouldn't involve him and pointed towards Yacob.

I saw some of the other plain-clothes police officers start to move.

I panicked, wondering what was about to happen and feared for my wife and children. Yacob who had been quiet suddenly found his voice and said he was my lawyer. I lost control of myself then, out of sheer fright. My head was in a daze....I was sentenced and then handcuffed. Yacob came to me and told me not to worry....I was moved to a cell in the Court complex. Before leaving me there ASP Mazlan came once again to me and said that the Inspector General of Police was very happy with the way I had handled myself in Court....

The proceedings moved fast after that. I did what the police expected of me. I was trembling uncontrollably throughout the proceedings. Even a jacket which was placed over me did not stop me from shaking and shivering uncontrollably. No one seemed to care. The words, sounds, sights all floated around me as if I was in a daze....I was sentenced and then handcuffed. Yacob came to me and told me not to worry....I was moved to a cell in the Court complex. Before leaving me there ASP Mazlan came once again to me and said that the Inspector General of Police was very happy with the way I had handled myself in Court....

'**They brainwashed me**'

I was interrogated over long and continuous sessions. I was always removed from my cell as No: 26, always blindfolded and handcuffed. I was systematically humiliated by my captors who always remained unidentified.

They stripped me of all self-respect; they degraded me and broke down my will and resistance; they threatened me and my family; they frightened me; they brainwashed me to the extent that I ended up in Court on 19 September 1998 a shivering shell of a man willing to do anything to stop the destruction of my being....

I am a happily married man with two lovely children. I was just doing my work and enjoying it. My captors and my interrogators have destroyed all that....I have had a long standing world wide reputation of being a respected intellectual individual....My captors for the purposes of their criminal objectives have unjustly destroyed my image.

I did no wrong and I am innocent. God knows that.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Statutory Declarations Act, 1960.

Subscribed and solemnly declared by the above-named 
Munawar Ahmad Anees
(NRIC No:480927-71-5139)
Kuala Lumpur 
7 November 1998

---

**Announcement**

Please note that there are 11 issues of Aliran Monthly in a year. Thus, this issue, December Vol.18(11/12), will be the last for 1998.
actually good news – does not help either. Their credibility is further tarnished and even the real good news, when it does come, will be treated with scepticism and will not boost confidence as quickly as it should.

Recovery will certainly come. The longer the leaders and the main press say it is around the corner, the more likely they will eventually turn out to be right, but at the cost of undermining the value of their analysis. Business people and the ordinary people need information and analyses they can trust. Most crucial for the recovery is a more settled political environment for investors to have confidence to make long-term commitments. That means a real recovery, after the wrenching experience of the last twelve months, may still be a year or more away.

**Exchange controls**

There are two essential elements to the exchange controls. The first is to gain control over the ringgit exchange rate. To do this, the government killed the offshore ringgit market – ringgit that was earning high deposit rates offered by a number of banks in Singapore. This offshore ringgit became available to currency players, including hedge funds. They borrowed ringgit offshore (because of severe limits already in place on their ability to borrow ringgit onshore) and used it to short-sell our currency. The idea was to buy back the ringgit later at a lower rate.

By preventing people from taking ringgit out and transferring ringgit from offshore accounts back to Malaysia, the government eliminated the offshore market from being a means of selling ringgit. The currency value is now no longer determined by foreign exchange markets but is fixed by the government according to what it thinks the rate should be.

The other element of the exchange controls is designed to prevent short-term capital from coming in and out of our stock market. To do this, the government has introduced a minimum one-year holding period on international fund managers: when they convert into ringgit to buy shares here, they have to keep their money in ringgit for at least one year. Only repatriation of dividends and profits is allowed during the one-year period – which means most of the capital brought in has to stay for at least twelve months.

While these controls are in place, the government has the opportunity to reduce interest rates without worrying about the ringgit value in the short-term. For currencies that are freely traded, a reduction in the interest rates of the home country resulting from government/central bank action would generally mean weakness in that currency. Essentially, interest rates can be thought of as the cost of money.

When a government reduces interest rates, it reduces the cost of borrowing a currency and also the return in holding that currency. Hence for currency traders, it is an opportunity to borrow the currency at a lower rate to be sold, i.e. exchanged for another currency. For those holding a currency where the interest rates are reduced, the return is lowered and they would thus be tempted to move out and find other high yielding currencies.

Reducing interest rates puts pressure on a currency. A government that does not allow the market to determine the value of the currency is not allowing daily fluctuations to show what the market thinks the value should be. This reduces short-term volatility in the currency; but at a cost. The cost is that the government and the people do not get a clear picture of which way a currency is heading.

**Abrupt exchange rate changes**

The view that exchange rates in Malaysia are now fixed and no one needs to worry about them anymore is mistaken. Before 1973, most countries had exchange rates that were supposed to be fixed as well. But that did not prevent changes in the value of currencies. The difference is that instead of having
small daily moves in the currency value, a sudden and large change in rates occurs when a currency becomes clearly over- or under-valued. It is practically impossible for a currency value to be unchanged relative to other currencies over time: as inflation and competitiveness in one country changes relative to other nations, the value of its currency will ultimately have to adjust.

Also, a currency may be pegged against one international currency but if that international unit moves in value so docs the home currency. We do not automatically get fixed exchange rates against other currencies even though our unit is now pegged to the US dollar. In fact, because of the recent weakness in the dollar, since pegging the ringgit to the dollar on 2 September, it has depreciated 17 per cent against the yen, 6.5 per cent against the Singaporean dollar and is also down against most other currencies. If the US dollar continues to weaken, our government will have to decide whether to make a change in the ringgit/dollar exchange rate or to allow the ringgit to continue depreciating against other currencies.

The present policy does not protect the value of the ringgit across the board. Even against the dollar, a fixed exchange rate policy does not mean that sudden relatively large changes cannot occur. That said, the current stability in the ringgit/dollar exchange rate allows interest rates to be pushed down. But will that help in producing an economic recovery?

**Budget deficit manageable**

Much has been made of the government increasing spending to push up the recovery. Although various figures have been given for different construction/infrastructure projects, in fact total government spending budgeted for the coming year (operating and development expenditure combined) is actually 2 per cent lower than the estimate for 1998. The government's revenue is falling, projected to decline 14 per cent in 1999. Taxes are down because companies are making less profits and unemployment is rising. The government could have chosen to cut its own spending a lot more to maintain a Budget surplus. This was indeed Anwar's strategy as Finance Minister: he initially announced a 2 per cent cut in government spending in the Budget last October and then a further 18 per cent cut in December.

Because of the fairly large decline in government revenue, there will be a Budget deficit. In absolute terms it seems large: RM9.6 billion this year and RM16.1 billion estimated for 1999. But as a percentage of GNP, or total national income per year, it is only 3.5 per cent and 6 per cent respectively which is manageable. It is like a person borrowing around 5 per cent of his annual income in a year when his income is low. Doing that for even a few years is possible - so long as the total debt of the government does not snowball into a much higher figure. That would necessarily mean either higher interest rates - the government's borrowing needs competing with that of the private sector and thus pushing up rates; or it could lead to very high inflation - if the government prints money to finance the growing deficit.

**Private demand still weak**

Although the government is seeking to maintain its total spending, the question is whether the private sector will hold up. This is crucial - but also the area of greatest uncertainty. There appears little need for private investment. Most sectors of the economy simply have too much capacity. There are too many hotels around the country and particularly in Kuala Lumpur. Motor companies are producing at 35 per cent of capacity because of the slump in sales. Electricity demand is almost flat but new capacity is coming onstream next year (planned earlier) which will mean excess capacity in the power sector of 65 per cent. There are too many mobile phone operators - demonstrated by the fact that now all, except Telekom, are losing money; many will scale back their expansion plans. On the external front, the cycle for electronics is turning down which is not positive for a sector that accounts for 54 per cent of our
total exports. There will not be much investment to build new capacity in this sector either.

The political situation does not help. If demonstrations continue and the Anwar case is protracted, the question of stability of the government comes to the fore. Previously, support for the PM was widespread; there was a designated successor; and a strong showing by the government in elections was a certainty. Now none of these hold. These are uncertainties that long-term investors would rather not face.

Weak private investment in itself will be a drag on the recovery. There is less demand to set up factories, buy equipment etc. It also means that not many new jobs will be created. As some firms in businesses that are declining close down, fewer jobs will be available for those laid off and for the young population coming into the working age group. Rising unemployment will undermine confidence and also prevent much of a pick-up in spending, which is a key driver of the economy.

In the Budget, the government expects private investment and consumption each to be relatively unchanged (up 0.2 per cent) in 1999. Given the overall environment, this seems mere hope.

The Budget expects the economy to grow by 1 per cent in 1999. The latest figures, however, show an acceleration in the decline of the economy: in the first quarter of 1998, GDP (or total national output) fell 2.8 per cent from a year back, in the second quarter it fell 6.8 per cent and for the third quarter the decline was 8.6 per cent. Assuming some improvement in the final quarter, for all of 1998, the economy would have shrunk by 7-8 per cent (compared with the 5 per cent contraction that the government estimated in the recent October Budget).

Next year is not likely to see as great a contraction, but going for a small positive growth may turn out to be too optimistic.

**Investment must lead recovery**

What will allow the economy to show a real recovery? Ultimately, it has to be private investment. It is this which generates jobs and, if in the right sectors, results in exports. But private investment is projected to fall 38 per cent this year. To pick-up, investors have to be confident that no major political upheaval is on the cards; they need to be confident about the economic policies in place; they need to see potential markets in which they can sell their products.

Do our economic policies encourage investment? By developing infrastructure, the government seeks to eliminate logistical bottlenecks. The capital controls are designed not to affect trade and investment in the real sector (as opposed to financial investment in the money and stock markets). Capital controls in the short-term may be the right policy. It provides some relief from high interest rates that were choking companies and threatening to bankrupt even firms that would be viable in normal times. The problem, however, is that behind capital controls, the government is seeking to help some companies that have made bad investments and should, by normal market forces, be wound up.

**Let bad capital go**

If Sime Bank has been badly mismanaged, then it should close down and shareholders lose their capital. Trying to save some of the shareholders (in this case, KUB has been guaranteed a payment that is 6.7x that of Sime Darby even though its stake is half that of Sime), means that the tab goes to the government (in this case Bank Negara) i.e. ultimately all Malaysians are paying for the mistakes of the management of this bank. When the government gives up future tax revenues as it will for PLUS by the rescue plan proposed for Renong, again the government, i.e. the people, are footing the bill for bad business decisions.

Certainly these organisations are large and if they go bankrupt there will be serious implications. But the damage control should be designed to help viable organisations, not to prop up the mismanaged ones. Banks that have lent to these organisations may have to take losses but then should raise new capital so that they can go back and concentrate on profitable new loans rather than giving out more loans to firms that
belong in the graveyard. Employees in these firms may have to look for new jobs - but an economy creates more jobs when it is lean and has less distortions, not when it supports cripples in the business world who cannot survive on their own.

Exchange controls cause distortions. These may be worth bearing in the short-term for some stability. But the longer they are in place, the greater the distortions that build up and the more difficult it is for us to remove the controls. Business people become used to artificially low interest rates and are not able to face interest rates that would otherwise prevail. Exchange rate pressure builds up and results ultimately in large changes. Foreign portfolio capital is choked out of the stockmarket which makes equities a more difficult source to raise financing for Malaysian companies. The controls are like morphine - all right for medicinal purposes in small doses and for a short-period, but we must make sure we do not get addicted or we will ultimately, as a nation, become unfit to compete in world markets.

Politics will affect the economy

The main problem for the economy right now is politics. Will Anwar be found guilty even though the former head of the police’s Special Branch himself had written to the Prime Minister expressing the view that the allegations against his deputy were baseless and appear to have been part of a conspiracy? If Anwar is acquitted, will other charges be thrown against him? What will the impact be on the leadership of UMNO which has already kicked him out, not just from his Number Two position but also from the party itself, purportedly because he is “morally unfit”? How would Anwar’s supporters react to the decision? What changes may come with UMNO elections and general elections both due within the next 18 months? With such uncertainties, Malaysians will be cautious in making big investments, like buying houses. Foreigners will be cautious about setting up immobile factories.

Politics necessarily affects the economy - which itself will impact politics. Political uncertainty will probably remain until General Elections are out of the way to determine the future direction of our country. Thus, a real economic recovery appears at least one year off.

Fundamentals sound

Our savings rate is high: 40 per cent of Gross National Product, or national income, is saved which allows for a high rate of investment. That investment must be channeled productively - not for projects like the tallest building, or the longest bridge, or the biggest dam. These may satisfy the egos of the leaders but provide little for the ordinary person. The added expenditure just to make sure something is the biggest is a waste of resources. Hubris because of twelve years of strong economic growth led the nation into projects that made no economic sense.

We are rich in resources. Our population is young and comparatively well-educated. Our industrialisation drive is well in gear and as the economy moves further from agriculture to high-tech manufacturing and value-added services, the people will prosper. The picture has looked bleak before, but we have recovered each time. We will recover again. How fast that happens depends on how quickly we let go of business cripples and on whether we pursue sound macro-economic policies. Crucially, it depends on confidence being restored so that we have a political system where dissent, grievances and political opponents are treated with justice and where serious opposition does not lead to chaos.

Malaysia has terrific infrastructure; but relative to our Executive, the main institutions of our polity have no fibre. We have amended our Companies Act many times, but the Internal Security Act and the Official Secrets Act remain, preventing free speech and open discussion. Our main national media are comparable to those in certain politically backward African and Eastern European countries. Our development as a political entity has lagged significantly behind our economic progress over the last twenty years. What is the price we now have to pay for this?
Outrage over gross violations

We, the members of Aliran, gathering in Penang on 22 November 1998, for the 22nd Annual General Meeting, are outraged over the gross violations of justice we have witnessed in our country in recent months.

First, we are shocked by revelations of the brutality inflicted on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim while detained under the ISA. Such violence inflicted on the former deputy Prime Minister bodes ill for all other ordinary Malaysians. We demand the findings of the investigation team appointed by the government, the report of which is now in the hands of the Attorney-General, be made public immediately.

Second, we are extremely concerned over the recent conduct of the Police Force and allegations of police brutality which threaten to undermine the credibility of the Force as guardians of our laws.

Apart from the beating-up of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, complaints include:

- fatal police shootings of three men and two women, including a woman in her eighth month of pregnancy, on October 2, 1998 at Taman Sungei Besi Indah, Kuala Lumpur;
- fatal police shootings of six persons on October 3, 1998 at Tumpat, Kelantan;
- charges of police brutality inflicted upon various Malaysians who were involved in peaceful demonstrations on several occasions as on 17 and 24 October, 1998 and/or during the arrest and detention of these individuals; and
- inhumane tactics of "turning over" and "neutralising" adopted by the police to deal with suspects and detainees, some details of which have been recently revealed by top police officers in chilling accounts in court proceedings.

We, therefore, demand that a Royal Commission of Enquiry be set up to probe the conduct of the Police Force.

The findings of this Commission of Enquiry should be made public so that appropriate action can be taken against those - directly and indirectly - guilty of these assaults, shootings, psychological torture, and abuse of power generally.

Third, we continue to note the biased behaviour of the Attorney-General and his practice of selective prosecution which has resulted, among others, in the incarceration of Kota Melaka Member of Parliament and Opposition DAP Youth leader YB Lim Guan Eng, for committing the "crime" of highlighting the plight of an elderly grandmother and her granddaughter, a minor, following the alleged rape of the latter by the then UMNO Youth leader, who was also UMNO Vice President and Chief Minister of Melaka state. Despite testimonies in Court by the victim that she had sexual relations with the UMNO leader, the latter has not been brought to trial.

A signature campaign to the Yang di Pertuan Agong calling for the pardon of YB Lim Guan Eng has received tremendous public support. We call upon the authorities to heed this call by the Malaysian people, and to right this wrong immediately.

Fourth, we are alarmed at the recent disregard for the due process of law and the erosion of the independence of the Judiciary. It must be ensured that those brought to trial are given ample access to their lawyers, to necessary documents and materials, and time to prepare their defence. We further demand that these trials be fair and open, and presided by judges of impeccable credentials.

Fifth, we protest the manner in which the media has conducted itself recently. Their reports have been one-sided and they have allowed themselves to be used as
propaganda mouthpieces of the government. We demand that the media perform its role responsibly and with integrity, and to be fair and truthful in its reporting of events and opinions.

Sixth, we wish to reiterate that it is a constitutional right of all Malaysians to express their opinions, to assemble peacefully and to associate freely without being subjected to any kind of kind of violence or harassment by the authorities.

Seventh, we deplore the recent development of persons being arrested at assemblies, and being denied access to legal representation at remand hearings. We reiterate the right to legal representation as guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and emphasise that natural justice requires this guarantee must apply to all stages of legal proceedings including remand hearings.

Eight, we reiterate our opposition to the ISA and call for its abolition immediately; and

Finally, this assembly of Aliran members hereby declares its support for the movement for justice and freedom, for transparent and responsible government, for due process and the rule of law, for reform, to which Malaysians from all walks of life and occupations, from all ethnic groups and religions have rallied.

Specifically, we announce our intention to join both the coalitions, the Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat (Gagasan) and the Majlis Gerakan Keadilan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerak).
Poised to Recover - Again

Once again, we are told that economic recovery is around the corner. Should we believe it this time?

by Ram

After the economy shrank by 8.6 per cent in July-September, is the worst behind us? Possibly, but the national media and the authorities do not appear to be fully confident. How else does one explain that on releasing the fall in Gross Domestic Product in the third quarter - the worst ever recorded in our country's history - the headlines of the papers did not give the GDP figure but rather proclaimed we are "Poised for recovery" (New Sunday Times, 29 November 1998)?

We have been told by the media and the politicians that economic recovery is around the corner since the data began to show we were in a recession. Prior to that, at the end of last year, we were told that there would be no recession. If poor economic numbers now have to be glossed as showing recovery, one wonders how much economic hoodwinking is really going on.

Malaysia does, however, have a recovery strategy that has become clear since September: introduce exchange controls and refloat the economy. The policy might work - at least to the extent of stemming the economic contraction. The main question is whether it provides the environment for sustainable long-term growth.

The odds for the policy's success are not helped by the way the government is implementing the strategy. Bailing out companies that are close to bankruptcy primarily because individuals involved are close to the government does not help us become a leaner economic entity ready to grow again. Double-speak by the national media - that bad news is

Continued on page 34