

## Malaysia Opp leaves jihad option open

THE STAR  
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

51-9  
15/10  
KUALA LUMPUR, Oct. 14, —  
The Opposition party, PAS  
(Pan Islamic Malaysian Party),  
has said it won't issue any offi-  
cial order for its members to  
fight in Afghanistan against  
the US and allied forces,

The party had recently de-  
clared jihad against the USA.

"We leave it to each Muslim to  
make their decision over the  
matter," the PAS president, Fad-  
zil Noor, remarked yesterday.

He refuted suggestions by  
Malaysia's ruling party, Uni-  
ted Malay National Organisa-  
tion, that the PAS had no right  
to declare jihad because it was  
just a political party.

"This is a right of every Mus-  
lim ... it doesn't belong to just  
PAS or Umno," he said, in re-  
sponse to statements that the  
PAS's call for jihad wouldn't get  
the backing of the government  
and those who go to Afghani-  
stan for the purpose of fighting  
the US-led forces against the  
Taliban would not be helped by  
Malaysian missions overseas  
should they get into difficulties.

THE STATESMAN

15 OCT 2002

# Malaysia dismisses report

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE, Oct. 11.** The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said today that his Government did not attach much importance to a *New York Times* report that terrorists linked to the Al-Qaeda outfit in Malaysia would be targeted in future by the United States.

In Manila, the Philippines National Security Adviser, Mr. Rolio Golez, "dismissed" the newspaper report, which said that Washington was likely to target terrorists tied to the Al-Qaeda in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Mr. Badawi was quoted as saying by the Bernama news agency that his Government did not attach much importance to the *Times* report as it merely quoted an official. The Deputy Prime Minister said that if the report was correct then the United States must disclose this information to Malaysia.

"I hope that if there is anything undesirable which they (the U.S.) feel will threaten their interests here or the interests of others or that of our own Government, they will not hesitate to inform us," he said in

Kuala Lumpur. This, Mr. Badawi said, would allow Malaysia to exchange information with the U.S. to take action against these terrorists.

In Manila, Mr. Rolio Golez stated that a team of American military advisers headed by a General would arrive in the next few weeks to help local troops address the problem of terrorism. He said the U.S. team would discuss with Filipino officials the possibilities of help in planning, training and adjusting their programmes to tackle international terrorist problems. The obvious target in the Philippines is the Abu Sayyaf group, which in the recent past has taunted the United States to take action against it. Foreign nationals, including Americans, have been targeted by this group which reportedly also has links to Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda movement. There is little doubt that Islamist extremism is a problem in Malaysia, the Philippines as well as Indonesia.

However, the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo Government in the Philippines has been unable to militarily tackle the Abu Sayyaf, whose terrorists have given the slip to the military twice in recent months.

THE HINDU

12 OCT 2001

---

## Malaysia for world meet

FD-4 1/19 By Amit Baruah *S. Asia Mail*

**SINGAPORE, SEPT. 14** The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has called for a world conference against terrorism following Tuesday's terrorist attacks in America in which some 5,000 persons were feared killed.

"We need to look at terrorism as a crime that has to be addressed by the whole world," Dr. Mahathir told reporters in Kuala Lumpur after signing a condolence book at the American embassy.

Dr. Mahathir, widely regarded as the leader of a moderate Muslim nation, was quoted as saying: "Islamic countries should not side with fellow Islamic countries while non-Islamic countries should not take side with non-Islamic countries on who are their friends or enemies."

According to the Malaysian leader, the root causes of terrorism had to be addressed if the cycle of violence was to be broken.

Separately, the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, said he was "happy" that possible American retaliation was not directed at Muslims.

---

**THE HINDU**

15 SEP 2001

AD-15  
17/2

# Harmony is Malaysia's strength: Mahathir

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE, JULY 16.** The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, completed 20 years in office today.

A controversial personality, Dr. Mahathir is one of the longest-serving Heads of Government in the world. He cited "stability and relative racial harmony" as his greatest achievement as Prime Minister.

A man not afraid of speaking his mind, Dr. Mahathir has steered the ship of State according to his own thought process — often criticising the Western world for its way of doing things. "I have not much time to think about regrets," the Prime Minister was quoted as saying at a press conference today.

"I may have made some mistakes but I can't regret the decisions that I have made, although they may be very unpopular and caused me to lose support," he said. "But I believe I did these things for the good of the country, not for my own good because I am going away. I can't stay forever".

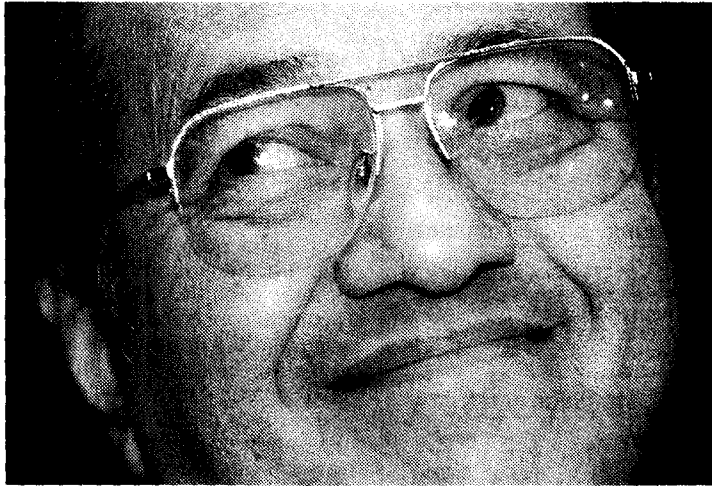
Referring to the political stability and relative racial harmony, Dr. Mahathir stated: "In Malaysia, we still live together, work together, play together. We still have our differences but we settle our differences across the table.

"I hope Malaysia will continue to be stable and able to grow rapidly. I also hope Malaysia will continue to be free and not controlled by any parties except Malaysians," he maintained.

The 1998 arrest of his one-time deputy, Dr. Anwar Ibrahim, and his subsequent conviction have divided the Malays in Malaysia, who constitute nearly 60 per cent of the population.

There is little doubt that Dr. Mahathir's popularity is at a personal low, but he is a fighter and may well lead the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) into the next election in 2004.

However, Dr. Mahathir is unfazed by what his critics think of



him and continues to remain engaged with matters of State and governance.

To a question on how he felt on completing 20 years in office, Dr. Mahathir said: "Don't know. If you don't remind me, I would have forgotten. I hope I will be able to retire as soon as I am allowed to retire. At the moment, I am not supposed to mention it because it has a very bad effect on the market. Maybe, share prices might go up if I retire, I don't know. They said it may go down."

The Prime Minister also dismissed a protest yesterday against the "draconian" Internal Security Act.

"This is the new culture that you have to protest against everything, so you can expect these things to happen all over the world," Dr. Mahathir maintained. "I am told that some 100,000 people will be protesting the G-7 meeting in Italy... in Malaysia, maybe 30 people, 100 people protest. It's a small thing. I don't see why people should be worried about these things."

Politically, the Prime Minister is facing several questions from within UMNO. The unexplained departure of his long-time associate, Mr. Daim Zainuddin, as Finance Minister, has also raised questions.

The rise of the extremist Islamic party or PAS has led to loss in sup-

port for UMNO and is definitely a cause for worry for both UMNO and the Prime Minister.

There is little doubt that the legacy of Dr. Mahathir will be a controversial one — like the 20 long years he has spent in office.

## Jail for Iranian dissident

**TEHRAN, JULY 16.** An Iranian reform journalist, Mr. Akbar Ganji (45), has been given a six-year jail sentence for harming State security, a statement from Teheran's courthouse quoted by the radio said today.

"Akbar Ganji was condemned by a Teheran court to six years in prison for collecting confidential information with the aim of harming the security of the State," the statement said.

"Akbar Ganji was also condemned for insulting the founder of the Islamic republic (the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini) and the sacred values of the regime, and for propaganda against the Islamic republic."

The verdict was definitive, it said, implying that Mr. Ganji could not appeal. Mr. Ganji was sentenced to 10 years in prison followed by five years in internal exile last January by a revolutionary court for attending a conference in Berlin that was judged anti-Islamic. — AFP

# THE BUILDER

As he nears the anniversary of two decades in power, Mahathir bin Mohamad spends most of his time in a newly built, green-domed office overlooking the beginnings of a grand city being built from scratch.

In the valleys below are artificial lakes, meticulously planned roads and parks, a giant pink mosque and imposing buildings to house government ministries.

Putrajaya, as the budding city is known, is a fitting spot for Mr Mahathir's twilight years. The Prime Minister will perhaps be remembered as Southeast Asia's Great Builder: He erected the world's tallest buildings, the Petronas Towers. He created the modern face of Malaysia — highways, airports, museums, hydroelectric dams and mass-transit systems.

Mr Mahathir has also been described as the most forward-thinking leader in the Muslim world. He steered Malaysia from reliance on tin, palm oil and rubber to a thriving trading nation that churns out microchips by the millions.

Yet the Prime Minister's new office in Putrajaya is fitting also because of its distance — 50 kilometres — from Kuala Lumpur, the commercial hub and erstwhile political capital. It is far from the people who elected him, and far from the growing number of critics and opponents who wish he would step down and go away.

Mr Mahathir is increasingly criticised and resented for the failings of the less tangible side of his rule: Institutions have decayed, corruption has spread and dissent has often been met with repression.

The story of Mahathir bin Mohamad, 75, his critics say, is that of a man who built a modern nation but destroyed a democracy, who used hope to inspire his countrymen but then resorted to fear.

Today, partly as a result of these failings, Mr Mahathir presides over a country gripped by political uncertainty that verges on paralysis. His party is losing elections, largely because of personal antipathy to the Prime Minister himself. His closest business associates, the "cronies" who helped finance and carry out his large-scale construction projects, are deep in debt.

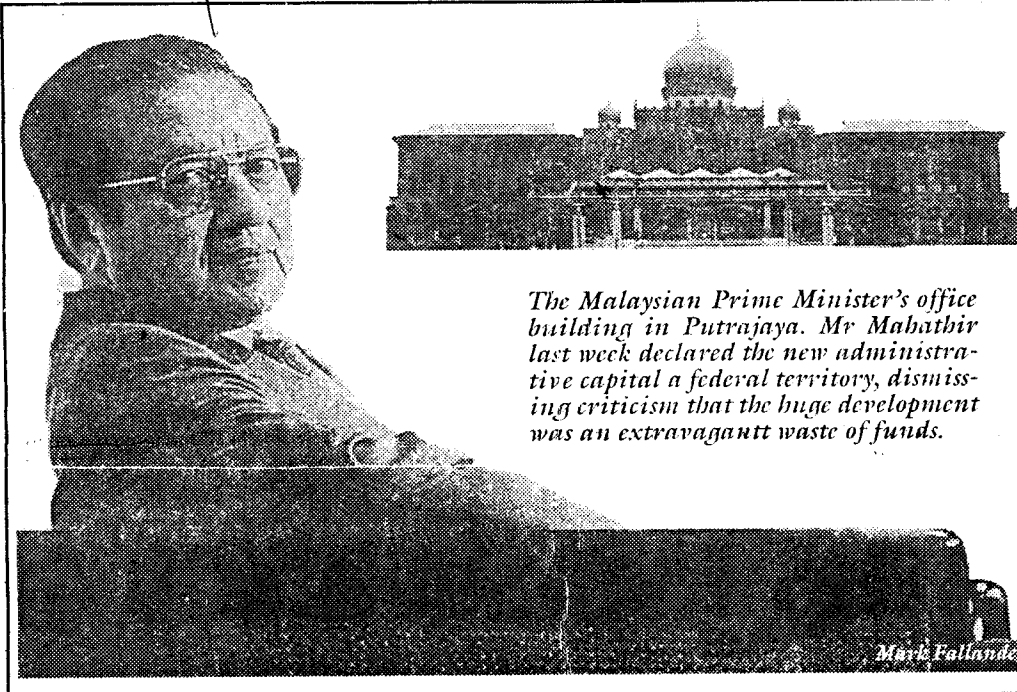
Judges are for the first time blowing the whistle on rigged elections and detention of government critics.

And a conservative Islamic party is steadily winning support, threatening the primacy of Mr Mahathir's secular-oriented party and putting the country's dominant Muslim community on a road toward dangerous divisions.

The success or failure of Mr Mahathir's Malaysia in the coming years is crucial both for the country's 23 million citizens and, to a lesser degree, for the more than half-billion people of Southeast Asia.

Malaysia is alternatively a beacon and a warning light for Southeast Asia. In racial and religious terms, this relatively small country is a Southeast Asian microcosm of somewhat exaggerated proportions, a test case of whether leaders can manage conflicts among Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, between indigenous populations and ethnic Chinese.

In economic terms, the country presents a test of whether two decades of intensive foreign investment, now trailing off, can be translated into a self-sustained economy able to compete with China — or, whether Malaysia



By THOMAS FULLER

The Malaysian Prime Minister's office building in Putrajaya. Mr Mahathir last week declared the new administrative capital a federal territory, dismissing criticism that the huge development was an extravagant waste of funds.

Today, the Prime Minister repeatedly and openly warns opponents of the government what they can expect if they challenge him. In April he told Parliament that the government was prepared to break with 'so-called international norms' to preserve 'peace'. 'You play with fire, you are going to get a lot of trouble in this country,' he said. A week later the Prime Minister carried through with his threat. The police detained ten Opposition figures who had vocally called for Mr Mahathir's ouster

and the region will be eclipsed and slide into decline.

The coming months and years will also determine whether Mr Mahathir's personalised, paternalistic style of government — a powerful executive, controlled press and draconian laws — succeeds in the most crucial test of any system: a transfer of power.

Shahri Samad, a former government minister, calls Mr Mahathir the "only party leader I know who is a liability to his party". And yet for a variety of reasons, the Prime Minister remains unchallenged from within: Party officials say no one has told Mr Mahathir that they would be better off without him.

"No one dares say it," Mr Shahri said. "And of course no one would say it to Mahathir directly."

Chandra Muzaffar, deputy president of Keadilan, an Opposition party, says Mr Mahathir is still in power because of "his obsession with power and control and dominance."

"He can't let go," Mr Muzaffar said. "He cannot step down."

For many Malaysians, ambivalence is the strongest feeling they have toward Mr Mahathir. He is the Prime Minister whose stewardship over the economy allowed a growing middle class to build their homes, buy their second cars and hire their Indonesian maids.

For years Mr Mahathir spoke to Malaysians' basic concerns, down to minute details. Trained as a doctor, he is known for inspecting the cleanliness of toilets at airports, for checking drains on city streets. He orders bureaucrats to plant trees.

Mr Mahathir is praised for his skill in keeping together a nation of so many races that it is best described not as a melting pot, but a salad bowl.

Prodded by his daughter, he also has stuck up for women's rights and AIDS awareness.

"I don't care that people have negative views of him," Marina Mahathir said about her father. "But often people have a one-dimensional understanding of him."

One of the Prime Minister's

sharpest critics, Lim Kit Siang, the chairman of the second-largest Opposition party, says Mr Mahathir is "either capable of great good or great evil".

"He is driven by a conviction that everything he's doing is right and for the good of the country."

Men like Mr Lim know Mr Mahathir's darker side. In 1987, the Prime Minister ordered the detention without trial of Mr Lim and about 120 other Opposition figures. Mr Lim was released after a year and a half without ever being charged with a crime.

Today, Mr Mahathir continues his tough, authoritarian practices. He controls the police and towers over anyone in his Cabinet.

His most famous opponent, Anwar Ibrahim, was once his designated successor. Mr Anwar was dismissed from government in 1998 after an abortive effort to unseat Mr Mahathir at a party gathering. He was arrested under

**The success or failure of Mr Mahathir's Malaysia in the coming years is crucial both for the country's 23 million citizens and, to a lesser degree, for the more than half-billion people of Southeast Asia. Malaysia is alternatively a beacon and a warning light for Southeast Asia. In racial and religious terms, this relatively small country is a Southeast Asian microcosm of somewhat exaggerated proportions, a test case of whether leaders can manage conflicts among Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, between indigenous populations and ethnic Chinese**

the country's Internal Security Act and subsequently beaten while blindfolded and chained to a bed in his cell.

The national police chief, who admitted carrying out the beating but said that Mr Mahathir was unaware of his actions, was sentenced to two months in prison and served 40 days. Mr Anwar was sentenced to 15 years in prison for sodomy and abuse of power, charges that he says were politically motivated.

The dismissal and dismal treatment of Mr Anwar were perhaps the worst political calculation of Mr Mahathir's career, putting a

spotlight on the excesses of his paternalistic style. The move destroyed a system of succession that had worked smoothly since Malaysia's independence from Britain in 1957.

"I wish that I could turn back the clock a few years," said the Prime Minister's daughter. "There were certain things that could have been avoided, like the black eye." (Mr Anwar showed up in court with a black eye.)

Mr Mahathir has never apologised for the beating and today refers to Mr Anwar's spinal injuries as a "backache". (Aides to the Prime Minister said he was unavailable to be interviewed.) Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore and Mr Mahathir's contemporary, has described the Anwar affair as an "unmitigated disaster".

"I think that Dr Mahathir paid a very heavy price," the elder statesman said during a visit to Kuala Lumpur last year. "He made an error of judgment, sev-

eral errors of judgment, which I felt were most unfortunate." The dismissal was also a turning point in the credibility that Mr Mahathir had with ordinary Malaysians. The day after Mr Anwar was dismissed, Malaysians realised that the country's government-friendly media were not there to tell them the news but to report Mr Mahathir's political agenda and shape public opinion.

Mr Anwar, who for years had been praised and heralded in the media as the next Prime Minister, suddenly was dragged through the mud and accused of

adultery, sodomy and abuse of power. The public felt manipulated in such a raw way that even Malaysia's nonpolitical masses reacted. It was the beginning of Mr Mahathir's steady decline in popularity.

Today, the Prime Minister repeatedly and openly warns opponents of the government what they can expect if they challenge him. In April he told Parliament that the government was prepared to break with "so-called international norms" to preserve "peace".

"You play with fire, you are going to get a lot of trouble in this country," he said. A week later the Prime Minister carried through with his threat. The police detained ten Opposition figures who had vocally called for Mr Mahathir's ouster. Four of them are still being held without trial under the Internal Security Act.

Mr Mahathir's power base is also buttressed by his dominance of the country's pliant media. For much of the past two decades, the Prime Minister's almost daily comments to reporters have been printed verbatim in the newspapers. His portrait is on the walls of every government office and most shops. His writings — he is the author of a half-dozen books — are prominently displayed in bookstores.

In March, a top government aide suggested that the Prime Minister's world view be offered as a course at universities.

"The time has come for the institutions to come up with a specific field of study on the thoughts of Dr Mahathir," said Dusuki Ahmad, the Prime Minister's political secretary.

After two decades in power — the official anniversary is July 16 — Mr Mahathir's views have become the country's views. His aspirations, prejudices and grudges and have become nationalised.

Malaysia's foreign policy is guided by the Prime Minister's personal ideology. Mr Mahathir invites world leaders like Fidel Castro of Cuba and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela because they share his anti-Western rhetoric.

Mr Mahathir's sharp tongue has

gotten him noticed both domestically and abroad. In April, he told an audience in Dubai that to avoid the pitfalls of multiparty democracy, "some countries must be ruled by dictators".

In 1998, during the economic crisis, he said he worried that if currency speculators continued to attack Russia, "then they may want to drop the bombs on those who attack them".

The Prime Minister makes few apologies for such headline-catching, yet sometimes offensive, comments. "I'm brash and abrasive but that's because I've noticed when people are nice and polite, they never get anywhere," he once said.

By the standards of his own political world, his brazen language is unusual. Mr Mahathir hails from a culture that values courtesy, nonconfrontation and temperance. Rural politicians in Malaysia often apologise after expressing strong views. Yet the Prime Minister seems to thrive on verbal conflict.

Over the years, Mr Mahathir's mastery of the dynamics of Malay and Chinese race relations also has been paradoxical. The Malays, the people who brought him to power, have abandoned him. And the Chinese, who viewed him as a Malay "ultra" and were apprehensive when he came to power, are his most solid supporters.

This is far from the only paradox closing out Mr Mahathir's rule. The Prime Minister was one of the first politicians in Southeast Asia to recognise the importance of the Internet for economic development. Yet today many of his critics use the global network to skirt Malaysia's strict publishing laws and disseminate anti-government views.

Demands on the Prime Minister are mounting: Lawyers are calling for a more independent judicial system, businessmen want a system of open bidding for government contracts, members of the governing party want a halt to bailouts of influential cronies and Chinese voters want a more independent press.

The Opposition is scrutinising every business deal that involves Mr Mahathir's family, often accusing the first family of nepotism.

In April, Mr Mokhzani announced that he was stepping down as the head of two high-profile companies, a move that some analysts interpreted as cashing out before his father leaves the scene.

Mr Mokhzani says he simply realised that he is not capable of ambition on the scale of his father's. "I've seen what my father has to sacrifice as the Prime Minister of Malaysia," he told a local newspaper in April. "I'm not sure that I'm made of the same stuff as he is."

Taken together, the pockets of dissent facing the prime minister are a formidable challenge and could force him to either resign or crack down harder. Already there are signs of internal rifts, such as the one with the country's second most powerful man, Daim Zainuddin, who resigned as finance minister this month.

When Mr Mahathir leaves, said Mr Muzaffar, the Opposition politician, "It will emerge from all the little things that have been happening."

He added, "It will not be like the Philippines or Indonesia: It won't be in the streets, it won't be a dramatic event. It will be something very quiet."

By arrangement with the International Herald Tribune

HD-12

# Mahathir says no to treatment abroad for Anwar

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE, MAY 24.** In a surprising move, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, today held a meeting with Opposition leaders but stuck to his decision that the jailed former Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, could not travel abroad for surgery. "We are disappointed with the outcome of the meeting," Mr. Fadzil Noor, president of the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), was quoted as telling reporters after the meeting at Putrajaya, Malaysia's new administrative capital. "The Prime Minister told us that Anwar will not be allowed to go abroad for treatment....that's his final decision," Mr. Fadzil stated, adding that the meeting had been cordial.

Apart from the PAS president, leaders from the National Justice Party (Keadilan) headed by Mr. Anwar's wife, Ms. Azizah Ismail, and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) were present at the meeting. Said to be the first meeting of its kind, it comes close on the heels of the Prime Minister trying to accommodate the interests of different sections even as several Opposition politicians have been placed under detention in recent weeks.

Mr. Anwar, who is serving a 15-year jail term for abuse of power and sodomy, is suffering from a slipped disc. Shifted last November to hospital from his jail cell, Mr. Anwar moved back to his prison on May 10 after he refused to undergo surgery in Malaysia. "Dr. Mahathir



**A small boy raises his fist in support of the Reformasi demonstration held at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. — AFP**

said the Government can allow the endoscopic surgery to be done here and to bring the experts to Malaysia." M...

meeting. "We appealed to him numerous times by giving reasons why Anwar needs surgery abroad. We told him that it would cost five times more than the estimated amount (for surgery abroad) if the consultant comes to Malaysia. But Dr. Mahathir said his decision was final, that Anwar cannot go abroad," the PAS chief added.

It is an indication that Mr. Anwar remains a "live issue" that the Prime Minister held a meeting with Opposition politicians to discuss the contentious issue of medical treatment for his one-time chosen successor. Other than this meeting, the Prime Minister, of late, has made several moves which appear to be aimed at regaining some of the ground lost by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the chief constituent of the Barisan Nasional (National Front) which rules the country.

While the party continues to have a comfortable majority in Parliament, it has lost electoral support in the last elections and also faced defeat in a key by-election. From within UMNO too, there has been criticism of the Government. A general meeting of the organisation is scheduled to take place next month. The Prime Minister has also appointed a Chinese press secretary in a bid to win back the support of the powerful Chinese community in the country which was concerned about the Government's approach to Chinese

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2001

# Chaff and the grain

519  
1813  
WHEN racial clashes broke out in Kampung Medan in Malaysia, crime reporters were despatched there. For safety reasons, many editors tried sending Chinese reporters instead of their Malay and Indian colleagues. Working against tight deadlines, the reporters did not just get the police side of the story. They also talked to the residents. To verify the number of victims who died in the clashes, they double-checked with their hospital sources. Sieving through the information, they separated facts from hearsay. The press did not depend on one source. In reporting fights involving ethnic groups, the press often takes extra precautions.

In the Kampung Medan incident, there is no shortage of experts claiming their accounts are correct. They include those who have never even stepped into the area. Foreign news agencies, usually run by a few correspondents, do not have the manpower to check out every detail but this is no excuse for sloppy reporting. Malaysians have reason to be concerned with the accuracy of foreign media reports. In some cases, the inaccurate and often sensational reporting comes from Malaysians working for foreign news agencies in Malaysia. It is not clear whether rewriting is done by their editors based in another side of the world. But the implications of irresponsible journalism have been damaging. For example, the *Associated Press* quoted an unnamed Opposition leader as saying 13 people were killed in four days of fighting in Kampung Medan.

The report, carried prominently in the *International Herald Tribune* on 14 March said: "The figure is in line with reports of about a dozen deaths from area residents and hospital sources, all of whom asked not to be identified. The figure could not be confirmed." *The Asian Wall Street Journal* on 14 March reported that the "actual death toll was about a dozen, twice as high as the official count." *Associated Press* has also continuously reported the fighting as being said to have been sparked by a dispute between an Indian family holding a funeral procession and a Malay one celebrating a wedding.

But the writer has not verified whether a funeral procession and a *kenduri* (feast) was possible between 3 am and 5 am when the incident took place. The foreign media could have easily checked the number of deaths if they seriously wanted to. The *Straits Times* (Singapore) and *Reuters* checked and reported that the six deaths

were accurate. *Malaysiakini* has given the impression that it reproduced an Opposition party statement without checking the figure. It said: "Based on reliable family and hospital sources, we fear that the actual number of deaths is greater than the official figure."

One US-based news Website, *Stratfor*, gave an analysis of the incident under the heading "Malaysia: Ethnic tensions weakening Prime Minister's hold on power." The report, read by policymakers and businessmen, is particularly damaging

**The ethnic clashes in Malaysia was confined to an area. To make it seem like the whole country was on fire was not news reporting. It was fiction, says WONG CHUN WAI**

as it had little information on the clash but the writer gave the impression that Malaysia was unstable with a possible outbreak of racial riots. Although some politicians have claimed there is a link between the foreign media and the Opposition, it does not sound convincing.

It is more a case of sensational and irresponsible reporting by the foreign media reporters. There is a

lesson here, too. Despite the authorities' mistrust of the foreign media, there is need for the latter to have access to decision-makers for accurate information. Our leaders must also be prepared to tackle issues head on instead of making vague and banal references to outsiders and troublemakers which no one can pinpoint.

Still, the home ministry and the police have for the first time provided more information to the press following a directive from Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to give all the facts. And at press briefings, the police readily answer all questions. It is a break from the past. The baggage from the 1969 riots appears to be lighter now with more openness from the home ministry and the police.

The question is whether the Malaysians can handle news detailing racial involvement without getting emotional and, at the same time, get out of the self-denial mindset. We don't need to get worked up over media reports of such fights. What is more important is the truth. The timing of the Kampung Medan incident is bad. For ordinary Malaysians, they had hoped to benefit from tourist arrivals for the Mega Sale Carnival and the Formula One race. When foreign reporters file jazzed-up reports of the Kampung Medan incident, which was confined to a neighbourhood, to make it look like the whole country is on fire, it is no longer news reporting — it is fiction.

— The Star/Asia News Network

THE STATESMAN

18 MAR 2001

18 MAR 2001

# Malaysia: riots show plight of Indians

*Handwritten: 17/3*  
**Kuala Lumpur, March 16**  
(Reuters): When communal clashes broke out last week in a tough, crime-ridden neighbourhood outside Kuala Lumpur the violence highlighted the plight of Malaysia's impoverished ethnic Indian minority.

Four of the six people killed in the nation's worst ethnic violence for more than 30 years were Indians, a community regarded as the poorest in the nation's multicultural society. Taman Desaria, where the clashes occurred, is a fringe of villages on the edge of Petaling Jaya, a satellite town south of Kuala Lumpur. It is divided into pockets of almost exclusively Indian and Malay communities, along with some immigrant Indonesian workers.

It is also one of the nation's most violent places. Police say there were 53 murders last year in the area, the highest rate in the country. Indigenous Malays were settled in Taman Desaria as part of Malaysia's New Economic Plan, designed to lift the economic and social lot of the majority ethnic group.

The Indians arrived from rubber plantations and erected slums next door, and with no jobs many turned to crime. A gang culture flourished and, according to police, violence has been going on there for the past decade.

Most of the Indians are Tamils. Their forefathers came from southern India around a century ago to work in the plantations and do the backbreaking work for their British colonial masters, such as building roads and railways. While Malaysia has transformed itself into one of Southeast Asia's most developed nations, its ethnic Indians are still bottom of the heap, holding less than two per cent of the country's wealth.

While race issues are highly charged, Malaysia's record for keeping the peace has been fairly good since Malay-Chinese riots in 1969, when around 200 people were killed after an election.

The last serious conflict was in 1998, when nine people were hurt in Hindu-Muslim clashes over the relocation of a Hindu shrine in northern Penang state.

The latest bloody fighting erupted last week after an argument over a broken windscreen. But days earlier there had been skirmishes when a Hindu funeral procession crossed the path of a Malay wedding.

Even before these clashes, taxi drivers would seldom venture into Taman Desaria.

"In this particular area you not only have economic backwardness but a high level of drug addiction as well," activist Charles Santiago said.

Indians have been blamed for committing more serious crimes than other ethnic groups in the country though they make up less than a tenth of the country's population.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 67 MAR 2001

17 MAR 2001



## Chinese missile base spotted near Taiwan

A US SPY satellite has detected a new Chinese missile base opposite Taiwan in the past few weeks, the Washington Times reported today.

"The base is located several miles northeast of Xianyou and some 135 miles from Taiwan where China has placed its newest short-range missiles that target the island," it said quoting US intelligence sources.

Nearly 100 CSS-7 short-range ballistic missiles and mobile launchers are deployed there, the report said. The base just discovered is the second short-range missile base for CSS-7s, said officials familiar with intelligence reports of the Discovery. "It gives them two facilities with CSS-7s that are within range of Taiwan," a senior official said. US intelligence agencies tracked a train loaded with missiles and launchers from a factory in central China to the base.

PTI, Washington

# Mahathir blames Opposition for Indian-Malay clashes

Kuala Lumpur, March 16

THE OPPOSITION is responsible for recent clashes between Indians and Malays Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said and added that it has instigated poor to protest against the Government.

"We can see how they are sympathising with the squatters by visiting the sick and injured in the hospital," he said yesterday, referring to the clashes between Malays and Indians in a poor neighbourhood on the southwestern fringe of Kuala Lumpur.

Mahathir said it is an opposition ploy to gain political mileage out of the clashes that has already claimed six lives, while injuring 48 others.

He said the opposition did not seem to have any humanitarian consideration. On rumours cir-

culating following the clashes between two groups of residents in Jalan Klang Lama where the poor neighbourhood is located, Mahathir said they were being circulated by certain unknown groups

He said this group was deliber-

*"We can see how the*

*Opposition is instigating*

*the poor to protest against*

*the Government"*

ately playing up stories that hundreds of Malays were killed just to arouse the anger of the Malays.

"If such riots are allowed to continue, there is a possibility that the Government will be top-

pled. This is what the opposition aspires for," he said.

Mahathir said the people should not create rumours since those who do so, would be doing it for a "particular reason."

He said reports of the number of casualties following the clashes exceeding six deaths, not only showed that the "inventor of the news was ill-informed but was also creating his own stories."

He dismissed the casualties following the clashes as false.

Official figures for the casualties include 6 dead, 48 injured and 220 detained, out of which 57 have been released on bail after interrogation.

However, several foreign media and a Malaysian online newspaper reported that the death toll was higher, quoting unnamed sources and reports.

Pool Bernama

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAR 2001

## Malaysian leader jailed

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE:** The detained Malaysian Opposition leader, Mr. Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor, was remanded to custody for three days as the police continued to investigate an alleged offence of sedition. Mr. Ezam, youth chief of the National Justice Party or Keadilan, has said he was misquoted by a pro-Government newspaper that he had called for protests to unseat the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad's Government. Mr. Tian Chua, a Keadilan vice-president, described the arrest without charge as "extremely irregular, extremely unfair" and aimed at stifling Opposition leaders. Mr. Chua also criticised the arrest of nine other activists, including three women, outside the police station where the 38-year-old Mr. Ezam was being detained. They were part of a group of 60 activists who held a candlelight vigil in support of the Keadilan youth wing chief. "We believe that Dr. Mahathir has lost his mandate to be the leader of the nation...it's time for him to step down and we will put pressure until he does," Mr. Chua was quoted as saying in Kuala Lumpur.



## Putin online



**MOSCOW:** The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, goes to soccer matches even though he seems to bring his team bad luck. He likes to read Tolstoy and Alexander Dumas. And he considers it his family's private business that Russia's First Lady, his wife Lyudmila, often remains on

the sidelines. These were among the answers Mr. Putin gave on Tuesday to some of the thousands of questions sent via the Internet by Russians eager for a rare online session with their President. Some foreigners and Russians abroad also took part. More than 15,000 queries came in to the Russian Internet news agencies gazeta.ru and strana.ru, which were collecting the questions along with the British Broadcasting Corp. Sitting in front of a laptop in a Kremlin studio, Mr. Putin spent an hour answering 18 of the questions passed on by journalists from the three news organisations. The unusual online session appeared to be an attempt to reach out to Russia's younger and largely liberal voters. — AP

THE HINDU

8 MAR 2001

# Islamist party gives pin-pricks to Mahathir

By Amit Baruah  
SINGAPORE, MARCH 1. The Malay-  
Singaporean Islamist group, Parti Islam  
Malaysia (PAS), is playing hard-  
ball with the United Malays Na-  
tional Organisation (UMNO) led  
by the Prime Minister, Dr. Ma-  
hathir Mohamad.

The UMNO, part of the ruling  
Barisan Nasional (National Front)  
coalition, has been facing dissent  
from within as also a loss in elec-  
toral support as reflected in the  
defeat in the Lunas by-election in  
November.

PAS is a new factor in the coun-  
try's politics.

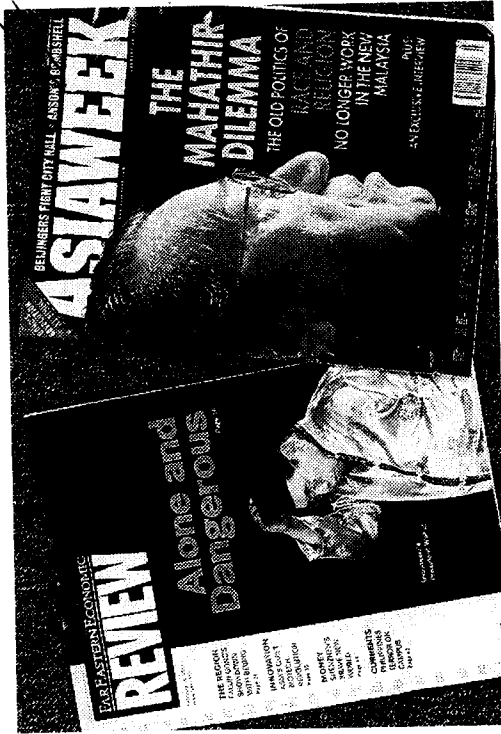
Given the uncertainties that lie  
ahead, parties like PAS are push-  
ing their headline agenda forward  
which could create problems for  
the ethnic Chinese and Indian  
communities.

The approach of "co-opting"  
the PAS is fraught with dangers. It  
has been seen in other parts of  
Asia that those who have sought  
to "co-opt" have often become  
the victims — moderate agendas

have vanished in the face of sus-  
tained pressure on sensitive is-  
sues like religion.

There is also little doubt that  
whatever be the western percep-  
tions, Malaysia has done well eco-  
nomically and has been able to  
chart its own path when the  
whole world is embracing the ec-  
onomic wisdom offered by the  
IMF-World Bank combine.

One can, of course, argue that  
the distribution of the fruits of de-  
velopment have not been even.



Cover pages of Hong Kong-based magazines, *Asiaweek's* Jan. 26, 2001 issue and the *Far Eastern Economic Review's* Feb. 15, 2001 issue. Amid a climate of increased criticism of the foreign news media, Malaysian censors continued on Thursday to withhold approval for distributing the current editions of two magazines that report on Asian affairs. The delays in distributing the magazines follow the Government's stepped-up scrutiny of foreign media since the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, complained that articles and photographs in a recent edition of *Asiaweek* made him look foolish and tired. — AP

Of late, the UMNO has shown  
keen interest in engaging with  
PAS, a headline Islamic outfit,  
whose professed goal is to inject  
its vision of Islam into Malaysia.  
However, the talks between the  
top UMNO and PAS leaders  
haven't yet taken place because  
the Islamic party has placed some  
conditions in the path of "unity  
talks".

The PAS has put forward three  
pre-conditions for the talks — the  
return of oil royalty payments to  
the PAS-ruled State of Terengan-  
gu, that its organ, *Harakah*, be  
published eight times a month as  
opposed to the current two and  
the retraction by the UMNO of a  
proposal that parties drop "Is-  
lam" from their names.

Following a statement from the  
UMNO that the Government and  
not the party could respond to  
these demands, Mr. Fadzil Noor,  
a PAS leader, said: "There are no  
two Mahathirs. If there are two  
Mahathirs, the Mahathir who is  
the UMNO president can direct  
Mahathir the Prime Minister to  
meet our preconditions."

It appears that the UMNO,  
which has been hit by sliding sup-  
port from within the Malay com-  
munity, is keen on wooing the  
PAS, which is a well-organised  
and growing.

While the UMNO and Dr. Ma-  
hathir are well entrenched in  
terms of numbers and electoral  
mandate, the fissures within the  
Malay vote bank have now made  
the UMNO look afresh at the PAS.

It is also clear that while Malay-  
sia and Malaysians believe in a  
moderate version of Islam, the

# Lee warns Malays against race-based politics

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE, MARCH 5** "Globalisation has spread and reinforced Islamic forces throughout the world. It is a part of globalisation. These are realities," said Singapore's Senior Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, in a recent speech to Malay-Muslim professionals.

Mr. Lee's remarks came at a dialogue session intended to seek clarification on his 1999 remarks that the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) must check the background of a religious Malay-Muslim officer before he could be put in charge of a machine-gun unit.

"Under severe stress, loyalty can change in unpredictable ways. How an individual reacts can be heavily influenced by how the group or community to whom he belongs reacts," Mr. Lee said.

"Loyalty relationships are not static. They evolve in a dynamic, changing environment... we are not changing in isolation. Singapore is the mirror image of the multi-racial divide in Malaysia," he said. History, he said, was replete with examples of how, when the survival of their people of nation is at stake, Governments must take hard decisions and exercise policies of prudence.

For nearly every job, the Senior Minister said, a person's race and religion were irrelevant. "But in

the security services because of our context, we cannot ignore race and religion in deciding suitability," he remarked.

Whether a Malay SAF officer made it to the top depended solely on merit. Malay officers have risen through the ranks and held senior appointments as Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels.

"Outside the SAF, there are Malay and Muslim officers deployed in the most sensitive appointments in our security agencies. Our concerns about conflicting realities are real. We know of at least one case where foreign intelligence agencies approached one of our senior officers because he was Malay," Mr. Lee stated.

Integration, Mr. Lee said, was a two-way process. "The Government would like our Malays to be an integral part of our society, but cannot force them... if Malays in Singapore show that they prefer to be separate, the other communities will pick up these signals and react accordingly. As the majority race, the Chinese have to show a willingness to expand the common ground by including other races..."

"Recent moves by the AMP (Association of Malay Professionals) can undo what we have achieved over the last 35 years of gradual integration... it is naive to believe

that AMP can create a collective Malay communal leadership without causing other races to mobilise their own counterparts..." he said. "Race-based politics will pull apart our society as parties contest to better advance their own community interests. On the other hand, multi-racial politics encourages integration. Integration has brought benefits to all," Mr. Lee maintained.

"Separate development must lead to a drifting apart of our society into Malay, Chinese, Indians and other communal segments. This will be a setback for all, not least for the Malays," he said.

**THE HINDU**

- 5 MAR 2001

- 6 MAR 2001