



THE NEW NATIONAL LANGUAGE

THINKING AND SPEAKING THE STUFF OF VALUES
PAK LAH ON REINFORCING THE SPIRIT OF AUGUST 31,
1957, FIGHTING CORRUPTION, ISLAM HADHARI, AND
BEING COMPARED WITH PAST LEADERS

BY Eddin Khoo and Jason Tan PICTURES BY Vinod Nair

MALAYSIANS HAVE been enthused by the recent ongoing rediscovery of a common language: The world's best health care, education and housing; the best public transport system and road safety in the world, all measured not by the length, height and girth of the profits of cosy, privatised corporations, but in what GLCs (Government-Linked Corporations) can do for the public good. And there's a rehabilitated dirty word that's slowly but surely beginning to make a comeback in the national conversation – public good. Not privatization or IPO, but public good.

The chattering classes have begun to spice their ice-blended and teh tarik with 'accountability, transparency, integrity' – words of the same family – taking their cue from Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia. Something in Pak Lah's governance, since he stepped into the country's top job in October 2003, has kindled the imagination of the public. Could there, just maybe, be another way to think about a Malaysian future? We now think less about the fastest way to win the contract (or secure the corner office) than, well, putting things to rights.

Two years ago, Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim, former president of the Malaysian chapter of Transparency International, lamented to *The Edge* about the expedient values that formed the false foundations of a tottering Malaysian corporate culture. But at least we could then begin to talk about it, he said. 'If people heard us talking like this a few years ago, we would have been laughed at.'

He was referring to the time when the country was not spared hyperbole, as when a regional news magazine described Malaysia as 'enjoying its greatest period of prosperity since the days of the Malacca Sultanate.' It was a time when 'Asian values' were dominant, their promise made tangible in the unprecedented material wealth and 'freedom of choice' that temporarily salved the nation's grievances about how much 'equity' each of its three main races had in the GDP.

But the East Asian Financial Crisis revealed this 'prosperity' as a fast friend, and 'Asian values' as empty sloganeering.

In his interview with *Off The Edge*, Pak Lah also speaks of the collective good ostensibly espoused by autocratic (some even say fascistic) governments that once clutched to 'Asian values', but with a difference: the values he would inculcate are centred in the dignity of each person, not the schizophrenic, self-serving dogma of corporatists who preach a greatest-good-for-greatest-number 'democracy' but obey only themselves in the way they peddle money, influence, and power.

The dignified individual sits comfortably with the spirit of consensus on which the country's 'social contract' is based.

Pak Lah is a remarkably simple person, with an easy authority and confidence that comes from knowing we must all

eventually return to whence we came. He prefers to create 'centres of decision-making' – to delegate and entrust people with responsibility; trusting in your ability to take the initiative – rather than to control every possible outcome to achieve a desired end.

Paradoxically, this openness has allowed the present administration to emerge from controversies – the suspension of the double-tracking project, the API and the hoary AP debate – with its stature enhanced in the eyes of the public.

It reflects trust in the ability of the court of public opinion (there's that word again) to decide right from wrong, and to say as much.

There are many unfinished tasks and challenges, to be sure. 'Yes, I do feel the pressure has been very great and the expectation has been very strong,' acknowledges Pak Lah.

And so, despite the fatigue of having just finished a very long day of meetings with distinguished members of the International Advisory Panel (formed to give input on Malaysia's place in an intensely competitive world), he spontaneously and graciously extends our interview session.

EDDIN KHOO: UPON ASSUMING POWER YOU REITERATED FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES, FIRST ARTICULATED BY THE NATION'S FOUNDING LEADERS, OF NATIONAL CONSENSUS, CLEAN ADMINISTRATION, A GOVERNMENT BASED ON NATIONAL UNITY. WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON HOW FAR WE HAVE COME AND HOW MUCH FURTHER WE NEED TO GO IN REALISING THESE IDEALS?
We must continue to do more.

It is now 48 years (since Merdeka) and the inculcation of these values must be a continuing process, because new generations are coming up – we have had three generations already – and each generation has to be inculcated with the same values. We cannot say that we do this once and we don't have to do it anymore.

Of course the government has a role to play but society, too, has a role to play; parents have a role to play. We must recognise the value of perpaduan (unity), having national unity means we are together as a united nation, that we have to work hard together in order to achieve a future that will be good for all of us. And we must do this through meetings and consultations. That should be our style. Anything that has to do with our future, the very important decisions that have to be taken, we must make it on the basis of a consensus. This is practised by the government in power today; this is practised by UMNO as a party; this is practised by the Barisan Nasional as a coalition. We take decisions on the basis of consensus and I think the approach we have taken is the right one. It is good that we do this since that is what is expected of us.

But the young have to be reminded, and they also have to recognise the value of consultation, discussion, the value of deciding on the basis of all agreeing...consensus.

And we have to be very reasonable. We cannot use consensus as a means to block (things from being done). Consensus means the big and the small agreeing together, right? A majority party and a minority party, all must agree together. But if this agreement on consensus is taken by anybody as a means to block, then that is wrong and we should not do that. The big ones should also not take the opportunity to impose upon others, irrespective of whether they agree or don't agree (with you).

My experience in the party and in the government – for so many years now – has certainly demonstrated to me that this approach is an approach that will remain with us. We will not abandon it. It has served us very well. It has made the government of Malaysia a stable government and our decisions have contributed to the good of the country and the people.



EK: YOU MENTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAS A ROLE TO PLAY BUT YOU DO BELIEVE THAT MALAYSIAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE MUST DEMONSTRATE A GREATER DEGREE OF SELF-RELIANCE AND MATURITY?

Of course. In fact, I expect that. But we still have to persevere. It does not mean that if we succeed with some things in one generation, that the next generation doesn't have to continue.

EK: THERE HAS BEEN GREAT PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MANY OF THE THINGS YOUR ADMINISTRATION HAS INITIATED; THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION, FOR EXAMPLE...
Yes, there is great support for that...

EK: WHAT I WANT TO ASK IS THAT EXPECTATION HAS BEEN EQUALLY GREAT...
Yes. I do feel that expectation has been very great and the pressure has been very strong...

EK: BUT DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS NOT ENOUGH OF A REALISATION THAT MANY OF THESE PROBLEMS, SUCH AS CORRUPTION, HAVE BEEN INHERITED BY YOUR

ANYTHING THAT HAS TO DO WITH OUR FUTURE, THE VERY IMPORTANT DECISIONS THAT HAVE TO BE TAKEN, WE MUST MAKE IT ON THE BASIS OF A CONSENSUS

ADMINISTRATION AND WOULD REQUIRE A GREAT DEAL OF TIME BEFORE THEY CAN BE RESOLVED?

Let me put it this way: the fight against corruption also took place during the administration of Tun (Dr) Mahathir (Mohamad). I am continuing with it, and am doing the best that I can because I have made a public pledge that I do not want corruption in my government, or for that matter anywhere else.

But my approach is (two-fold). On the one hand, a punitive one – a full report is submitted; from the report the ACA must believe there is a case for investigation; if they find that the evidence proves that a person is corrupt the matter is taken to court, and if the individual is found guilty, he is punished.

Such an action is taken on an individual, or group of individuals, responsible for a corrupt

act and (who must) therefore be taken to court and punished.

But I am also paying a lot of attention in the area of prevention. It is very important that corrupt acts must be prevented. We cannot simply wait for people to commit the act and only then start investigating.

That is not the way to solve the problem. We want the preventive, not just the curative, aspects of fighting corruption.

Certainly, the curative must be there, and while we try to complete all the cases under investigation – the punitive aspect – we hope there will be no more new ones, because we have been telling the people 'corruption is bad,' and we hope no one will be inclined, tempted, to be corrupt.

But if we only concentrate here – quietly investigating, taking the case to court, charging the individual which generates a lot of

publicity, what is happening on the preventive side? If we don't look at this aspect there will be new cases. Once we finish with the old, there will be others and there is no end to that.

To end it, we have to ensure that we are very effective in the area of prevention. Even in the area of curative action, we must make sure that we do things with justice. We are not going to frame anybody as that itself is a crime.

But if we are forced to investigate we will make sure that the investigation is conducted properly, and once there is real evidence only then will we proceed to prosecute.

EK: AND WHAT ARE THE FIRM AND LONG-TERM MEASURES BEING TAKEN ON THE PREVENTIVE SIDE?

Well, we have established the Institut Integriti Malaysia (Integrity Institute of Malaysia) that has been conducting courses, seminars – and this is not just confined to government servants, but also involves the private sector and NGOs.

Two, within the government we try to improve the Public Service Delivery System. At the same time I have also announced, and this is being carried out now, that we need to create more centres of decision-making. By 'centre' I don't necessarily mean a whole building, centre can be one person. We can decentralise (decision-making). We do not want decision-making to be confined to only one person; but that person must delegate certain powers; specific, very specific powers should be given to various officials so that decisions can be arrived at quickly and there is no temptation, therefore, for anyone wanting a quick decision to resort to giving favours, money.

We therefore reduce temptation on the part of anyone to corrupt, offer money, in order to get a decision fast. And there are other regulations, other approaches that have been made. For example, procedures for land application, for approving houses, getting CFs; we want to improve the administration of this so that there is no delay. This will, to a great extent, also help to prevent corruption from taking place.

Delays can breed corruption.

JASON TAN: SO ALL THESE PROCEDURES ARE BEING SET IN PLACE, AND IN A QUITE DETAILED WAY, BUT PERHAPS THE PUBLIC IS NOT QUITE AWARE THAT THIS IS TAKING PLACE AND HENCE THE IMPRESSION THAT THINGS ARE SLOW.

EK: FOR INSTANCE, ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS TAKEN IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION HAS BEEN WITHIN UMNO ITSELF. BUT HERE SERIOUS AND REASONABLE CONCERNS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED ABOUT THINGS LIKE 'DUE PROCESS' AND 'TRANSPARENCY' INVOLVING CASES.

HOW DO YOU THINK THESE CONCERNS CAN BE ADDRESSED?

The party has its own set of procedures. The cases brought to the Disciplinary Committee

are considered by the members of that committee, but these are not the procedures of a court of law. Our disciplinary procedures, rules and regulations do not require that action to be taken on the basis of court procedure.

EK: BUT SOME DELEGATES AT THE RECENT UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPRESSED CONCERNS THAT A LACK OF 'DUE PROCESS' AND 'TRANSPARENCY' COULD LEAD TO A CLIMATE OF POLITICAL BLOOD-LETTING, THE SETTling OF VENDETTAS, LOCAL POWER STRUGGLES. CAN THESE THINGS BE CONSTRAINED?

Immediately after the previous UMNO General Assembly (the one before the last in July) the committee began to look into important cases of money politics. During that time all sorts of people submitted all sorts of reports and the committee had to look through them; but once the committee has done this, it will have to decide on the various cases, who will have to be investigated and called before the committee to explain why action should not be taken against him. And while this is done, we will have to decide on a closing date for complaints... we cannot have it open all the time, indefinitely. And we take the decision.

If we don't have that closing date there'll be a lot of nonsense coming up. Everybody

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will find an excuse to make a report about this or that person. And if it carries on like this, there will be no end to it. There will be feelings of revenge, all sorts of things would happen. We cannot allow this.

We must have certain rules; the procedures must be laid out and you go according to these rules and procedures.

EK: AND YOU BELIEVE THESE RULES AND PROCEDURES ARE SUFFICIENT...

The rules and procedures are sufficient. Some people have said that once (Tan Sri) Isa (Samad's) case came up and he was found to be guilty, only then did they recall incidents and they want to report so and so. Before that, they didn't seem to care but once Isa's case came up, they want to bring up their own complaints.

That's not the right thing to do.

It is a fact that Isa was not the only member of the Supreme Council who was investigated. That I know for a fact. But not enough evidence was found in the cases of other people. I don't have to name them but Isa was not the only one (investigated).

People have to realise that action against corruption does not only mean 'get somebody, take him to court, charge him, throw him in jail for 20 years, only then is something being done.'

That is not everything about fighting corruption.

In the area of the prevention... because, you know, we have been fighting so hard... there have been cases where the police are offered bribes but they refuse, 'I don't want.' And this is an indication of kesedaran (awareness) which is the result of preventive work.

JT: IN PREVENTIVE WORK THERE MUST BE AN INCULCATION OF CERTAIN VALUES...

Definitely! The inculcation of honesty, good governance and trustworthiness. That's what we're talking about. All the values we have been stressing, again and again and again, to make people realise. This is the process of inculcation – we talk about it, advise that this is a very important value – that's how we do it; but this process takes time. And it must go on; we must not feel jemu (weary) but must continue to talk about it.

This is why I introduced Islam Hadhari, because Islam Hadhari will appeal to religious sensibilities. We have to appeal to that because it reminds a person that his religion is also against corruption, against anything that is not trustworthy, and we hope that he will feel compelled not to do anything that is untrustworthy, that it is an abuse of power. Religion can have a very strong appeal on a person. That is what I believe.

EK: IT IS DIFFICULT TO OPPOSE THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM HADHARI WHICH 'PRIORITISE THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILISATION' AND 'IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF LIFE BY DEVELOPING PEOPLE WHO ACCUMULATE KNOWLEDGE AND MASTER SKILLS.'

NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE CONCERNS THAT THE VERY IDEAS OF ISLAM HADHARI ARE NOT PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD AND IMPLEMENTED BY OFFICIALS WITHIN YOUR OWN DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS.

We have been promoting a number of kursus (courses), ceramah (forums), Majlis Penerangan (Information Assemblies) and these involve hundreds of thousands of people... almost 400,000 people. And we have two phases – the first, we launch Islam Hadhari and its campaign; the second, we do it again and continue to do it now.

It is not easy to reach out to everybody but we must continue to persevere – books and booklets have been printed, public forums and forums on TV have all been done, just to make the people understand what Islam Hadhari is all about.

But it is really not very difficult to understand. Of course, later PAS came in and said all kinds of things to get the people confused, but apart from that it is not difficult to understand. Islam Hadhari is



not a new denomination, not a new school of thought. Islam Hadhari is like a formula, it's a guide to understanding the teachings of Islam. If you understand the teachings of Islam, follow this guide since it is based on the teachings of the religion.

The guide, of course, for the Muslims is 'you must be faithful to Allah, you must beriman (possess piety), you must be an individual with a strong faith in God. The non-Muslims have their own faith. In the Rukunegara we have the principle 'Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan' (Belief in God) because we want Malaysia to be a nation that believes in God.

For the Muslims, according to Islam Hadhari, we are simply saying 'kepercayaan dan kesetiaan kepada Tuhan' (belief and faithfulness to God), beriman dengan Allah (piety); the second, we have to be trustworthy and dependable...

And this can be accepted by everyone. These are not values exclusively for the Muslims. In an MCA ceramah, I explained that these are universal principles. I said to them, 'For every principle I read out to you, and the fact that I abide by them...if any of you are opposed to that, raise your hand, stand up and say "we Chinese-Buddhists cannot accept these principles because it is against our religion."'

Of course nobody stood up because these principles emphasise common, universal values.

EK: HOW DOES ISLAM HADHARI DIFFER FROM THE ISLAMISATION PROGRAMME OF THE MAHATHIR ADMINISTRATION WHICH, MANY BELIEVE, LED IN FACT TO A POLITICISATION OF THE RELIGION?

That's the problem. When we introduce programmes, some people politicise it but that is only to be expected. I know that.

You do know that I was the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department who was given the responsibility to promote the inculcation of Islamic values at that time (1981)?

I was the one. Later on, somebody else took over. Anwar (Ibrahim) came as Deputy Minister (after being coaxed to join UMNO in 1982) and Dr Mahathir said (to me), 'Give this (responsibility) to him. He (Anwar) was interested in all things religious, all things about Islam, so we passed it on to him and it became his responsibility. Such projects as the International Islamic University, Bank Islam...I was the one dealing with all this initially. Anyway, there's no need to go into (what happened in the past).

What we are doing today is to become more precise (in the kind of Islamic values to promote). We have decided what the principles are; previously we didn't have that. We just thought in general terms about good values, Islamic values, universal values, encouraged the inculcation of universal

Islamic values; we talked about honesty, hard work, kerajinan (diligence). That is what we were doing before.

Islam Hadhari attempts a more structured approach. Its principles are spelt out in the 10-point principles and we want you to understand these principles and follow them. They can serve as a guideline for what we are able to do.

We talk of the first principle of faith in Allah as the foundation of a just and trustworthy government. A leader must also be just and trustworthy, so I ask my audience, 'I am your Prime Minister, I am Muslim. I know that I have to be honest in carrying out my duties and responsibilities. I must be trustworthy. But if I am to be just and trustworthy on the basis that my religion expects these responsibilities of me, what is wrong with that?'

I am accountable. As Prime Minister I am accountable, right? To Parliament – to submit everything, reports and all, to Parliament; but if I want to go one step further that as a Muslim I am accountable to my Creator, Allah the Almighty; that on the Day of Judgment, before God I will be examined with regard to how accountable I have been in all that I did throughout my life, is there anything wrong in submitting myself to that kind of accountability. Are you against that? The reply is firm, 'No. Why should we be against it?'



Because you have two reasons (to do right and good) – one, is on the basis of the law (undang-undang dunia); the other, undang-undang agama/akhirat (the Law of the Religion and the Hereafter). You choose that and you impose two things on yourself, two kewajiban (obligations) – kewajiban atas nama agama, kewajiban atas nama undang-undang – you are responsible to the teachings of your own religion, you are responsible to the law of the land.

I was just talking to the IAP (International Advisory Panel) and they were very surprised at the beginning but practically everyone asked me to promote Islam Hadhari. 'You must go beyond Malaysia,' they said. They believe this is a formula, an approach, a guideline that can create a better understanding of Islam and what Islam must do. And at the same time, if Islam Hadhari is the way to follow, it will also create the imperative and spur Muslims to work harder and achieve greater success in life.

EK: ISLAM HADHARI IS A PROGRESSIVE IDEA BUT ONE THAT REQUIRES A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION. AND AGAIN, FOR ISLAM HADHARI TO BE PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD AND IMPLEMENTED, THE EDUCATION PROCESS MUST BEGIN WITH THE VERY OFFICIALS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS SO THAT THEY CAN ENSURE THE PROPER PROPAGATION OF THE IDEA...

The official book containing the principles of Islam Hadhari was published by JAKIM. This will also help spread the explanation of it to the people...what Islam Hadhari is all about.

Recently, someone said to me, 'Pak Lah nak bina Islam Hadhari macam mana?'

(Pak Lah, how do you want to construct Islam Hadhari?) For them, if you talk about faith, it's a mosque; if you talk about education, it's a school. They ask, 'Pak Lah, Islam Hadhari ni, Pak Lah nak buat apa bagi orang nampak 'ni'? (What do you want to do to make this Islam Hadhari visible?) So I said, Islam Hadhari talks about principles, about guides, about approaches, to use our language 'kaedah' (method) – satu cara untuk memahami agama kita, memahami bahawasanya agama kita mengajar kita jadi baik, dan kalau kita ingin baik, ikutlah panduan-panduan 10 prinsip yang ada; dan 10 prinsip ini boleh dipakai oleh kerajaan, boleh dipakai oleh NGO, boleh dipakai oleh mana-mana kumpulan atau keluarga atau individu. Pilihlah yang sesuai. Jadi, kalau begitu ia menjadi satu prinsip pegangan kita.

(a way of understanding our religion, understanding that our religion teaches us to be good, and if we seek to be good, follow the guidelines according to the 10 principles provided; and these 10 principles can be employed by the government, by NGOs, by any group, family or individual. Select the most appropriate one. In that case, it can be a principle that binds us all).

So, I say, don't make the approach like it was before – endless forums with a question time. No, we must translate Islam Hadhari into programmes that the people can understand. When I go and open a new school, in the course of my speech, I explain that this is consistent with the concept of Islam Hadhari because the principles of Islam Hadhari require you to embrace knowledge, the mastery of knowledge. Anything that has to do with the Ministry of Education, with Training Institutes, with acquiring knowledge... this is what Islam Hadhari requires.

And when we talk about good governance, we talk about honesty, that we must avoid corruption... this is all an approach towards Islam Hadhari. Even the environment – you can talk about how you cannot destroy the environment because Islam advocates safeguarding the environment. And you can quote the ayat Quran.

So, that is how it is.

It's like the Rukunegara. There is no such thing as a Rukunegara building, no such thing as a Rukunegara plantation. It is already a way of being; these are values in all of us already and we are simply inculcating them – trustworthiness, honesty, justice – in you.

We don't have to build an edifice for that. We don't need to have a structure for that.

JT: SO, IT'S ABOUT ESTABLISHING A MORAL COMPASS...

Yes! A moral compass. That's a good word...

JT: IT SEEMS THAT THE CHALLENGE TO ISLAM HADHARI STEMS FROM A MATERIALISTIC WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD, AND THIS DERIVES ITS VALUES FROM AN EMPHASIS ON THE ECONOMY...

But there's nothing wrong with that. There is nothing in the Quran that suggests you cannot acquire wealth. If you cannot acquire wealth, you cannot pay zakat (tithe); and if there is not zakat there will be no revenue (for the government).

EK: WHAT ABOUT THE CHALLENGES POSED BY A 'MATERIALISTIC CULTURE'?

Well, all the more reason, then, to have the moral compass in you.

If you are able to acquire wealth, you must fulfil your responsibilities by paying zakat.

JT: BUT SOME STILL BELIEVE YOU NEED A STRONG EDIFICE IN ORDER TO RECOGNISE SOMETHING...

Well, we have mosques all over the place and some people still don't even go! You teach

But if you provide leadership and you are faithful to the objectives of the programme you're promoting, then I don't think anybody would mind. But if politicisation means abuse of power to secure political interest, that's a form of politics that will be totally rejected.

EK: IN THE LAST UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY, KETUA PUTERI, NORAINI AHMAD, DELIVERED A LUCID ADDRESS THAT DWELLED ON ASPECTS OF EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS. PUTERI UMNO, MEANWHILE, HAS DONE FORMATIVE WORK ON THE GROUND AND THEY ARE A GROUP THAT REFRAINS FROM RHETORICAL POLITICS. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN CONSOLIDATE THAT?

One of the things I like and am encouraged about Puteri UMNO is that they have undertaken many projects – the promotion of English, storytelling, literacy campaigns... And I want them to continue to do this and not just treat these as passing programmes like a flash in the pan.

It must be consistent. Anything that has the objective of inculcating values, bringing about

knowledge but does not have a heart, there is no guarantee that he will use his knowledge for the good, he might use his knowledge for something bad. In Islam, that is not permitted since Islam says you must embrace 'good knowledge,' knowledge that can serve the purpose of making you a better human being. Hence, Islam states, 'Ilmu membawa manfaat' (Knowledge brings reward).

But Ilmu (knowledge) is intrinsic and there are many varieties – those that bring good and those solely used for the bad – ilmu yang bawa pada dosa (knowledge that brings sin).

So, when I talk of the development of Human Capital, I'm not talking merely about providing more knowledge, merely stopping at the stage of making the human being a 'knowledge worker' or a 'knowledge interpreter.' We must go beyond that and the individual must be inculcated with good values – must be a good person, must be trustworthy, honest, a person who has the spirit of wanting to help, a person with a civic consciousness, a person who is responsible; only then can you have Human Capital. If all you do is put knowledge in a person's head and you do not know what that person is going to do with it, then you have not created Human Capital.

EK: IF I MAY TRANSLATE THAT IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT: FOLLOWING THE LAST UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE CALL BY UMNO YOUTH FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE NEP, THERE WERE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY SOME LEADERS OF THE COMPONENT PARTIES OF HAVING A COLLECTIVE RATHER THAN EXCLUSIVE APPROACH TO RESOLVING NATIONAL PROBLEMS. HOW DO YOU THINK A BALANCE IS BEST ACHIEVED?

The balance will come at the level when a decision has to be taken in order to implement what we think will be in the best interest of the nation and the people. That's the time when we address the question of balance. I always say, each community has its communal expectations and aspirations, but you know that others too have their own expectations and aspirations; now, how do you finally decide on the best interest? Well, the role of the leadership is to listen and bring together all these interests, then make a decision that will be good for all. Therefore, what is expected to be implemented 100% by one community, they will have to realise that this cannot be. When you bring together different interests under one common programme, there must be some kind of give and take. There must be.

If everyone wants the maximum fulfilment of plans and aspirations, then we can't help. We will have to implement separate programmes for separate communities and that won't do. We cannot have that.

Of course when it comes to religion everybody has separate programmes, but when we talk about economic development,

ISLAM HADHARI IS NOT A NEW DENOMINATION, NOT A NEW SCHOOL OF THOUGHT. ISLAM HADHARI IS LIKE A FORMULA. IT'S A GUIDE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

them to pray and if they truly believe prayer is important, they will pray even if it is in their office, in the room, without going to the mosque; but if you don't regard prayer as important, then you construct as many mosques as you want and they still won't go...

EK: THERE ARE SOME WHO BELIEVE THERE HAS, IN THE PAST, BEEN A TREMENDOUS POLITICISATION OF EVERYTHING – RELIGION, THE ECONOMY, EDUCATION. ONE OF THE LOUDEST CALLS FROM THE PUBLIC HAS BEEN 'LESS POLITICS, MORE GOVERNANCE'. IS THIS AN APPEAL YOUR ADMINISTRATION CAN APPRECIATE AND RESPOND TO?

The term politicisation is generally applied when people excessively use something for political benefit, and they use it in a way that advances a certain political interest. Whether it is right or wrong, they don't care because 'my politics must survive.' And they politicise things. Of course, people are not happy about that and they are right.

But to say that politics has no role at all, that is also not correct. If you look at politics as administration, this is a form of politics that can be promoted. In this case, maybe the word is not politics but government.

One aspect of politicisation indicates a certain abuse of politics, when someone is driven by other motives and they want to interfere when they feel their political interest is affected. This could be regarded as politicisation.

social change and that can only deliver success over a period of time, then the program must be implemented over a long period of time. You must be ready to push diligently, you cannot simply say, 'I'm tired,' and stop.

You will remember what Tun Mahathir himself said at the UMNO General Assembly several years ago – the one when he announced his intention to retire. He apologised for this and that, he said, 'Saya cuba ubah sikap Melayu, saya tak berjaya.' (I tried to change the mindset of the Malays and did not succeed.)

And after that he announced his resignation.

This does not mean he did not try. He did, and has, tried. But I cannot say that because Tun Mahathir admitted that he had not succeeded then I am not going to do it. If I take that position then I'm ignoring a certain responsibility – the responsibility to provide the leadership, to get the people to do certain things that are right and good, to get the people to change...

I cannot abdicate my responsibilities.

That is why I'm emphasising 'soft development,' emphasising the development of Human Capital. And what is Human Capital? It is the whole human being himself – it's not only the brain he has in his head, it is also the heart; it must be a person who is good-hearted, clever; a person who has knowledge. But with a person who has

national development, there has to be this spirit of give and take. What is reasonable from the sum part, we put together, then we propose it to the nation and we come to a consensus since every group sees in the proposal presented to them something of what they want.

This is what I go through. Other parties may talk about unity, musyawarah (consensus) but they never get into the real problem of what I have to get into, or Tun Mahathir before me, Tun Hussein (Onn) before him and Tun Razak before that – to sit down and deliberate, because we have to come up with something. This is not empty coffee shop talk...talk simply for the excitement of talking. We have to translate it into specific actions and programmes, to be implemented and we therefore have to take a great deal of care, attach greater responsibility upon us to come up with something that is acceptable to all.

This is the time when the balancing comes in.

EK: AND YOU BELIEVE THE SPIRIT OF COMPROMISE AND CONSENSUS WILL ALWAYS PREVAIL?

Yes! It has to! We have no other choice! I don't know when the time will come when people will transcend their ethnic origins...

EK: DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO SUCH A PROSPECT?

Well, if it happens I would be very happy. But I doubt it will ever happen.

We must have principles – common principles – that we hold on to together.

I remember once before when I was arguing with a group of students; they said, 'Why must we have Rukun Negara Lima Perkara when we already have Rukun Islam? Why don't you make the Rukun Islam, Rukun Negara?'

My reply, 'If you make Rukun Islam Rukun Negara the non-Muslims won't accept (it). Then you have a situation where Muslims live by the Rukun Islam and the non-Muslims don't have those Rukun, so they will do anything they like... we wouldn't be jointly bound to accept certain principles that governs our behaviour, thought and our actions.'

But in the Rukun Negara it is stated 'Belief in God.' When there is this important clause of 'Belief in God,' it means Rukun Negara does not replace Rukun Islam for the Muslims. It is not the intention to replace the Rukun Islam.'

But I remember that I had to face the Islamic Student leadership and it was tough... a tough argument with them.

So, we have to find a Rukun for the whole nation, something common for all Malaysians to hold together. We pledge by these principles that we remain together and in Rukun Negara there is that crucial principle of 'Belief in God'.

It is the same argument that I'm experiencing now with Islam Hadhari. Some have said, 'Islam Hadhari? Apa ni? Jadi Islam yang asal ni kita buangkah?' (Islam Hadhari? What is this? So, our original Islam, do we discard it?)

EK: DO YOU THINK THAT MALAYSIANS INCREASINGLY HAVE A PROBLEM WITH SELF-RENEWAL?

New ideas are always received with scepticism by some people. I have never known of any new idea that is readily used and completely accepted by everybody. Whether it is Communism, Socialism, Capitalism... so many ideas have been introduced; these days we talk of globalisation. You think everybody embraced it wholeheartedly, right from the beginning? Some would accept it; others will have nothing to do with it. Anything you introduce – even if you say you are introducing it for the good of all – it takes time to accept and, not only accept, but to accept, make it your guideline and implement it, consciously, to use it as a moral compass.

WHAT IS HUMAN CAPITAL? IT IS THE WHOLE HUMAN BEING HIMSELF – IT'S NOT ONLY THE BRAIN HE HAS IN HIS HEAD. IT IS ALSO THE HEART; IT MUST BE A PERSON WHO IS GOOD HEARTED, CLEVER; A PERSON WHO HAS KNOWLEDGE

It is the same with corruption. If everybody has pledged in the name of God that we will not do it (corruption) we will solve the problem in 24 hours. Why should there be a problem of corruption if everybody rejects it because it is something totally unacceptable and immoral.

JT: SO, ESSENTIALLY IT IS PEOPLE MAKING DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES, TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEMSELVES...

Yes! People must decide, undertake the responsibility that they will not engage in bad things.

JT: ONE OF YOUR INITIAL CALLS TO THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC WAS 'WORK WITH ME, NOT FOR ME'. WOULD YOU AGREE THAT FOR SUCH A PARTNERSHIP TO EVOLVE, SERIOUS EFFORTS MUST BE MADE TO CONSOLIDATE A CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND A SENSE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

Absolutely! I mean every word when I say, 'Work with me, not for me. We are working for the nation so come along and let's do it together.

Of course, I play the role of the leader but you play another important role...

EK: HOW DO YOU THINK A CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS CAN BE CONSOLIDATED, THROUGH, FOR EXAMPLE, THE MEDIA...

The role of the media is very important. And the media has the responsibility to promote positive principles. Everybody

knows the power of the media so use that power well even as you expect us to use the power to rule well.

It will be very dangerous if this power is abused.

Nobody should have the power and freedom to do anything he wants.

EK: IN TERMS OF A CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, WHEN YOU ASSUMED POWER THERE WERE VIEWS EXPRESSED THAT YOU WOULD HAVE A TOUGH JOB REHABILITATING MANY OF OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS...

It is tough. And this has everything to do with Pembangunan Modal Ehsan, the development of Human Capital. The development of Human Capital is not just to do with the brain into which you deposit knowledge. Of course, the whole body is dictated by what you think but Human Capital will be good when that person is a good person. Clever, honest, trustworthy – a person who works hard, is helpful, generous, considerate, caring, loving, concerned... that is the kind of Human Capital we want.

EK: AND HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE A FREE MEDIA, PROPER ELECTORAL PROCESS, THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY CONTRIBUTING TO THE BUILDING OF THE HUMAN CAPITAL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?

All these are regulatory institutions. In everything we do, there must be regulations. If a society doesn't have order, then that society will be destroyed because there will be a condition for the survival of the fittest. It will be as if we are in an animal kingdom.

But when there is order – rules and regulations – the issue of morality will be engaged; the issue of good and bad. And often you have to think of the issue of good and bad not just in the context of you as an individual, but you must also subscribe yourself – even to the point that you have to sacrifice – for the good of the society. You must, therefore, in a society, in which you are a member and not completely independent, where you cannot feel you have nothing to lose, you must think of the society as a whole. So, when confronted with what is good for the society as a whole, you must be ready to sacrifice complete individual rights for the sake of the public good.

There must be sacrifice. There are so many rights in the world so it is very selfish to think solely of the individual's right. The rights of others must be considered, too. If everybody thinks of the need to exercise his individual rights without recognising the need to think





THERE IS NO NEED TO SAY TUN MAHATHIR WOULD HAVE DONE IT THIS WAY. BECAUSE HE IS A DIFFERENT MAN. THAT KIND OF EXERCISE (OF COMPARING) FOR ME IS FUTILE AND ACADEMIC BECAUSE EVERYBODY DECIDES ON THE BASIS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES HE'S IN AT THE MOMENT

of the common good, then there will be chaos.

But, of course, the law has to be just.

The principle of justice is very important. That's why in the Quran there is the greatest emphasis on Justice – God is Just, God is Forgiving; you can do all kinds of things but if you repent, God, who loves and cares for you, is always fair and Just.

EK: THE HALLMARK OF THE LAST ADMINISTRATION WAS AN ALIENATION FROM PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, FROM A SENSE OF CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS, CAN THE ABDULLAH BADAWI ADMINISTRATION GUARANTEE THAT A GREATER SENSE OF BELONGING CAN BE CREATED?

I want to put it this way. When I think of what I want to do, I am not thinking about what the last administration did. When I take over a company from someone, I have to accept both assets and liabilities. Saya terima jawatan dan tanggungjawab Perdana Menteri dengan apa yang ada ... segala apa yang ada (I accepted the position and responsibility of Prime Minister and all that comes with it.) I can't say I want to do this, that one I don't want

to do'. Tak boleh. You can't do that. I [am] fully responsible for all [that happens in] this place under me as the chief administrator of the nation, as the Prime Minister. So I look at it as it is now and decide 'ini kena buat macam ni la, yang ini kita kena buat macam ni' — this we do it this way and that we do it that way. Of course, others will start comparing how things were done in the past with how they are done now. We cannot be doing that sort of thing. It is not fair to keep on comparing what is happening now with before. Take it as what is happening now — is it right or wrong? Because we are living in today's world. We are living now. At this time. This date, this year, this is the problem. What is Pak Lah doing about it? He has done this, ok that's good. Tak payah kata, 'Oh, kalau Tun Mahathir, dia akan buat macam ini.' There is no need to say Tun Mahathir would have done it this way. Because he is a different man. That kind of exercise (of comparing) for me is futile and academic because everybody decides on the basis of the circumstances he's in at the very moment. And you assess it, [whether it is] right or wrong — 'Ok, boleh tak boleh?' (Ok, is

this right?) Kalau tak boleh, just say so— 'Why are you doing this? That's not right. We cannot accept it.' But we cannot say, 'I cannot accept it because if Tun Mahathir were here he would not accept it.' You cannot do that.

It's the same when Tun Razak took over from Tunku Abdul Rahman; he assessed the situation and had to introduce certain policies to suit the circumstances of that time, relying on his own judgement. There was no need for him to guess what Tunku Abdul Rahman might have done. Now, under the circumstances, is this right thing to do or not? Ok you do the right thing. Because now it's your job. Yang baik kita terus; kalau tak da perubahan, benda ni berjalan dengan baik, kita buat lah. (We keep the good; if there is no change in the circumstances and it is still effective, we will continue doing it.) We all believe in Vision 2020. I'm not giving the country another objective. But to achieve that objective is a long journey. And I am now entering the second half (of Vision 2020). I want the country to achieve that objective. I want to work. That's all there is to it. It's not fair to all the time mengungkit (repeatedly raise issues of the past). Bila kita mengungkit, orang kata dalam budaya kita terungkit-ungkit, orang tak suka. Tak payahlah. (No need for this as people don't like it when we keep digging up old issues) But sekarang (now) you have given the job to him; let him do the job. He makes a mess of it, kena la dia. (laughs) ■