PEOPLE'S POET
Usman Awang (1929-2001)
The People's Poet

by Dr Syed Husin Ali

Usman Awang looms very tall in any conversation, writing or study on modern Malay literature. Also very well-known as Tongkat Warrant, he used about a dozen nom-de-plumes to write poems, dramas, literary criticism and even a series of essays on Malay courtesy (budi bahasa), especially in the earlier part of his career. But almost all of his outstanding poems were written under Tongkat Warrant, while his views on Malay courtesy were usually expressed, most appropriately, under the pseudonym Manis.

Usman is popularly considered, and most justifiably too, as perhaps the best poet in the Malay language. Most important, he is accepted without question as a people’s poet. Writing since 1955, Usman did not produce a very large corpus of poetry, only about
Malaysia mourns the passing of Usman Awang, the people’s poet. In this issue, we feature tributes by Dr Syed Husin Ali and Amir Muhammad. They speak of his immense contribution not only to Malaysian literature but to society as a whole.

Dr Wong Soak Koon takes another look at several of Usman’s well-known poems, highlighting his careful selection of details and images. She describes the poet’s life-long concern for justice and fairplay and his empathy for the suffering of the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. Take time to appreciate these poems reproduced inside.

The other focus of this issue of AM is the proposed Third Link for Penang. We present a series of articles arguing that a more comprehensive and sustainable transport policy must be developed for Penang.

Ganesh Rasagam gives us 10 reasons why the Third Link is not needed. We also report on what several Penangites have to say. Anil Netto warns that Penang is already turning into a huge expanse of tar and concrete. He asks: Where is the transparency in the preparation of feasibility studies and the EIA report? Have the people been consulted? Finally, we reproduce a memorandum to the authorities from a newly established network called STOP (Sustainable Transport Options for Penang). We hope that you will support this endeavour.

We wish all readers Selamat Hari Raya, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and belated Deepavali greetings too! Let us celebrate our differences, but let us also remember those detained under the ISA.
200 of them. But the man, his personality, his poetry and his ideas have a much deeper and wider influence than that number would suggest. Many of his poems are simple, clear, oftentimes romantic, and just beautiful. He was a master at weaving words into striking phrases, sentences and verses that are of exceptional classical beauty and sometimes appear to be nostalgic and even escapist.

Although the forms of Usman's aesthetic creations are strongly traditional, yet in content they express many ideas and ideals that are very modern. Usman was deeply against feudal and colonial domination, which in his view strangles freedom and progress. Particularly in the early part of his career he strongly opposed poverty, which he saw as the product of exploitation; and he deeply empathised with the desire and attempts to alleviate the conditions of the disadvantaged and the marginalised. He was against class, ethnic and gender discrimination, and in his own artistic way he always fought for equality, inter-social harmony and national unity. He was against war and always longed for universal peace. All of his emotions and ideas on these matters are effectively expressed in his writings, not just his poetry.

**Duri Dan Api**

In two cases, Usman combined both poetry and action. The first was when, together with Said Zahari and Tajuddin Kahar, Usman led a long strike to defend Utusan Publications from being taken over by the ruling political party then. During the strike Usman was productive in writing poems about their struggle. The most well known among them is “Duri dan Api”, a title which he used for one of his anthologies. After more than a hundred days, the strike was defeated and almost all the striking staff lost their jobs. Said was detained in Singapore for 17 years.

Secondly, Usman was very supportive of the Palestinian struggle for liberation. He formed and led the Malaysia-Palestine Friendship Association. He was invited to a Palestinian conference led by none other than Yasser Arafat. There he recited his poem in honour of the Palestinian struggle, “Salam Benua”, a title also used for another of his poetry collections.

Because of the ideas expressed in many of his poems, Usman was considered and even branded as a leftist. But Usman was never involved directly with party politics, although he was very politically conscious. Indirectly he was very close to leftist politicians like Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Haji Muhammad (Pak Sako) and Lim Chin Siong. He was even supportive of them as well as the parties that they led, like the Partai Rakyat (in Malaya then) and Barisan Sosialis (in Singapore). In fact, for a long time, until his health affected his creative activities, he even acted unofficially as editorial advisor of many of the PRM's publications. But Usman did not reserve his kind help only to his leftist political friends. He was always ready and willing to extend a helping hand to anybody who sought it, including those in or close to government, especially the young burning with aspirations of becoming a famous writer like him.

Usman’s compatriots, young and old alike, loved most of his poems. In the fifties, not long after Usman’s works appeared in publication, a wave of interest developed, especially in schools and among students, to hold public declamations of Malay poetry. It later spread far and wide to all kinds of literary competitions and cultural functions. Usman’s poems, such as “Bunga Popi” and “Pak Utih” became prominent features in such declamations. The wave subsided in the seventies and eighties, when there was more emphasis laid on materialistic economic development.

But in the nineties it was revived. Recently, when a government-controlled television featured poetry reading before its prime news time, the first poem recited to inaugurate this short programme was by Usman. It was recited by another well-known poet-novelist and also national literary laureate, A. Samad Said, who regards Usman as one of his earlier mentors. There is no doubt that Usman is not only a people’s poet, but also a very popular one. No wonder, a number of his poems have been translated into almost a dozen foreign languages, including English, Russian, Chinese and Arabic.

As a person Usman was sweet, gentle, sensitive, humorous, kind, hospitable and yet sometimes firm to the point of being recalcitrant. All kinds of people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, from school children to senior ambassadors, loved to meet and befriend him. And Usman was ever ready to receive and entertain them. He had the help of a most wonderful wife, Hasnah Din, whose delicious cuisine was al-
ways a great joy to their guests.

In fact they also had the patience to entertain some stragglers, relatives or friends, who came to stay much longer in their hospitable home. I stayed with them for nearly a year when I was an “unemployed and floating” graduate. So too with poet-artist Latiff Mohidin, some time later. In 1974, when the police were seeking to arrest some students, Hishamudin Rais, Yunus Ali and others sought refuge with Tongkat and Kak Senah, as they were often affectionately referred to. They extended their generosity even when they were facing financial difficulties.

Synthesising The Good

Like his poetry, Usman’s personality embodied both tradition and modernity. He was traditional but not conservative, modern but not westernised. He seemed to have succeeded in synthesising the good in both. His life and his outlook seems to have been influenced by three main factors, namely, his early background, his immersion into the lower strata of Singapore society, and his close interactions with his colleagues, especially in Utusan Melayu.

He was born within a poor rural family in Sedili, near Kota Tinggi, Johor. When still a teenager and during his early twenties, he served as a forced labourer under Japanese military, and also as an office boy and a policeman under British colonial rule. He knew exactly what poverty and the struggle to live really meant.

When he worked in Singapore, he was immersed into the predominantly proletarian Malay society there. He became one with their desire and attempts, as a minority group, to survive colonialism and struggle for freedom and progress. In Utusan Melayu, where he worked and interacted with many, particularly A. Samad Ismail, who were involved in the fight for independence and social justice through that well-known newspaper, Usman matured as a man, an intellectual and a literary figure. There is no doubt that, when his economic life improved a great deal during his stay in Kuala Lumpur, Usman was not as actively involved with left politics, which anyhow had declined in the eighties and nineties. But he remained committed to his former ideas and ideals.

I know that some of his friends were very disappointed when Usman wrote and read a poem in praise of Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1995. But at that time, he and many of his former leftist friends too, were enthused by Mahathir for adopting apparently a firm position against neo-colonialism and for taking up the just cause of Palestine. Mahathir was echoing forty years too late what the left had fought for, and for which many were accused of mouthing so-called pro-Communist slogans and as a result some were jailed under the ISA. In this poem, Usman praised Mahathir for his rather progressive stand on certain international issues. Actually, long before this, Usman had also written poems dedicated to Ahmad Boestamam, Hasnul Hadi. Said Zahari and Dr M.K Rajakumar, following their detention without trial under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA). There is nothing special in Usman’s praise for Mahathir.

A Wonderful Human Being

Aliran joins the nation in mourning the passing of Usman Awang, the renowned poet and novelist who stood out as a giant among Malaysia’s literary figures.

Usman was a great patriot and a wonderful human being. His sense of humanity transcended ethnic considerations. In a society where interethnic friendship too often remains an ideal rather than reality, he was a consistent and true friend of all communities.

His writings always reflected deep and sincere concerns for the common man. He will be remembered not just for his literary achievements but as a ‘poet of the people’.

We in Aliran have a special reason for missing him. Usman served as a member of Aliran’s Trust Board for a number of years beginning when the Board was established in 1985.

May God shower him with His blessings.

Aliran Executive Committee
29 November 2001
Usman’s Last Poems

JENTAYU YANG LUKA (Untuk Wan Azizah)

Tiba-tiba dia bangkit
Dengan kelembutan yang tetap sopan
Berdiri di barisan paling hadapan
Sebagai pahlawan keadilan

Lama dulu wajahnya tersembunyi
Di belakang pemimpin berani sang suami
Mengintip dengan mata kecilnya
Segala tingkah dan senyuman pura-pura
Si pengampu yang bermuka dua
Si penyembah yang berjiwa hamba
Si pengemis segenggam laba

Dia adalah jentayu yang luka
Terbang mengepak menyonsong gumpalan awan
Mencabar dunia yang semakin kejam.

SAUDARA ANWAR IBRAHIM
(Selamat Hari Lahir)

Palu telah dijatuhkan
Lama sebelum tanganmu terikat ke belakang
Kau gegar aras kayangan
Kekuasaan yang mula tergoncang

Sekali tanganmu terancung ke udara
Sejuta teriakan menyambutnya
Sejuta gelombang gema menyahutnya

Demi sumpah perjuangan
Demi maruah keadilan
Tabah dan gagah
Tidak pernah menyerah.

When Anwar Ibrahim was sacked as DPM and Deputy President of UMNO, Usman was dumb-founded. He immediately visited Anwar to express his deepest concern and sympathy. He planned to compile an anthology of poems in honour of Anwar. Actually there had been a long and special relationship between the poet and the politician. When Usman was recovering from his bypass surgery, Anwar and Wan Azizah visited him. Usman arranged to take a group photograph of his family with them. For a long time the photograph of the group decorated the lounge in his house. When Usman became less mobile, he transferred the photograph to his own bedroom.

Usman was concerned that his deteriorating health and the slow response from fellow poets were delaying his project. Anyhow, with his determination and the help of Prof Muhammad Haji Salleh, another national literary laureate, and others, Usman managed to produce, under his and S.S. Dino’s editorship, an anthology called Dari Derita Bangsa (From the Sufferings of a Nation). It contains works from 21 prominent local poets. The most significant thing is that the anthology is closed by two poems by Usman, “Jentayu Yang Luka” (Wounded Phoenix), dedicated to Wan Azizah, and “Saudara Anwar Ibrahim”, for the occasion of his birthday.

In them Usman expressed his candid support for their struggle to establish justice, freedom and truth. They were his last poems. I know they came from the very depth of Usman’s sincere heart.
Rereading Usman's Poems

A lifelong concern for Justice and Fairplay

by Dr Wong Soak Koon

It is sad that very often we are impelled to reread a poet’s works because he is no longer with us, when the best accolade one can give a writer is to read his creations, enjoy them as well as critique them while he is with us and can give us fresh feedback. In rereading some of Usman Awang’s words, I was first drawn to a paragraph in his acceptance speech when he was awarded the “Anugerah Sastera Negara” (National Literary Award) in 1983, which reads:

Such is the case that when I have attained half a century, I am almost inundated, by all sorts of honours which are suddenly heaped upon me (dikejutkan oleh berbagai-bagai penghormatan yang bagaikan tiba-tiba bertimpa datangnya). Many odd questions arise. Have I done something wrong? Have I erred? Have I ceased to be the voice of the poor and the oppressed? Or, is it because I have, not only high blood pressure, but problems with my heart, that it is felt that something ought to be given to me before the blood stops flowing and the heart stops beating?

So much of the man is conveyed in these few lines. Foremost is an unrelentingly honest self-scrutiny which prevents him from simply bathing in the glow of yet another accolade. His word bertimpa even connotes a sense of of the burden and weight of these numerous honours. The questions he asked himself reveal a keen sense of the danger of public honour eroding private integrity. Can and will a Sasterawan Negara (National Laureate) continue to speak out against the authorities in the cause of justice and fairness or will he become another alat-alat negara (a tool of the state)? With his characteristic wit, he then refers to his own mortality and in so doing, may have reminded the more sensitive among his listeners in the august Banquet Hall of Parliament House that death levels all, the honoured and the unsung, the powerful and the powerless.

Usman Awang’s life-long concern for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised is found not only in his poems but in his short stories, essays and drama as well as his novel. Some of his closest friends may feel that he was a socialist at heart but it is unnecessary to attach a label to a concern for social justice that was culled from lived experiences and not from a political manifesto or party politics. Usman Awang’s “politics” were born of a deep empathy for the suffering of a poor farmer like Pak Utih, or a rebel in the jungle awaiting violent death, or an ice-cream seller hawking his wares in the heart of a busy metropolis. In fact the idealism and, in some poems, the romantic sentimentality, is the very opposite of the hardened practicality which must guide politicians, government and opposition alike.

A master of the well-selected detail and the sharpest metaphor, Usman Awang continues the “protest” tradition which, for some, began in the Sejarah Melayu, or Malay Annals, where injustice was not passively endured by the rakyat. In clever language usage (innuendoes and sarcastms), in subtle acts of defiance or outright accusations (e.g. the peasant women who protested loudly when their cooked rice was stolen by members of the defeated King’s retinue after the fall of Malacca), the people in The Malay Annals, aristocratic or common folk, indict injustice.
In the oft-recited poem, *Pak Utih*, (Father Utih, 1954) Usman Awang uses simple language to expose unfulfilled promises of “freedom” under the newly-independent nation state. *Pak Utih* still waits for better medical care while he pays the medicine man (or *Pak Dukun*) from the meagre store he has earned by the sweat of his brow. The juxtaposition of the rural citizenry with those in towns who too readily wave their hands as leaders pass in their limousines thematises the poet’s recurrent concern with the rural-urban divide. Banquets, feasting are activities of urban, bourgeois citizens who have forgotten the contribution of the peasant (*petani yang berjasa*), and thus do not care to know of his suffering.

An independent nation with such uncaring leaders and citizens is really directionless beneath its surface progress and development. The final line: “Where are the leaders going in their limousines?” aptly sums up the general lack of a political will to effect change for the likes of *Pak Utih*. No wonder then that 20 years later in 1974 when Usman Awang wrote *Pak Utih* (2), *Pak Utih* is in a worse state with his land mortgaged, his grandchildren, very likely, destined for the lock-up, either because of their own criminality or, more likely, because of their agitation for reform as a younger generation impatient for justice so long denied. The poem ends poignantly with the images of death and decay as the starving grandchildren die from feeding on the *ubi gadung*, but there is an ominous warning of future unrest in the final lines:

Now and then in the still of the night from the hill-top on the jungle fringe a voice comes chanting:

dandle high dandle low
the *parang* has been sharpened
once you’ve set to have a bath
let the water really flow.

(*alang-alang mandi biar sampai basah*)

The patience of the Malay peasants may no longer work to constrain their wrath and a song to lull children becomes a rallying cry to action in the fight for justice.

Rereading Usman Awang’s *Bunga Popi*, 1955 (*Poppies*) in this season of violence and war as the war-mongers fan emotions in America and other places and the blood of both the innocent and combatants in places like Palestine and Afghanistan colour the soil, we are reminded of the horrors unleashed by men:

From blood, from pus that rots in the soil from skeletons that have lost their lives the result of war maniacs who kill love, the red flowers bloom beautifully, requesting to be adored.

The poppies, so bright and beautiful, are the emblems of war, soil enriched by human blood and pus.

In *Salam Benua*, 1970, (“Greetings to the Continent”), Usman Awang’s ability to transcend political and ethnic boundaries so as to respond to a common humanity resonates like a clarion call to us to ask important questions. Who gains from the division, the boundaries erected? Who dictates the borders of the so-called new world order? With characteristic insight, he says:

they rob us with their laws
sending bullets wrapped in dollars forcing us to choose and choose we must there is no other way.

“Bullets wrapped in dollars” is an arresting image pointing to the fact that “war” can also be waged, away from battlefields, in Stock Exchanges, in the neo-colonialism of foreign aid. And to combat this subservience to the Big Powers of the world, some defy even their own national leaders who have capitulated. These defiant ones are themselves propelled into violence having “chosen guns and bullets.” And so, divisions remain as violence begats violence and “little children sling on their weapons.” The poem nonetheless ends on a note of hope, however slim, as the poetic voice greets his fellow men with a vision of a world without visa, pass-
Usman Awang’s views on the role of the intellectual or the literate person in societies where many are still illiterate centres on the role of the public intellectual. The intellectual must immerse himself in the daily lives of the poor, the oppressed, rural folk and not simply enjoy the bourgeois comforts of an urban milieu. (See Peranan Intelektual or The Role of the Intellectual). All too often, the bourgeois’ intellectual can be co-opted and so becomes complacent or even indifferent. Usman Awang repeatedly counsels them to experience in person the hardship of the oppressed, the poor and allow their five senses, mind and heart to learn lessons not learnt in the universities. The reference to learning from the poor, the oppressed is very important for it necessitates humility; we must realise that our book-learning, our myriad economic theories are not the only answers. In speaking of the writer’s movement, Angkatan’50 (The 50’s Group), for example he says:

We of the Angkatan’50 do not have a wide and robust understanding of the many ills in our society. And we must acknowledge that what we have thus far articulated about the people’s suffering has come from our own viewpoint, from the angle of vision of the middle-class.

This brief survey cannot hope to do justice to the rich legacy Usman Awang leaves us but we hope that it will encourage people to read his works if they have not done so or to reread them. But above all, Usman Awang’s life-long concern for justice, fairplay and for the lot of the oppressed must continue to energize us into action. That would be the best “monument” we can erect to honour him.

Father Utih

I

He has one wife - whom he embraces until death five children who want to eat everyday an old hut where an inherited tale is hanging a piece of barren land to cultivate.

The skin of his hands is taut and calloused accustomed to any amount of sweat O Father Utih, the worthy peasant.

But malaria comes hunting them even though he offers a million prayers and Mother Utih calls the village medicine man for magic formulas, curses repeatedly chanted.

The medicine man with his reward goes home with money and a pullet tied together.

II

In towns the leaders keep shouting of elections and the people’s freedom of thousand-fold prosperity in a sovereign state a golden bridge of prosperity into the world hereafter.

When victory brightly shines the leaders in cars move forward, their chests thrust forward O! the beloved subjects wave their hands.

Everywhere there are banquets and festivities delicious roast chicken is served chicken from the village promised prosperity.

Father Utih still waits in prayer where are the leaders going in their limousines?

1954 (Translated by Adibah Amin)
**Poppies**

From blood, from pus that rots in the soil,
from skeletons that have lost their lives,
snatched by weapons,
the result of war maniacs who kill love,
the red flowers bloom beautifully, requesting to be adored.

Those who live on are remnants of life, full of sufferings,
wizened, bent, deformed, maimed and blind,
war in retrospect is full of horrors;
they remember now, in bitterness, in solitude.

Others lost children, husbands and sweethearts,
lost their sources of support, their livelihood,
they live in starvation,
thousands widowed, thousands disappointed,
thousands tormented;
millions of orphans live on, and beg.

The war maniacs have killed all love!
war raged and found profit in colonial lands!
war raged and killed babies in their cradles!
war raged, and destroyed cultural values

Poppies are the flowers of fallen soldiers,
flowers drenched red with blood, full of horrors,
we hate war, full of killing!
we cry for a never-ending peace!

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**Greetings To The Continent**

I
They separate us
the passports visas frontiers all names for barriers
they rob us with their laws
sending bullets wrapped in dollars
forcing us to choose
and choose we must
there is no other way

II
Friend, you have chosen guns and bullets
many leaders prefer their dollars
for this you must soak your clothes
red grass, red river
children’s weeping
the blood of the exploited

III
You squeeze cactus and grind stones
to make food and drink
girls toil decorated in dust
little children sling on their weapons
you darken the sky with exploding pipelines
others sing in prisons
for the freedom of Palestine

IV
We strive in drying rice fields
daring peasants have begun to clear the virgin jungle
small beginnings in a cloudlike calmness
a calmness that nips us in the bud
we the few are still learning
from all your experiences,
and our own

we shall consolidate the May eclipse
at the true target
of this archipelago

V
Greetings
without visa
passport
golf
colour
to humanity, people,
of all continents.

1955 (Translated by Adibah Amin) 1970 (Translated by Muhammed Hj Salleh)
Death Of A Patriot
by Amir Muhammed

With the passing of Usman Awang, Malaysia is left with one less person who knows what matters. He is one of the very few Malaysian writers whose appeal could cut across racial and cultural barriers, and he maintained right to the end the spirit of questioning those in power. (“spirit of exposing social injustice” - The Star)

Several of his poems, plays and short stories are comfortably enshrined in the collective imagination of two generations of Malaysians. Equally important is the image of the man himself, whose integrity, humility and open-heartedness have served as inspiration to many.

He once recounted an early experience that served as a guiding principle for the rest of his life. During the Japanese Occupation he was a forced labourer for the invaders before managing to escape with the help of a Tamil clerk, who hid him in his house. The clerk’s wife told him, “Treat this as your own house, Usman. We are all the same. Regardless of race, we all have the same red blood. People are divided between the rich and the poor, the bad and the good.”

As a policeman during the Emergency, he was compelled to arrest many people but later said, “I don’t know why they were caught. They seemed to us to be good people, teachers, shopkeepers, workers. It was only gradually that I started to learn the truth about the political situation, detentions, police action and so on.” Another formative experience was when he was assigned to guard a political congress; listening to the left-wing nationalist leaders like Burhanuddin Helmy, Shamsiah Fakeh and Ahmad Boestamam were invaluable in shaping his social conscience.

War and poverty had cut short his formal education at Standard Six but his immersion in the university of life - as policeman, journalist, editor, and activist - made sure that his works were grounded in the social verities of their time. His early poems such as the anti-war “Bunga Popi” (1955) burned with a commitment to universal humanity and a hatred of brutality and discrimination. His “Pak Utih” (1954) is the ballad of a neglected farmer that ends:

Pak Utih masih menanti dengan doa,
Bapak-bapak pergi ke mana di mobil besar?

He wrote a second poem called “Pak Utih” in 1974 which underscored the fact that independence from our colo-
Tiba-tiba Pak Utih pandai menulis
Ditulisnya huruf-huruf sebesar batang kelapa:
I-N-F-L-A-S-I

In his later poems, the undoubted strength of his convictions became tinged with irony and satire instead of mere righteousness. “Bagaimana Kalau”, “Benarkah Ketam Mengajar Anaknya Berjalan Betul?” and “Surat dari Masyarakat Burung Kepada Datuk Bandar”, all written in 1979, are brilliant socio-political critiques cloaked in fun and mocking laughter, although his language remained as supple and unpretentious as ever.

Not all his poetry revolved around the theme of social injustice. “Kekasih” (1971), with its sensuous metaphors and seductive rhythms, remains one of the greatest expressions of romantic love in the language; its popularity is proven by the fact that it has been set to song several times.

Although best-known as a poet, he did make some important contributions to other genres. His groundbreaking verse-play “Matinya Seorang Pahlawan” (1961) helped to popularise the idea of 15th century Malaccan warrior Hang Jebat as the real hero in his fight against Hang Tuah. Jebat was recast as a fierce idealist who valued truth and friendship above feudal allegiance to an unjust king:

Raja adil raja disembah
Raja tak adil raja disanggah!

The theme so captured the public imagination that “Matinya Seorang Pahlawan” has become one of the most performed of local plays. His musical “Uda Dan Dara” (1972), which is due to be restaged in a big way next year, is not just a love story but a socialist protest against class barriers and capitalist exploitation.

A handful of his short stories will also survive as testaments to his dramatic acumen and moral rigour. “Sebuah Khemah Didirikan” (1961) commemorates the Utusan Melayu strike when journalists from that newspaper were trying valiantly to save it from political interference. In its depiction of the lonely struggle of maintaining integrity and self-worth against the lure of easy money, it is one of the finest short stories written in this country. Equally powerful is “Matinya Seorang Perempuan” (1959), in which the murder of a woman becomes the catalyst for a boy to realise just how dangerous his politician father is.

He was a man imbued by principles of justice and equality but he knew how to have fun. Pictures of him from his early days show a striking dandy, and anecdotes abound of his romantic pursuits. His appetite for life included in it an antipathy for the corrupt and exploitative - in other words, people who would be most likely to reduce the quality of that life.

He was a fierce defender of the Malay language and wrote “Keranda 152” (1967) to commemorate the occasion in which language activists protested against the continual marginalisation of Bahasa Malaysia, but he was no ethnocentric bigot. His poem “Sahabatku” (1983), dedicated to his friend Dr. M. K. Rajakumar, contained his vision of a united nation:

Bilakah semua warga negara mendapat hak layanan dan keadilan yang sama
Dikenali dengan satu rupa nama: Bangsa Malaysia?

It’s no accident that among the eight men who have been awarded the title of Sasterawan Negara (National Laureate), his is easily the most widely-read and recognized among non-Malays. It was wonderful to see artists from so many language streams pay tribute to him at Salam Benua, an event organised in 1998 by the privately-owned Actors Studio, which is most commonly associated with English-language theatre.

Even Usman’s tenure as editor in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in the 1970s is fondly remembered as a time when the institution was open to, and encouraging of, participation from writers and cultural figures from all races. The official notion of cultural space became narrower and more exclusionary after he left. The cultural bureaucrats of today should perhaps read deeply into the closing stanza of his “Salam Benua” (1970):

Salam tanpa visa
pasport
golf
warna
kemanusiaan rakyat
seluruh benua.

Although ill health reduced his creative output to a trickle in the last de-
A radically censored/“edited” version of this piece appeared on page 3 of The Star on 30 November 2001 where even phrases like “the lonely struggle of maintaining integrity and self-worth against the lure of easy money” were deleted. Any phrase suggesting that the authorities can be questioned was similarly snipped. The phrases deleted are shown in italics.

We reproduce this piece both as a tribute to Usman Awang’s courage and, ironically, as an illustration of the kind of “editing”/self-censorship practised by the mainstream media.

Usman Awang - a good writer with a few great works, a lover of truth and life, a scourge of the false and the rapacious - is emphatically a credit to the burgeoning Malaysian race that he helped to create. %

Following Usman Awang’s death, some of the government-controlled media have been repeatedly showing clippings of Usman with Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, which were taken during a function organised by Utusan Melayu.

Two years ago Zainuddin Mydin who was then Chief Editor of Utusan Melayu group organised a poetry reading function apparently to honour Usman Awang.

According to Syed Husin Ali, Usman told him that Zainuddin persistently persuaded him to attend the function. Usman gave all kinds of excuse so as not to go - his health, his inability to walk up steps and to sit long through such occasions. But Zainuddin was insistent and he promised Usman to take all measures necessary to make him comfortable. Being the magnanimous person he was, Usman did not have the heart or strength to ignore the pleas, even from a person he was not terribly easy with.

To Usman’s surprise, Mahathir also attended that function. Usman was equally surprised that Utusan Publications, of all things, considered it appropriate to take it upon themselves to proclaim him as Seniman Agung (Great Artist). He was given RM5,000, a sum too small compared with such a high-sounding title, which was ceremoniously handed over by the Prime Minister.

It so happened that during that time Mahathir was feeling the strain of the implied attacks by national literary laureate, Datuk Shahnon Ahmad, through his notorious novel Shit. Both Mahathir and Zainuddin appeared to be looking for the support of the highly respected Usman.

According to Syed Husin again, after that unfortunate occasion Usman told him that he felt very sad because he thought he was “deceived” (terpedaya). He never imagined that anyone could take advantage of him in order to help a leader whose political credibility was under question then. Much later, Usman gave an interview to a young artist friend to express his sadness.
hen asked recently how he thought the judiciary had performed since he became the Chief Justice of Malaysia late last year, Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah replied that it was not for him to say but for the people to judge. To lawyers, who are in the best position to judge, the answer is plain. During that short period, confidence in the judiciary is beginning to be restored.

Judges, who had previously been sidelined by the former Chief Justice of Malaysia late last year, Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah replied that it was not for him to say but for the people to judge. To lawyers, who are in the best position to judge, the answer is plain. During that short period, confidence in the judiciary is beginning to be restored.

What has brought about this noticeable change? As Tan Sri Dzaiddin himself said after his appointment, it is a question of leadership. Unlike his predecessor, Tan Sri Dzaiddin leaves each tier in the hierarchy of the judiciary to operate independently of each other with the head of each to be responsible for the judges under him, but with Tan Sri Dzaiddin in overall charge.

His call to his judges was to be independent and to decide according to the evidence and facts. He was not one to order or request his judges to decide in a particular way, as seemed to have been done by his predecessor according to the revelation by Justice Mohamad Kamil in his recent judgment in an election petition. In the atmosphere created by Tan Sri Dzaiddin, judges were seen to perform their function with more confidence. The decisions of the Federal Court in the Zainur case, of the High Court at Shah Alam in the habeas corpus case and of Justice Mohamad Kamil in the election petition are cases in point. Each is supported by the facts and the law of the case. Then there were the decisions of the Court of Appeal which have put back some sense of proportion into the award of damages in defamation cases.

These developments were welcomed by the Bar. The judiciary was seen to be on the road to full recovery. But the question lingered in the minds of lawyers as to whether this change for the better was going to be allowed to con-
continue. An indication that the judi-
ciary was coming under the close
scrutiny of the Executive was
given when senior ministers of the
Government publicly criticised
Justice Mohamad Kamil for dis-
closing in his judgment referred
to above, that his superior had
given him a directive over the tel-
ephone to strike off the election pe-
titutions he was to try.

Initially, the Government’s posi-
tion on this alleged interference
with the judge’s exercise of judi-
cial discretion was one of concern
because of the adverse effect it
would have on the independence
of the judiciary. The Minister in
charge of law in the Prime Minis-
ter’s Department, Datuk Dr Rais
Yatim, thought that the disclo-
sure, having been made by the
judge in his judgment, must be
taken seriously by all parties, and
he himself would take necessary
measures to ensure that the dis-
closure was investigated. Ex-
pressing the hope that such inci-
dents would not recur, he said:
“The country is known for its ju-
dicial independence and we must
make it clear that nobody should
violate our judicial system.”

After Tan Sri Dzaiddin’s pre-
decessor voluntarily owned up that
he was the person who had tele-
phoned the judge, but denied
that he had given him the alleged
directive, the Government’s stand
on the issue was seen to shift. The
Prime Minister took the judge to
task saying that he had, by mak-
ing the disclosure, “tarnished” the
image of the court by dragging
it into public controversy and
“now we have a problem trusting
the court”. Particular emphasis
was given by the Prime Minister
to statements the judge had made
in the judgment expressing his
frustrations over a personal mat-
ter involving his child. The
Deputy Prime Minister seemed
to be unhappy with the way judg-
es were going about improv-
ing the image of the judiciary. His
advice was that members of the
judiciary could by all means im-
prove their image, but they should
not go beyond their responsibil-
ties to prove a point to the Gov-
ernment and the people. What
that means was not clear. What
was clear was that a scenario like
that which preceded the events of
1988 and which resulted in the in-
tegrity of and confidence in the
judiciary being undermined, was
being created. As in 1988 when
the Prime Minister said that it
was up to the head of the judici-
ary (then Tun Mohd Salleh Abas)
to admonish judges (in that case
for making public their political
views), it was publicly announced
by Datuk Dr Rais Yatim that the
Government was willing to give
extra power to Tan Sri Dzaiddin
to discipline judges following re-
cent “judicial quips” made by
judges when they made their de-
cisions. After all, it was the Chief
Justice who “holds the whip. You
can’t whip from outside.”

In the light of these statements by
Ministers of the Government, the
future direction of the judiciary is
once again becoming uncertain.
Whether the judiciary was to pro-
ceed on the road to full recovery
would depend on who was to be
appointed to fill a vacancy in a
senior judicial post created by the
retirement of Justice Lamin bin
Mohd Yunus, the former President
of the Court of Appeal, in March
this year. The logical choice for the
Court of Appeal post was Tan Sri
Wan Adnan bin Ismail, the Chief
Judge, Malaya. That seemed to be
dictated by both seniority and
merit. If that happened, the ques-
tion of interest was who was to
succeed him as Chief Judge, Ma-
laya? If the image of the judiciary
was to continue to improve, the
successor must be one who satis-
fied generally accepted criteria for
the appointment of judges. These
require the most senior to be the
first choice unless another is more
suitable by reason of:—

- merit,
- legal ability (in the sense of
  professional qualification, ex-

Where appointments and promotions are made in disregard of
acceptable criteria it is not the confidence of the public in the
judiciary alone that is undermined. Good judges, too, will feel no
pride in being part of a judicial system where neither merit nor
seniority is recognised.
experience, knowledge, character)

- character (by reference to honesty, integrity, open-mindedness, diligence, common sense, temperament)

- personal skills (in communication, language, analytical, mental agility, leadership skills, ability to accept criticism)

- Awareness of what is required of a judge (meaning that he must be apolitical, secular in approach, fearless and uninfluenced by personal difficulties or views, and independent)

On these criteria, there could be no dispute about the most suitable candidate. The obvious choice was Justice Malik Ahmad. He was the senior most Federal Court judge after Justice Wan Adnan, and his merit as a judge was beyond question.

**Alarm Bells**

But when the appointments were announced on 6 September, 2001, it was Justice Ahmad Fairuz who was named as the new Chief Judge, Malaya, to succeed Justice Wan Adnan who became the new President of the Court of Appeal.

Many will recall Justice Ahmad Fairuz’s involvement in the Court of Appeal decisions in the contempt cases of Murray Hiebert and Zainur Zakaria, the latter of which was recently resoundingly reversed by the Federal Court. Justice Fairuz also presided over the coram which heard and dismissed the Malaysian Bar’s appeal against the decision of the High Court to restrain the holding of an extraordinary general meeting of the Bar (convened to discuss allegations of impropriety against the then Chief Justice and a sitting judge of the Court of Appeal). The Court of Appeal had dismissed the Malaysian Bar’s appeal on, amongst others, the ground that the Federal Constitution prohibited any discussion on the conduct of judges except in Parliament. While these cases were decided on facts peculiar to themselves, the principles involved were universal, particularly those pertaining to fundamental liberties. That Justice Ahmad Fairuz has been chosen over Justice Abdul Malik in spite of the implications of those decisions is worrying.

Many will also remember the highly controversial decision of Justice Ahmad Fairuz in the election petition case brought against Wee Choo Keong in 1995, where, after holding Wee (then a member of the DAP) to have been disqualified from standing as a candidate in the Parliamentary election, had returned the losing candidate as a Member of Parliament without requiring the process of holding a by-election to be gone through.

With the appointment of the new Chief Judge, Malaya, the apprehension felt by many members of the Bar that the improvement in the judiciary was to be short-lived appears justified. Where appointments and promotions are made in disregard of acceptable criteria it is not the confidence of the public in the judiciary alone that is undermined. Good judges, too, will feel no pride in being part of a judicial system where neither merit nor seniority is recognised.

It looks as if the much-welcomed decisions of the courts given since Tan Sri Dzaiddin became Chief Justice have rung alarm bells that the judiciary is becoming too independent. We may be in the process of seeing history repeating itself. The country will be the loser once again if it does. It is indeed a great pity. Instead of going forward, we have now taken one step back.

Now that Tan Sri Dzaiddin has “decentralised” the judiciary, the responsibility for the performance of the High Court in Malaya will fall squarely on Justice Ahmad Fairuz’s shoulders. Just as Tan Sri Dzaiddin has been subjected to close scrutiny by the Bar since his appointment as Chief Justice, Justice Ahmad Fairuz will equally be. Having witnessed the recent improvement in the performance of the High Courts of Malaya, any change indicating that the judiciary may be retrogressing to the pre-Dzaiddin days will be immediately noticeable.

It is hoped that that will not happen.

Raja Aziz is a former chairman of the Bar Council Malaysia. This article first appeared in Insaf the journal of the Bar, in September 2001.
Aliran is utterly dismayed and disappointed with the appointment of Datuk Abdul Gani Patail as the new Attorney-General succeeding the current holder of the post, Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid. It is an appointment that is not likely to enhance the prestige of our system of justice or encourage public confidence in the fairness of prosecution.

Abdul Gani comes with a dark cloud hanging over his head regarding his controversial conduct concerning the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Nallakaruppan cases, as alleged by Manjit Singh in his hand-delivered letter to then Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah on 12 October 1998.

According to this letter (which is on public record and easily available and reproduced in *Aliran Monthly*, Vol 21(6) pp 7-8), it was alleged that Abdul Gani was involved in a questionable attempt to elicit evidence against Anwar Ibrahim in a way that would prejudice his case. It is suggested that Abdul Gani had wanted Nallakaruppan to bear false witness against Anwar Ibrahim.

A totally-shattered Manjit agonised in his letter:

“I was shocked that Dato Gani even had the gall to make such a suggestion to me. He obviously does not know me. I do not approve of such extraction of evidence against ANYONE, not even, or should I say least of all, a beggar picked up off the streets. A man’s life, or for that matter even his freedom, is not a tool for prosecution agencies to use as a bargaining chip. No jurisprudential system will condone such an act.

“IT is blackmail and extortion of the highest culpability and my greatest disappointment is that a once independent agency that I worked with some 25 years ago and of which I have such satisfying memories has descended to such levels in the creation and collection of evidence. To use the death threat as a means to the extortion of evidence that is otherwise not there (why else make such a demand?) It is unforgivable and surely must in itself be a crime, leave alone a sin, of the greatest magnitude. Whether his means justify the end that he seeks are matters that Dato Gani will have to wrestle with within his own conscience.”

Further, the Federal Court in the Zainur Zakaria case never cleared or exonerated Gani and in fact raised very serious concerns about prosecutorial propriety.

His appointment begs the question: What is integrity all about? Does it amount to anything in our system of justice? A person without a tainted character would be the best person qualified to hold this high position. Such a person would bring respect to his office and win the confidence of the public.

Justice itself has fallen victim with this appointment. Whatever hope there may have been for change has been brutally reversed. Sadly, it is back to the bad old days. This appointment has starkly emphasised the government’s complete contempt for public opinion and for our shared values in the notion of fairness and justice.

P. Ramakrishnan
President
20 November 2001

*JUSTICE*

Appointment Of New AG

Aliran Utterly Dismayed

Justice itself has fallen victim with this appointment.
“Liberty of thought means liberty to communicate one’s thought.”

Salvador de Madariage
1886 - 1973
Spanish diplomat, writer, critic

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AM 2001: 21(10)
1. Will the Third Link reduce urban traffic congestion and travel delay?

NO!

Traffic modeling shows that with both the Penang and Butterworth Outer Ring Roads in place together with the Third Link, traffic congestion and travel delay will be much worse than at present. New roads, especially bridges, attract more traffic that in the case of Penang will be mainly single occupancy private cars and motorcycles. The road networks at the exit and entry points to the Third Link will not have adequate traffic dispersal capacity to cope with this increase in vehicles as shown by the experience in the Klang Valley and in many parts of the world.

2. Will the Third Link improve the quality of the urban environment?

NO!

There will be increased air and noise pollution from vehicular emissions and more residential neighbourhoods will be exposed to traffic generated pollution. There will be significant impact on the coastal zones, the marine ecology and the port from the sediments and waste generated by the seabed construction and land reclamation activity. The widening of access roads and construction of new overhead passes will lead to visual intrusion and community severance in established residential districts.

3. Will the Third Link improve travel safety and comfort?

NO!

An increase in private vehicle usage normally results in higher rates of deaths and serious injury from road accidents especially for the more vulnerable road users such as motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. Delays due to traffic congestion at the entry and exit points and increased exposure to noise and air pollution will increase driver frustration and have an adverse health impact. The average length of driving trips will increase resulting in a higher risk of road accidents.

4. Will the Third Link increase public transport usage?

NO!

The Third Link will significantly increase private vehicle ownership and use and will further erode public transport usage.

5. Will the Third Link facilitate sustainable landuse?

NO!
The Third Link will intensify urban sprawl, generate longer, more expensive and inefficient commuting trips and establish extensive, unsustainable urban landuse and travel patterns. The pattern of urbanization will be based on a car centric road network that will require substantial land allocations for road and parking space at the expense of coastal community recreational facilities, parks and open spaces.

6. Will the Third Link enhance quality of life for the people of Penang?

NO!

With increased traffic congestion, pollution, destruction of natural coastal and marine eco-systems, urban sprawl and stress, there will be an obvious decline in the quality of life for both residents and visitors to Penang.

7. Is the Third Link economically feasible?

It is unlikely that the firm that gets the toll concession will enjoy a positive return on investment based on revenue from grossly inflated traffic volume projections. However, this simplistic economic evaluation will not include the external environmental and social costs of the project that will be borne by the people of Penang.

Japanese loans are normally tied to Japanese consultants, contractors and equipment suppliers who will only leave the crumbs to the locals. Ironically, at a time when Japan has decided to switch focus away from roads and bridges to investments in public transport systems, Japanese firms are actively pursuing these projects overseas to be built using Japanese funds and suppliers so that more Japanese cars and motorcycles can be sold.

8. Is the Third Link financially sustainable?

NO!

The estimated cost of RM 2.3 billion appears to be unrealistically low considering the complexities of undersea tunneling and the fact that the relatively simpler Penang Bridge cost almost RM 1.0 billion around 20 years ago! In any case, the next two generations of Malaysians will be indebted to the Japanese for this loan. Given the notoriety of the Japanese financial system there is more than enough reason to worry about whether the financial viability of this project has been properly analysed.

9. Will the Third Link enhance Penang’s economic competitiveness?

NO!

The usual arguments of reducing travel times and delay costs do not hold in this case as traffic congestion will still be a major problem. On top of that, land freight costs will increase, as both bridge tolls will inevitably need to be raised substantially to pay for the Third Link. As for tourism, the traffic congestion, urban sprawl and decline in quality of life will certainly erode the attractiveness of Penang. It is rather unlikely that tourists will arrive in droves to visit the “Titanic” in the middle of the Third Link!

10. Is the Third Link the only or best option?

NO!

Optimising the efficient use of the Penang bridge through widening and implementation of intelligent traffic management systems, expanding the ferry service and introducing an integrated lightrail transit (LRT) based public transport system are far more sustainable and cost effective solutions in the long-term.

Ganesh Rasagam is a traffic planner based in Penang.
How The Ferry Service Was Scaled Down

The old collapsed (see arrow) terminal that was never repaired

**NO. OF FERRIES AND TOTAL CAPACITY DURING PEAK HOURS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Early 70s</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Ferry *</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>DD</td>
<td>VP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferries Available</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferries running during peak hrs (A)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Ferry capacity (vehicles) (B)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of trips/hour (approx) (C)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vehicles ferried/hr (AxBxC)</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vehicles ferried/hr (all ferries)</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  Type DD : Double-decker vehicular ferries - Lower deck: average 33 vehicles. Upper deck: average 32 vehicles
  Note : Vehicles excludes motorcycles and bicycles

**FERRIES IN USE THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Normal Days (no. of ferries)</th>
<th>Weekends &amp; Public Holiday (no. of ferries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.30 am - 10 pm</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 pm - 12 midnight</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnight - 1 am</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 am - 6.30 am</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- An additional ferry terminal for double-decker vehicles ferries was built in the mid-1970s.
- The Penang Bridge was completed in 1985. The ferry service was at its peak then.
- In the late 1980s, the old terminal collapsed and was never rebuilt. The old passenger-vehicle ferries were discarded while the top-decks of the vehicular ferries were hastily converted to carry passengers. (picture above)
- By end 2001, there were 3 vehicular / passenger ferries and 2 double decker vehicular ferries in service.
In the 1970s, when I joined the Penang Port Commission, there were seven vehicle-cum-passenger ferries (of which about six were in service) that docked at the old terminal. These were Pulau Pinang, P. Langkawi, P. Aman, P. Tioman, P. Lumut, P. Redang, and P. Pangkor.

Just before I joined in 1975, a new terminal was built (on both the mainland and the island). At first, there were three double-decker vehicular ferries - Pulau Talang-Talang, P. Rawa, and P. Undan (built in Hong Kong) - using this new terminal. Three more of these ferries were acquired later: P. Rimau, Pulau Kapas, and P. Angsa (built in Pasir Gudang).

The ferries used to come at a frequency of 5-10 minutes. It was operating dengan lancar (very smoothly).

So at the time of the collapse of the old terminal, there were six vehicle-cum-passenger ferries (out of seven available) and five double-decker vehicular ferries (out of six available) in service.

When the old terminal collapsed in the late 1980s, the seven old vehicle-cum-passenger ferries were disposed of. The six newer double-decker vehicular ferries were converted to vehicle-cum-passenger ferries.

The number of ferries in service dropped from about 11 to 5 after the collapse of the old terminal.

Currently, out of the five ferries operating daily, only two operate after 10 p.m. and just one from 1 a.m. until the early morning. On weekends and public holidays, there is usually an extra ferry in service from 10 pm until midnight.

The long queues of vehicles at the ferries terminals are sometimes due to ferries being out of order. So you have these five ferries in service, and if one or two of them are out of order, the waiting time becomes longer. These ferries have been operating for more than 20 years, so I guess their engines are not at their best.

Some people still prefer using the ferries - much depends on where they are coming from and their ultimate destination.

There might be a need for a third link perhaps after five years or ten years. But I don’t think there is a need for a new link now. For now, you need to increase the number of ferries and rebuild the old terminal. I hear there are plans to bring on two new double-decker ferries later this year.

Improve the ferry service first and then assess the traffic situation to see if there is still a need for another link.

The third link is a waste of money. We need to improve the ferry services. A lot of people are put off by
the ferries now as they have to wait such a long time. They should bring back the (double-decker) vehicular ferries. If we were a rich country, building a Third Link wouldn’t matter – but we are not. The problem is the government is not listening to the people.

Guard, B’worth:

My friend, a retired teacher, thinks the third link will be good as a back-up just in case the Penang Bridge collapses. But to me, the Penang Bridge and the ferries are enough. Just improve the ferry service. A RM2 billion bridge-tunnel project is not necessary. We all know why they like these big contracts (rubs the tips of his thumb and index finger together).

Homemaker, B’worth:

I think Penang people will suffer if they have the Third Link. If the Third Link comes, then Penang will be flooded with cars-lah. At the moment, you just see those roads in Penang, peak hours, crawling here and there...They say Penang Bridge congested, congested,. But when they go over to Penang, that side so congested also. I think the ferries, they should expand-lah. They should do something to the ferries. But a lot of people are against the second bridge. Even the (traffic) police chief was saying that day, it’s no point building the Third Link when the roads there are not completed. The main thing is to complete every road facility, then only you think of the Third Link.

But I think the Third Link shouldn’t come up. Congestion. At the moment the Tanjong Tokong roads are so crowded already. Kedah people want to go there all, will flood that place. And the condominiums all coming up in Tanjong Bungah. They should stop building condominiums in Penang - too many already. Let the people come over the mainland and stay. They have the Penang Bridge and the ferries, they can just cross over.

Make better roads, tar the housing estate roads, I see the roads in Penang already worse, congested you know. Cannot-lah... So what do you think? The Third Link is not worth it ah? It’s not worth it. People will get more stressful on the other side.

Repair Shop-owner, B’worth:

Third Link? This one ah? (laughs) Ten years-lah (to complete). Not so fast-lah. It will take 10 years before you can see anything. Now you cannot (see anything). They haven’t started. It will take a few years...drag here, drag there...afterwards half way, they say the economy no good, then they stop again. I think 10 years above-lah.

I think they need it (a Third Link). The Bridge there quite jammed already. The government will do it. They have loan from Japan now....they can collect back (from tolls), some more they got lubang (an opportunity).

These politicians have lubang, some more the land they buy at a cheap price, after they sell at an expensive price, got lubang one-lah all these politicians; we all got no lubang only; we pay the toll only. Before we can start paying, they have already earned back the money.

I think next time they will change the ferries, they will change to small ferries like the ferries to Pulau Langkawi, can take just 100 passengers, small ones, so very fast - take 5 minutes to reach Penang. The old ferries remain as double decker but only all for vehicles, better-lah - efficiency.

You want to go to Penang, you just park your bike there and take the small ferry, faster-lah, 5 minutes you can reach Penang. The big ferries they should keep that just for cars.

Some more they can earn money. After give licence to this and that one...semua kawan dapat duit lah. Kita ta’ da lubang, we pay the toll only. ❄
It was only on June 1 that Works Minister Samy Vellu declared that the government was determined to push ahead with a RM2.3 billion northern link: a 9.2 km bridge-tunnel from Bagan Ajam on the mainland to Bagan Jermal on Penang Island. The decision, he said, was “final”. Obviously, not “final” enough. Within days of Samy Vellu’s announcement, all sorts of objections and counter-proposals surfaced - from the state’s traffic chief who was concerned about the traffic implications to politicians with vested interests in having the link near their constituencies.

The head of the Penang Port, for his part, said the port would be implementing a multi-million ringgit dangerous cargo terminal on a 50ha reclaimed site, just beside the proposed area of the northern link. It also had plans to dredge the channel to make it deeper – from the present 11.5 metres to 15 metres. The proposed northern bridge-tunnel would make such dredging work impossible.

Then came murmurs that a southern link might be more suitable. The Penang state government proposes a 20 km southern link - from Hujung Bukit on the mainland to Batu Maung on the Island, arguing that these areas were underdeveloped. So does the Penang Development Corporation, which has land banks in the south that it wants to develop. We are not quite sure how these land banks were acquired, how much was paid for them and whether the sellers received a fair price.

All these reservations and counterproposals make a mockery of the federal government’s feasibility study for the northern option, which - to put it mildly - has been found wanting and lacking in public participation and transparency. What kind of report is this? The firm that prepared the feasibility report also obviously failed to adequately consult all the relevant parties.

No Environmental Impact Assessment for the either the northern link or the southern link has so far been made public. So far, the debate in the media has been restricted to the choice of location for a new link - whether a northern link or southern link would be more appropriate. There has been little public discussion on whether the Third Link is really necessary in the first place. (The First Link is the ferry service while the Second Link is the 8.5 km-long Penang Bridge, completed in 1985.)

Samy Vellu’s northern option, about 8 km away from the ferry terminals, was to have been in the form of a 9.2-km bridge-tunnel. It would have started as a bridging until it reached two artificial islands before mid-channel on either side: these would have been the starting points of a mid-channel 2-km long tunnel that...
would allow shipping traffic to and from Penang’s ports to pass unhindered.

But this northern link appears to be history as the state government is now gung-ho about a longer southern link: a bridge without any tunnel.

But the lingering question remains: is a new link really necessary? Or is it merely to provide “jobs for the boys” - lucrative construction contracts for favoured firms?

Aliran categorically opposes the Third Link, whether it is in the north or in the south. Penang cannot afford more traffic congestion, which is what another road link to the island will lead to, choking the state’s already narrow, congested streets even further. Already, the vehicle density on Penang’s roads is higher than that of Singapore and Hong Kong.

Officials are talking about Third Link, but so far nobody has mentioned how much the proposed toll rate would be. Come on, give us an indication of the likely toll rate. Why the silence on this?

It is likely that the toll rate will be even more than the astronomical rates imposed for the much shorter Second Link between Johor and Singapore.

More than 15 years after the Penang Bridge was opened, commuters are still paying RM7 in bridge tolls for the ride from the mainland to the island.

The Penang Bridge, which provides easy access to the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zones and the Penang International Airport, complements the decades-old, neglected but still functional, still popular ferry service in the north linking Butterworth on the mainland to George Town on the island.

Certainly, the Penang Bridge is rapidly reaching its maximum carrying capacity, especially during peak hours. Traffic grinds to a standstill every time there is an accident on the bridge.

But much of the Penang Bridge’s traffic snarls could have been relieved had the ferry service not been neglected since the bridge’s completion in 1985. The frequency of the ferries has fallen sharply since then (see table).

Where Have All The Ferries Gone?

Only five out of six available ferries ply the channel now. When one or two of these ferries break down, commuters are left with only three or four ferries and not surprisingly, long queues of vehicles snake out of the terminals waiting up to an hour before boarding. All this is a far cry from the 11 ferries, including five double-decker vehicular ferries, operating in 1985, when the ferry service was at its peak, just before the Penang Bridge was completed.

In the late 1980s, the old ferry terminal on the mainland serving both passengers and vehicles collapsed and was never rebuilt. That terminal had operated side-by-side with the existing terminal, built in the mid-1970s.

The existing terminal used to cater to the five double-decker vehicular ferries that provided fast, efficient service. When the old terminal collapsed, these vehicular ferries were hastily converted to vehicular-cum-passenger ferries.

The original vehicular-cum-passenger ferries that once docked at the old terminal were gradually discarded, drastically reducing the total number of ferries operational and their overall vehicle-carrying capacity.

At present, cross-channel commuters pay 7-ringgit (1.8 dollars) in toll charges per car - the ferry toll was hiked to make it on par with the Penang Bridge toll - and toll is only collected on the mainland side. Once on the island, commuters can opt for either the Bridge or the ferry for the toll-free ride to the mainland.

More often than not, impatient commuters on both sides give the ferry service a miss - when they see the long queues outside the ferry terminals on both the island and the mainland - and head for the bridge.

Critics allege that the terminal was never rebuilt and the ferry service was scaled down so as to maximise toll collection on the new Penang Bridge. Port authorities, for their part, have argued that the ferries are outdated and running at a loss. It is likely, however, that the losses are due to the ferry terminals not being used to optimum capacity resulting in insufficient gross profits to cover fixed overheads.

Whatever the case, frustrated commuters have deserted the ferry service in droves. Not surprisingly, the rise in traffic on the Penang Bridge has surpassed even the planners’ expectations: the original toll booths proved to be grossly insufficient to cater to the expanding traffic volume and new toll booths had to be added.
Responding to the concerns over the environmental impact of the proposed Third Link, Works Minister Samy Vellu has said the government would go ahead with the project as it gave priority to commuters' convenience.

He said the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies had been conducted earlier and the findings were submitted to the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry before the design for the proposed link was drawn up. "There will be no adverse effects to the ecology system as we will take into account many aspects before construction work starts," he said.

But the state traffic police chief has warned that planned new ring roads on the island would have to be completed first before the new link is completed. This is to cater for an expected surge in car traffic pouring into the island, which is about half the size of Singapore.

Even establishment personalities involved in heritage conservation and the Penang Port have expressed reservations. Heritage activists are concerned about the impact of additional traffic on Penang's efforts to be listed as world heritage site.

It is a fact that the number of cars will rapidly fill up additional road space provided by the new roads and the proposed Third Link. One wonders if there will be an open tender in the selection of contractors if the Third Link is bulldozed through. In any case, the Third Link's final cost could well be more than the RM2.3 billion ringgit mentioned in press reports bearing in mind that the Penang Bridge (without any tunnel) cost RM850 million some 20 years ago.

### Possible Solutions

Penang doesn't need another road link for now and all that is needed is a less costly, urgent upgrade of the ferry service to immediately relieve congestion on the Penang Bridge. The authorities recently added two more dedicated vehicular ferries to their fleet, resulting in a dramatic drop in waiting time and shorter queues. Imagine if more such ferries are added! Congestion on the Penang Bridge would immediately vanish. So more ferries (which cost only RM14 million each) and terminals are desperately needed - but the authorities would rather spend billions on a massive new bridge rather than give the Penang Port the RM125 million it says it need to upgrade the ferry service.

Those with long memories may remember there were pledges to widen the Penang Bridge from two to three lanes each way, as was initially planned. The extra lane could have served as a dedicated bus lane.

In the long term, the state should be looking at more sustainable transport modes, including Light Rail Transit systems (on both the island and the mainland) with cross-channel links (high-speed passenger ferries, hovercraft, or even an LRT link). Constructing new ferries and running a vastly expanded ferry service would provide hundreds, even thousands of new jobs in Penang.

Sustainable transport options overland could include electric trams, trolley-buses, light rail trains, and monorails.

Meanwhile, non-motorised transport modes like cycling and walking should be extensively promoted. Pavements and traffic-free zones need to be expanded.

The key to avoiding congestion is an efficient integrated public transport - the approach should be to move people not vehicles. It would be even better if there could be thoughtful accessibility planning to reduce the need for people to commute long distances for work and leisure.

But before all this can happen, there has to be greater political will and coordination in improving public transport. It is vital to have a state-level public transport body to improve public transport in Penang.

One wonders whether the reluctance to improve public transport has anything to do with the government having one eye on the sales of Proton and Perodua cars, which could be jeopardised if more public transport alternatives are available. The huge road/bridge construction contracts and potentially lucrative toll collection are other factors that are likely to make governments less interested in sustainable transport.

But by failing to plan for affordable sustainable transport options, the government reveals its lack of concern for the quality of the people's everyday life. Such recklessness may one day come back to haunt us. But it might be too late by then for Penang. "The Pearl of the Orient" would have morphed into "The Parking Lot of the Orient."
We are an alliance of non-governmental organizations in Penang which share a concern over the lack of a comprehensive sustainable transport policy in the State including the suitability of the proposed Second Link to Penang. We are of the view that this new proposed link should be regarded as the 3rd link between the mainland and the island, given that the ferry service is the original first link.

We consist of the Consumers’ Association of Penang, Sahabat Alam Malaysia, Aliran, the Penang Heritage Trust, Sustainable Transport Environment Penang, Sustainable Independent Living and Access, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Penang Division), and the Malayan Trades Union Congress (Penang Division).

**Car Ownership Trends**

The JICA Urban Transport study in 1981 had projected the per capita vehicle ownership for Penang to be 6.1 persons per car and 5.7 persons per motorcycle by the year 2000. However, these levels were surpassed even before 1990 and ownership levels in Penang are comparable to developed countries with 3 persons per car. Thus, in the year 2000, Penang had 321 cars per 1000 persons compared to 96 for Singapore and 49 for Hong Kong.

**Vehicular Density**

While the total road length in the State increased by about 38% be-
between 1990 and 2000, the total registered vehicles in the State increased by 107%.

Vehicle density thus increased by 1.5 times, while the number of vehicles per 1000 persons almost doubled. Hence, the pace of road development in Penang is not keeping pace with the rapid growth of motor vehicles.

During 1991-2000, traffic volume on the major primary roads in the State increased by around 10% per year largely attributed to growth of private vehicles (cars and motorcycles).

**Accidents And Other Health Hazards**

An analysis of Penang’s road safety records shows that between 1991 and 2000, the rate of increase in road accidents (deaths and injuries), is significantly higher than the average for the entire country. The number of accidents per 10,000 persons in Penang is almost four times the national average in 2000.

The contribution of vehicle emissions to the overall air pollution load is also a major concern. Private cars, which constitute around 30% of the total number of vehicles, contribute more than 67% of the total emissions of particulates.

**Lack Of Integrated Transport Planning**

We are of the view that urban transport planning needs to be comprehensive and integrated instead of being ad hoc. It must take into consideration the roles of various modes (road/rail/water) and interchanges, the role of non-motorised transport and the management of environmental and social impacts. Its objective should be equitable and efficient access for the people, not only motorcars.

We firmly believe that the State requires a comprehensive sustainable transport policy that is fundamentally committed to public transport and discourages private motorized transport. Such a transport system must be economically, ecologically and socially sustainable.

**Concerns About The Third Link To Penang**

The purpose of the Third Link seems to be to solve the frequent gridlock of motor vehicles taking place on the present Penang Bridge.

We believe that:

a) This problem cannot be addressed by simply facilitating access for more private cars and vehicles on another Bridge when the problem is the mobility and access of people.

b) This solution also cannot be adopted without first considering its effect on the already serious traffic problems existing on Penang Island.

c) In view of its enormous cost, we believe that other options such as upgrading the ferry services or a rail link should also be considered.

d) Finally, in any proposed solution, the traffic congestion in the city and on Penang Bridge must be considered as part and parcel of the same problem.

**Transparency And Accountability**

In view of the Government’s commitment to transparency and accountability, we urge the Government to initiate public consultations on these issues. We also request that all the previous studies relating to Penang’s traffic problems and the feasibility of the ‘Third Link’ be open for public scrutiny and debate.

We look forward very much to being provided with these studies and reports so that we may understand better the rationale and basis for the proposed Third Link.

We record our deep regret over the statement by the Public Works Minister, Datuk Seri Samy Velu that public consultation is unnecessary as this is a Federal Government project. [The Star, 17/3/2000].

We trust that you will give this appeal your utmost consideration and would provide us with the information we have requested for. We also look forward to having a meaningful public consultation and dialogue with you in this regard.

We look forward to your urgent response.

S.M. Mohamed Idris
(for and behalf of S.T.O.P)
The state government’s plan for a New Gurney Drive promenade is just a red herring to divert attention away from the issue at hand. Does Penang really need more another link to allow more traffic to pour into the island? A “New Gurney Drive” will not be the same. The existing Gurney Drive - known for its sumptuous food-stalls and relaxed atmosphere - and Penang are almost synonymous. While it is arguable whether a new promenade farther out will capture the same charm, let us not forget why the existing historical Gurney Drive sea-front is endangered: to make way for feeder roads leading to the proposed bridge-tunnel link (the Third Link).

Indeed, the Third Link will create new arteries cutting across the island and along the sea fronts. The additional traffic from these new arteries will spill into George Town’s inner city area and other residential areas, further choking Penang’s already narrow streets. The state traffic chief has rightly pointed out that without additional roads on the island and mainland, the Third Link will add to Penang’s traffic woes. But if more roads are built, the additional traffic and pollution will destroy what’s left of Penang’s charm and dim George Town’s hopes of gaining recognition as a world heritage site. We demand that the EIA report be made public.

We maintain that another road link to the island is not necessary. Instead, we should be looking at ways to curb the volume of traffic and stop traffic pouring into the island, which has a limited carrying capacity. What we badly need is a light rail transit system supplemented by and integrated to an efficient bus service. This we do not have. Such an integrated system should cover the main commuter routes on the island and the mainland. If possible, there should be a train-link or high-speed ferry service across the channel connected to the LRT terminals on the island and the mainland much like Vancouver’s Sea Bus ferry service, which is linked to its Sky Train elevated rail service.

Where to find the money for an LRT system? Scrap the plans for the RM2.3 billion bridge-tunnel link as well as the Penang Outer Ring Road (PORR) and the Butterworth Outer Ring Road (BORR), which will likely cost a further couple of billion ringgit. Incidentally, how did the government arrived at the price tag of only RM2.3 billion when, to our knowledge, there has not yet been an open tender for the new link? The money saved from these projects can be used to build the LRT network.

Lessons have not yet been learnt from the last financial crisis. The government seems to indulging again in mega projects, the latest idea being a fancy new building to house the state assembly (the present building looks perfectly adequate and dignified) and all government departments. Funny how there is always a shortage of land for low-cost housing but not for such mega projects like this.

Give us faster, more frequent ferries and an LRT network and spare us more traffic, pollution and tolls. Penang has been known as the Pearl of the Orient. Don’t turn it into an Island of Misery. Please scrap the bridge-tunnel project.

We reiterate our call for the First Link - the ferry service - to be expanded as a short-term solution. Why has there been such a deafening silence from the government on the ferry service? Why can’t we have more modern, faster ferries for now? Is that too easy and too cheap a solution compared to the mega bucks it is willing to pump into the Third Link? Don’t tell us the ferries are not economically viable but a RM2.3 billion bridge-tunnel will be. And please tell us the proposed toll rate for this bridge-tunnel now so that the public can have a better idea what they are in for. Surely there would have been an assumed toll rate in the financial feasibility forecasts for the new link.

Aliran Executive Committee
7 August 2001
A new international order may not have emerged from the cauldron of 11 September, but it is not too early to discern the outlines of the emerging world.

September did not change everything: the map of the world, the global pattern of economic and military power, the relative distribution of democratic, semi-authoritarian and tyrannical states remains much the same. Many of the problems which are least susceptible to traditional forms of state control (the environment, migration, the drugs trade, Aids) long predated 11 September.

Yet this recognition of continuity downplays the degree to which the attacks on the US ‘homeland’ have reshaped, or promise to reshape, our world.

First, there has been a marked increase in the focus and assertion of United States power. The US was, prior to 11 September, the dominant world power in every significant index. Yet it was uncertain as to how to exert this, wavering between a multilateral approach, tenaciously pursued by the Clinton administration, and the unilateral - which is not the same as the isolationist - policy favoured by Bush. The signs of that unilateralism were evident enough in the first few months: rejection of Kyoto, stalling on OECD regulation of tax havens, sliding out of chemical warfare conventions, NMD, sneering at the UN, to name a few.

The events of 11 September have forced the Bush administration to reverse some of these policies and stall on others. But in two important ways there has been major change. Within the US, the crisis has produced a radical strengthening of the power of the President: no leader in US history, with the possible exception of Roosevelt in wartime, has had the control over Congress, his own party, the military establishment, and public opinion that Bush enjoys. Inept on his feet he may be, but the US President does know how to build a coalition and that is what he has done at executive and political levels.

At the same time the crisis has led much of the rest of the world to work more closely with the US. When the call for co-operation from Washington comes, it has proven hard to refuse. Here lies the second of the great changes brought about by 11 September: some US allies, notably Saudi Arabia, have moved further away, but the overall diplomatic balance sheet has been to America’s advantage.

Russia has, with its own benefits in mind, consolidated a strategic and political collaboration with Washington: it has given the green light to a temporary stationing of US forces in Central Asia, and is offering itself as a long-term partner in the energy market, an alternative to the unreliable Persian Gulf. China, too, to the alarm of some in the Middle East, who look to it as the only permanent member of the Security Council not to have a colonial past, joined the counter-terrorist campaign. Germany and Japan have, in some measure, sloughed off their post-1945 pacifism.

Against this, however, lies the third of the outcomes of 11 September, the consolidation, to a degree latent but not present before that date, of a global coalition of anti-US sentiment. Just as US liberal writers have talked in the 1990s of the importance for US dominance of ‘soft’ power - in media, language, lifestyle, technology - so the opposition to US power is forming above all in this domain.

This has highlighted a change in the nature of power in the modern world. The basis of much orthodox international relations
theory is the concept ‘balance of power’: this means not an equal distribution of power, but a self-correcting mechanism, whereby, if one state becomes too strong, others form a countervailing alliance.

This version of balance of power did not work in the period since the end of the Cold War: there was no countervailing bloc. Rather, everyone seemed to ‘bandwagon’, to join the US bloc and its associated international institutions like Nato and the WTO.

However, if states bandwagon, popular opinion does not necessarily follow. At the level of popular feeling, and not just in the Muslim world, a countervailing balance is taking shape. Hence the opposition of much of Latin America to support for the US campaign, widespread objections in East Asia and in, normally anti-Muslim, India.

These shifts in the distribution and character of power are compounded by changes in the management of the global economy; 11 September has depressed certain important sectors of the market - airlines, tourism, oil, insurance.

It has diffused a wider lack of confidence on the part of investors and consumers, accentuating the trend towards recession. It has pushed down global demand for oil - there is now surplus capacity. This has precipitated not only a fall in oil prices, but also led to a price war between OPEC and the main non-OPEC producers.

There is renewed concern to reduce dependence on oil from the Gulf - the site of two thirds of the world’s reserves, but now felt to be a region of enduring instability. Non-Gulf producers, notably Russia, the Caspian states and Venezuela, are pressing their case.

The Return Of The State

The most important economic shift is that, above all, 11 September has brought the state - and not least the US state - back into the management of the world economy: neo-liberal faith in the market, already frayed, has now been further eroded as governments promise to subsidise ailing sectors, use fiscal adjustment and lower interest rates to offset the crisis. One open question is how all this will affect the euro changeover next January: the stability pact is already under pressure, and George Bush is not likely to worry about what happens to this rival to the dollar.

Some of the changes that have become evident since 11 September were already incipient: the assertion of US power by Bush, the rhetoric of cultural conflict, a resiling from a commitment to universal standards on human rights, intervention by OECD states to offset an anticipated recession. Yet that date marks a rupture in modern history. It takes years to assess the consequences of major earthquakes: 11 September will be no exception. The broader seismic impact can, however, be discerned.

Source: The Sunday Observer, November 25, 2001

Fred Halliday is Professor of International Relations at the LSE. His new book ‘Two Hours That Shook the World: 11 September 2001, Causes and Consequences’ is published this week by Saqi Books, London.

Haven’t We Learnt A Thing?

Nip it in the bud, linger not a moment more,
Perchance it triggers off a major holocaust.
Hurl no longer, explosive cocktails,
Over demarcation lines of a fanatical few.

Stop the insane massacre, end the senseless slaughter
Of innocent lives snuffed out mercilessly
And of those embroiled in the dispute.

Dwellings that once were, are razed to ruins, reduced to ashes;
In the smithereens there’s no place to rest the weary head.

And you motley crowd of onlookers and insipid bystanders,
Show compassion with an unprejudiced mind; lend a helping hand.
Refrain from adding fuel to the fires of speculation,
Of unsubstantiated accusations, wild insinuations and propaganda.

Haven’t we learnt enough after two World Wars
And countless conflicts, the madness of it all?

Noel F. D’Oliveiro
I refer to Hamdan Mohammad’s letter on Kabir. For his information, Kabir, the 15th century uwahhid (believer in the unity of God) was a founding father of Sant Mat (Path of the Saints). The quote in Aliran Monthly that seems to have perturbed Hamdan is not to be taken literally. Kabir is reputed to have been an eclectic mystic who was intent on exposing the futility of the externalities of religious fervour. The quote is meant to illustrate the mystical awareness of the omnipresence of the Almighty. Should Hamdan be interested he could refer to Charlotte Vaudeville’s A Weaver Named Kabir (Oxford University Press, 1993 and 1997). Wasallam

Latif Kamaluddin,
School of Social Sciences, USM
via e-mail

Sipisi
Klang

I refer to Hamdan Mohamad’s e-mail, ‘Misleading Quote?’ You impress by printing it with a mute defence. I am so amused I cannot resist responding. Whoever Humayan Kabir was, I believe we are NOT to take his words literally. Read their meaning as a whole for it’s his way to say that God is ALL encompassing and is everywhere.

Would Humayan be so naive to say (and to believe) that the Muslim God lives in Mecca? It was just to show man’s narrow thinking. Did not he continue that ‘He who made the world lives not in a city made by hands?’ This should be self-explanatory!

Vivekananda called for an end to all superficial religious and sectarian differences. The Parliament of Religious gave him a standing ovation. He said,

‘Sectarianism, bigotry and its humble descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth with violence, drenched it with human blood, destroyed civilizations and sent whole nations into despair. Had it not been for such horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword and the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way

Monday, 11 September 1893. The first ever World Parliament of Religions welcomed representatives of all religions of the world to Chicago.

Amongst the delegates to this parliament was a young man who represented nothing and yet everything. He belonged to no sect, but India as a whole. He was the great Swami Vivekananda.

This was the first time this young Hindu monk spoke before such an assembly. He had prepared nothing, while other speakers read from written texts. Each of the other orators spoke of his God, of the God of his sect. Vivekananda alone spoke of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal Being, in The One.

Letters should be no more than 250 words and must include the writer’s name and address. Pseudonyms may be used. Send letters to: Editor, ALIRAN MONTHLY, 103, Medan Penaga, 11600 Penang, Malaysia or e-mail to: aliran_letters@hotmail.com Views expressed need not reflect those of Aliran.
to the same goal!”

It is indeed very sad that on 11 September 2001, the 108th anniversary of Vivekananda’s Chicago Address, the ‘horrible demons’ he referred to once again reared their ugly heads and demonstrated their handiwork on the New York World Trade Centre. In response to these inhumane attacks, another class of demons targeted innocent Muslims of America in the name of patriotism and revenge.

No superpower, however great, can end sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism. It is to the power and weapon of Love, to which Swami Vivekananda often alluded in his speeches, that the world needs to turn in order to end violence and terrorism.

K Puvirajan
Bukit Mertajam

As an *Aliran* subscriber, I would like to thank you all for your coverage of issues in Malaysia and your fight for justice and human rights. Recently I read news that some churches in Malaysia were burned. This is a very serious matter and I hope that *Aliran* will play its part again. And please act fast before things get worse. In the past, I read news of Indonesian Chinese being killed but sadly *Aliran* took a long time to publish news about them. I wish you all the best. I will continue be an *Aliran* subscriber.

Sean
via e-mail

**Media Owners And All That ...**

Wong Kok Keong’s article, ‘It Matters Who Owns the Media’, (AM, e1, 8) was well written and highlighted the idealist concept of ‘absolute objectivity’. By implication, it drew our attention to the realist concept of ‘relative objectivity’.

I agree that ownership of print and broadcast media is important because it greatly influenced the line or stance taken by journalists. In short, the owner’s agenda is writ large in any media organisation, ‘the needs of nation-building’ having no place to their operations. If those needs are addressed, their definition becomes the jealously guarded turf of the top politicians in the National Front.

It is well known among senior journalists that the corporate culture of *The New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and their associated dailies and periodicals is conformist, mainly because they are owned and controlled by UMNO.

Once, before Operasi Lalang in 1987, the corporate culture of *The Star* was somewhat creative because MCA which owned it wanted to moderate whatever excesses that UMNO at times reflected. Since then, MCA appears to have forgotten or failed to play that role.

As for the broadcast media, largely owned by the Government, its related agencies or parties closely linked to them, discerning Malaysians know the situation: the less said the better!

Hence, the print and broadcast media in Malaysia are little more than propaganda machines for the powers that be, or businesses that generate income for their owners.

Look, for instance, at the reporting in *The Star* of the ongoing MCA leadership crisis which centred on the party’s acquisition of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* against the popular will of the Chinese community. It illustrates the tendency of top management, in such situations, to ignore or even doctor the views of those opposed to their interests. Journalists operating under such conditions must abide by the decisions taken by these top managers to protect their own jobs.

This is lamentable. Malaysians should rightly expect to get a diet of relatively objective news at their breakfast table, not news tainted by sycophancy.

B.C. Tan
Penang

**Arson Attacks On Churches**

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B.C. Tan
Penang
Friends, when we last met a year ago, I was very elated. I really felt democracy was on the march. There were clear evidences for this jubilation.

The gathering at the Kamunting Detention Camp then had attracted more than 2000 active and spirited citizens.

The Kesas Highway gathering was another high point for democracy. In a fantastic show of defiance, tens of thousands turned up to demand for their rights.

Attendances at the various ceramahs was impressive.

There was at least a semblance of unity and cohesion in the Barisan Alternative.

But all these encouraging trends and signs have crumpled in the onslaught of the state.

While elsewhere, individuals who were fighting governments and nations for their rights were rightly or wrongly termed as terrorists, right here at home it is the state that has turned terrorist against the individuals. It is the state in this country that is terrorising activists who stand up for certain rights.

Beginning from April the state apparatus were used in a very high-handed fashion to arrest and detain critics and dissidents under the ISA without addusing a single shred of evidence to implicate these unfortunate activists. The BN has imputed a lot of unsubstantiated and violent activities to them to justify their arrests and incarceration. But those accused and locked away have been denied their fundamental right of defence. They were not accorded this natural justice.

To strengthen the BN’s argument for the continued existence and the use of the ISA, we were inundated with tales of Malaysian Mujahidin running wild with the intention of toppling the elected government through violent means.

Recently we even heard the ridiculous claim that this so-called Malaysian Mujahidin were planning to attack some American sailors. Again no evidence was produced.

Unfortunately for the Americans but fortunately for Mahathir, the September 11 tragedy had to happen as if to strengthen Mahathir’s hand - indeed it has strengthened his hand.

In a self-serving stand Mahathir now thumbs his nose at the Americans, claiming that he had been right all along in using the ISA in curbing violence and fighting terrorism. I’m sure he couldn’t contain himself when Congress passed some obnoxious laws to curtail freedom and invade personal privacy. But just because America passes these laws, it doesn’t turn the ISA into an acceptable and just piece of legislation. It is still immoral. Let’s not forget that.

If Mahathir harps on the fact that he still needs the ISA to contain violence, it is legitimate to ask how many people are there running around violently to overthrow his government? Have we witnessed any rioting in this country? Have we had any industrial strikes that threaten the well being of the nation in a long spell?

While he focuses the nation’s attention on a small minority who...
may pose a challenge to his political leadership by branding them as threatening the peace of the country, he cunningly takes away the rights of the majority.

People lose their rights, while he points an accusing finger at the minority as being culpable of causing mischief.

When he denies a political party a permit to hold a ceramah, he is not only crippling a political party activity, he is actually denying the majority of the people their right to listen to differing views.

When he restricts a political party’s publication only for its members, he is in fact denying the people’s right to information.

And when he lands hard on the few, he sends cold shivers to the many. this is why this year’s observance of Operation Lalang was such a subdued affair. The crowd wasn’t all that big; there were no fiery speeches or spirited chanting of slogans. They were not allowed anywhere near the camp but were stopped some 3km away from it.

And when they dispersed and went into shops for refreshments, 48 of them were picked up. I suppose they were picked for not rioting!

But the message is clear. Even if you are peaceful, they will go after you as long as there is any form of gathering that is seen as protest against the government. The intention is to intimidate and discourage the people from rallying around any cause.

It is unfortunate that there is no visible politics to counter Mahathir’s policies or offer an effective alternative. It is a shame and such a disappointment that the Barisan Alternative is in such shambles. DAP has dropped out. PAS with its unbending views on the Islamic State has disillusioned the vast majority of the non-Malays. The merger between KeADILan and PRM has been deliberately aborted. Some well-known personalities in the KeADILan are stepping down from the leadership. And the mad scramble for party posts is on which rather than strengthen KeADILan will weaken in.

It is in this perspective that we have to view our role in society. To expect political change through political parties - either from the ruling or opposition parties - is an impossible dream. They are only interested in positions and power.

Our role is all the more crucial. We must continue to do what we are doing with even more determination.

The educative role that we play through the Aliran Monthly will continue to focus on issues that are vital to us as a nation. The various concerns that need to be addressed will be given due attention.

We can only be effective when our readership expands and we are able to reach out even further. We need to talk about this later to formulate new strategies to achieve this.

Our citizen’s Health Initiative will continue to speak up for an effective and just healthcare for all.

Our Charter 2000 will struggle for a freer and fairer media so that the tainted image of journalism will be redeemed.

We will continue to oppose the 3rd link between the mainland and the island because it means more pollution, congestion and nightmare for those on the island.

We will not be cowed or broken by those who do not mean well for us. As long as there is a will, we will prevail.

I am amazed that we have survived 25 years, in spite of the oppression, in spite of the ISA, in spite of the printer problems, in spite of media blackout, in spite of growing old.

I have no doubt we will be around for the next 25 years - with or without me!

Nothing can deter us, as long as the spirit is willing, as long as our faith is strong, as long as our heart is throbbing.

It is said, “There is in this world no such force as the force of a man determined to rise. The human soul cannot be permanently chained.”

We will not be bought or bribed or appeased by Mahathir’s token gestures or proffered concessions. Our stand is clear.

Let me conclude by quoting Archbishop Desmond Tutu; who vividly illuminates this stand:

“I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights.”
Aliran is shocked at the absurdity of retired Court of Appeal president Tan Sri Lamin Yunus’ reasoning in responding to Raja Aziz Addruse’s remarks regarding the appointment of Justice Fairuz Sheik Abdul Halim as the new Chief Judge of Malaya.

Lamin had claimed that Raja Aziz’s view was “tantamount to criticising the ability or inability of the King to appoint a suitable person.”

He carries this ridiculous argument further by stating, “If such a criticism in public is allowed to pass, it simply means that the King’s integrity can be questioned in public.”

We are disturbed beyond belief that Lamin has shown such disrespect to law and logic. We are dumbfounded that he has forgotten his own ruling in the appointment of Judges of the High Court, of the Court of Appeal, and of the Federal Court, who “shall be appointed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, on the advice of the Prime Minister, after consulting the Conference of Rulers.” (Article 122B (i))

Lamin had stated on March 2, 2000: “The intention of the Article is clear i.e. the Yang di-Pertuan Agong must act on the advice of the Prime Minister.”

In other words, His Majesty does not choose the candidate or decide on the suitability of the candidate for appointment. The choosing and deciding is the prerogative of the Prime Minister. His Majesty merely fulfils a constitutional requirement and discharges a perfunctory duty that is required of him.

How can Lamin justify his contention that Raja Aziz’s view was “tantamount to criticising the ability or inability of the King to appoint a suitable person”? How can he even argue that the King’s integrity was being questioned? What is the basis? Where is the logic?

Lamin would have been honest and to the point if he had argued that Raja Aziz’s view questions the Prime Minister’s ability in choosing the right candidate and the PM’s wisdom in deciding the candidate’s suitability. In fact, this is what Raja Aziz’s view is tantamount to: It is a criticism directed at the Prime Minister. His Majesty is not part of the controversy or the cause of it.

One wonders whether Lamin was being mischievous in what appears to be an attempt to drag the good name of the His Majesty into this controversy by deliberately distorting Raja Aziz’s intention in highlighting a perceived injustice in the appointment of the new Chief Judge of Malaya.

What other inference could be drawn when one studies Lamin’s judgment of 2 March 2000 concerning Datuk Hj Moktar bin Hj Sidin’s eligibility to be part of a quorum to hear Dato’ Seri Anwar’s appeal.

Lamin referred to Clause (1A) of Article 40, which states:

“In the exercise of his functions under this Constitution of federal law, where the Yang di-Pertuan Agong is to act in accordance with advice, on advice, or after considering advice, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall accept and act in accordance with such advice.”

He then concluded, “Clearly therefore the Yang di-Pertuan Agong must act upon the advice of the Prime Minister. The advice envisaged by Article 40 (1A) is the direct advice given by the
Lamin further emphasised the prerogative of the Prime Minister which he contended must be binding. “So in the context of Article 122B (1) of the Constitution, where the Prime Minister has advised that a person be appointed a Judge..., legally the Prime Minister can insist that the appointment be proceeded with.”

It is therefore very clear that it is the Prime Minister who is responsible for causing a particular person to be appointed.

If Lamin had intended to defend the newly appointed Chief Judge of Malaya, he should have argued rationally and legally to justify this appointment and not pull a red herring to hit at Raja Aziz.

In the circumstances, it is in order to demand that Lamin apologises to His Majesty for unnecessarily dragging in his good name. He also owes an apology to Raja Aziz for imputing things that were clearly not meant to be.

P Ramakrishnan
President
13 November 2001

Rescind And Restore Koo's Honour

It was an asinine decision to replace the name of a national hero who had laid down his life for his country. It was an insensitive and unthinking decision which mocks the decision-makers and makes a mockery of honour and patriotism.

It was in recognition of his loyalty to country and duty that Tan Sri Koo Chong Kong was honoured by a grateful state for his services and sacrifices in combating the communist terrorists. What would have been a better tribute to the late Perak Police Chief than to perpetuate his memory by naming the road leading to the state police headquarters? This tribute was meant to be part of our history in living memory and inspire others to emulate this gallant example of service to country and duty.

The 24 councillors who decided to revoke Koo’s name and replace it with another name - which has no significance whatsoever - have shown no sense of history or displayed any notion of gratitude. By their thoughtless action they have sullied Koo’s name and slurred his honour and brought anguish to his family.

They have callously ignored the fact that the nation’s peace and prosperity enjoyed today is largely due to gallant people like Koo and others in the public force and the army who had sacrificed their lives in the true spirit of dedication and patriotism.

This insult to Koo’s memory honouring his valour and bravery, cannot be obviated by merely stating that the City Council’s road-naming committee “felt it was proper and suited current times” to rename the road.

Aliran would like to ask this road-naming committee whether it would condone or tolerate a decision by some road-naming committee to rename roads like Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Tun Razak, Jalan Tun Sambanthan and Jalan Tun H S Lee, in keeping with “the current times”? It is unthinkable. No one should even contemplate an idiotic idea like that!

It is only fitting that this asinine decision be rescinded and the name of Koo be restored to its rightful place and left there in perpetuity.

All road-naming committees must heed and be guided by this simple advice: Before you pull down the fence, find out why it was put up in the first place.

P. Ramakrishnan
President
27 November 2001
Herb Feith, 71, a leading Indonesianist, was killed in a traffic accident that occurred while he was on his way home from Monash University, Melbourne, on 14 November 2001. While crossing the railway lines, Herb was knocked down by a train.

Herb’s major works included *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (1962), which was based on his Cornell University PhD dissertation, and *Indonesian Political Thinking 1945-1965* (1970) which he co-edited with Lance Castles. He served in Monash University for over 30 years and for a while held the post of professor of politics, which he subsequently vacated to devote more time to research and writing. His students, many now distinguished Indonesians, included Harold Crouch (who previously taught in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), Ulf Sundhaussen, Krishna Sen, David Bourchier, Jim Schiller, Richard Tanter, the late Rex Mortimer, Ichlasul Amal and Dewi Anwar Fortuna.

When he retired, a major conference was held in Monash in 1992, bringing together Herb’s colleagues, friends and former students – a *Who’s Who* of Indonesians - from all over the world. The book *Democracy in Indonesia in the 1950s and 1990s* (1994) edited by David Bourchier and John Legge is a tribute to this outstanding scholar.

But Herb was always more than a scholar. He was the first Australian volunteer in Indonesia in 1951 and played an instrumental role in developing the Volunteer Graduate Scheme which sent Australian volunteers to Indonesia. A fore-runner to the US Peace Corps programme, this programme lives on today as the Australian Volunteers International which sends thousands of Australians to work in developing countries. In the 1990s, Herb and his wife Betty returned as volunteers to Indonesia after their retirement; for almost 10 years Herb served as Visiting Professor of Politics in Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta.

His love for Indonesia did not prevent him from criticizing Suharto’s *New Order*. Based on his study of contemporary Indonesia, he developed the notion of the *repressive-developmentalism regime*, which influenced the way many young Indonesians and Indonesians viewed the *New Order*. Herb was also very concerned with the *New Order’s* treatment of East Timor and West Papua, and thought deeply on how to solve the conflicts there. Indeed, in his latter years, Herb developed a passion for peace studies and was active in the peace movement. It was due to people like Herb that the peace movement in Australia took a rather different turn from its counterparts in the United States or Britain, for instance. For in Australia peace issues clearly went beyond concern over nuclear proliferation and strategic affairs. With the Asia-Pacific region as backyard, Australia’s peace movement, influenced by people like Herb, was directly related to the questions of development and democratisation of developing countries as well.

It was in this connection that Aliran first developed close ties with Herb. We were honoured by his presence in a seminar *The Arms Race* which we held in Penang in July 1983. His address to us is contained in the book which we subsequently published. Following that seminar, Herb continued to correspond with us and whenever he dropped by to visit his Penang relatives —
his daughter Annie having married a Butterworth boy — he would oblige us with a talk, or at least drop by the office to share his latest thoughts.

It was my privilege to interact closely with Herb for some four years in the late 1980s when I took up a lecturer’s position in politics in Monash University. I learnt a great deal from him about Indonesian politics and about peace. It was during this time too that I discovered what an inspiring teacher he also was.

As I was scheduled to inherit the course Rich World Poor World, an introduction to the politics of development, which Herb had taught for more than a decade, I thought that I should sit in for a few classes and pick up some tips on how to teach the course the following year. In fact, I was so enthralled with how he taught the course that I ended up following his course the entire semester.

In trying to communicate better with his students, Herb evolved a particular style of teaching based on Freirean pedagogic principles, among others. Hence he sought to relate teaching-learning to the outside world on the one hand, and to break down the ‘banking’ notion of education (wherein the teacher ‘deposited’ knowledge into the minds of his/her students) on the other.

For his large classes, Herb would always prepare one to two sheets of notes on a particular topic. Students picked up these notes as they walked in. For the next 10 minutes, they would read. Herb would then entertain questions. All were encouraged to ask. On other days, Herb would show a movie, or invite a speaker. Again, there would be questions. Before the session ended, Herb allowed students to make announcements about upcoming events, a talk, a film, a demonstration, etc. There was much learning to be gained from outside of the classroom.

His tutorials were broken down into smaller groups that he called ‘cells’. These cells were required to meet separately outside of the formal lectures and tutorials. Herb would attend these cell meetings occasionally. Herb was turning the normal teaching-learning process upside down. Learning was to be conducted through questioning; knowledge was to be sought through co-operative rather than individual effort; and there was much to learn outside the ivory towers of academia. To assess the students, he did not simply consider their contribution to the research report, for many the end product of learning. He stressed, equally, the process of learning. Accordingly, apart from awarding marks for the final essay, he invited the students to assess themselves as well as others in their cells based on one’s contribution to the group. He organized his Peace Studies course very much the same way and in both cases motivated the students to think about international development and peace affairs, and to do something about them. There was some magic to all this as Herb engaged his students.

Likewise, when he supervised his graduate students – and I was privileged to co-supervise several with him – he read and listened intently to what they had to say. He would then pose his questions. Questions, and more questions, it appeared lay at the core of his teaching and learning method.

Not only did Herb influence the Indonesianists therefore, he touched young volunteers, undergraduate and graduate students, the peace movement, and much beyond. I will treasure not only having learnt so much from him while I was in Monash, but also the times we went jogging on the beach in Batu Feringghi, looking for vegetarian food all over Penang, and the picture of Herb catching a mid-day snooze in my office.

Aliran extends its deepest condolences to Betty, his wife, and their three children – David, Annie and Robbie, and several grandchildren. We thank them for having shared this wonderful person with us. Q
NO

To Third Link

Batu Maung: Proposed site of Third Link (Southern Option)