



# Explaining the dilemma

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**K**HOO Boo Teik in *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir* Mohamad explains that Che Det was Dr Mahathir's pet name, which was formed by adding the Malay honorific to "det", which was a "familiar shortening of the last syllable of his name".

Dr Mahathir then changed the Che to C.H.E., "a set of European-like initials".

"The resultant C.H.E. became Mahathir's European-sounding pseudonym in a series of articles which he writes for *the Sunday Times* in Singapore. As a pseudonym, C.H.E. Det was an artful improvisation, probably born of the self-consciousness of young adulthood for Mahathir employed it to conceal the fact that the views expressed (in his articles) were being written by a

Malay," writes Khoo.

The articles were published towards the end of 1948, came out regularly in 1949 and tapered off in 1950.

Khoo categorised the articles according to the content. They were: Observations of Malay customs and social life, such as *ronggeng*, fish, marriage customs and housewives; analyses of the problems of the Malays like the Malay language, education and *padi* planters; and political writings touching subjects like nationality, royalty and the Malays in South Siam.

"C.H.E. Det was no country hick. He was a sophisticated town Malay by his own reckoning, cosmopolitan in the way he grasped the Malay world. In contrast, the world of the Chinese, in Malaya appeared to him as if only in the imagery of Furnivall's marketplace," writes Khoo.

Khoo also writes that C.H.E. Det's legacy was "knowing one's own world while confronting alien and dominating worlds one tended to comprehend in caricature."

An author of books, papers and articles, *The Malay Dilemma* by Dr Mahathir is one that stands out for the controversy that it caused when

written in 1969.

The book shows us his thoughts, beliefs and explains the behaviour of the Malays.

"Mahathir writes very frankly of the inbreeding of the Malays, the plight of the Malays and the need to devise special policies to help uplift their economy from its poverty-stricken state," writes Morais.

Khoo, meanwhile states that *The Malay Dilemma* was constructed very much according to "the methodical way that doctors approach medical problems.

"It will be recalled that *The Malay Dilemma* begins with a pathologist's

report on "what went wrong" on May 13 1969, which emphasises that things went wrong, among other reasons, because "the Government was no longer able to feel the pulse of the people".

"The book continues with a "history taking" of the "influence of heredity and environment on the Malay race. Thereafter it proceeds with a "therapeutic analysis" of the Malay value system and code of ethics," Khoo writes.

He adds that *The Malay Dilemma* was the definitive document of post-Merdeka and pre-EP Malay nationalism. - **by AUDREY EDWARDS**

**Feb 19:** Dr Mahathir declared a six-month war on drugs, referring to dadah as the nation's number one menace

**Feb 25:** The Government introduced the Malaysia Incorporated concept, modelled after Japan Inc. It would be the main vehicle for getting the public and the private sectors to work hand in hand for rapid industrialisation

**Feb 26:** The Government announced that it was drawing up a list of areas that it had traditionally monopolised which could be handed over to the private sector as one way of reducing federal expenses. This is now known as the privatisation concept

**March 19:** Dr Mahathir launched the Leadership by Example campaign where he urged civil servants to

work 15 minutes longer each day as a "symbolic sacrifice"

**Aug 9:** The Dewan Rakyat passed the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1983 by 136 to 9 which stated that if a Bill had not received the Royal Assent within 15 days of it being presented, it would be deemed to have been done so and gazetted. The Prime Minister, instead of the King, would

have the power to declare a national emergency. Although the Dewan Negara passed the Bill, it took four months for the Bill to be assented to. The Bill sparked a constitutional crisis in the country between the Government and the Rulers. The Government had to resort to a nationwide campaign to drum up support for its position. Its first mass

rally was held in Alor Star, Kedah, and attended by 50,000 people

**1984**

**Jan 9:** The Dewan Rakyat at a special sitting passed the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1984, by a 141-10 vote after a six-hour debate, bringing to a close the nation's Constitutional crisis