

## THE BAR ON OSTENTATIOUS LIVING

either through rich wives or whatever. But there is the rationale that if they are too ostentatious, people might associate the government with such extravagance and therefore the government becomes more remote from people?

A: Well, if they are all that rich, I think it is better for them to live on their riches rather than be with the government. If they are with the government, they should live within the means of their government income. If they find this too restrictive, they of course have to reconsider their positions. We cannot have the situation where we will have to explain that so and so is rich by inheritance and all that. That is not in keeping with our desire to have a clean, efficient and trustworthy government.

Q: So your philosophy can be conceptualised as (prescribing) a new lifestyle for the elite. Whether that is a political elite or business elite, it must not live like Maharajahs. It must live decent, modest (life). This is a substantial change from what maybe is seen as sign of decadence in the past.

A: I don't know about decadence and other things, but I think the people generally expect us to be modest in our way of life and that is how we should live if we value public opinions. As you know, politicians have to seek

being modest with whatever I do.

Q: Your plan to conform to a moderate lifestyle is in line with the wishes of Islam. Do you not propose to use Islamic teachings to bring about these changes, in particular as the Malays are already familiar with Islamic injunctions?

A: We do use Islam as a basis for our action but the problem for some people is that they are prone to make their own interpretation of what is really Islamic. If we do not follow their interpretation, they say we are not following the teachings of Islam. Islam is a pragmatic religion which gives flexibility in specific situation. What we practise today is in accordance with what presently exists in our country and is not in contradiction with the teachings of Islam. The Prophet himself did not immediately require the people of Mecca to follow him upon receiving God's command. It was only when Islam was strong and he arrived in Medina that he changed his method. Even that was done when almost everybody had embraced Islam. We must bear in mind that Malaysia is a multi-religious country and the non-Muslims play a very important role. We must take this into consideration in implementing the dictates of the religion. We are not ignoring Islam but the religion itself gives us flexibility.

## 'Serving govt - not meant for the rich'

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Q: Datuk, on the subject of leadership by example, the word is that you, or the new government, has directed all senior politicians, junior politicians and senior civil servants and so on that they must adjust to a less ostentatious lifestyle, that they should not indulge in conspicuous consumption. Is this true?

A: Well, on the salaries that all these people draw I don't think they can be very ostentatious. If they are ostentatious, then there must be something wrong with their behaviour. What they have been told to do is to live within their means. If they live within their means there should be no ostentation. That is all that we want them to do.

Q: Datuk, some of them may have private perfectly legitimate sources of income,

public approval every five years, and if they don't behave themselves, I have a problem of trying to persuade the public to vote for people who lead ostentatious lives. Mind you, I myself, am subject to a lot of criticism on this. First, the people say well it is nice for him to say all these but he himself is buying a new car and he has recently taken delivery of an aeroplane and he is building his own house and also a new office. Well, I don't know whether I can explain these things or not, but largely these are things that were ordered before I became Prime Minister. At the time, the finances of the government were more than sound. But if the people want, I am prepared to give these things up. I don't care about living in grand style but I thought I am