

responsibilities

demonstrations are violent. Either they run away or get involved, ready for violence.

I am trying to change the mindset. I know I may sound idealistic, but I am saying it based on my conviction and my experience.

Q: The government believes if you are unhappy, you should make an appointment with the government and tell them what's wrong.

A: Let's talk about the Indian problem. Incidentally, we're all Malaysians. Their problem in this country is genuine.

Of course, we have a party that claims to be representing the Indians, but obviously, they feel that they are not satisfied with the representation, and that the representation of the Indians are considered by them not to be effective. Obviously, they are desperate. And I know, in many cases, they have genuine grievances.

Once they (irresponsible elements) take over there is no accountability, no responsibility and no legal legitimacy. And then, they were prepared to go to the absolutely ridiculous, criminal and irresponsible act of telling the world that we, Malaysia, commit ethnic cleansing.

My point is that, try my method. Try, lah!

Q: Is the use of force justified in dispersing peaceful people?

A: If you had rules and regulations which include an investigation into a situation where violence takes place, immediately Suhakam, or whoever, must start an inquiry. Then the blame game can go there. Not here, in the newspapers or the blogs.

Q: In an illegal rally, is it justified to use force?

A: No, not by anybody.

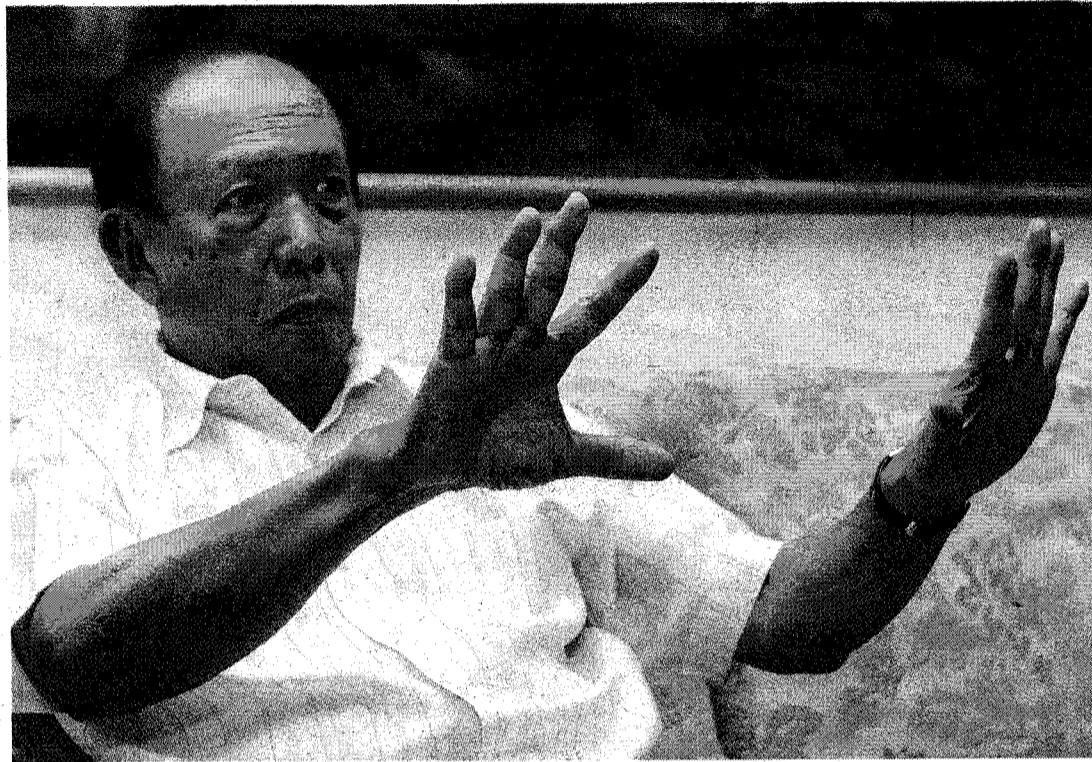
The police will tell me, in many cases it is true, that they are provoked. But, like in the Maldives, they (anarchists) love to see the police. They have a target because, as the police, you represent the government.

So, you take action, and then there's a reaction.

Q: Is Malaysia ready for peaceful assemblies?

A: Yes! Come on, we have been independent for 50 years.

In the old days, after the demonstrations by the Indians, there would have been retal-



iation immediately.

Q: By whom?

A: By Malays, maybe. No way could the Indians have avoided retaliation.

I know there are rumours of plans (of retaliation). But the point is that now there is maturity, lots of talk in the press and the blogs. I think it's healthy.

Q: So, what should the government's next step be?

A: I just told you! Get organised! Or ask Suhakam to do it. Come up with a working paper, start with that.

It's not that this has never been attempted — we did — but this was in Tun Dr Mahathir's time. This is Abdullah's time, he's more liberal, more open. People ask him to impose the ISA, he said it could be used but under specific circumstances. It's so comforting when he says it; as against the old days.

It's necessary to make this comparison between the old days and the present.

I was at parliament speaking to the members of the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Good Governance. Lim Kit Siang was chairing my speech. I got up and said: "What a nice sight. In the old days, there was no place, even in this international forum, for opposition leaders." They all laughed.

That's change. I'm telling you, we are mature. Provided, that is,

and I always have this qualification, that there is economic progress going on.

Of course, everybody has complaints. Malays have complaints. But the Tamils are such a minority and they don't form an important force, so people don't seem to pay too much attention to them. But they need this attention.

This is a question of attitude. I am so happy that the prime minister actually directed the MIC to look into the matter. But they should not have been told by the prime minister. It should have been an on-going thing. Maybe they need to have a good, fresh look at themselves.

Q: You said earlier that rights come with responsibility. What if demonstrations impinged on other people's rights?

A: I'm telling you, try my way. If advance notice is given, and routes are determined, orderliness is ensured, people are going say: "Look, there's a demonstration. It's going to pass through here. Come, let's watch."

It's never been tried.

Every day, it comes out in the newspapers, businessmen saying: "This is not good for business, we lose a lot."

I know the tricks. The TV saying every day that *Ini bukan budaya kita* (this is not our culture).

I'm sorry for ridiculing this, but where is there a *budaya* (culture) of violence anywhere in the world? Do you think violence is a French *budaya*? Indonesians? Filipinos?

These are partisan expressions. It's not an accusation, it's a fact.

If you follow my suggestion, Malaysia might be one of the first developing nations to try this.

Then, if the demonstrators don't observe the regulations, impose severe penalties. Again, include this in the law. Have a system of inquiry ready.

This is a non-partisan view. Don't anybody dare tell me that I'm anti-government, or anti-Umno.

I am saying this in the national interest, with pride and an awareness that Malaysia needs much better orderliness and guidance as far as this is concerned.

Q: Do you think the concept of the right to freedom of expression in Malaysia is a middle class idea?

A: No. What about those people in Baling? They were not middle class. They were poor smallholders.

You cannot dismiss people. We should not recognise them in order to arrest them. That's negative.

The right to peaceful assembly is enshrined in our democratic institution. That right also gives the right to the government to refuse.

The thing at issue is not that the rights are not there. The rights exist. It is the application of the right and the administration of the right that I am taking issue with.

This matter is an everyday

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affair, it is of interest to all political parties. They have one common interest, they want to express themselves on the one hand, and, in spirit, the government wants to allow them.

Q: Should the possibility of a riot justify depriving people of the right to be heard?

A: You say "the possibility". Once I accept this, the government authority will say: "There is a possibility of a riot." Full stop. Rejected.

The possibility of a non-riot, non-violence, has never been looked at.

The rules and regulations to establish orderliness have never been tried. Tried — that's the point.

It could fail. But try it.

This government and administration is very liberal and tolerant. But what is happening is that, the anti-government forces are pushing the government to see its limits.

So the survival of liberalism and tolerance depends on the ability of all to contribute. It is in the interest of all to see that this liberalism and tolerance survive. It is in the interest of all.

Q: If the government doesn't come up with a system, what would this say about human rights and about us?

A: The government has the right to say no. The government has a right to refuse. But if it does, I'll be disappointed.

Try, lah!