

The Harvard Club Of Malaysia Dinner

Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, 29 July 2002

"THE NEW MALAY DILEMMA"

I wish to thank the Harvard Club of Malaysia for inviting me here tonight to speak on "The New Malay Dilemma".

2. The Malays are among the few people whose race is legally defined. Thus the Malaysian Constitution states that a Malay is one who habitually speaks Malay, professes the religion of Islam and practises Malay customs. There is nothing said about the definitive culture of the Malays. It follows that changes in culture does not make a Malay person a non-Malay.

3. Culture is made up largely of the value systems accepted, even if not actually practised by a people or a race. Observations have shown that the culture of a people determines whether they are successful or they fail. Actual race or ethnicity or the colour of the skin or the domicile, temperate or tropical, are not factors which determine the performance of people. Thus there are Europeans who fail to make progress although generally Europeans are considered as successful and progressive people. One must not forget that in the Middle Ages the Europeans were backward relative to the Arab Muslims who built the Great Islamic Civilisation. On the other hand, many Asian races have been successful in the past and also presently, while others remain backward and primitive.

4. Even black Africans have been successful e.g. the Abbyssinians, although most are unable to make any progress.

5. Europeans, Asians, Africans and Amerindians can all be successful and can all fail. It is therefore not the race or ethnicity which determines success. It is the culture. The greatest European nations of the past were the Portuguese and the Spaniards. Today they are far behind the other Europeans. As I said it is not race or ethnicity but the culture which determines the performance of any race or people i.e. the value system that they believe in and adhere to at a given time.

6. When I wrote the Malay Dilemma in the late 60s I had assumed that all the Malays lacked the opportunities to develop and become successful. They lacked opportunities for educating themselves, opportunities to earn enough to go into business, opportunities to train in the required vocation, opportunities to obtain the necessary funding, licences and

premises. If these opportunities could be made available to them then they would succeed.

7. And so I thought the solution lies in affirmative action or positive discrimination in their favour. I am told by those who drafted the New Economic Policy (at that time I was out of favour and had been expelled from UMNO) that they used the Malay Dilemma to plan for affirmative action for the Malays and other Bumiputeras. Whether it is true or not it is not important. But their proposals seemed quite similar with what I wrote.

8. Implementing affirmative action was not as easy as planning it. Capital, licences and permits, premises etc were made available and later contracts and shares were given to aspiring Malays. The Government set up agencies to represent the Malays to improve their capacity to take advantage of the affirmative actions of the NEP. When the idea of privatisation was espoused it was natural to give many of the opportunities to Malays.

9. In education, quotas and scholarships were created to provide the opportunities for them to gain the required knowledge in all fields so as to ensure their upward mobility.

10. It was assumed that the Malays would all grab at these opportunities. Initially they did. The early scholarship students studied very hard and qualified themselves especially for employment in the Government. But today the attitude has changed. Getting scholarships and places in the universities at home and abroad are considered a matter of right and are not valued anymore. Indeed those who get these educational opportunities for some unknown reason seem to dislike the very people who created these opportunities. Worse still they don't seem to appreciate the opportunities that they got. They become more interested in other things, politics in particular, to the detriment of their studies.

11. In business, the vast majority regarded the opportunities given them as something to be exploited for the quickest return. Very early on they had sold off their opportunities in order to become sleeping partners in an arrangement cynically known as "Ali Baba", in which Ali merely obtains the licences, permits, shares or contracts and immediately sell these off to non-Malays, mainly Chinese. They learn nothing about business and become even less capable at doing businesses and earning an income from their activities. They become mere sleeping partners and at times not even that. Having sold they no longer have anything to do with the business. They would go to the Government for more licences, permits, shares, etc.

12. Admittedly a few of them were serious and some of them succeeded. But the majority contributed nothing to the NEP target. The NEP quota of 30 percent would have been achieved long ago had all the shares, licences, contracts, etc been used by the Malays fully.

13. Why has this thing happened? The answer lies in the culture of the Malays. They are laid back and prone to take the easy way out. And the easy way out is to sell off whatever they get and ask for more. This is their culture. Working hard, taking risk and being patient is not a part of their culture.

14. It should be remembered that in the past the Malays were not prepared to take up the jobs created by the colonial powers in their effort to exploit the country. Because the Malays were not prepared to work in rubber estates and the mines, the Indians and Chinese were brought in. At one time the migrants outnumbered the Malays. Had they continued to outnumber the Malays, independent Malaya would be like independent Singapore. But the Malays have apparently learnt nothing from the near loss of their country in the past. Today they are still unwilling to work and foreign workers are again flooding the country. And because they are not equipping themselves with the necessary education and skills they have continued to depend on others.

15. Their political dominance will protect them for a time. But that dominance is fading very fast as they quarrel among themselves and break up into small ineffective groups. Their numerical superiority means less today than at the time of independence. But they are not quite conscious or they choose to ignore this fact. Their "tidak apa" attitude lulls them into a feeling of security that is not justified.

16. The Malays together with the other Bumiputeras make up 60 percent of the country's population. But in terms of their political clout it is now much less than 60 percent. They are now more dependent on non-Malay support, both the Government party and the opposition.

17. Economically of course they have less than half the 30 percent share that has been allocated to them. If we discount the non-Malay contribution to the nation's economy, Malaysia would be not much better than some of the African developing countries.

18. To succeed the Malays must change their culture. They must look towards work as a reward in itself. They must regard what they achieve through work as the true reward. There should be some financial reward but this must not outweigh the

satisfaction obtained from the result of their work. They must have proper work ethics which involve taking pride in the result of their work rather than the monetary reward alone.

19. The races which take pride in their work and its results are the most successful people. The idea of quality is not commonly understood by Malays. The result is shoddy work. There is no pride. And without this, without the desire to continuously improve the results, there will be no progress.

20. Changing culture is far more difficult than changing the policies of Government. It is easy enough to propose affirmative action but it is not easy to implement it. The recipients must have the right attitude if the results are going to be obtained.

21. Once it was realised that creating opportunities was not enough, attention shifted to changing attitudes. Courses and lectures were given on values and culture. It was necessary to point out the dangers faced by the Malays. They are still not out of the woods yet. Today they can lean on the crutches of Malay privileges to protect them. But crutches invariably weaken the users. To be strong and to be able to fend for themselves the crutches must be discarded.

22. Unfortunately their view is that their crutches are symbols of their superior status in the country. The sad thing is that they are not even using the crutches properly. As a result they gain nothing or very little from the availability of these aids.

23. Dependent as they are on these crutches they will remain weak. Yet they have the capacity to acquire the necessary strength so as to throw away the crutches. All that is needed is to change their wrong perceptions and to change their culture. If they do this, in stages perhaps, then they would be able to straighten up and to stand tall like the others.

24. So what is the New Malay Dilemma? Their old dilemma was whether they should distort the picture a little in order to help themselves. The new dilemma is whether they should or should not do away with the crutches that they have gotten used to, which in fact they have become proud of.

25. There is a minority of Malays who are confident enough to think of doing away with the crutches, albeit gradually. But they are a very small minority. Their numbers are not going to increase any time soon. They are generally regarded as traitors to the Malay race.

26. Perhaps because I am trained as a doctor of medicine I look at crutches differently. There was a time when doctors expected crutches to be used for life. But today doctors get their patients on their feet as soon as possible. Physiotherapy has been developed into a science with the aim of rehabilitating the incapacitated. Prosthesis have been perfected so that even those without legs can walk normally and those without hands can handle things like their fortunate colleagues.

27. We see today people born without hands actually painting and writing with their feet. And the results they achieve are as good as those of well-endowed people. Necessity and sheer grit enable them to do this. It is clearly possible to minimise dependency on aid and to achieve normalcy almost.

28. Among Malays the sense of pity is very strong. They would not want a handicapped person to overcome his handicap. They would rather openly and loudly sympathise with him. "Kasihan" is the word they utter frequently. And they would help the handicapped by doing things for them. They would not want to get the handicap to overcome his disability himself. Certainly they do not think that the handicap should earn his way in life by acquiring some marketable skills. Pitying the handicaps, they want them to remain dependent.

29. There will be a host of protest over this generalisation about Malay attitude. We read almost every day about blind Malay people and other handicapped Malays graduating with university degrees or driving cars or doing all kinds of work. This does not prove that the generalisation that I make is wrong. These are exceptions. They only prove that if the right attitude or culture is adopted, even the handicapped can succeed.

30. I have seen the effect of being over sympathetic towards the handicapped, including old people. They become even more handicapped, even more dependent. They seem to wallow in this pity for them. And they will never be able to overcome their handicaps. Charity is fine. We should all be charitable. But we should help with our charity to make the handicapped less dependent on charity and pity.

31. This is not the attitude of the Malays. They like to express pity, often in front of the subject. It undermines the spirit and prevents the development of a positive attitude and attempt to recover.

32. Given a positive attitude and strong determination all handicap persons can achieve a degree of improvement and become as nearly normal as possible.

33. The dilemma faced by those few who want to build a strong, resilient and independent Malay race without crutches is that they are most likely to end up becoming unpopular and losing the ability to influence the changes in the culture and the value system which is necessary. It seems that they should not try and yet they know that without the cultural changes the Malays are going to fail.

34. But this is not the only dilemma faced by the Malays now. The emergence of the Islamic Party has resulted in the struggle to build the resilience of the Malays being deflected by the so-called religious imperatives invented by political Islam.

35. The Malays are deeply religious but they are not knowledgeable enough about Islam to distinguish between what is Islamic and what is not. Religious piety is highly valued by the Malays but they equate piety with outward appearance and not the true teachings of the Al-Quran and the true tradition or Hadith of the Prophet. This simple perception of their religion open opportunities for the unscrupulous to exploit religion for their own purpose.

36. Religion is not a matter of common sense. It is a matter of belief, of faith. Trying to argue on the basis of common sense or logic is not going to get one anywhere.

37. But if it is the true teachings of religion it does not matter if it is logical or not. Islam for example teaches only good things, good values which can ensure Muslims become good people and their society is stable, well-governed and prosperous. The fundamentals of Islam can help build a successful and healthy civilisation. This was what happened to the ignorant Arabs who embraced Islam 1400 years ago. This wild, unprincipled feuding Arab tribes united and developed a Muslim civilisation which lasted 1300 years. It collapsed only after the Muslims deviated from the true teachings and returned to their pre-Islamic ignorant Jahilliah ways.

38. In Malaysia today we are seeing the abuse of the teachings of Islam. Using Islam as its name and shamelessly misinterpreting it, the politicians of the so-called Islamic Party have cashed in on the deep faith of the Malay Muslims to trap them and close their minds to anything else other than what they have been taught by these politicians.

39. For example it is normal for people to be grateful for what they get. In Malaysia the development brought about by the Malay dominated Government must surely earn the thanks and therefore the support of the Malays.

40. Seeing this the religiously trained teachers in the Islamic Party actually taught their captive followers including children in the kindergarten not to be thankful to the people who gave them anything. They are taught that in Islam there is no need to thank the Government which helps them. They are taught that this is the duty of Government and any Government would do this. They have only to be thankful to Allah and not to the Government for the bounties that they get.

41. This is totally against the teachings of Islam but such is the faith in these political Islamic leaders and their interpretations of Islam that the recipients of Government help will actually curse and condemn the very Government which had been generous to them.

42. On the other hand, any obvious misdeeds by these so-called Muslim politician is justified or forgiven or overlooked. Thus their leaders can commit khalwat, or surreptitiously marry outside the country, or curse and swear or claim that Allah also curses and swear, even expose themselves to women, or break up the Malay Muslim community by having separate prayers, threatening to divorce their wives should their wives reject their unprincipled behavior or support other parties, rejecting imams on political grounds through boycotts of any villager who does not support them, but still their leaders will be considered as good Muslims whom they must follow.

43. Democracy is mainly about the people choosing the Governments to rule the country. It is assumed that the people will choose the good people, the right people who can form a good Government, delivering to the people both their material and spiritual needs, developing the country and defending the country against foreign hegemony. But sometimes the majority of the people may not be able to choose wisely because they have been completely brainwashed.

44. In Malaysia many of the Malays have had their minds controlled through the abuse of religious teachings. Today in Malaysia many Malays, not really understanding Islam, have been misled by the seemingly pious turban and Arabic dress of the Islamic Party leaders. They fanatically follow the dictates of this party even when this leads to the country becoming misgoverned, to practices and values against the teachings of Islam. It is not far-fetched to say that for many Malays their Malay and Islamic values have been destroyed. Such is the deviation from Malay and Islamic culture that many Malays are willing to vote and support a Party which advocates and practises violence, which curse and swear and lead by immoral leaders. The end result of the deviation must be the election of a bad Government and the stoppage of the efforts

to ensure that the Malays remain politically empowered and economically as advanced as the other races.

45. Malaysia is committed to Democracy. We are not liberal democrats but we certainly uphold the most important element of democracy, the right to elect our Governments through voting into power the party we think will best serve us. But because of what I have mentioned regarding the brainwashing by the so-called Islamic Party, there is every danger of the wrong party being elected and forming the Government. We have seen this happening in many countries where populist parties which promise all kinds of impossible things have been elected by a gullible electorate. It is possible for this to happen to Malaysia. It is entirely possible for all the prosperity, the stability and the racial harmony to be destroyed.

46. The dilemma that the Malays and the peoples of Malaysia face is whether we should in the name of democracy, allow the country to be destroyed or we ensure that people are not subjected to manipulations to the point where they will use democracy to destroy democracy.

47. It has to be remembered that most democratic countries are mindful of this possibility. Many so-called liberal democracies do not allow Communists and fascists to participate in their elections. They do this because they believe that if these parties win a democratic election they will put an end to democracy.

48. Can we take a leaf from their book and risk condemnation for not being democratic?

49. That is the second dilemma facing the country and in particular the Malays. The danger for the Malays is that their development and empowerment would be so retarded that they will never be able to gain their rightful place in their own country. They will be impoverished economically and also politically. Their empowerment at this point in time will wither away. And they will be the deprived in their own country.

50. You have asked me to talk about the New Malay Dilemma. As you can see I have identified not one but two new Malay Dilemmas. I leave it to you to digest this view and I hope by diagnosing the diseases we can help to prescribe the remedies. I wish you all the best.