

Malaysia

Beyond Communal Politics

Goh Cheng Teik



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Address all correspondence to
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Preface

"THERE is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," wrote William Shakespeare. There is now such a flood tide in the history of independent Malaysia. If it is taken, it is likely to result in a breakthrough in the solution to the ethnic problem in the country and steer the people in the direction of a truly Malaysian Malaysia.

Shakespeare also warned us of the consequences of ignoring this tide. "Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries." Should the present generation of Malaysians miss this tide, succeeding generations may have to paddle their way through the rocks of ethnicity and the rapids of tension and violence. Once ethnicity is permitted, tolerated and then legitimized, it may not be possible at a later stage to phase it out. As the present conflicts amongst the Bosnians, Croats, Macedonians, Serbs and Slovenians clearly demonstrate, ethnicity that does not go extinct can erupt and wreak havoc at a time that is least expected.

I am most anxious to write about this crucial stage of my country's political evolution. Given my academic background in the science of politics and my present first-hand experience of practical politics, I believe I can combine analytical skill and inside knowledge to bring into focus the crucial issues of the times and to encourage sober and rational discussion of them by concerned citizens of all races.

Unfortunately, time is a constraint. No politician is in complete control of his time. He has to be at the beck and call of his constituents. Nevertheless, I managed to take two weeks' leave last autumn and spend them at Wolfson College in Cambridge. That was the time I began writing this short monograph. Since then I have used every spare moment to try and finish it. Needless to say, the finished product does not meet the rigorous requirements of scholarship but I do hope that full-time scholars will continue to pursue this subject with greater depth.

Let me thank Professor Sir David Williams, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge; the President and Fellows of Wolfson College, including Dr. Derek Nicholls and Dr. Jack King; and Dr. S. Murk Jansen, Fellow of Newnham College, for making my sojourn at Cambridge both pleasant and fruitful. I am also grateful to Tan Sook Ping of Bank Negara Malaysia for her help in obtaining statistical data and my staff, Karen Thong and Tan Keng Luan, for meticulously typing the manuscript.

Goh Cheng Teik,
Penang, 1994.

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