

Malaysia poll echoes independence struggle

by Sophie Tanapura

The following report was filed from Bangkok on Jan. 24.

On Jan. 28, the third off-season election will be held in Malaysia since the opposition launched its strategy to discredit Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad by orchestrating the resignation of members of parliament, thereby forcing premature elections in the just vacated seat. In this most recent case, Dr. Lim Ann Koon of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) was pressured to resign by dissidents of the ruling United Malay National Organization under the leadership of Tengku Razaleigh in order to field a candidate of their choice. Dr. Lim insisted that his resignation was for "personal reasons" only; however, the opposition's arm-twisting was an open secret widely discussed in the Malaysian media. It is not difficult to interpret Lim's unexpected move as serving only to discredit the MCA, especially in the eyes of its coalition partner UMNO.

The opposition strategy at this point is not so much to pack the parliament with their people, but rather to build a climate of animosity toward the prime minister and try to create a loss of faith in his authority, thus forcing him to step down or call early federal elections. The leadership of this effort consists primarily of former Prime Minister Tunjku Abdul Rahman; former Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh; and Mahathir's former Deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam, all with deep personal grudges against Mahathir. Their drive to overthrow him has not been easy, since he still enjoys much popular support and is generally credited with Malaysia's economic and political stability.

Therefore, in order to create the political and economic chaos necessary for massive unrest, opposition leaders have aligned themselves with both domestic and international groups committed to Malaysia's destruction as a sovereign nation: environmentalists, pro-drug lobbyists, Amnesty International, the International Labor Organization (ILO), Islamic fundamentalists, and most crucial for their strategy, the international press "mafia," who generally despise any nationalist leader exerting sovereignty over his country. The opposition's hypocritical campaign slogan for this election, "We abhor despotism," is clearly intended more for international consumption than to gain any credibility domestically.

Most egregious in the eyes of Malays has been the alliance these former UMNO officials have built with the Chinese communalist-based Democratic Action Party (DAP), who

are committed to destroying Malay political dominance in Malaysia, and whose disruptive tactics are strongly reminiscent of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).

Malaysia has a unique electoral tradition among nations, and this election will be a unique test of it. The government is run by a coalition of political parties, however, totally unlike the parliamentary system of European nations, it is formed *before* an election and functions as a permanent institution without consideration as to what an individual party scores at the polls.

Thus, for the upcoming Jan. 28 election in Ampang Jaya, a district just outside the nation's capital of Kuala Lumpur, there will be as of this writing, two major candidates competing. One, Mr. Ong Tee Keat of the MCA, the other, Datuk Haji Harun Idris, representing the united efforts of all opposition parties. Mr. Ong is the 32-year-old political secretary to the Minister of Labor Lee Kim Sai, himself a leader of the MCA. Ong, an engineer, is fluent in Malay, Chinese, and English, and is a "grass roots" organizer for the Labor Ministry. All the member parties of the Barisan coalition—UMNO, MCA, Malaysian Indian Congress, Gerakhan, and others—will campaign and support the election of Mr. Ong, who represents not the MCA, but the Barisan in this election.

The constituency of Ampang Jaya, with a total population of 69,000, is 68.3% Malay, 25.8% Chinese, and 4.6% Indian. The challenge for the predominantly Malay population will be to rise above any racial bias and vote for a Chinese politician who represents the very political system, the Bar coalition, upon which the country successfully won independence. Historically, the Barisan, and its predecessor, the Alliance, have deliberately fielded non-Malay candidates in Malay districts and vice versa to foster racial harmony.

For their part, the opposition is playing a particularly evil role by fielding an ethnic Malay candidate, a long-time political activist, well known to the electorate, who also wants only to unseat Mahathir. The Malays have therefore been placed in a clear crisis of identity as to where their loyalties are—to a higher principle of racial harmony and national well-being, or narrow racial self-interest. It is worth noting that as soon as Dr. Lim Ann Koon resigned his seat, UMNO leaders announced that the MCA would have the right to choose a new candidate, since this seat, by Barisan agreement, was assigned to the MCA, despite the fact that it had predominantly a Malay constituency. The principle of Barisan unity would thus be maintained.

The historical precedent

In 1952, five years before winning independence from the British, the Malaysian people were confronted with a similar test. Up to that point, both the Malays and Chinese were separately represented by their own organizations, UMNO and the MCA. The Alliance was the brainchild of Col. H.S. Lee, the head of the Selangor MCA, and Datuk Abdul Razak, his counterpart in UMNO and the man later to

be known as "The Father of Development," Malaysia's second prime minister. Rather than fielding candidates against each other in the first elections the British permitted under their rule, the two leaders decided to collaborate and field a common slate in Kuala Lumpur under the Alliance banner. Though the British claimed that without racial harmony, they would not grant independence, they opposed the Alliance, and instead backed the former UMNO leader Tun Hussein Onn, who had since been forced out of the party!

Onn advocated opening UMNO to non-Malays (which he later reversed). This was vehemently opposed by the rest of the party on the grounds that in the midst of a full-scale war against a predominantly Chinese communist guerrilla force, they could not safely permit Chinese into the party. The Malays were also clearly committed to reasserting their dominance in their native country after being relegated to a mostly *Kampung* (village)-centered existence, playing virtually no role in the business community, which was dominated by the Chinese. Though a corrupt Malay sultanate had accepted the niche-like existence of the various races, the leaders of the independence movement were challenging the status quo. The creation of the Alliance provided the best possible solution under the circumstances to ally the Chinese and the Malays, and soon after include those of Indian heritage in the MIC.

The Alliance won 11 out of 12 seats, Onn's party taking only 1. The British, needless to say, were caught totally by surprise, and a new era was born. The Alliance was then elevated to a national level and proved equally successful in the next major elections in 1955, when they won 51 out of 52 seats in the Federal Legislative Council.

If member parties of the Barisan coalition take advantage of the historic opportunity offered in this election and fight to rally especially the Malays around the higher purpose of the Barisan, election victory will be probable. The full commitment of all Barisan parties to back Mr. Ong has been announced, and is the first step in the right direction. Remarks made at the first national joint convention of the MCA and UMNO following the victorious 1952 elections can surely provide the appropriate spirit to meet the current challenge. The MCA President Datuk Tan Cheng Lock told the Convention:

"Emancipation from oppressive conditions, whether they be political, social, or economic, can only be won at the price of personal endeavor. National progress must be attained by definitely organized and carefully concerted endeavor. Success needs to be achieved; it cannot be granted or conferred.

"There is no magic formula for the attainment of Malayan freedom and independence. It is a matter of hard work and sweat by each and every one of us who loves and is devoted to Malaya as his homeland or permanent home.

"We must exert our earnest and utmost efforts to achieve the positive task of bringing about and advancing the cause of unity, especially between Malays and Chinese, which is

Benazir Bhutto visit removes Saudi doubts

by Ramtanu Maitra

Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Zardari's Jan. 10-12 visit to Saudi Arabia was a resounding personal success for the new prime minister. The two-hour meeting she had with King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz in the presence of top aides and leading members of the Saudi royal family was "remarkably warm" and friendly. King Fahd, it was announced, accepted an invitation to visit Pakistan, and as Pakistani Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan pointed out upon return to Islamabad: "There was no indication that the Saudi government and leadership regarded her as anyone else but the chief executive of Pakistan."

The significance of Bhutto's choice of Saudi Arabia for her first trip abroad since assuming office cannot be overstressed. The Saudi kingdom has remained a trusted friend of Pakistan throughout the upheavals the country has faced over the last two decades. Saudi Arabia provides financial support in the form of crude oil at concessional rates, and has also contributed generously to lighten Pakistan's burden in maintaining 3 million Afghan refugees who came to Pakistan after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Continuing Saudi financial support for Pakistan could be crucial for Bhutto, who has pledged to eradicate poverty and make Pakistan "another Japan."

Washing away misgivings

There had been audible rumblings in the Arab capitals after Bhutto's election victory and accession to power last December. Arab leaders were uneasy about a woman heading an Islamic state, and reportedly there were misgivings within Saudi Arabia about the Bhutto family's ties to Iran. Bhutto's mother, Begum Nusrat Bhutto, who chairs the Pakistan People's Party, is from Iran.

With her trip to Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Bhutto

the prerequisite of freedom and independence.

"The merger of the UMNO and MCA which recently swept the board at the Municipal and Town Council elections, the formation of Sino-Malay Liaison Committees in the various parts of the Federation, and the organization of

acted quickly to quell such fears. She sent Khan Bahadur Khan, Minister for Religious and Minorities Affairs, with a message to the Saudi leaders pledging Pakistan's continuing commitment to Saudi security. Minister Khan met with Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Naif, interior minister and a full brother of the king. While still in Saudi Arabia, Minister Khan announced that Mrs. Bhutto would be visiting Saudi Arabia in January.

Officially, Bhutto's visit was to perform *Umrah* (pilgrimage to Holy Mecca in the non-*Haj* period) at Makkah Mukkarrama. During the pilgrimage, her entourage, which consisted of 60 people who had suffered at the hands of the previous regime for their fight for democracy, was afforded the rare opportunity of entering the Khana-e-Kaba, the House of Allah. Reports say that when Bhutto, supported by her husband Asif Zardari, emerged from the Holy Kaaba, tears were streaming down her cheeks. It can be assumed that the Harvard and Oxford-educated prime minister had also established her credentials as a faithful follower of Islam.

Relations among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran were a key point of the agenda, as indicated when Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan, not originally included in the prime minister's entourage, was summoned to Dharan, Saudi Arabia, where they were meeting. According to the Islamabad daily *The Muslim*, Yaqub Khan's presence could have been related to Pakistan's role in bringing about better relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In the long-drawn-out war between Iran and Iraq, Saudi Arabia has backed Iraq's war effort, while Pakistan has remained neutral, a posture which has sometimes been construed in Riyadh as a pro-Iran tendency in Pakistan. In November 1987, for instance, Iran and Pakistan signed a trade agreement which ensured a \$400 million two-way trade. In addition, Iran agreed to supply 20,000 barrels of crude oil a day to Pakistan (Pakistan rejected the offer to supply its entire requirement). The agreement also provided for the use of Karachi and the neighboring part of Muhammadbin Qassim for the import of Iranian goods. The agreement was made a day before the U.S. declared an economic boycott of Iran, and at a time when Saudi Arabia was attempting to organize a collective Arab mandatory boycott against Iran.

Later, in February 1988, when an international conference in Islamabad sponsored by the London-based Is-

lamic Council and attended by more than 1,000 delegations from the Muslim world, passed a resolution branding Iraq as the aggressor in the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states sent a communiqué to Islamabad protesting the resolution and Pakistan's involvement in producing it.

There are other outstanding matters. In 1985, Saudi Arabia had asked the late President Zia ul-Haq for a partial withdrawal of Pakistani soldiers from the kingdom. At least 10,000 Pakistani soldiers, approximately 20% Shiite Muslims, were stationed in Saudi Arabia, holding key positions in the technical branches of the armored corps, air force, and navy.

A problem arose when reports came that some Pakistani soldiers had refused to engage in police action in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia against the local population, a large number of whom were Shiites. It was also reported that a number of Pakistani soldiers had deserted Saudi Arabia and sought political asylum in the neighboring Yemen Arab Republic following a minor border incident between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Although reports of a mass exodus of Pakistani forces from Saudi Arabia were exaggerated, many high-level visits by Pakistani leaders, including then Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo in December 1987, were undertaken to sort out the delicate matter.

Another issue on the agenda for Bhutto and King Fahd was the fast-breaking situation in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia has consistently backed Pakistan's policy toward the Afghan mujahideen. It was at King Fahd's behest that the recent meeting between the Peshawar-based IUAM and Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov took place at Taif. King Fahd also met privately with Vorontsov.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia both agree that the Soviet troops must withdraw by Feb. 15, as stipulated in the Geneva Accord, and the Afghans must be left alone to decide what form of government they want. There are, however, differences, due largely to the circumstances and constraints in which Pakistan has to function. For example, while the Saudis appear to be open to the Soviet insistence that the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) must be included in the broad-based coalition government in Kabul following the Soviet troops' withdrawal, this concept is flatly rejected by the Peshawar-based mujahideen.

today's National Convention under the joint auspices and leadership of UMNO and MCA to work for the attainment of Malayan independence furnish concrete proof of the signal success of the Alliance, which is essentially non-communal in spirit, aim and nature."

And from a convention address by Datuk Abdul Razak:
"Let the unity so far established be the foundation on which to mold a bigger and more lasting unity which will grow into a national solidarity on which the future of this country will be molded and consolidated."