

'LOOK EAST', UNITY AND EMIGRATION

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CHEE KHOO'S DIALOGUE WITH MAHATHIR

Dr Tan: The white man for more than a century has asked us to look to the West for our education, finance, development etc. Then you came along and asked us to look East. But as you are aware, and indeed you and other Barisan leaders have emphasised, there are many aspects of Japanese life that we must not try to emulate for example, Japanese militarism before World War II. I am surprised that you have not emphasised ELITISM amongst the Japanese. As you are aware, in Japan only the very best student can get places in most Japanese universities. How about emulating this aspect of Japanese life, not just in education but other fields of human activities?

Dr Mahathir: We do within each group really — each racial group. Simply because the

everytime a government leader speaks, is not going to build a nation and why don't they try to emphasise the Malaysian nation and forget about the Chinese, the Indians, the Malays, then we may march forward towards that cohesiveness a little faster."

Dr Mahathir: Well, it is not only for the Government to think of Malaysians. It is also for the people and the fact remains that the Chinese do consider the preservation of their Chinese origin as very important, so do the Indians and therefore so do the Malays.

If they say I don't care what my origins are, I am a Malaysian and be damned with my origin, then of course it will be easy. Of course that is not happening now and because of that the Government has to recognise the fact that there are different racial groups.

MASS MEDIA

Dr Tan: Yes, but you see the Government is in a much better position than any others to set the pace because the mass media in this country (including

the Ulu with no newspaper, with no means to buy a TV or radio then I will have to depend on government news.

Dr Mahathir: Nowadays they buy their own things. They don't listen to the Government.

Dr Tan: As you are aware within the last decade or so Malaysia has lost some of her best brains because of emigration of some of her best qualified and highly trained manpower. And the main reason why they have emigrated is their fear for the education of their children. Do you think that this is an instance of good riddance to bad rubbish or should the Government try to take steps to assuage the fears of the non-bumiputras, so that they will not emigrate from this country?

Dr Mahathir: Well, they are emigrating not only from Malaysia, they are emigrating from Singapore, from Hong Kong, from all kinds of places. This is a normal happening, normal phenomena that is found everywhere and people want to seek a better life for

who have gone to Australia, settled there for a few years and then found that Australia is not all that good, pack their bags and go to Canada and some of them after going to Canada and found it not so good and have packed and come back here.

This has happened, so how can a country accommodate such people, the wishes of such people. The way I see things, there will be emigration, there is no way we can stop it.

Dr Tan: I agree, emigration is a way of life in this modern age. They migrate from UK to America, to Canada, to Australia but wherever I have gone, the little travels that I have done I have talked with Malaysian and I would say a 100 per cent of them have told me "Doctor I have come here because of my children's education."

Now I asked them what's so wrong with education in Bahasa Malaysia? I told them bluntly if they can do it in Thai, in Tagalog, in Japanese, in Mandarin, what's wrong with doing it in Bahasa Malaysia and then have English as a se-

around putting their names in High Commissions and Embassies, I started putting up my nursing home. I didn't visit any High Commission. I have never visited any up to now for the purpose of emigrating.

The first time I was in Australia was in the company of G.P's, these people thought I had gone there to get registered as practitioner there.

I told them I did nothing of that sort. I had gone there as a visitor and to attend the G.P. conference. I did not visit the health authorities there to get myself registered as a practitioner in preparation for my eventual stay there. Recently I was in U.K. and I talked to lots of young people.

They said, "Doctor I am afraid of the Education Policy of the country." I asked them bluntly what is wrong? If they did not like the system why didn't they come back and change it. I challenged them. But I think all said and done, if the Government tries to see their point of view you may "I don't say you will" well retain the use of some of them.

Dr Tan: Despite 25 years of industrialisation we have still not developed a

Japanese are more homogenous, they can practice elitism within the Japanese communities and even in Japan there are Chinese communities and Korean communities.

Dr Tan: But they are very small and insignificant.

Dr Mahathir: Nevertheless they are not given the kind of status.

ELITISM

Dr Tan: But they are not regarded as Japanese, they are regarded as Koreans and as Chinese although they may well speak Japanese very fluently.

Dr Mahathir: Exactly, they speak Japanese fluently, they fit all the criteria that was we use here to provide citizenship. In fact if we were to do what the Japanese do to the Chinese or the Korean there will be hue and cry in this country.

But the fact is that here we are more liberal, we accept them and because we accept them we have to accept also the fact that there are different communities in this country which develop at different paces and because of that, to just single out elitism as the criterion is not good enough. It has to be elitism within each community and that is what we are practising.

Dr Tan: For the purpose of this interview, I talked with many people, including veteran journalists and they were telling me "Doctor can you emphasised, try to bring out in the interviews that this emphasis on Malays Chinese Indians

newspapers) are all government controlled. The radio T.V. are all government controlled, in the hands of the Government, so the Government should set the lead. The Government has control of all the paraphernalia of mass communication which others don't have. That's why I say (not that the best brains are in the government, I don't concede that for one minute) but say the Government should set the lead because of the reasons that I have stated.

Dr Mahathir: The Government has set the lead in many instances but its not necessary that the people will follow the lead. People have got their own thoughts and they are not easily influenced by what the Government says. The fact is that in all these matters both the Government and the private sector must act in unison.

Dr. Tan: I agree. The Government must act in such a way that it must carry the people along. And if the Government says we should try to forget our racial origin and think of ourselves as Malaysians, that will make it much easier for the private sector to sway the others to think likewise.

Dr Mahathir: We do. If you listen to the jingles and the songs by the media for example. We talk of Malaysians and not as Chinese, Indians and Malays. If you follow the TV programme . . .

Dr. Tan: Unfortunately, I don't listen to TV/Radio.

Dr Mahathir: Ha, ha, that is the influence that the Government wield, that's what you said just now, we have the media.

Dr. Tan: If I were up in

themselves. I mean it is not just because of the education of their children. It is simply because they want to emigrate.

Emigration is just one excuse. People migrate for many reasons not necessarily for education. Of course, if education is the problem here, then the only thing that can be said is the education policy of this country and it is not a bad policy because education in Bahasa has been proven to be equal (at that level anyway) to education in other languages. People who were educated in Bahasa have been able to obtain their Ph. D. abroad and become very highly qualified.

The problem is one of wanting to be educated in English, and not getting an education in English. I have always emphasised that when you are living in the country you have to accept the good with the bad.

That is the desire of these people which is very difficult for us to accommodate. I have always emphasised that when you are living in the country you have to accept the good with the bad.

You can't have the way everything you want it and if you have roots in that country whether it is doing well or not doing well you are going to stay there. When the moment things go slightly different from what you desire you pack your bags and go. Well it is very difficult to persuade such people and I am quite sure where they go they are not going to be permanent also.

I have known of people

cond language?

I told them bluntly, but lots of them have really no desire to leave this country and lots of them can really contribute a great deal to this country, their brains are first class and a little bit of understanding on the part of the Government of their problems probably will go a long way towards their not leaving this country.

SYMPATHETIC

I once talked to a lawyer and he said he would not pull out lock stock and barrel but "I am not going to give up my citizenship. I want to return as soon as my children's education are over. I will go back." This is the sort of "Loyalty" in them. So I think, if the Government were a little bit more sympathetic to their problems rather than "Terbiar sahaja" than it will get the use of these people with good brains and this country like any other country can see good brains.

Dr Mahathir: You mentioned just now about their loyalty, the loyalty of the parents yes, the children will not have any loyalty.

Dr. Tan: The children will probably not come back. They have different roots. I am talking of the parents.

Dr Mahathir: How can we accommodate them. There are not many of them although they may be very brilliant. We have to have people who are prepared to put up with things that they don't like as much as they can put up with things that they like.

Dr. Tan: I agree with you entirely. That's one of the reasons after May 13th when lots of doctors went

well-conceived industrial strategy and policy with a view to setting up coherent goals and guide industrial activity towards this end. This partially explains for the fact that the composition of manufactured exports is weighted heavily on non-resource-based activities like textiles and electronics whose contribution to the development of a healthy industrial base is minimal.

An opportunity we have missed as a consequence of the absence of a well defined industrial policy is the development of a lucrative automobile industry. May I know what steps are being taken towards formulating such a policy as it is imperative that we should have an industrial blue-print which of course can be modified with changing circumstances.

If there is already a policy I wonder whether it is possible for you to state briefly the policy objectives.

KNOW-HOW

Dr Mahathir: In the first place, regarding the industrial policy it is something that is far easier to talk about than to work out simply because we are not a very rich country, despite our wealth, in order to determine exactly how we industrialise.

Also we have very little know-how. So we have to take what comes and also attend to our major problems. For example we have a lot of unemployment and because of unemployment we have to go for industries that create employment opportunities and incidentally the electronic industry is one that can create many

employment opportunities.

So we went for that not because we like electronics, but because it gives us an opportunity to create employment. Now if you want to go into other fields, you must have certain basic necessities. For example if one wants to go into the automobile industry, one has to have a lot of supporting industries and knowledge in the supporting industry must be sufficient in order to support an automobile industry.

We don't have that kind of knowledge and we don't have people who produce electric circuits that are used in motor cars, meter and die casting and all kind of things that go into the automobile industry. Therefore we just can't rush into the automobile industry as much as we cannot rush into other industries because of the question of the consumer market that we have in this country. It is small.

We think that we have now reached the point when we can gingerly go into the earliest part of the steel industry, the smelting of steel, because we have the gas and now we consume sufficient steel to justify putting up a plant. This is our first move towards heavy industry but once you have that you may want to develop other industries that are spin-off from there.

EXPERTISE

Again you need to have the expertise to have the market and the size of the market is extremely important and therefore much as you would like to go step by step, have the basic in-

There are so many limitations that the simple policy is not really implemented. It has to be based somewhat on circumstances.

Dr. Tan: My question is up to now, we are emphasizing not on resources that we have but we go on to textile for which we import all the raw material; we go on to electronics, where we are not doing anything but actually repacking only. You see, I do agree with you that it is necessary to provide jobs but if *pari passu* we try and give more emphasis on agro-based, try and promote industries that use more rubber, more oil palm, more tin, — these are goods of which we are the world's biggest producers — then we can be going places.

I want to bring you back to your answer, you have stated again and again in your reply that we don't have the expertise. That comes back to the question that I asked you just now where lots of these people have left, example to, Australia.

I was surprised one day to hear that the former professor of Mechanical Engineering was there in Sydney. Now he would be an excellent chap to provide us with the expertise and yet he is gone there to work where he had some difficulty in getting a job because when he looked for the job they told him he was over qualified for the job!

These people can contribute a great deal to what you talked of — lack of expertise. I am not talking of the doctors, students in Australia. There are lots of

their choice is to go away.

Dr. Tan: You had often mentioned that we have to be more productive to be competitive especially in international markets. I support your call for increased productivity but this calls for a fundamental change in our attitude towards work and discipline. While we can see steps being taken to achieve these objectives many hold the views that much more has to be done especially in the area of higher-level manpower. With a view to meet the increasing demand for this category of manpower, I wonder whether it would be possible for the Government to take stock of available talent in the higher echelons of the private sector as well as in the academic community.

After having identified such people would it be possible for the Government to invite a selected few to serve the Government in posts commensurate to their qualifications and experience for brief periods and presumably at inflated salaries. Many think we should, especially during these difficult times, take advantage of such capabilities that are available to consolidate our economic foundations.

Dr. Mahathir: Well, this is not a new idea but to ask the people in the private sector to serve in the Government is different.

Dr. Tan: For short periods.

Dr. Mahathir: For short periods at inflated salaries.

Dr. Tan: You see that chap is making \$150,000 — per year — if you offer him a super-scale A job also

“Look here, I am about coming here for one year or two years,” and if you find it difficult to get from the public funds I am sure there are millions of twoons in this country who would probably help the Government. But I really don't see why the Government funds should not be used if you think of the millions that are wasted.

Dr. Mahathir: I don't agree with the millions being wasted.

Dr. Tan: You only have to read the Auditor-General's report. It is all there.

Dr. Mahathir: But the fact is if you employ them the millions will continue to be wasted. There is no guarantee that they will not be wasted.

Dr. Tan: As you know I have just interviewed Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin. He tells me that there is some response from the civil servants.

industries first and move on to the next. One has also to consider the size of your market and your ability to market inside the country as well as outside the country and also your own capital.

The private sector in this country will not put in \$3,000 million dollars for a steel mill when they know nothing about steel, nothing about marketing of steel. We may think it is very good for the country but they think in terms of profit. Therefore the government has to come in.

Now in the case of the automobile industry we made a big mistake right from the word "GO". We allowed all kinds of cars to come into the country as a result there is no one single make or size that is used in sufficiently large number to justify the industry. Nevertheless we want to go into the automobile industry not because it is automobile but because it provides us with the kind of engineering technology that is very important for this country. But there is a price to be paid.

If you want to produce a car that is for a small market, the economies of scale will mean that you will have to pay higher price. It is cheaper to buy a foreign car but because of the necessity it may be necessary for us to pay the price of having cars made more costly. So these are being locked into by the government but there is no doubt that at some stage we must go into higher technology industries in order to upgrade our capacity.

other people who can contribute to this industrialisation that you and I would like to see in this country embarked on.

Dr Mahathir: First of all, regarding resource-based industries: we are doing fairly well. We have such industries but one has to remember that the fact that we have rubber in this country does not mean that the manufacturing of rubber goods in this country is an economic proposition.

Frequently, it is cheaper and much more desirable to export the rubber raw because they will be producer where the consumer products are going to be marketed, rubber tyres for example. At the moment we are the biggest producers of rubber gloves in the whole world. In fact we supply roughly 40 per cent of the world's supply of rubber gloves, rubber ballons and the like.

That's an economical proposition but to produce tyres here is not an economical proposition. With regard to the expertise, it is not a question of a few people who have the knowledge of engineering; we need all kinds of expertise which will take time to develop.

Dr. Tan: Yes, but what little that we have, we lose and how are you ever going to build up?

Dr Mahathir: That part can be replaced very easily because we can buy that kind of expertise.

Dr. Tan: Yes, but you cannot be all the time be dependent on foreigners.

Dr Mahathir: Yes, if

its not going to attract him despite his willingness to serve but if you offer him half way between what he is getting and the highest the Government can offer he probably will consider making the sacrifice.

Dr Mahathir: You know what will happen to other government servants.

Dr. Tan: I am talking of short periods.

Dr Mahathir: Even for short periods, it creates a lot of problems.

Dr. Tan: I agree.
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FOREIGNERS

Dr Mahathir: Even when we invite foreigners to come there is a lot of resentment among Government servants. Why should the other chap be paid more, expatriation fees and things like that. But if you take a chap who is in the country it is going to cause even worse repercussions. Nevertheless we have invited private individuals to help the government in terms of advice, discussions and other consultations. In fact I myself very frequently have sessions with them in order to tap their brains for whatever it is worth and I found it extremely useful, but to have them really working, that is going to be much more difficult.

Dr. Tan: Because unless they really work full time, they really cannot contribute substantially the knowledge that you want, to build up the higher technology that you talked of. They come and advise you and other officials that's really not satisfactory.

But if you can them,