

Tun Abdul Razak: A Statesman Emerges



By R. V. Pandit

TUN ABDUL RAZAK is an ideal administrator. Not only is he an efficient man, deeply involved in the administrative machinery of Malaysia, but he has a delicate and sensitive feel for the country in whose liberation he played so important a part. Through the long, leisurely years of Tengku Abdul Rahman's Prime Ministership, thg Tun, nominally the Tengku's deputy, shouldered much of the burden of rule. He played a vital role in the forming of the Federation, in facing up to Sukarno's Confrontation, in adjusting to the aftermath of the split with Singapore, in solving the internal security problem, and in fighting racial unrest. His nationalist instincts burned steadily throughout all this, as exemplified by his pet interest, a passionate interest: national development. All this established him as one of the most able administrators in Southeast Asia. Tun Razak, however, is basically a political man, a party man whose strength lies in the deep roots he has in the villages of Malaysia.

In a six-hour interview with The Asia Magazine recently, the Malaysian Prime Minister answered, clearly and frankly, an enormous number of questions on national and international political affairs. His answers revealed that he is now more than an administrator: he has become a statesman. We print here some of the questions and answers that emerged from our interview with Tun Razak, the longest interview that the Malaysian Prime Minister has ever granted.

R.V. Pandit: Sir, I believe you have an unemployment rate of something like 7%. Since Malaysia's credit standing in the monetary world is very good and you can easily raise funds for development, do you think a massive infusion of capital could further accelerate the country's growth to alleviate this problem?

The Prime Minister: I do not think so. I do not think we can do that for the next five years.

RVP: Is trained personnel one of your problems?

PM: Yes, in a way yes. Manpower is the greatest problem — not money. You have got to train these people and also you've got to change their attitudes to restructure society; if we are to turn life in the rural areas into modern life, new concept from the existing economy into industrial economy, then we have really got to change their attitude and that will take time. We cannot rush into it.

RVP: Do you think sufficient numbers of your people take advantage of the job training opportunities that are offered to them?

PM: This is one of the problems that over the years has got to be sorted out. People have been told that there is this opening and they have got to be brought in to take this opportunity, to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them. That's why it is not possible to go faster than we are doing now.

FLEXIBILITY ON LANGUAGE

RVP: Sir, I realise that every country must have a national language and you must encourage the Malay language in Malaysia. But is the future development of your language going to be on purely classical lines or will it be a

practical medium, using English words which are now so commonly understood in Malaysia?

PM: English is a commercial language and we use English words; we will continue to mix English words with Malay to make the language as simple to understand as possible. This applies particularly in teaching of technical subjects. Like the Indonesians, we also use words like Organasasi for organisation, Institut for institution, Confrontasi for confrontation . . . all this is very common now. Many English words come in our conversation.

THE PARTY IS THE BASE

RVP: How much time do you devote to Party work, national affairs, international relations and so on?

PM: Very difficult to say. The Party is very important. You have got to live up to the Party — that is your base. Foreign affairs, nothing very much. We do not have any problems with any country; we've just to keep track of things. We cannot influence events very much. Our main task here is to formulate policy that we think is practical.

NO OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE

RVP: Sir, do you think that the outside powers play a disproportionately large role in the affairs of our region?

PM: In the past, yes, that is what we are trying to avoid. We are trying to get them to keep away from this region in the sense that they should not unduly influence affairs here. They can have trade but for the rest they should leave the countries in this region to lead their way of life. To do things on their own. This is our idea really of a neutrality for South East Asia. As I explained to you, from ex-

perience, we cannot resolve all of the problems in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia without bringing in the big powers. So what we would like for the future is that the countries in this region be allowed to resolve their problems in their own way without influence from outside. Outside powers, the big powers, can trade but that is about all.

RVP: But some of these problems have been created by them. Vietnam was created by the Americans.

PM: It is true. That is the trouble. That is why we want this area to be a peaceful area and to be peaceful it must be free of the big power influence.

RVP: But do you not think they should solve the mess that they have made?

PM: They cannot solve it unless they get out of it. They cannot solve it in the sense that if they try to solve it they, cannot do it alone. They will have to bring in China and Russia into consultation. All this can be avoided if they leave this area to the people in this area so that we can solve our problems.

RVP: While the United States is trying to disengage, this treaty of friendship between India and the Soviet Union - do you think this is a Soviet intrusion in our region?

PM: Well, this is again an attempt by the big powers to come into this region. This is contrary to our own concept. We do not like pacts, once you have pacts then you have groupings.

REGIONAL GROUPINGS

RVP: Sir, during the last 15 years there have been many regional groupings of South East Asian countries. There has been ECAFE, SEATO, ASPAC, ASEAN and so on. Do you

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think anything really' comes out of these groupings?

PM: I think ASEAN yes, because it comprises of countries in this region which are neighbours: Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore. ASPAC is not so good, it is just a consultative body but as I said earlier ASEAN is something more than that. There is the desire among these countries to try and get together and solve common problems, to try and work together in fields where we can work together for mutual advantage and common interests.

RVP: Sir, but since human nature is what it is and since it is this human nature that influences policies of countries, don't you think that unless these countries are equally prosperous, most of these groupings will tend to be uneven and may not be fruitful?

PM: Yes, that is fair enough. The five countries in ASEAN are all of equal status in the sense that they are all developing; they may have different problems, like Singapore has different problems, but still they are developing countries and have one very important thing in common and this is they belong to this region and their survival depends on their ability to live together peacefully and in friendship and co-operation.

RVP: But there has been very little evidence of such co-operation in the past. They have banded together when threatened by outside threats and things like that, but otherwise there has not been much co-operation.

PM: This is one of the things that we intend to tackle. In fact, I have suggested that countries with common interests, like Thailand, ourselves and Indonesia, should stick together and try and work together for economic developments like in the field of manufactured goods; certain goods we manufacture, other goods Thailand will manufacture and still other goods Indonesia should manufacture. This will be the beginning of an Asian Common Market.

BILATERAL ARRANGEMENTS

RVP: Yes, exactly, but don't you think, Sir, much could be achieved by bilateral deals instead of regional groupings?

PM: Yes, I agree with you. This is something we are working on. Trade and even just friendly relations are better served by bilateral talks because the more countries you bring in, the more problems they bring. Countries like Thailand, ourselves and Indonesia, we have common problems and if we

agree by bilateral talks then we could try and enlarge this agreement which will get us somewhere but if you try and talk to five or six countries then you get problems, like the Common Market is now facing. Yes, this is what we intend to do. Your view coincides with mine exactly' and this is what we have been trying to do, first with Thailand and then with Indonesia, because we have common problems. They are producing the same goods as we do, trying to industrialise the way we do, and the same with Thailand.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

RVP: Sir, what will be your Governments' attitude at the United Nations General Assembly on the question of Communist China's admission?

PM: Well, we have already voted for their admission last year. Our view is that there is only one China — that China's seat should be given to the People's Republic of China. The question of Taiwan is a separate issue; Taiwan is a separate entity and if she wants to she should be allowed independent membership of the UN. This is the view we have but this will largely depend on the fate of the Albanian Resolution that will be moved. I do not think it will be right to expel Taiwan . . . we have stated in the past and we say quite clearly now that our policy is that there is one China. But the people of Taiwan should be given the right to start a new nation; that is our considered policy. Now we have got to work out a formula following this policy.

RVP: Once the People's Republic of China is admitted to the UN, will your country, Sir, take steps to establish diplomatic relations with Peking?

PM: That is another matter; that is a separate issue.

RVP: Will your attitude depend on the relations of the Chinese Communists with Communists on your borders?

PM: Well, it will be based on the principle that we have agreed upon with other countries like Russia. Russia has agreed to peaceful co-existence and non-interference into our affairs. We will have to request China to do the same; that is quite natural.

RVP: If the People's Republic of China gives such an undertaking, would you accept it on its face value?

PM: We have to.

MSA - CLASH OF INTERESTS

RVP: Sir, I want to ask you a question about the Malaysia-Singapore airlines. MSA was looked upon internationally as a very successful example of regional co-operation. When the split was an-

nounced, was there any way of saving the great joint venture?

PM: No. Because there was conflict of interests — Singapore was more interested in an international airline, in international routes, but we are more interested in a domestic airline and therefore the interests clashed. So unless we separated there were bound to be difficulties. We are not so interested in making profits; we are interested in providing service, if we make a profit well and good but we must provide service if we are to get round the country. You see we have to have a service to the East Coast, to Kota Bharu, Kelantan and East Malaysia and to some small towns, otherwise how can we bring people around and how can we encourage tourism?

RVP: Sir, if the domestic routes on your proposed new Malaysian airline are not profitable, will you subsidise the operations?

PM: Yes. Service to our people comes first.

NO RELIGIOUS GROUPINGS

RVP: Sir, in this era of the technological age where you yourself put so much emphasis on economic development and you repeatedly stress that economic co-operation is the key to fulfilment of the promises that you have made to your people, what is your view of international or regional groupings based on religion?

PM: Religion? Oh, I think that will not work. I do not think we should do that; we should have religious groupings in order to co-operate on religious matters, like the administration of Islamic religious affairs and interpretation of the Koran in a correct way. That's all. . . We want to work together on research into interpretation of religion, Islam as a religion for all time, and make it a vehicle of progress instead of a hindrance to progress.

LIBERAL EDUCATION

RVP: I am pleased to hear that from you because for the last so many years Malaysia has kept out of groupings of this kind, and this I think contributed to the excellent international image of your country and your former Prime Minister. On another aspect, may I, Sir, ask you to explain how the Moslems in this country happen to be so liberal and not in any way fanatical?

PM: I think it is education, the liberal, the British liberal education, and they are practical too. Also the leadership. It is the practical leadership that has helped.