

Dukuns, bomohs and gurus
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Before Indonesia's President Suharto departed on a foreign tour this fall, he paused for a special ceremony. One of Indonesia's dukuns (soothsayers) had predicted a possible disaster for the country in late 1970, and sacrificial rites were duly scheduled. Several water buffalo were rounded up and slaughtered. The head of one was buried on the eastern tip of Java, and the head of another on the western edge. With Indonesia's most populous island thus bracketed, Suharto embarked on his journey. So far, no disaster.

One Step Beyond. Most Asian leaders are sophisticated, well-educated men who seek advice from the sort of people that U.S. Presidents or British Prime Ministers rely upon—Congressmen and Cabinet Ministers, academicians and old friends, and of course wives. Asian leaders often go one step beyond, into the metaphysical, consulting astrologers, mediums, soothsayers and gurus.

In nations whose people cling to revered traditions, the leaders can hardly afford to do otherwise. Calling in a dukun or a bomoh (medium) does, after all, please the masses. But in quite a few cases, it also gives a leader a feeling of added insurance.

Indonesia's Suharto is a shrewd pragmatist, but he is also a man who grew up amid the Moslem, Hindu and animist influences of central Java. He frequently plans strategy with military men on the golf course, listens to his impressive array of American-trained economists, and keeps abreast of current trends via tape-recorded textbooks. Suharto also relies on his spiritual advisers. Since his youth, he has consulted an influential mystical teacher, Raden Mas Darjatmo, who serves as a combination dukun, kebatinan (medium) and guru. Suharto often seeks out his old dukun when he visits his home village of Wonogiri.

Following the abortive Communist coup attempt in 1965, Suharto ruled out a swift move against then-President Sukarno on the advice of a dukun. Instead, he whittled away at Sukarno's power; eventually Sukarno faded away as a political force. On the advice of another dukun, Suharto recently avoided a hard-line approach to student dissidents and sat down for a series of discussions with them until tempers cooled.

Royal Astrologers. In Thailand, precise times for major events are determined by the royal astrologer. Twenty years ago, a Buddhist monk told Thai Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn that he would serve as Premier three times; he is currently in his third term. Thus when a family astrologer recommended a shift in living quarters to avoid inauspicious influences, Thanom and his family forthwith vacated the official residence for nearly a year.

Members of the Thai military elite conceal the exact time of their birth to prevent enemies from learning their weak spots by having accurate horoscopes cast. King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a thoroughly modern monarch, yet he does not set out on journeys without consulting an astrologer about the most auspicious departure time.

In Malaysia, to make sure that rain does not dampen outdoor ceremonies, a bomoh is often designated to ward off showers. Government employees buy "holy water" from a medium to bring them job promotions. Malaysian Minister of Works Tun V.T. Sambanthan regularly consults Hindu priests to determine the best days to open new facilities. Cambodian Premier Lon Nol is said to have summoned a monk named Mam Prum Moni. Says a member of the

National Assembly: "He is the most important man for General Lon Nol."

On the other end of the spiritual scale are Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos: Lee shuns the metaphysical altogether, while Marcos relies little on astrologers or mediums. It is likely that they will be the exceptions for a long time to come. In a sense, the leaders are pursuing the same reasoning as the 17th century French Philosopher Pascal did in his "wager" on God. It can hardly hurt to call in an otherworldly adviser—and it just might help.

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