

CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

in Malaysian politics and society

by

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PREFACE

Any concerned Malaysian who has been following the leading events of the eighties would realize at once that this book deals with many of the major challenges of this decade.

The first section is on UMNO politics. There is no doubt at all that the factional feud within UMNO and all that it implies for Malay society and the Malaysian nation has been the most important event of the last three years or so. UMNO politics is of course closely linked to the whole question of democracy, or the lack of it. There is a whole section on this.

The related, though separate, challenge posed by the communal situation in the country is the next subject of study. There are 11 essays, some long, some short, in this section. 'Islam and the Question of Religion' which is of course intertwined with the communal problem is the title of the fourth section in this book. Certain controversies over specific Islamic issues which the Malaysian public is aware of, are discussed in some of the essays.

Three of the essays in the section on 'Education, Youth and Community Service' look at the problem of how we could inculcate moral values among the young. This has been a major concern of not only education planners but also our political leaders right through the eighties. The sixth and last section in the book contains reflections on Malaysian society.

It must be emphasised that while many of the essays analyse the challenges facing us, there is also an attempt to examine some of the choices before our people. A number of the essays on ethnic relations, for instance, suggest remedies to the deteriorating communal situation. Similarly, the section on Islam and religion discusses alternative paths to spirituality and ethics.

It will also be observed that many of the articles are in fact responses to particular episodes. As a case in point, there is an analysis of the UMNO party election of 1984. There is another article on the state of the nation after 25 years of Merdeka. No attempt has been

made to modify these pieces or to update them. These are studies of particular events or reflections on certain periods of our history and therefore provide insights into specific situations as they presented themselves in the ebb and flow of human affairs. It is important to retain the original analysis as it is, so that the reader would be able to see how a certain trend had developed over a period of time. This is particularly true of the sections on 'UMNO Politics' and 'Democracy'.

As far as the essays on democracy are concerned, it must be mentioned, at this point, that this book does not include some of my important writings on the subject before 1986. These writings are in *Freedom In Fetters* (Aliran, Penang, 1986). Nonetheless, the present collection has almost all the articles I had written on the crisis that confronted Malaysian democracy just before and immediately after the infamous Operation Lalang of 27 October 1987.

Readers will also notice that I have left out from this volume, all my essays on the New Economic Policy (NEP), the economy and development. This is because Aliran has published another collection of essays on these topics. It is called *The NEP, Development and Alternative Consciousness*. Aliran, Penang, 1989). All my articles on regional and international affairs have also been excluded. I hope to publish them in a separate volume sometime in the future.

While many of the articles in this book have been taken from the Aliran Monthly, a significant number of these essays have not appeared in any Aliran publication. In each of the six sections there are such pieces, which are either conference papers or articles written for books and journals published by other institutions at home and abroad.

One final word. There are many flaws in the book. I take full responsibility for them. Critical comments from readers would be most welcome.

Chandra Muzaffar

September 1989
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May God guide and protect all these good people.

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