

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Title	Intellectual Statesmanship in the Mahathir Era
Source	http://phuakl.tripod.com/pssm/conference/day130.doc
Author 1	Johnson, Deborah
Author 2	NA
Author 3	NA
Publication/Conference	4th International Malaysian Studies Conference; 3-5 August 2004, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi
Edition	NA
Document Type	Article
CPI Primary Subject	Education
CPI Secondary Subject	Philosophy, Politics, Culture; ;
Geographic Terms	Malaysia;
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**The International Malaysian Studies Conference
(MSC4)**

3 – 5 August 2004

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM),
Bangi

PANEL: Politics & Leadership
DAY 1 - PANEL SESSION 3: 3.45-5.15pm - Room 1 (FSSK)

Intellectual Statesmanship in the Mahathir Era

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ABSTRACT

Whilst intellectuals are commonly seen as standing outside of and speaking truth to power, this paper examines the conflation of the roles of the intellectual, technocrat and political leader (termed 'intellectual statesmanship') as exemplified in the persons of (Tun) Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. The roots of this phenomenon are examined along with the manner of its operation and its consequences in Malaysian political life. It is argued that on the one hand it produced leaders with long term vision and commitment to seeing that vision become reality, and enabled leaders to shape national thinking and formation; on the other hand it resulted in a narrowing and domination of the public sphere, circumscribing discussion of alternative views and ideas. The phenomenon of intellectual statesmanship buttressed claims for the need for 'sustainable governance' and 'Malaysian democracy'. Whilst new Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, has begun moves to reform many of Malaysia's institutions, there has as yet been little evidence at the institutional level of changes that would allow a less constrained and more robust public intellectual engagement.

Intellectual Statesmanship in the Mahathir Era
By Dr Deborah Johnson

Intellectuals are commonly seen as standing outside of, and speaking truth to, power. While there are two extremes, according to Edward Shils – i) ‘those who dispute prevailing norms’, and, ii) ‘those who in some basically accommodating way ... exist to provide order and continuity in public life’ (Shils, 1958-9, cited in Said, 1996, p.36), Edward Said was of the opinion that it was only the former (those who dispute prevailing norms), who truly fulfil the modern intellectual’s role. This was because, he asserted, ‘the dominant norms are today so intimately connected to ... the nation, which is triumphalist, always in a position of authority, always exacting loyalty and subservience rather than intellectual investigation and re-examination.’ (Said, 1996, p.36) In her study of the ‘Islamisation of knowledge’ debate in Malaysia and Egypt, Mona Abaza commented that the Malaysian intellectual scene was ‘dominated by managers, bureaucrats and technocrats. One often hears’, she said, ‘of a new type of Malaysian intellectual, working as a “think tank” willingly coopted and participating in the ideology of the “New Malay” and the state’ (Abaza, 2002, p.58). On the other hand, an ‘intellectual “avant-garde” culture’, she asserted, ‘was in a certain manner eradicated’ (2002, pp.57-8). Others closer to home such as Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas and Rustam A. Sani have pointed to a dearth of a ‘functioning intellectual group’¹ and a ‘modern intellectual culture’,² respectively.

Such comments prompted my study (begun in 1997 during the later years of (Tun) Dr Mahathir’s term in office as Prime Minister) of intellectuals, intellectual discourse and ‘discourse concerning intellectuals’ in twentieth century Malaya/Malaysia. Representing just one aspect of this wider study, this paper examines the conflation of the roles of the intellectual, technocrat and political leader as pointed to by Mona Abaza. Termed ‘intellectual statesmanship’, this phenomenon with roots in Malay feudal politics is seen to have been characteristic, in particular, of Dr Mahathir’s Prime Ministership. It is argued that on the one hand the phenomenon of ‘intellectual statesmanship’ produced leaders with long term vision and commitment to seeing that vision become reality, and enabled leaders to play a prominent role in shaping national thinking and formation; it was, on the other hand, also complicit in enabling the continuation of neo-feudal political arrangements and buttressed claims for the need for ‘sustainable good governance’ and a ‘consensual’, non-confrontational ‘Malaysian democracy’ - for example, as articulated by former Foreign Affairs Minister, (Tan Sri) Ghazali Shafie.³ Continuing the patterns from

¹In an interview at his home in Kuala Lumpur on 12 Jul. 1998, Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas made the claim that there still did not exist a ‘group of functioning intellectuals’ in Malaysia. He wrote his first article highlighting the need for intellectuals in developing societies in 1954, whilst doing graduate studies in Amsterdam. This was later to be the subject of a talk on Radio Malaya. (It was published in the UK in the *Malayan Forum* student magazine (1959).) On the various occasions he has subsequently addressed the issue, especially in his book, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*, he has continued to maintain this view (1977, pp.1,7).

² Rustam A. Sani has since the mid-1980s expressed ongoing concern for what he describes as an ‘intellectual crisis’ and the lack of a ‘modern intellectual culture’ in contemporary Malaysia (1985; 1986; 1987; 1991).

³Ghazali Shafie has been an advocate for ‘sustainable good governance’ and a ‘consensual’ rather than ‘confrontational democracy ... of the western kind’ (Ghazali Shafie, ‘New Leaders must protect the Future’ (Keynote Address given at the opening of the International Symposium on World Peace at the

the colonial past, this phenomenon enabled political leaders to shape and institutionalise Islam as an ‘authority-defined’⁴ religion and culture. Further, it resulted in a narrowing and domination of the public sphere, circumscribing discussion of alternative views and ideas. Whilst new Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, has begun moves to reform many of Malaysia’s institutions so as to foster accountability, there has as yet been little evidence at the institutional level of substantive changes that would allow a less constrained and more robust public intellectual engagement.

The study begins with an outline of its conceptual framework; it then goes on to discuss the ideas and manner in which both Dr Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim enacted the roles of intellectual statesman; it will explore the roles and relationships with political leaders of intellectuals in opposition politics, in the media and in think tanks – and the ways in which political leaders cultivated intellectuals to advance their own political interests. It will look at the ramifications of these culturally justified practices and finally briefly examine trends under Abdullah Badawi’s leadership.

Conceptualising the Social Location of the Intellectual

Edward Said in his famous 1993 Reith Lecture Series for the BBC (published in 1994 as *Representations of the Intellectual*) points out that it was Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (See: Gramsci, 1971), who perhaps pioneered the understanding that intellectuals, and not social classes, were pivotal to the workings of modern society (Said, 1996, p.10). According to Gramsci, those with the function of the intellectual in society can be divided into two types: first, ‘traditional intellectuals’ such as teachers, priests, and administrators, who continue to do the same thing from generation to generation; and second, ‘organic intellectuals’ who were actively involved in society and constantly struggled to change minds; they were directly connected to classes or enterprises that used intellectuals to organise interests, gain more power, etc.

Despite the early pioneering work of Syed Hussein Alatas (*Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (written 1971-2, published in 1977, but conceived in the 1950s) and the much earlier writings of Mohammad Hatta in Indonesia (which I will briefly discuss), Malaysian social scientists have been reticent in following up the suggestions of Gramsci and Said, to study the activities and characteristics of this social phenomenon called ‘intellectuals’. Of course, many articles and books have been written about the thought, writings and contributions of individual intellectual (including religious) figures. However, it is their role and place as a social phenomenon, which I would like to focus upon in this paper.

International Islamic University), *Star*, 13 Jan. 1993, p.20; ‘Global Currency System needs Reviewing’, *NST*, 24 Sept. 1998, p.12; (2000, pp.87, 321). It was a democracy that could work ‘successfully without an opposition in Parliament if an adequate representation is provided for in the party’ and by the ten member National Front coalition (M.G.G. Pillai quoting Ghazali in ‘Opposite Views Out of Focus’, *FEER*, 11 Oct. 1974, p.26).

⁴For use of this term refer: (Shamsul A.B., 1996).

In August 1932, as chairman of the New PNI (*Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia* or Indonesian Nationalist Education Association), Mohammad Hatta wrote a party brochure in which he explained PNI's nationalism. He envisaged neither a 'feudal nationalism' (*kebangsaan cap-ningrat*), nor an 'intellectuals' nationalism' (*kebangsaan cap-intelek*), but a 'nationalism of the people' (*kebangsaan cap-rakyat*). Thus, he identified three societal domains, which form the basis for conceptualisation in this paper and which are diagrammatically represented as follows:

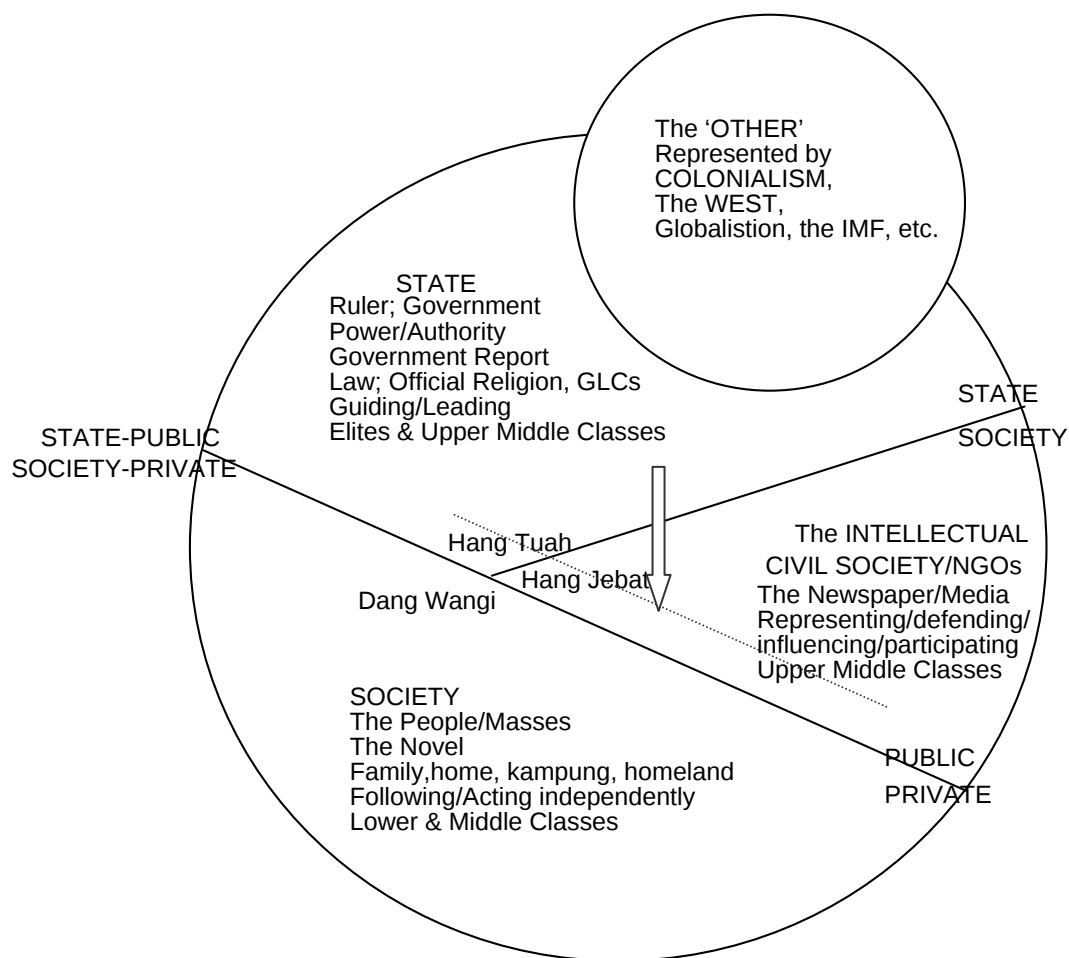


Figure 1 - **The Domains (and Discourses) of State, Society and the Intellectuals**

The first is the domain of 'power' or the 'state' – in Hatta's situation, this was local rulership based on royal birth and succession; and external colonial rule. Its obverse was the newly imagined egalitarian 'realm of the people', who claimed the right to choose their leaders. Interposed between these domains was the 'domain of the intellectual' – containing elements with which Hatta took particular exception. He criticised the intellectuals (*kaum intelek, kaum terpelajar atau kaum cerdikpandai* – and we should note the repetition indicating that the terms in *Bahasa Indonesia* were new and still experimental) (Mohammad Hatta, 1976, pp.97-8), who thought that:

[a country] will not be developed or prosperous if it is not guided by people with a superior knowledge ... [who are] elites because of their brains and abilities' (*orang yang berpengetahuan tinggi ... bangsawan karena otak dan kecakapan*) ... the people only know how to follow. Because of this, the fate of the people and the affairs of the country are to be in the hands of the intellectuals (*kaum intelek*) (1976, pp.97-8).

Thus, Hatta is thinking sociologically. With shades of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* ((1988), first published in 1902), Hatta situates his new 'intellectuals' (*golongan kaum terpelajar baru*) as standing with the people. The people (rather than colonial, feudal, religious or other aspiring elites), he asserts, are the body and spirit of the nation (*bangsa*) and thus

[the] responsibility of the intellectuals (*kaum intelek*) is no less than to plumb the depths of the desires of the people and to explain the way those desires are to foster progress into the future (1976, pp.98).

As previously indicated, this paper focuses on the conflation of the roles of the political statesman and intellectual, which is termed 'intellectual statesmanship' and diagrammatically represented by the merging of the two upper segments of Figure 1. Indeed, there seems to be the expectation that Malaysian leaders to be individuals of 'intelligence and intellectuality'.⁵ According to Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia (ISIS) director and Mahathir associate, Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee, a political leader in Malaysia has to have, and be seen to have, intellectual credentials.⁶

Expanded tertiary educational opportunities in Malaysia have produced a better-educated bureaucracy, a larger urban middle class and a more educated political constituency. Nonetheless, despite the potential for greater plurality and participation in public life, the political executive has not only been able to maintain, but has increased, the measure of its control and influence over political life and discourse. It has done so whilst limiting the power of royal rulers and moving to a performance-based leadership ethos (as indicated by the emphasis on leadership capacity, ideas, achieved social harmony and national economic performance, etc.). Nonetheless, it is argued, the political arrangements and trappings of centralist (feudal) power were at the same time being reproduced. Thus, power is seen as residing in the person of the leader and not in the office or in the institutions constituting government (Pye, 1985, p.23). Personalised power also means that not only can the institutions be readily changed according to the leader's purpose, but that the qualities and intentions of the leader and one's relationship with (and loyalty to) that leader are of crucial importance. Criticism and issues of succession become especially challenging.

⁵Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, a political rival of Dr Mahathir and leader of the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), was described in such terms. (Raja Petra, 'The Legend of Nik Aziz', Raja Petra's personal website, (<http://members.xoom.com/rpetra/NikAziz.htm>), 1996).

⁶This has been especially so, according to Noordin, since the promulgation of Mahathir's Vision 2020 in 1991 (Interview with Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee, K.L., 8 Aug. 1998).

An expanding Malay intelligentsia came to have increasing influence in Malaysian and UMNO politics (Means, 1991, pp.20,23,35,55,74,136-7,266). As Case's study has highlighted (1996), younger, educated 'sub-elites', whose intellectual formation was quite different from their predecessors, came to challenge the power-holders at independence. After the May 1969 racial riots, according to Tunku Abdul Rahman, 'the [Malay] ultras or as they preferred to be known, the intellectuals, ... and the university students' (1986, pp.63-4) – a reference which included MP Dr Mahathir Mohamad and student leader Anwar Ibrahim - stridently called for the Tunku's resignation as Prime Minister giving their support to his deputy, Tun Abdul Razak.

Tun Razak's appointment in September 1970 as Malaysia's second Prime Minister signified the beginning of a more technocratic and democratically-constrained phase in Malaysian politics - a phase in which Malaysians were seeking to embed their own intellectual frameworks displacing those inherited at the time of independence. Tun Razak was a leader who exemplified the intellectual statesman – a British-trained lawyer with a lineage connecting him with chieftains serving the Pahang royalty, he was open to new ideas and seemed more ready to accommodate the demands of the Malay intelligentsia and the 'Young Turks' in his party. He prioritised intellectual credentials insisting that cabinet members (and party and bureaucratic elites) have tertiary qualifications. Consulting extensively not only with experts from overseas, but also with a group of local 'intellectuals' and progressives - including Abdullah Majid, Dr Ungku Omar Ahmad, James Puthucheary and A. Samad Ismail - who were quietly assembled by his political secretary, Abdullah Ahmad, in a backroom approach to solving the country's problems - he presided over the implementation of ambitious, corrective, pro-Malay, affirmative action policies, which were to re-chart the country's future.

Though Tun Razak moved Malaysian political leadership away from an aristocratic to a more meritocratic basis, he was also, in effect, substituting one kind of elite with another of much the same political inclinations. In fact, under his leadership he set the pattern for an ongoing concentration of power in the executive. He managed to revitalise UMNO and (in June 1974) form an extended National Front (*Barisan Nasional*) coalition, which effectively neutralised much of the political opposition. He did away with local government elections in favour of government appointed councillors, again nullifying political opposition. His record demonstrates that underlying intellectual statesmanship there is an elitist, potentially authoritarian, even neo-feudal current, which pulls towards the technocratic centre.⁷ He was the mentor of, and was in part responsible for the rise to prominence of, the intellectually able Dr Mahathir.

When in 1998 I asked Malaysians to name their intellectuals, one who featured prominently in people's responses (contrary to the expectation that intellectuals stand outside of power) was then current Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir. In fact, Dr Mahathir has exemplified the intellectual statesman *par excellence* -

⁷For discussion of measures he took to strengthen executive dominance (use of patronage, limitations on parliamentary democracy and removal of parliamentary immunity; constitutional limitation of public discussion of 'sensitive issues', etc.), refer: (Means, 1991, pp.14-6; Case, 1996, pp.119-20,133-4).

striving to produce the ideas that will advance his people. Dr Mahathir has asserted that a leader has 'to look ahead all the time'; he must not only come up with new ideas but 'must try to get his views accepted as much as possible' (Adshead, 1989, pp.5,101).

Dr Mahathir as an Intellectual Statesman

Speaking at a lecture to students in 1979, Hassan Ahmad described Dr Mahathir as a professional, who could be regarded as an intellectual (*seorang intelek*). 'He is a thinker, a person who is creative, a writer, a politician who is constantly demonstrating an active mental ability.'⁸ In seeking to promote Dr Mahathir, Hassan was also arguing for a revision in the understanding of the term, 'intellectual'. General usage at the time, he reminds us, had asserted that an intellectual (*orang yang intelek*) was a person of education (*orang yang terpelajar atau yang berpelajaran*). In contrast, he suggested that:

An intellectual has an ability to think creatively and in a rational and systematic manner ... [to] help solve the practical everyday problems; ... is always endeavouring to seek knowledge and to develop his thinking in the interests of his society; is always open to new ideas; ... [is] a creator of ideas, a guide for others; ... is not too academic, not influenced by emotions and feelings when explaining something; ... always tries to seek the truth on the basis of reason and facts which can be verified (1988, p.461).

Importantly, in this view an intellectual may be someone holding political power. Indeed, there has been argument to suggest the importance of 'intellectuals' within government and the bureaucracy.⁹ Amongst those recognised as prominent intellectual figures in government have been Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Dr Nordin Selat, Mohd. Noor Azam and Musa Hitam.¹⁰ Whilst Hassan Ahmad placed Dr Mahathir within a discourse of the intellectual, this has not been as explicit in Dr Mahathir's own rhetoric.¹¹ He aspired to be a leader as he imagined a leader should

⁸ (Hassan Ahmad, 1988, pp.461-2) The lecture on 17 Nov. 1979 concluded a journalism course organised by the UM Student Association. Dr Mahathir was at the time the Trade and Industry Minister and Deputy PM under (Tun) Hussein Onn.

⁹ (Mohd. Affandi Hassan, 1980; Shamsul A.B., 1993) Intellectuals in this context were generally understood to be those with higher degrees.

¹⁰ A British-trained lawyer with postgraduate qualifications in International Studies, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie has had prominent positions in the regimes of all four Malaysian Prime Ministers. He was Secretary General of Foreign Affairs under the Tunku; Minister with Special Functions, Information Minister and Home Affairs Minister under Tun Razak; and Home Affairs Minister under Hussein Onn and Dr Mahathir. The first to gain a UM doctorate for a thesis written in Malay, Nordin Selat lectured at the UM before becoming Political Secretary (1977-1980) to the Minister for Culture, Youth and Sport, Tan Sri Samad Idris. Mohd. Noor Azam was an SITC-trained teacher, who had been an active in student and teachers organisations. He played a prominent role in PENA, GAPENA and the *Dewan*; and had written popular columns 'Surat Dari Jakarta' (1969-1971) and 'Perspektif' (1971-1982) in the *Dewan Masyarakat* journal before being appointed Special Officer (in 1982) and then Political Secretary to the PM in August 1984. Musa Hitam was a former Deputy Prime Minister under Dr Mahathir.

¹¹ Reflecting his own background as a medical practitioner, Dr Mahathir's conception of an intellectual would seem to emphasise technical know-how and the ability to apply 'useful' knowledge rather than literary or philosophic pursuits. Refer, for example: 'Upacara Perasmian Kongres Cendekiawan

be - a man of ideas and vision; with a social conscience and mission; a popularist and modernist intellectual figure; and, a man of authority.

Assisted by the reputation he had built up through his medical practice, Dr Mahathir first won a seat in the Federal Parliament in 1964. He became known as the outspoken and somewhat 'unpredictable MP from Kedah'.¹² He had a mind and opinions of his own; and was an articulate and forthright speaker in the mass media and in debate in the parliament. Because of his propensity to observe symptoms, diagnose conditions, and prescribe cures, people called him 'Dr UMNO'. He enjoyed the thrust and parry of political life and was comfortable speaking to self-consciously intellectual students in a way few of his parliamentary colleagues were.

'MP drops bombshell on students' was the headline of an article in the University of Malaya student magazine, *Mahasiswa Negara*, describing Dr Mahathir's contribution to a forum in 1966 entitled 'Students and Politics'. He had asserted that students were young, politically immature and remote from the general population. Generally, they were a disappointingly sheepish group who, when they did show an interest, tended to follow 'those who did not even pretend to have a mind of their own'. Despite his view that 'the political influence of students should be limited so as to be in keeping with their limited responsibility',¹³ students under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim rallied behind him in his post-13 May 1969 campaign for the Tunku's resignation.¹⁴ However, it should perhaps be no surprise that later as Education Minister under Tun Razak, it was Dr Mahathir who oversaw the introduction of legislation, which effectively brought campus politicking to a halt.

In the late 1960s, he was a regular contributor to a perhaps now forgotten English-language news journal, *Opinion*, which set out to serve as a redress to 'the sorry excuses we have for serious journalism in this country'.¹⁵ Thus, it was claimed that 'an open platform for the uninhibited expression of critical, responsible opinion is badly needed in this young democracy of ours'.¹⁶ Indeed, Dr Mahathir was to write one of the most devastating critiques of the lack of democracy under the Tunku's regime - describing UMNO as a party which had become 'subservient to his person' and held together 'through a system of patronage and disguised coercion'; and, a government which 'was openly contemptuous of criticism, with [p]olicies ...

Melayu II' (Speech at officially opening the Second Malay Intellectuals Congress at UKM, Bangi), 1 Jul. 1989.

¹²Syed Jaffar Alsagoff, 'Dr Mahathir and the Straits Times Group', *Opinion*, 2 (3), 25 Feb. - 25 Mar. '69, p.213.

¹³'MP drops bombshell on students', *Mahasiswa Negara*, 4 (3), 8 Jun. 1966, p.2.

¹⁴Anwar Ibrahim: ISA Charges and Refutations', in (CARPA, 1988, pp.65-71).

¹⁵The mainstream English language newspapers, the *Straits Times* and the *Malay Mail*, were in the control of British interests. It was claimed in the Editorial of *Opinion*'s first edition in August 1967 that 'there were no journals of opinion in this country'. Thus, the aim of the editor, Syed Jaffar Alsagoff, was to provide such a journal, which dug for the facts and printed the real story, irrespective of the repercussions. It was to be the 'Leader of Press Freedom' (Editorial', *Opinion*, 1(1), 15 Aug. 1967, p.1; 'One Year Old', *Opinion*, 1(12), 20 Sept.-20 Oct. 1968, p.165).

¹⁶Syed Jaffar Alsagoff, 'Editor's Note', *Opinion*, 2(3), 25 Feb.-25 Mar. 1969, p.214.

which completely ignored public opinion'; a government 'busy on devices to perpetuate itself'.¹⁷

Despite his apparent liberal democratic zeal, it was evident even at this time that Dr Mahathir had his own understanding of how a democracy should work. In *The Malay Dilemma*, he decried 'governments of mediocre people ... bereft of ideas ... and ... generally unable to rule'. In his view a newly independent country needed 'above all, superior skill at the helm of Government ... [which was] able to feel the pulse of the people [and] ... interpret it correctly' (1970, pp.12,11,15).

Amongst his various political analysis pieces was one in August 1968 entitled 'In Defence of Feudalism'. It drew a sharp response from *Opinion* readers. Some thought his argument for benevolent feudalism indefensible. Though they, like him, recognised the presence in Malaysian polity of 'not inconsequential groups ... dependent ... upon the continuing privileges and dispensation of overlordship', they could see little in his argumentation to justify countenancing it. Though not averse to a government-constituted and supervised order, Dr Mahathir was nonetheless critical of the political arrangements in the immediate post May 1969 period describing the government as authoritarian and having no dialogue with the people.¹⁸ In his view, it could not be sustained in the longer term, because such governments eventually suffered a lack of ideas and a lack of feedback from the governed. However, he did not see a return to the type of Parliamentary Democracy existing before 13 May as a possibility. Malay fears for their future had to be accommodated. Instead, he advocated not rule by royal decree or authoritarian directive, but rather a technocratic rule based on the forging of ideas by listening to the people.

Dr Mahathir frequently expressed his ambivalence toward 'Western democracy' as, for example, in his speech at the 50th UMNO convention held on 11 May 1996. In the West, according to Dr Mahathir, 'democracy' has been made a religion and had 'bought with it undesirable consequences'.¹⁹ On the other hand,

Malaysian democracy is not a religion. ... Democracy is not for democracy's sake but for the good of the people and the nation. If the people and the country benefit then we will accept practices which are said to be democratic. If the people and the nation get only the worst from any practice that is said to be democratic, we will give priority to what is good for the country and the people and put aside the question of whether or not it is democratic.²⁰

¹⁷ (1970, pp.9,11-2) This book was to be banned by the Tunku and remained so up until after Dr Mahathir became PM in 1981. Similar criticism was directed at Dr Mahathir in the late 1990s.

¹⁸ Interviews: To Dr Mahathir', *Opinion*, Oct.-Nov. 1969, p.286.

¹⁹ These undesirable aspects include Opposition Party sponsored demonstrations and strikes aimed at toppling the incumbent government; rich and/or influential minorities directing domestic and foreign policy; unstable minority or coalition governments; inappropriate intervention by NGOs, the mass media or the judiciary; interest-driven or ideologically-driven government; socialism, the welfare state and the championing of the poor; excessive union-led strikes and demonstrations. The elected government, in Mahathir's view, should be allowed to govern free from such destabilising forces.

²⁰ 'Understanding the past is key to party's future', 50th UMNO Convention at the Dewan Merdeka on 11 May 1996 in *NST*, 12 May 1996, p.14. See also: 'Amendments vital in Keeping with the Times',

Democracy in Malaysia was to be practiced primarily at the ballot box. 'The people have the right to elect who they wish to lead the Government. ... Only by an election can change be effected. ... the people can choose whomever they wish to be their leader and can then bring him down if he fails to rule effectively'. This [according to Dr Mahathir] is the 'underlying principle in the philosophy of democracy'.²¹ Democracy, then, is about choosing (intellectually competent and 'good') leaders rather than about choosing between political parties, ideologies and policies. According to the 12 May 1996 *New Sunday Times* editorial:

UMNO's democracy has shown its true colours in the way it picks its national leaders. Fifty years after it first enjoined the Malays to choose a leader instead of having one thrust upon them, democracy continues to serve the party and the country in the best way that it can - by giving Malaysians the freedom to choose good leaders, and to reject bad ones.²²

This 'state-of-intent' with its intellectual statesmen as leaders is diagrammatically summarised and compared with alternatives as follows:

Table 1 Summary of Malaysian 'States-of-Intent'

<u>Nature of Intended State</u>	<u>Persons at the Helm</u>	<u>Ideological Bases</u>
Feudal Polity	Royal elites	Feudalism (<i>kerajaan</i>)
Malay-based assimilationist state (versus Malaysian integrationist state)	(capable) elected Malays	Malay ethno-nationalism (<i>kemelayuan/kebangsaan</i>)
Malaysian Democratic State	the masses/people and their elected leaders	democratic socialism (<i>kerakyatan</i>)
Islamic State/ <i>Ummah</i>	<i>ulama</i> or religiously qualified politicians	Islam
Sustainable Democracy	Consensual intellectual statesmen (and the educated, technocratic elite) with powers to ensure regime maintenance	Intellectualism: the intellectually-able should

NST, 14 Dec. 1998, pp.12,15; 'All Malaysians should defend our Sovereignty', *NST*, 20 June 1998, pp.10,12-3.

²¹'Understanding the past is key to party's future', *NST*, 12 May 1996, p.12.

²²'Fifty years of free choice', *NST*, 12 May 1996, p.12; See also 'Redeeming dignity of religion', *NST*, 6 Sept. 1997, p.12.

However, when any leader has at his disposal a range of means by which to ensure that the processes of choosing a leader are biased in his favour, his ongoing legitimacy must inevitably come into question. One who rose to challenge Dr Mahathir was Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He also very carefully and consciously crafted his image as an intellectual leader (Tan, 1998), attracting the support of segments of the intellectual community, the middle class and the Malay (Islamic) grassroots.

The 'Young' Muslim Intellectual and Activist - Anwar Ibrahim

Anwar Ibrahim has been held up as the 'prototypal activist [Muslim] intellectual'.²³ The 'Muslim intellectual' in Malaysia has been described as learned, possessing a clear vision and strong commitment to the embodiment of Islamic ideology and cultural values, possessing understanding of an Islamic world-view and a global outlook, critical in thought, a good manager and leader, enterprising, with the ability to influence others and propagate ideas, of refined character and open to criticism and self-evaluation - all characteristics said to be exemplified by the Prophet and his Companions. The activist Muslim intellectual is to guide humanity to the 'purity of Islam' and be an 'active agent of change in consonance with the ordination of vicegerency [*khalifah*] bestowed by Allah' - ultimately involving the Islamising of human civilisation (Sahri Bahari, 1989).

However, Anwar Ibrahim was seen by many as compromising his role as a dissident and public intellectual, when in 1982 he was coopted by Dr Mahathir into joining UMNO. Whilst he seemed genuinely convinced that he could continue his Islamic agenda by helping to bring such change from within the ruling party, some would argue that he, in effect, diluted his own voice as well as that of the NGO he led. (The criticism directed by the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM) at the government had long been an irritation to it.) He also seemed to take a step back from his formerly outspoken stance in rejection of the repressive Internal Security Act (ISA). By coopting Anwar not only did Dr Mahathir succeed in raising the Islamic profile of UMNO, he also managed to neutralise some of the sting of ABIM and the opposition Islamist party, PAS.

Anwar's intellectual role changed in the process. No longer the non-partisan idealist and activist, he now spoke on behalf of authority. Ever so quickly did he rise through government ranks from Deputy Minister in the PM's Department (1982-83) to Culture, Youth and Sports Minister (1983-84) to Agriculture Minister (1984-86) to Education (1986-1991) and then Finance Minister (1991-98). His charisma, oratorical skills and popularity amongst students and young professionals were assets to the party and incumbent government, as was his international reputation as a young Muslim intellectual (*cendekiawan*) and activist (Aswab Mahasin in (Gellner, 1995, pp.ix-x)).

He made the most of every opportunity to call for balanced development, which included uplifting the people's intellectual level (1991; 1992). The love for

²³(Esposito, 2001, p.178) This book devotes a full chapter to Anwar.

knowledge was to be nurtured and developed in every Malaysian.²⁴ As Finance Minister he gained a reputation for using his annual budget speeches as a platform for demonstrating an intellectual tenor.²⁵ With liberal sprinklings in his speeches of quotes and references to famous texts and scholars, he made persistent reference to the need to promote intellectual vibrancy, moral fortitude and cultural creativity (1994a; 1995a; 1999; 2000).

His Islamic revivalist rhetoric from his student and ABIM days continued but in a more measured manner within the Malay nationalist framework of UMNO. Popularist concerns such as poverty, low cost housing, inflation and corruption marked his political stance (1998). He gradually transformed his rhetoric and image to match his increasing role in the international arena. Emphasis on Malay and Islamic efflorescence shifted to advocacy of an 'Asian renaissance' based on authentic local tradition and universal values (1994b; 1994d; 1996a). From the mid 1990s his exhortation to cultivate a local intellectual tradition began to contain the recommendation to learn not only from Malay and Islamic 'greats' but also from assorted Asian reformist thinkers - a seeking of knowledge wherever it may be found; but also a critique of narrow-minded Islamists, communal extremists and secular humanists.²⁶

Asians were to provide the guiding ideas and moral leadership for a reconstruction of civilisation on a world scale. The Western Enlightenment was in decay, struck down by 'Reason that is too proud, Reason that murders ... God Himself and the moral ideals that spring from faith in the Absolute Transcendent' (1996b). Asia's singular contribution to the world could be 'a renewal of faith in the Divine' and a reassertion of the moral values that flow therefrom, for the 'Asian Man at heart is *persona religiosus*' and Asian society is one in which [f]aith and religious practice is not confined to the individual, [but] ... permeates the life of the community' (1996d). Out of the renaissance of a culturally diverse Asia would come the universal and perennial civilisational and moral ideals that would provide light to guide a world stumbling in a dark wood (1996b). Such a project involving a 'saving' knowledge and value system bringing a better life for mankind actually parallels that pursued by Western Enlightenment thinkers. He uses the same language, even though ostensibly setting out to achieve this 'renaissance' on a quite different, Islamic reformist epistemological basis.

At the official opening of the new National Library building in 1994 he shared his dream of reliving the glory of the 'knowledge triumphant' era of Islam's past.²⁷ (He had long been at the forefront of a movement to Islamise Malaysian

²⁴ (Farush Khan, 1994; Straits Times, 1996; Anwar Ibrahim, 1999); 'Anwar: Strive to enhance knowledge', *The Star Online*, 23 Nov. 1997.

²⁵ See especially (Anwar Ibrahim, 1994c) as illustrated in the Lat Cartoon (reproduced in the Appendix); also (1991; 1992; 1993); and his speeches as Dep. PM at the joint opening of the UMNO Youth and Wanita General Assemblies (1994a; 1995a).

²⁶ Figures such as Jose Rizal (Philippines), Rabindranath Tagore (India), Muhammad Iqbal (Pakistan), Jamaluddin al Afghani (Iran), Sun Yat Sen and K'ang Yu-Wei (China) were studied and popularised as the forefathers of an Asian renaissance (1996c; 1997b).

²⁷ Farush Khan, 'Uplifting People's Intellect to Match Progress' (Speech given at the Official Opening of the National Library Building in Jalan Tun Razak on 16 Dec. 1994), *NST*, 17 Dec. 1994, pp.1,5.

society and intellectual life.)²⁸ As an intellectual leader he frequently set reading assignments for public servants (including university Vice-Chancellors) and was influential in shaping the Malaysia's intellectual canon (NST, 1987; Anwar Ibrahim, 1995b; 1999; 2000). At the Asian Press Forum he called on the Asian media to play a greater role in inculcating a knowledge culture and providing a forum for intellectual discussion of contemporary issues (Kwang, 1994; NST, 1994). This sparked a response in the Malaysian media.²⁹ Indeed, when Anwar gave out challenges to the intellectual community, they responded - demonstrating his influence in setting the country's intellectual agenda. The journal *Pemikir* (Thinker) - modelled after the well-known *Foreign Affairs* journal - was launched soon after he called for a raising of the level of intellectual discourse in the country.³⁰ When Anwar called for the University of Malaya to set up an East Asian Studies Centre focussing on Islam and Confucianism, the Education minister, Dr Sulaiman, was reported as responding that it would be set up in the 'quickest possible time'.³¹

A careful reading of his public statements suggests that Anwar was the quintessential Malay politician carefully balancing his obligation of loyalty to Dr Mahathir with his own more 'liberal' instincts. However, at times his expressed views on leadership and democracy seemed little different from those of Dr Mahathir. He was once reported to have said that 'the people can do without the opposition as the Barisan Nasional is able to play "the Opposition's role" effectively'. The Opposition only created issues and confused the people. Instead, the people should cooperate with the government to ensure continued progress and unity.³² He has referred to election day as the day when the *rakyat* would be 'king' deciding who and what they wanted (1994a). In his 1992 Budget Speech he referred to critics of the government who forget the role played by government in providing their facilities and comforts, inferring that their ingratitude and disregard of their responsibility to the community was a betrayal the *rakyat* and the nation. In response to the alleged 'disrespect' shown by Malaysian students overseas in criticising some of the country's leaders, he suggested that students should offer

²⁸See for example: (1983; 1997a) and 'Membangun Semula Tamadun Keilmuan Islam', *Risalah*, 6, 1978 in (ABIM, 1981, pp.49-51).

²⁹Note the editorial comment by NST Editor-in-Chief, A. Kadir Jasin, in the NST (18 Dec. 1994, p.17; 1 Jan. 1995, p.15) and *Utusan Malaysia* Editor-in-Chief, Johan Jaafar, in *Mingguan Malaysia* (25 Dec. 1994). See also Kalimullah Hassan, 'Anwar's remarks on role of papers spark press debate', *ST*, 3 Jan. 1995, p.15.

³⁰Rashid Yusof, 'Have More intellectual discourses, scholars told', *NST*, 17 Aug. 1995, p.4; (Hassan Ahmad, 1995). *Pemikir*, a quarterly Malay-language magazine, was first published in Jul./Sept. 1995. Its editorial panel comprised leading Malay intellectual figures: Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Datuk Dr Noordin Sopiee, Johann Jaafar, Rustam A. Sani and Chamil Wariya. The Editor-in-Chief of *Utusan Malaysia* (the publisher), Johan Jaafar, in his foreword to the first issue, described it as a 'knowledge' magazine cognisant of intellectual trends elsewhere, but providing an alternative non-Western perspective.

³¹(Choong, Alex & Sarban Singh, 'Anwar: Set up East Asian Studies Centre', *NST*, 13 Mar. 1995, p3) The following day UM Vice-Chancellor, Datuk Abdullah Sanusi, was reported as saying that a working paper would be drawn up and presented to the university's Senate for approval within a couple of months ('UM follows up on East Asian Studies Centre Call', *NST*, 14 Mar. 1995, p.7).

³²Anwar: 'People can do without the opposition', *NST*, 18 Jan. 1995, p.4. (reported when speaking to people in Sarawak in the lead-up to the 1995 General Elections); He did not recommend 'unfettered' democracy but a 'middle path between anarchy and absolutism' (Speech at the 42nd Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, KL, 19 Aug. 1996)

'constructive views' and ideas for the betterment both of the party and the people - rhetoric which Dr Mahathir had also used.³³

After his fall-out with Dr Mahathir, Anwar once again became an open and strident critic of the government and its leadership.³⁴ His experiences (like those of Dr Mahathir) serve to shed light on the interaction between the ideals and realities of Malaysian politics. Behind the *wayang* (shadow puppet play) of intellectual statesman and loyal followers are the messy political intrigues, rivalries, strategic alliances and compromises of principle which an aspirant for power has to negotiate if he/she is to succeed in rising to the top – all of which challenges the more idealistic conceptions of intellectuals within politics, if not without.

Intellectuals in Opposition Politics

Those opposing or criticising authority (as in the case of students and individuals such as Abdul Aziz Ishak in the 1960s, Anwar Ibrahim in the 1970s and 1990s, etc.) tend to be seen in the disturbing mould of the traitorous, Hang Jebat as opposed to the legendary loyalty of his counterfoil, the classical Malay hero Hang Tuah. Not only in government but also in opposition, 'the agonies of a risk-fraught, choice-complicated obligation of followership' and loyalty (Kessler, 1992, pp.148-9) must be considered. Criticism must be constructive and proffered in the right spirit through proper channels. Indeed, people have in the past voted for the government in power rather than the opposition precisely because the government was the ruling authority and on that basis had a claim to their loyalty. The unhappy tendency of a person of contrary nature and critical thought, as intellectuals are sometimes thought to be, to constantly question and restlessly challenge the *status quo* can therefore be disturbingly problematic. However, despite the limitations and uncertainties, oppositional politics has provided a platform for certain intellectual actors to have their say and be heard.

In March 1968, Dr Tan Chee Khoon along with Dr Lim Chong Eu (a non-chauvinist Chinese who had left the MCA and founded the United Democratic Party (UDP)), academic Professor Wang Gungwu, Dr J.B.A. Peter, amongst others, got together to form the Malaysian People's Movement (*Gerakan*).³⁵ Because of its leadership, it came to be known as the 'party of the intellectuals'. Premised on non-communalism and moderate democratic socialism and seeking to attract the interest of the Malay community, 'well-known Malay intellectual', Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, was elected as its first Chairman (Vasil, 1971, p.305; Crouch, 1996, p.48).

Although *Gerakan* was not able to sustain its non-communal thrust nor its 'intellectual' label after prominent intellectuals left in 1971, there were other parties which continued the long tradition of leadership of opposition parties by prominent

³³'Don't misinterpret Govt's liberal policy, Its a sign of maturity, says Anwar', *NST*, 2 Oct. 1985, p.6.

³⁴(1998; 1999) See cartoon portrayal (in Appendix) of Anwar's image reversal back to his radical student persona. This was an astute observation but also a device used by the mainstream media to discredit and side-line Anwar in the days during which he was launching his *reformasi* movement following his dismissal and preceding his arrest.

³⁵Wang Gungwu was at that time Professor of History at the University of Malaya; Syed Hussein Alatas was Professor of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore; and Dr J.B.A. Peter was President of the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

intellectual figures: for example, Ahmad Boestamam (PKMM, API, PRM); Burhanuddin al-Helmy (KMM, KRIS, PKMM, PAS); Ibrahim Yaacob (KMM, KRIS, PKMM); Ishak Haji Muhammad (PKMM, Labour Party); Kassim Ahmad, Sanusi Osman, Syed Husin Ali and more recently Sheryll Stothard and Rustam A. Sani in the Malaysian Peoples Party (PSRM/PRM);³⁶ Lim Kit Siang, Kua Kia Soong, K. Singh, Fan Yew Teng in the Democratic Action Party (DAP); Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Abdul Hadi Awang, Fadzil Noor, Subky Latiff, Yusof Rawa and Shahnon Ahmad in PAS; and Chandra Muzaffar in *KeADILan*.

Such parties have offered two very important ideological alternatives to the communal and elite-accommodating platform of the ruling National Front coalition. On the one hand, there is the non-communal, democratic and more class-based position of the DAP, PRM and *KeADILan*, whilst on the other there is the Islamist position of PAS premised on a vision of constructing an Islamic state. In all these parties there is a critique of the UMNO's Bumiputraisim, 'neo-feudalism' and diffuse patronage system. In the late 1990s, there was a further attempt to build a viable oppositional Alternative Front (*Barisan Alternatif*, BA) coalition capable of challenging the ruling coalition, which has held power since independence. However, it faced enormous ideological and operational challenges even just to ensure its cohesion and political survival.³⁷

Despite the emphasis of opposition parties on democracy and social justice, they often appear to operate out of much the same cultural praxis as those they critique. Their prominent and often long-serving leaders are the ideologues, around whom the party is constituted. The party is often dependent on leaders' visibility and profile, whilst at the same time providing these individuals the vehicle by which to access a constituency. As a government-controlled mainstream media is often keen to highlight, internal party workings may be no more democratic than those of the ruling parties.

Intellectuals and the Media

In the main the mass media is government-owned and constrained by punitive legislation and a practice of self-censorship. It is expected to be constructive, non-adversarial, containing critical thought but lacking slander and incitement; based on reason and not emotion. It is a discursive praxis of subtlety, nuance and sensitivity to possible misinterpretations and unfavourable reaction. The media has an acute awareness of, even preoccupation with, the politically powerful. In short, it betrays 'feudalist' tendencies.

Articles in *Mingguan Malaysia* on 18 February and 10 March 1996 by NST Editor-in-Chief Datuk Abdul Kadir Jasin and Tun Daim Zainuddin (Economic

³⁶The PSRM (the renamed People's Party (PR)) was said to have been inaugurated in 1968 by 'a group of young intellectuals' (including Kassim Ahmad) who propagated 'scientific socialism' in preference to the Indonesian brand of socialism (Marhaenism), which Boestamam's *Partai Rakyat* (PR, founded 1955) had followed (Rustam A. Sani, 1975, p.42). (This text gives further details of the earlier parties mentioned by acronym only in the above text.) The PSRM became the PRM under the leadership of Syed Husin Ali.

³⁷After a long debate over PAS's policy of seeking an Islamic state, the DAP withdrew from the BA in September 2001.

Adviser to the Government), respectively, sparked a media polemic over the lack of a resilient Malay voice (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998). Significantly, a number of the writers blamed the neo-feudal elements undergirding the Malay cultural and political situation. Kassim Ahmad, for example, highlighted an obsequious subservience to power, asserting that many Malays 'only want to listen to people in power'. He accused the powerful of being 'highhanded towards critical thinking'. As the gatekeepers who can either facilitate or marginalise, they certified the 'good' and 'acceptable' and adjudged the 'correct' and 'true'. Only they get a hearing (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998, pp.56-9). Syed Husin Ali saw Malaysia as not having transited from feudalism to capitalism, but as having elements of both. In a rather blistering attack, he asserted that those in power can appropriate land without proper compensation; expect ceremony and titles; give rank, contracts and gifts to the faithful and deny the same to their critics (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998, pp.108-12). Rustam A. Sani highlighted the rhetorical emphasis on Malays being united - a monolithic group possessing one view and attitude to issues. However, he says, such a view was only the view of a dominant group or individual. In an inversion of the feudal theme, he saw the elite failure to give full support to the process of modernising the Malay nation, culture, language and religion (with the recent passing of the Education Act) as a betrayal of the Malay cause – an act of treason (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998, pp.38-40).

Intellectuals (*kaum intelektual*) came in for some particularly pointed criticism. Their barrenness of thought (rather than a lack of courage) had left them unable to offer alternative ideas (as Dr Mahathir had done in his book *The Malay Dilemma*) so as to give content to the Malay vision for the future and to refine the thinking of Malay leaders.³⁸ Thus, *orang Melayu* simply go along with establishment thinkers. It is as if our brains are frozen, Nasrul Hadi lamented (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998, p.96). Also included in the book collating this polemic was an essay (published in 1989) by Dr Sanusi Osman on the 'Role of Malay Intellectuals',³⁹ in which he defined the 'intellectual' emphasising critical thinking, social criticism and contribution to social change. He explained the factors behind intellectuals' lack in numbers and voice and exhorted Malay intellectuals to return to the standards of independent critique and activism exemplified by pre-independence notables such as Abdullah Munsyi, Za'ba, Ahmad Boestamam, Usman Awang, amongst others (Sanusi 1998, pp.100-1).

This polemic, thus, tended to situate political leaders, the media and intellectuals as central actors in the 'neo-feudal' court of contemporary Malay politics. Neo-feudal elements can also be seen in the relationship between Malaysian think tanks and their political patrons.

Patronage and Ideas - Politicians and their Think Tanks

Especially in the 1990s, any senior or up-and-coming politician of substance, it seemed, had to have his own think tank. Furthermore, intellectual bodies had to find a suitable political patron not only to ensure ongoing financial viability, but also

³⁸Nasrul Hadi, 'Tulisan Daim: Bukan Kerana Taka Berani', (A. Karim Haji Abdullah, 1998, pp.96-7).

³⁹Sanusi Osman, a former lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Political Science at UKM, was in 1996 Secretary General of PRM. This essay was originally published in Sanusi Osman, *Ikatan Etnik dan Kelas di Malaysia*, Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1989.

so that their research could benefit from the prominence and advocacy of that political patron. It was only in 1983, early in Dr Mahathir's term as Prime Minister, that the first political think tank (the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia (ISIS)) was established. Headed by former *NST* Editor, (Tan Sri) Noordin Sopiee, ISIS was to become Malaysia's largest and premier think tank. Seen to be closely associated with the Mahathir government and receiving government as well as some external funding, ISIS staff have provided policy input in the areas of domestic and foreign policy, international security, and increasingly in the 1990s in the area of economic policy. ISIS staff were involved, for example, in the framing of the Vision 2020 agenda.⁴⁰ In addition, ISIS has functioned as Malaysia's representative organisation in regional 'epistemic community' and second track dialogues, with Nordin Sopiee playing a leading role.

Significantly, ideas generated by ISIS staff are not 'owned' by the originator but by the organisation itself.⁴¹ Further, for reasons of national security, ISIS researchers do not regularly interact with the mass media. Its main publication, *ISIS Focus*, has had only a limited circulation, though it did produce a Malay language journal, *Negarawan*, which served a more general local audience.

This is quite different to the role played by another think tank established in 1993 by Dr Mahathir.⁴² The Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) was a government attempt to moderate Islamic discourse and contextualise it within Malaysia's Vision 2020 agenda, although it also seeks to have an international reach. Its stated aim is to provide a 'true understanding of Islam to all citizens of the world' (IKIM leaflet, 1998). IKIM scholars continue to have regular columns in leading newspapers; they have an active publication program; run frequent seminars and conferences for leading local and international scholars with programs also at a state level; in early 2000 began a training and consultancy centre; and, on 6 July 2001 launched its own radio station, *Ikim.fm*.⁴³

Likewise, when Anwar was in power, he had links with several think tanks that mirrored the links Dr Mahathir had with ISIS and IKIM. The Policy Studies Institute (IKD), for example, helped in important ways to give substance to his intellectual agenda. Formed in 1985, it was headed and staffed by many of his former ABIM colleagues.⁴⁴ It provided research support, speech writing assistance, a vehicle for maintaining contact with his intellectual constituency including

⁴⁰Interviews with Rustam A. Sani, once a researcher with ISIS, and Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee, K.L., on 17 Aug. and 8 Aug. 1998, respectively.

⁴¹See (<http://www.jaring.my/isis/>).

⁴²IKIM (*Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia*) is said to be the brainchild of Dr Mahathir. Set in elegant surrounds (not far from the National Archives), its well-appointed facilities (occupied since Oct. 1993) suggest a generous original government funding grant. For details of its planning and launching on 3 July 1992, refer (Ahmad Sarji bin Abdul Hamid, 1996, pp.315-21).

⁴³Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen Bin Shaikh Mohd Salleh, 'Ikim: Institute goes on air for Islam', *The Star Online*, 13 Jul. 2001.

⁴⁴IKD's Founding Chairman, Kamarudin Jaffar, had been ABIM Secretary General (1981-1985) and Anwar Ibrahim's Political Secretary (1986-1991). Following Anwar's dismissal from UMNO, Kamarudin left UMNO to join PAS.

students, academics and NGOs, as well as a channel for collaborative research endeavour with overseas parties.

Anwar was also associated (as Education Minister) with the formation of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). Unlike IKIM, it was primarily a research and postgraduate training facility that grew initially out of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur. It was founded in 1987 by Anwar's former academic mentor, Professor Syed Naquib Al-Attas, and with its well-resourced library continues to attract Muslim scholars from around the world.⁴⁵

These are but a small sample of the various government and privately funded think tanks, which have mushroomed in Malaysia since the mid 1980s. They address a variety of issues from maritime, strategic and foreign policy concerns; economic and development issues; to communal and indigenous issues. They support not only the federal government and senior politicians but also state governments, political parties and public interest groups.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is not always clear where to draw the distinction between academic institution, think tank and NGO, nor between the government and private sectors.⁴⁷

The personalised nature of the links between politician and think tank are important as signified by inter-connected fortunes of both parties. Two examples will suffice. The International Malay Secretariat (SMA) headed by GAPENA chief, Tan Sri Ismail Hussein, had as its patron the rising 'new Malay' politician and Selangor Chief Minister (1986-1997), Muhammad Muhammad Taib. When his political career faltered following legal proceedings against him in Australia, the SMA was also to lose much of its momentum and profile.⁴⁸ Similarly, the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue at the University of Malaya, headed by Chandra Muzaffar

⁴⁵For a more detailed discussion, see (Abaza 2002, pp.88-105).

⁴⁶For example, the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems (Mimos Bhd.) was founded in 1985 to advise the government on information technology issues. Similarly, the Malaysian Institute of Maritime Affairs (MIMA) was founded (July 1993) by the Malaysian government's National Security Council to deal with maritime issues. This is in contrast to the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre (MSRC), which was founded (in Sept. 1993) primarily as a support vehicle for Najib Tun Abd. Razak, who was then the Defence Minister. Amongst think tanks at a state level there are the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), which was founded in 1985 to assist the Sabah state government, and the Socio-Economic and Environment Research Institute (Seri) founded (28 Oct. 1997) to help with Penang's strategic planning. Communally-oriented think tanks include the Institute of Strategic Analysis in Planning (INSAP) founded 1989 as the economic policy body of the MCA; the Huazi Resource and Research Centre founded 1985 to research community and national issues faced by Malaysian Chinese; and the government-initiated Institute for Indigenous Economic Progress (Indep) founded (19 Feb. 1998) seeking to advance the interests of *bumiputera* in Sabah.

⁴⁷One example is the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER), which vigorously maintains its independence from the government and yet has members of its staff consulting for government and (government-linked) business organisations, whilst also serving on government economic policy bodies such as the NEAC and the NECC.

⁴⁸Muhammad Muhd. Taib faced charges (brought in Dec. 1996) of not declaring a large amount of money that he was attempting to carry out of Australia. He had been part of the Vision (*Wawasan*) team which helped Anwar challenge (Tun) Ghafar Baba in 1993 for the position of UMNO Deputy President. Muhammad had been an ardent advocate and exemplar of the *Melayu baru* (new Malay) ideal - the young, internationally oriented, business-savvy executive that Malays have aspired to be (Dinsman & Sutung Umar Rs, 1993; Muhammad Muhd. Taib, 1993; A. Rahman Muda, 1996).

and with perceived links with Anwar Ibrahim, was to be reconstituted following Anwar's demise and the subsequent non-renewal of Chandra's contract.⁴⁹

ability or must position himself in relationship with those who do. As a consequence, intellectual endeavour can become captive to political agendas, whether focussed at a national or international level. Finally, neo-feudalist elements also featured prominently as both causal factors and explanations of Malaysia's 'Anwar' crisis, though contending democratic and Islamic ideological threads were also present.

The Anwar Crisis and its Implications

After strains in the relationship between Anwar and Dr Mahathir had been evident even as early as 1995,⁵⁰ an apparent abortive leadership coup at the June 1998 UMNO General Assembly was perhaps the last straw. Thereafter steps were taken to increasingly isolate Anwar, culminating in his removal from office.⁵¹ He was subsequently arrested, put on trial and sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of abuse of power and sodomy.⁵²

It is not so much the details of these events, which are important to this present discussion, but rather the public reaction to them. Whether Anwar was guilty as charged or not, it was the way he was treated that raised the ire and concern of the general populace, alienating a large segment of the Malay population. It raised questions in the minds of ordinary Malaysians concerning the role of institutions such as the media, judiciary, and police and stimulated people to re-examine their political philosophies and commitments. Indeed, it demonstrated the dire consequences for a leader of overstepping the accepted norms of political cultural praxis.

⁴⁹The Centre, which began in 1997, was actually the brainchild of Osman Bakar who recruited Chandra Muzaffar to help set it up. The fact that it got up and running as quickly as it did was perceived by many to be due to connections with Anwar Ibrahim. Though having a small staff (which included Farish A. Noor and a secretary), the Centre managed to draw a large number of postgraduate students seeking to sit under Chandra's tutelage. In Feb. 1999, the government declined to renew Chandra's contract citing financial reasons, although it was widely believed that it was because Chandra since Sept. 1998 had been openly critical of Dr Mahathir and involved in opposition politics. Its new head Prof. Abdullah Alwi Hassan indicated that he hoped to 'upgrade' it into a Centre of Civilisational Studies (Ritikos, 1999).

⁵⁰In Anwar's speech at the joint opening of UMNO Youth and Wanita assemblies ('Be Prepared to face bigger challenge', *NST*, 24 Nov. 1995, pp.12-3) he responds to claims of a rift in his relationship with Dr Mahathir.

⁵¹On 24 June 1998, Tun Daim Zainuddin was appointed Special Functions Minister with responsibility for economic matters (while Anwar was still Finance Minister). Late in June a stimulus package of 12bn ringgit in government spending was announced - a reversal of the 18% cut in spending announced by Anwar in Dec. 1997. In Jul. 1998, controls were tightened on the mainstream media. Several prominent figures seen to be aligned with Anwar Ibrahim were forced to resign. They included a TV3 executive, and the Editor-in-Chiefs of the major Malay-language dailies - Johan Jaafar of the *Utusan Malaysia* and Nazri Abdullah of the *Berita Harian*. On 27 Aug. 1998, the Bank Negara Governor and Deputy Governor resigned over policy differences with Dr Mahathir. On 1 Sept. 1998, the government announced currency exchange controls and on 2 Sept. Anwar was sacked as Deputy PM and Finance Minister..

⁵²For discussion of these events refer: Chandra Muzaffar & Farish A. Noor, 'Beyond the Wayang of Kerajaan: Reflections on the Anwar Ibrahim Episode', (<http://www2.jaring.my/just/Analyziza.html>).

Feudalist Culture Transgressed and Reaffirmed

Anwar's alleged sexual improprieties - serious charges for a man who had once been at the forefront of an Islamic revivalist movement calling for greater Islamic observance and moral integrity - were not seen as the major reason for his demise.⁵³ Rather, his main transgression was that he had dared to challenge the leader. His 'treason' had vitiated the loyalty-based ruler/ruled relationship and irreparably damaged the father/son relationship of trust and filial obedience. At least, this was the essence of much of the analysis in both the pro-government and opposition media.

According to M.G.G. Pillai: 'A challenger who fails in a feudal society is killed'.⁵⁴ 'Perpetual leaders', asserted Sadirah K., 'remain the biggest stumbling block [to reform]. ... They breed this culture of loyalty by ensuring that power remains in their hands' (*Harakah*, 24 May 1999). Indeed, the UMNO rank-and-file were at pains to reassert their loyalty. A former Anwar associate was quoted as saying: 'What is important is loyalty to leaders and that is the way to save the party'.⁵⁵ When Anwar's successor (Abdullah Badawi) was announced, the mainstream media gave emphasis to his loyalty and filial piety by highlighting a photograph of Abdullah greeting his mother in a filial manner. The loyalty discourse was used to discipline a restive citizenry. Collusion with foreigners and street protests were labelled as disloyal, unpatriotic and un-Malaysian.⁵⁶ However, such discourse also came in for some serious criticism. Sadirah K. questioned whether 'concerns of loyalty [to an individual were] more important than integrity'. Citing Charles Colson [of Nixon Watergate fame], he declared that 'loyalty if not attached to a cause that is moral and just can be the most dangerous of all virtues' (*Harakah*, 22 Mar. 1999). Further, it was claimed that 'loyalty to individuals is un-Islamic'.⁵⁷ Thus, Malaysians were called upon to re-examine the focus of their loyalty - whether the party, the leader, the system, the cause, or right principle. A disjuncture was evident between an older generation raised on a Malay nationalism incorporating 'feudal' elements and a younger Malay generation for whom Islam was a greater point of identity.

⁵³As opposition writer Sadirah K. pointed out, certain moral deficiencies in others of the UMNO faithful had not led to their downfall (*Harakah*, 5 July, 1999).

⁵⁴Sang Kancil, M.G.G. Pillai, 20 Jun 1999.

⁵⁵(Sadirah K., *Harakah*, 24 May 1999) Criticised for his allegedly pro-Anwar speech at a Kelantan divisional delegates meeting, Datuk Fauzi Abdul Rahman, Deputy Minister in the PM's Dept., was reported to have met the PM and reaffirmed his loyalty (*Utusan Express*, 9 May 1999).

⁵⁶Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz questioned Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail's loyalty to the country when the latter visited the Philippines: 'What kind of patriotism is that? When others run down your country, your first instinct is to stand up for your country. If something is not right you should criticise internally.' (*Star*, April 30, 1999) Malaysians involved in the *reformasi* movement were advised not to allow themselves to be used by foreign subversive elements so as to destroy the country. Instead, according to Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, Malaysians should use intelligent means and proper avenues to voice their views and not resort to mob rule and street demonstrations. ... "We have to find our own ways to overcome problems which we are facing. The Government will study the people's views and demands, and implement policies accordingly." (*Star*, 30 Nov. 1998)

⁵⁷Sadirah K., *Harakah*, 24 May 1999.

Like the *Malay Annals*, written by an Islamised court in an attempt to come to terms with what had happened in the aftermath of the fall of the Kingdom of Malacca to the Portuguese, the key explanation for the reaction against Dr Mahathir in the Malay community was that the ruler had not lived up to what was expected of him as a leader. Malaysian historian, Dr Cheah Boon Kheng in his address to the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS) on 11 December 1998, declared that the 'central theme' of the Malay Annals was that of 'injustice'.⁵⁸ Sultan Mahmud had failed to 'follow Islamic precept' and, thus, his kingdom had fallen. Similarly, whilst Anwar had been disloyal, Dr Mahathir had also failed as a Malay leader. In publicly shaming Anwar, he had outraged Malays 'whose ancient Annals, the *Sejarah Melayu*, have decreed that "if subjects of the ruler offend, they shall not, however grave the offence, be disgraced or reviled with evil words"'.⁵⁹ In the 'social contract made by our rulers of old to the people ... if any ruler puts a single one of his subjects to shame, that shall be a sign that his kingdom shall be destroyed by Almighty God'.⁶⁰

In addition, there were charges that Dr Mahathir had slandered (*memfitnah*) Anwar - a serious offence within Islam - and suggestions that under Islamic jurisprudence such charges that had been levelled at Anwar would never have come to court. There was recognition that democratic principles such as the freedom of speech and of association and the independence of the judiciary were severely compromised. However, in Malaysia's system of personalised politics it was the behaviour of these two leaders, which was the main focus. Relationship not ideology counted as illustrated also in the experiences of a number of prominent Malaysian intellectuals during this period.

Tracking Intellectuals' Fortunes

Following Anwar's sacking, Chandra Muzaffar was openly critical of Dr Mahathir and became involved in the founding of the opposition ADIL movement (on 10 December 1998). As a consequence he was effectively 'sacked' in February 1999 as Director of the Centre of Civilisational Dialogue. He became the Deputy President (and much of the brains behind) the National Justice Party (*KeADILan*) - launched by its president Anwar's wife, Dr Wan Azizah, on 4 April 1999. In this capacity Chandra was a key player in working towards a common platform with other Opposition Parties (PAS, DAP and PRM), resulting in the formation of the Alternative Front (BA) coalition. However, he like many other opposition activists narrowly missed winning a seat in the 1999 General Elections.⁶¹ Turning down offers of academic positions abroad, Chandra chose to continue to work within *KeADILan* up until late 2001, when he announced his decision not to re-contest his position ostensibly in order that he could refocus on his NGO activities.

⁵⁸NST, 23 Dec. 98, p.7.

⁵⁹Reformasi File, Sabri Zain; See also *Harakah*, 16 Aug. 1999.

⁶⁰PRM President Dr Syed Husin Ali addressing a 15,000-strong audience at a PRM ceramah in Sungai Nibong, Penang on 22 May 1999, as reported by Sabri Zain, 'Record of Shame', Sangkancil, 29 May 1999.

⁶¹The DAP gained only 10 seats (one up on 1995) with both its leader (Lim Kit Siang) and deputy leader (Karpal Singh) losing their seats.

Up until mid 1998, Rustam A. Sani had been a prominent columnist in the Malay language daily newspaper, *Utusan Malaysia*. His weekly column was regarded as 'must-read' material and helped set the agenda for public discussion. However, in the period following Johan Jaafar's 'resignation' as editor at *Utusan*, Rustam found that articles he submitted as usual were not published. No explanation was given nor was any correspondence entered into. Rustam simply understood the signals and decided to move on.⁶² Subsequently, his articles appeared in opposition-aligned newspapers and magazines such as *Harakah* and *Detik*. As a member of the Malaysian Peoples Party (PRM), he became media spokesman for the opposition Alternative Front.

Leading Malaysian economist and academic, Jomo K.S., with four others had to face a RM250 million libel suit brought by prominent media tycoon, Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun, for remarks critical of cronyism published in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* on 21 December 1998 and subsequently on the Internet.⁶³ He was criticised also for his involvement in helping to shape the BA's economic policy.⁶⁴ Interestingly, prior to the 1999 elections he had never even registered to vote. This was revealed when Jomo legally challenged the election process on behalf of the 680,000 other mostly young and possibly more pro-opposition-oriented people, who had recently registered but were unable to vote due to Election Commission policy.⁶⁵ His colleague in the Malaysian Social Science Association, Syed Husin Ali, continued his commitment to seeking a non-racialist political alternative for Malaysia through his active involvement in opposition politics at the helm of the PRM. The party, which was once again unsuccessful in winning a seat, subsequently began moves towards a merger with *KeADILan*.

Amongst intellectual figures aligned with the ruling coalition was Datuk Dr Rais Yatim, a former deputy leader of Spirit of 46 Malay Party (*Parti Melayu Semangat 46*), who had been rehabilitated back into UMNO ranks. He won his seat in the 1999 election and was rewarded with the position of Minister in the PM's Department responsible for legal matters. Despite having once written a book

⁶²It had been suggested that his column on the editorial page be reduced in size, but Rustam was unwilling to countenance this (Interview with Rustam A. Sani, DBP, 17 Aug. 1998).

⁶³Jomo K.S., 'Malaysia Props up Crony Capitalists', *AWSJ*, 21 Dec. 1998; See also: 'UM Lecturer Files Defence In RM250 Mln Libel Suit', *Utusan Express*, 12 May 1999 and 'Vincent Tan Sues Five For RM250 Million For Libel', *Utusan Express*, 6 Apr. 1999.

⁶⁴For details refer: Fathi Aris Omar, '10 agenda perpaduan nasional' (Ten point agenda for national unity), *malaysiakini*, [<http://www.malaysiakini.com/News/2001/01/2001011102.php3>], 11 Jan. 2001; For further insight into his economic and political thought refer: Interview: 'Jomo on the current situation in Malaysia', Transcript of interview given to *The Australian* newspaper during his visit to Australia in mid-Feb. 1999, *Harakah*, (<http://members.xoom.com/harakah2/a19990315/1062b3e09.html>), 15 Mar. 1999.

⁶⁵Chelsea L.Y. Ng, 'Jomo files suit against Election Commission', *The Star Online*, (<http://thestar.com.my/online/>), 18 Nov. 1999; 'Tidak daftar bukti Jomo hipokrit' (Not registering proves Jomo is a hypocrite), *Berita Harian* Internet Edition, [<http://www.jaring.my/bharian/mon/news10.htm>], 15 Nov. 1999; Jomo K.S., Letter to the Editor, *NST* (for publication), (<http://members.tripod.com/~mahazalimt/011199xf.html>), 1 Nov. 1999.

strongly denouncing the ISA, he very quickly became the voice of the establishment dismissing his book as 'merely an academic exercise'.⁶⁶

Others with pro-establishment links have nonetheless also been able to provide commentary with a critical edge. Former Deputy Prime Minister, Musa Hitam, during this period filled the role of retired Senior Politician, commenting on Anwar's dismissal and the need for UMNO to deal with the erosion of Malay support.⁶⁷ He was in April 2000 appointed as first Chairman of the (government initiated) Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam).⁶⁸ Abdul Razak Baginda, Executive Director of the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre (MSRC), has been critical of unquestioning Malay loyalty to political leadership. Rather than loyalties around particular people, he has favoured loyalty to a democratic political system and the rule of law.⁶⁹ He has pointed to the need for government to dialogue with the younger, less feudal and more sophisticated, knowledgeable, IT-literate and critical sections of the electorate who will be increasingly important to the outcome of future elections.

Malaysia's special envoy to the United Nations, Adbullah Ahmad, also provided some ginger for the ruling party in his *NST* commentaries. He called for UMNO to be responsive to the increasingly sophisticated and savvy Malaysian electorate; to lessen corruption and the links between business and politics; highlighted the need for protection of individual freedoms, the need for opportunities for women and the importance of a credible opposition. He was appointed in 2001 as Editor-in-Chief of the New Straits Times Press and given the job of trying to restore its flagging fortunes (Jayasankaran, 2002). He was subsequently dismissed on 21 November 2003 ostensibly as a result of an article he wrote on 12 November criticising the Saudi royal family and causing embarrassment to the Malaysian government.

A New Era under Abdullah Badawi?

Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi came to power on 31 October 2003, when Dr Mahathir stood down as Prime Minister after some 22 years at the helm. Since then, those crafting his image have presented him as a leader concerned for the rural, Islamic and urban middle class (multiracial) grassroots; and, as 'Mr Clean' committed to tackling corruption, inefficiency, 'red tape' and wastefulness. Much has been made of his Islamic credentials as the grandson of a prominent Islamic *ulama* and as a student of Islamic studies at the University of Malaya. Nonetheless, he does not have quite the 'intellectual presence' that either Dr Mahathir or Anwar Ibrahim (or before him Musa Hitam) had. Rather, he is the long-serving and loyal politician and bureaucrat, well versed in the mechanics of the civil service and government. 'Work with me and not for me' was a slogan given prominence soon after he became Prime

⁶⁶(Faridah Begum, 'Rais: It was purely academic', *The Star Online*, (<http://thestar.com.my/news/>), 6 Jun. 2001) This book arose out of his doctoral studies in England (Rais Yatim, 1995).

⁶⁷'Wake-up Call', *FEER*, 9 Dec. 1999, p.16.

⁶⁸'Human Rights, Etc.', *AgendaMalaysia*, (<http://www.agendamalaysia.com/detailinf.asp?gnum=1&num=50>), 7 Apr. 2000 (accessed: 18 Dec. 2000). He decided in March 2002 not to stand for another two-year term (J. Tan, 'Musa giving up post as Suhakam chairman', *The Star Online*, (<http://thestar.com.my/news/>), 30 Mar. 2002).

⁶⁹Paper presented at Seminar organised by Political Science Students at UKM, 15 Jun. 1998.

Minister. Yet, have there been substantive changes, which would indicate a radically new era under his leadership?

Despite some new faces, the Cabinet, especially the important positions, is comprised of many of the same faces as before. A National Integrity Plan has been proposed and new measures put in place to ensure greater accountability by parliamentarians. Reforms of Government Linked Companies (GLCs) are under way and a moderate 'Islam Hadhari' has been articulated. However, there have been no moves to modify or remove laws such as the ISA, Official Secrets Act (OSA), the University and University Colleges Act (UUCA, 1975), etc, which constrain and order the public sphere. As elsewhere, the September 11 terrorist attacks have justified the ongoing need for security measures, which tend to counter human rights and freedoms. The same kinds of legislative and institutional structures (as perhaps would be expected) continue from Dr Mahathir's term into the present. Though without an overt intellectual presence, he is still the head and centre of a state, which claims proprietary rights over the intellectual resources and institutions, which support it. He is still in some measure the 'intellectual statesman' at the helm of a nation 'seeking knowledge' for its further development and the benefit of its citizens.

Consequently, whether within or outside of power, public intellectual engagement can be a perilous road to walk for someone committed to principle and public activism (and/or seeking political promotion). Political priorities often take precedence and, thus, this paper has focussed on the close ties between (even confluence of) the intellectual and political realms in Malaysia. Within this context, independently minded and critical intellectuals can be especially dangerous 'loose canon' threatening the feudal dynamics that continue to constitute the lived Malaysian reality. Rather disturbingly, the intellectual also provides an alternative embodiment of many of the ideals represented by the 'neo-feudal' ruler and 'intellectual statesman'. Today, power is centred in the person of the Prime Minister, who also has at his disposal extensive mechanisms with which to shape discourse and thought in legitimization of that power. The 'Malaysian way' may have as much to do with the skilful technocratic management of thought (See also comments by Kessler (1999)) as it has to do with adept handling of the individuals, factions, ethnic groups, and organisations that are ever present and ready to test that power's claims and record. Loyalty is desired but is not necessarily blind. In this context, the intellectual figure in Malaysia is an important and necessarily sophisticated social actor.

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