Birth of Euro

Are There Lessons for SAARC?

by Dr M Zakir Husain

A lot of hard work is to be carried out in the SAARC region both in the countries and regionally. The essential building blocks include a varity of things; it is important to start putting these in place: Mere annual Summits and other ritual meetings or symbolic gestures will not deliver SAARC.

EUROPEAN Union has conceived and delivered monetary union. And what has SAARC — the regional grouping of South Asia conceived but not yet delivered?

The Euro — a single currency for 11 member countries of the European Union — has arrived. A new world currency is born. The birth of Euro signifies more than the monetary union. It heralds even greater political, security and economic integration of Europe.

Is there a lesson here for the other geo-political alliances such as the ASEAN and the SAARC? Indeed there is. To achieve Euro, it took vision and hard toil, it took discipline and dedication. It also required sacrifice by individual members of the Union to achieve a common destiny. From each member country, it demanded surrender of some national interest and imperatives to move forward to realise a common shared vision and goal. The political leadership and statesmen of Europe have acted wisely with great forersight and courage.

SAARC : Many Obstacles Yet

What is the situation in SAARC region? There are longstading territorial and political disputes that continue to cloud the relationship in the Indian subcontinent. There are smouldering internal ethnic strifes in at least three countries. Trade and commerce, travel and tourism are restricted due to barriers old and new. Security perceptions are riddled with suspicion and rivalry between two major member countries. Preferential trade (SAPTA) agreement is faltering, and Free Trade (SAFTA) seems rather remote.

Apart from political inertia, relative economic development disparties are proving obstacles. Where there is agreement on intentions, practical actions are often bogged down in narrow technicalities. In short, the grand vision of the original founders of SAARC remains just a vision endorsed more in rhetoric but less by political pragmatism or sagacity. And now two members of SAARC are locked in nuclear arms race. Regional integration is for advancing the socio-economic progress and peace and not a game of political or military upmanship between rivals.

Could it be that countries of SAARC are too diverse, too unequal, its leadership too pre-occupied with misplaced ambitions and wrong priorities, and trapped in legacy of past conflicts? Are the people and the civil society too unfamiliar with each other? Also, notably in the Indian subcontinent, the power projection by the chief executive is too high or at times arbitrary, less is a tradition of collective leadership and personal accountability of the chief executive to the elected parliament. National legislatures have in effect been sometimes sitlelined by very imposing political leaders with great popular appeal and extraordinary charisma.

The truth is that it is not the Generals and Presidents who create history; it is the people and their institutions which do. Excessive projection of individuals and adoration of cult figures have done more harm than good for progress of nations and of regions.

Lack of a Political Cuture of Consensus?

The growth and consolidation of regional geo-political and economic institutions require broad political agreement across party lines; it requires continuity of consensus on regional alliances through successive political regimes. A price to be paid for regional integration is the surrender of some national interests for the sake of achieving a common goal and common good for the alliance. For all that, first we need mature and stable national institutions.

That is why it is so important to nurture a strong and open parliamentary democracy, democratic institutions, and create traditions of tolerant and transparent political discourses to build understanding and lasting consensus on major national and regional issues across narrow party lines. That is why national parliaments should function more as supreme legislatures and be not subverted either by ambitious dictators or capricious chief executives. While great leaders with vision have conceived great ideas, we need strong institutions of peoples' representation, enlightened and efficient bureaucracy, and an educated and informed public to carry forward and give concrete substance to grand visions. Regional alliances for greater economic, political and cultural integration across countries with separate tradtions and stages of development require much more than just vision.

Not Just Governments, People also Matter

Regional alliances are not merely matters of high ideals best left to political chief executives or formal government apparatus. People are equally important; people to people contacts and understandings create many foundations of closer integration between countries. Travel and other exchanges between people of the SAARC region are still very infrequent, and riddled with many restrictive requirements.

Free flow of information across countries, high population literacy and education, employment, political stability and continuity are also preconditions for sustained socio-economic development and nurturing essential regional identity in the SAARC region. Informed and educated population will create strong civil society with shared interests and views and a deep sense of regional identity. Sadly though, good understanding of South Asian Regional alliance is lacking even among the social "elite".

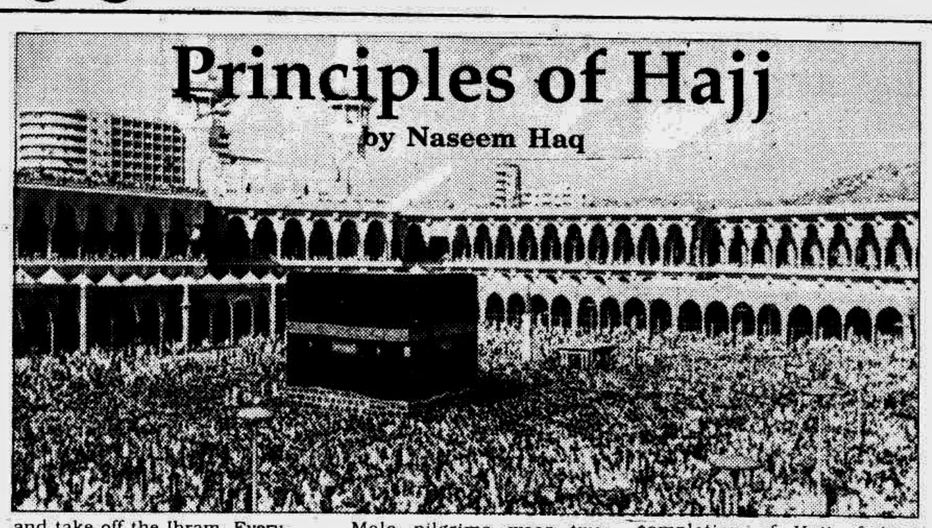
Does the talk of SAARC as an alliance make much practical sense to the common people? Probably not. Is there sufficient political education to reach a national conensus on SAARC and its implications even among the different political parties? Parhaps not.

More Work and Less Rhetoric

A lot of hard work is to be carried out in the SAARC region both in the countries and regionally. The essential building blocks include a varity of things; it is important to start putting these in place. Mere annual Summits and other ritual meetings or symbolic gestures will not deliver SAARC. In principle the vision of SAARC as a strong and thriving alliance for cooperation and integration is still sound. But a close reading of the evolution of the European Union will convince the leaders in politics, business, and the arts that wish is not substitue for work. And there is a lot of work to be done yet.

Principles of Hajj

by Naseem Haq



"VERITY, the first House (of worship) appointed for mankind was that at Bakkah (Makkah) full of blessings, and a guidance of 'Al-Alamin (mankind and the jinns)."

Surah Al-Imran; Ayat 96

Talbiya —

Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik,

Labbaik la sharika laka labbaik,

Inn-al-hamda, wan-ni mata laka wal-mulk, la sharika lak.

What is Hajj?

Hajj is the pilgrimage and the fifth pillar of Islam. Muslims gather in Makkah, in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar and worship Allah. This performance is called Hajj. Hajj enables us for a few days to live and move for Allah alone. We have to give up many ordinary things, even our usual clothes during Hajj. The full rituals of Hajj takes five days, from the 8th to the 13th of Dhul Hajjah of the Islamic calendar.

On whom is Hajj farz or compulsory?

Hajj is compulsory on all healthy, adult Muslims who can afford to make the pilgrimage. Unlike Salah (Namaz) and Sawm (fasting), which is compulsory throughout our lives, making the pilgrimage to Mecca is compulsory only once in a lifetime.

Fazilat 'benefits' of Hajj

Once a person performs Hajj and does not indulge in any sinful activities, he will become as innocent as a child. Therefore during Hajj one should take the resolution:

I) To abandon all sins;

II) To sincerely regret all previous sins;

III) To firmly determine to abstain from sins in future.

Different kinds of Hajj

There are three different ways of performing Hajj

I) Hajj-e-Ifrad: For this kind of Hajj, make the *Niyyah* for Hajj-e-Ifrad and adopt the *Ihram* and complete all the necessary requirements and preparations for Hajj. For Hajj-e-Ifrad, *Umrah* is not necessary before Hajj and one must stay in *Ihram* up to the 10th of Dhul Hijjah, till the Rami (throwing of the pebbles). For this Hajj, Korbani is not *Wajib* or compulsory.

II) Hajj-e-Qiran: For this kind of Hajj, make the *Niyyat* for Hajj-e-Qiran and adopt the *Ihram*. On reaching Mecca, the pilgrim has to perform *Tawwaf* and *Saiee* for Umrah, and stay in the same state of *Ihram* till Hajj. The Ihram can only be taken off after the Korbani on the 10th of Dhul Hajjah.

III) Hajj-e-Tamattu: For this kind of Hajj, first make the Niyyat for Umrah only and on reaching Mecca perform the Tawwaf and Saiee for Umrah and take off the Ihram. Everything which was unlawful in the state of Ihram is now lawful until the first day of Hajj, i.e., the 8th of Dhul Hijjah. On this day, the pilgrim has to adopt the Ihram again but this time for Hajj. After Hajj and Korbani, on the 10th of Dhul Hajjah the Ihram can be taken off.

Out of these three kinds of Hajj, Hajj-e-Tamattu is the most convenient, but the best kind is the Hajj-e-Qiran.

The three Farz (compulsory) of Hajj are:

I. Adopting the Ihram

II. Presence in Arafat

III. Performing the Tawwaf-e-Ziarah

All the above three must be performed to complete the Hajj.

Farz (compulsory) for Umrah

I. Adopting the Ihram with proper Niyyat

II. Tawwaf (The circumambulation of the Kabah seven times)

Wajib (next to compulsory) during Umrah

I. Saiee (walking briskly seven times between Safa and Marwa)

II. Qasr (trimming of the hair)

Wajib requirements of Hajj

I. Presence at Muzdalifah

II. Rami (throwing of pebbles at the Jimar at Mina)

III. Those performing Hajj-e-Qiran or Hajj-e-Tamattu should give *Korbani*.

IV. Performing the Saiee (walking briskly seven times between Safa and Marwa).

V. Trimming of the hair or shaving of the head.

VI. Tawwaf-e-Wida.

Out of all the above requirements, it is compulsory for a pilgrim performing Hajj-e-Qiran or Hajj-e-Tamattu to give Korbani on the 10th of Dhul Hajjah, but if any one of the other requirements are missed out, even then Hajj will be complete.

What is Ihram?

Ihram is wearing the garment of a pilgrim for Hajj or Umrah in the name of Allah.

Male pilgrims wear two clean seamless white cotton or towel sheets measuring $2\frac{1}{4}$ meters each. One piece should be used to wrap round the waist, above the navel. The other one is used as a wrap round the left shoulder, the right shoulder and the head should not be covered. The bottom sheet should be above the ankles.

Women pilgrims are allowed to wear their usual clothes. The hair should be fully covered, as for each hair falling during pilgrimage there is a penalty of one sheep. Their garments should be up to the ankles and sleeves up to the wrists. The neckline should be high.

After adopting the Ihram, one should offer two *rakahs* (units) of *Nafl salah (Namaz)* and begin reciting the 'Talbigah'.

Conditions to refrains from or conditions not permitted in the state of Ihram

I. Using or touching perfume.

II. Wearing stitched clothes and covering the head and face and wearing sandals which cover the ankle joint or cover the middle bone of the foot — (for male pilgrims only)

III. One cannot remove any hair from any part of the body.

IV. Cutting of the nails. (These should be done before adopting the Ihram).

V. Hunting or killing of animals or helping anyone in this regard.

VI. Killing of any insect, e.g. lice, ant, etc.

VII. Cutting the grass or plucking any kind of plant.

VIII. One cannot indulge in any kind of sexual activity.

IX. Quarreling with fellow pilgrims is absolutely forbidden.

X. Doing anything sinful.

XI. During Ihram a female pilgrim cannot wear *Mendhi*.

XII. Pilgrims wanting to go to Madinah before Hajj, can adopt their Ihram while coming from Madinah to Makkah. But before beginning the journey, if a pilgrim adopts the Ihram with the Niyyah of performing Hajj and goes to Madinah before the Hajj, he/she will have to remain in the Ihram till the completion of Hajj, failing which, a sacrifice of a sheep will become Wajib.

Niyyah for Umrah or Hajj

The Niyyah for Umrah or Hajj is as follows :,

"O Allah, I am making the intention for performing Umrah/Hajj, please make it easy for me and accept my Umrah/Hajj."

Hazar-e-Aswad

Hazar-e-Aswad is the black stone implanted in one of the southern corners of the Kabah. It is Sunnah to kiss this stone during Tawwaf for Umrah or Hajj, but, due to the rush of pilgrims, if this is not possible, then raise both hands up to the ears, facing the palms towards Hazar-e-Aswad, assuming that you have placed them on the stone, then recite Takbir and Tahlil — (Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, wah lillahil hamd) and kiss your hands. All the seven circuits of the Tawwaf commences from the Hazar-e-Aswad corner.

Namaz at Arafat

It is Sunnah and was the practice of Prophet Muhammah S.M. to offer Zohr and Asr Salah (Namaz) at Arafat at the Masjid-e-Namira after one Adhaan and two Iqamah. This salah is called "Jamabainas Salatain". Here one is also permitted to offer the salahs in one's own tent instead of going to Masjid.

Rami

Rami means the throwing of pebbles at the Jimar at Mina. After offering the Fajr Salah at Muzdalifah, pilgrims start for Mina. On reaching Mina, the pilgrims perform the Rami at Jamrat-ul-Aqaba. Pebbles for Rami are collected from the dawn of 10th Dhul Hijjah to the dawn of 11th Dhul Hijjah.

Substitute Hajj

A pilgrim can perform substitute Hajj for someone on whom Hajj is Farz, but is blind, invalid or is very, very ill or is dead.

Farewell Tawwaf or Tawwaf-e-Wida

Tawwaf-e-Wida is Wajib for everyone who has completed Hajj. Here *'Idtibah'* (wearing of the Ihram in the correct way for males); *"Ramal"* (brisk walking in the first three rounds of the Tawwaf); and "Saiee" (walking briskly seven times between Safa and Marwa) are not included.

The Fazilat (benefits) of Madinah Sharif

The Ziarah of the Rawza Mubarak of Prophet Muhammad S M holds the highest "Sawab" and benefits on earth. To gain one's own prestige and prosperity, there is no other greater way than the "Ziarah". Many scholars consider the Ziarah Wajib, therefore, the person who is lucky enough to go to Madinah for this purpose must consider himself extremely fortunate.

Prophet Muhammad S M has said : "Anyone who comes to me for Ziarah, it will become Wajib for me and will be my duty to do "Shafayet" (ask forgiveness from Allah) for that person.

The Hajj

There are five days for performing Hajj. They begin from the 8th of Dhul Hijjah and end on the 13th of Dhul Hijjah.

The first step of Hajj begins at Masjid-al-Haram, with Tawwaf of the Baitullah or Kabah. Then you perform the rest of the rituals at the Masjid-al-Haram according to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad S M. From Masjid-ul-Haram, you go to Mina and spend a day and night there, where you offer five times Salah beginning with the Zohr till the Fazr of the next morning.

From Mina you go for one day to the valley of Arafat and the Mount of Mercy. This is most important and the main principle of Hajj. Here you offer the Zohr and the Asr Salah together with one Adhaan and two Iqamah.

From Arafat you go to Muzdalifah. Here you are required to offer the Maghrib and the Isha Salah, spend the whole night in worship, and collect pebbles for the Rami. This night at Muzdalifah is one thousand times more blessed than the night of Qadr.

From Muzdalifah, you go back to Mina and perform Rami at the big Shaitan (Jamrat-al-Aqaba). Then you do your Korbani and trim your hair or shave your head.

The second most important principle of Hajj is to go back to the Masjid-al-Haram and perform the Tawwaf-e-Ziyarah. Then you would have completed all the three farz (compulsory) requirements of Hajj.

Next you go back to Mina where you spend two or three more days. The main thing now is to throw pebbles at the three Shaitans (Jamrat) for two more days. Then from Mina you go to Makkah to perform the Tawwaf-e-Wida.

Your Hajj is now complete and you can begin your journey home.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

A Brief Visit to Malaysia

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

During the NEP (New Economic Policy) era (1970-1990), an affirmative action policy in favour of the Malays was pursued vigorously in the fields of education and business, which resulted into dramatic changes in the ethnic mix of employment. In many industries and professions, where, the Malays were seriously underrepresented, proportionality was achieved at least in the junior positions.

IN my last Letter From Europe, published in the Daily Star of 2nd February 1999, I wrote about my recent trip to Singapore, which I had to undertake for personal reasons. Almost at the end of my stay there, I thought I should make the most of my long journey and hop across to West Malaysia and have a look around. Besides, since my student days in London, I had always wanted to visit Malaysia because some of my closest friends in England in those years, came from that part of the world. The trip to Singapore, which was totally unexpected gave me a golden opportunity to fulfil this long-cherished wish. So one day, early in the morning, I left my temporary home in Singapore to catch a bus with the intention of heading north towards Peninsular Malaysia.

The weather was fine. The thermometer outside a departmental store showed a reading of 24 degree centigrade and there was a gentle breeze blowing from the north. On my way to the bus terminal, I saw that the street lights were still on. Night-shift workers were going back home with drooping eyes and day-shift ones dashing to their work places. Hundreds of noisy school children of different ethnic groups were on their way to school. I bought a ticket and occupied a front seat in order to have a good view of the panorama all along the way.

We soon crossed the straits of Johor and entered the town of Johor Baharu (population: app. one million), which is located at the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia and linked to Singapore by 1 km long causeway. At the border the immigration and customs officials checked our papers with equal efficiency as on the Singaporean side. Johor Baharu is the capital of Johor, one of the nine federating sultanates of Malaysia. Although it has now basically become a part of Singapore's hinterland, it was a powerful kingdom in the sixteenth century. Physical proximity to modern Singapore has helped Johor Baharu to develop its industry , especially in the field of electronics. Palm-oil, coconut and pineapples are produced in abundance. There are rubber plantations and deposits of tin and iron ore in the state. Even though the town seemed to me to have significant Chinese influence, we could feel that we were in a different country with a different culture (more akin to our own). People were more easy-going and friendly. The distant note of *ghazal* floating in the air sounded familiar and I wondered why there was such a difference.

Malaysia is composed of two regions — West Malaysia and East Malaysia. They are separated by approximately 650 km of South China Sea. West Malaysia is also known as Peninsular Malaysia because it occupies greater (the southern) part of the Malaya peninsula. To the north lies Thailand.

Malaysia's total population is estimated to be twenty million of which ethnic Malays and other indigenous peoples constitute 59 per cent, while ethnic Chinese and Indians comprise 32 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. In West Malaysia, almost 60 per cent of the population are ethnic Malays. The Malays speak Bahasa (a Malay language of the Austronesian group), which was clearly influenced by Sanskrit many centuries ago (even the name Bahasa sounds very similar to Bhasha), the Indians speak Tamil, Hindi , Bengali, Urdu etc. The Chinese speak mutually incomprehensible dialects of Chinese. The Malays are predominantly Muslims while the Chinese practice Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity. The Indians are either Hindus or Muslims. So this is truly a multiracial, multicultural society with a variety of religious affiliations. How did it come about?

Although today ethnic Indians comprise a mere 9 per cent of the population, historical evidences suggest that the Malay peninsula came under the influence of the Indian Hindu civilisation more than two thousand years ago. Later, traders from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and other parts of coastal India brought the new faith (Islam), which quickly spread like wildfire all over Southeast Asia. Indeed it would not be considered as an exaggeration to say that the modern Malays are basically a happy mix of the old Malays and the Indians. Some Arab influences are also visible. These diverse cultures have left their mark on the language, religious practice, rituals, music, arts and crafts of modern Malaysia.

In my last Letter, I described how in the early fifteenth century, Malacca, a Malayan port on the strait of Malacca, became the centre of a powerful kingdom under the military protection of the Chinese emperor and when the Chinese first started settling on the peninsula in significant numbers. Actually most of these early Chinese settlers adopted the language and customs of the Malays and are today known as the Baba Chinese. However, in recent times, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the second major wave of Chinese immigration started. They migrated in large numbers to the peninsula to work in the tin mining industry and develop it. Establishment of rubber plantations all over Malaya in the late nineteenth century opened up opportunities for immigration from south India. Immigration from both these sources continued until the first quarter of the twentieth century. But when did the Europeans arrive on the scene?

We have already seen (in my letter on Singapore) how the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British obtained footholds on the peninsula, how they fought each other and how the British finally established their military supremacy in the area by defeating the Dutch. The British did not fight a full-scale war to conquer Malaysia. Actually at that time Malaysia did not exist either as a constitutional Federation or as a centralised kingdom. Most of the country, which is today known as the Federation of Malaysia ,was divided into a number of independent Sultanates, who were often busy fighting each other. The British, as in India, primarily came to East Asia in search of trade. They took advantage of the distrust and enmity among the local powers (which included the kingdom of Siam or Thailand) and internal dissension and gradually extended their authority by playing one off against the other. The British colonial expansion in this area started in 1786 when they first built a settlement on the island of Pinang (north Malaysia), which they had leased from the local Sultan and concluded in 1909 when Johor and four other north Malayan sultanates came under its control. The British hegemony continued through the first and the second world wars except a brief interlude of approximately four years (1941 to 1945) when it was militarily occupied by the Japanese.

In 1957, the country became independent under the name of the Federation of Malaya (present-day, West Malaysia) and a constitution which sought to address the ethnic issue by giving citizenship to most non-Malay immigrants (the Chinese and the Indians) and providing special privileges to the Malays who were considered as economically disadvantaged vis-a-vis the immigrants. Every effort was made to retain the power of the hereditary Sultans. According to the constitution, the head of state was elected by and from among these sultans for a term of five years. He also used to enjoy considerable veto power which was gradually curbed in 1983, 1993 and 1994 by Dr. Mahathir, the democratically elected Prime Minister. In 1963 the Federation was expanded to include Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (now known as Sabah). Ethnic differences caused such ill feelings between Singapore and the rest of the Federation that in 1965, Singapore left the Federation and decided to fend for itself.

Actually ethnic tensions have dominated the Malaysian political and economic scene for more than 150 years. As we have seen before, in mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese started coming into the country to work in the tin mines and develop that industry. Later came the Indians to work in the rubber plantations. From that humble start, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Chinese had started playing a dominant role in both urban and rural sectors of the economy. Ethnic Indians also had become a relatively important factor in large-scale agriculture. At the bottom rung of the society were the Malays, especially in rural areas, where they worked as day labourers or small subsistence level farmers.

In colonial Malaya, the British not only exercised political power but also owned the major trading and shipping companies, the banks, insurance companies and the large tin mines and rubber plantations, while the Chinese controlled most of urban commerce and industry. So it was not surprising that by early twentieth century relationship between the Bumiputeras — the sons of the soil (note the Sanskrit influence) — and the ethnic Chinese became very tense and the sons of the soil, meaning the Malays, seriously feared a Chinese political take over as well at the end of the British rule.

This is true that the Chinese and to a lesser extent ethnic Indian immigrants had greater initiative than the Malays in taking risks and starting private businesses. But the plight of the Malays was due not only to this factor but also due to the educational system or the lack of any system at all. In colonial Malaya, hardly any money was spent on public schooling. English medium education, which was necessary to find jobs in the government or in big companies was open to the sons of the nobility. The system was structured in such a manner that it actively discouraged the sons of the ordinary Malays to enter these schools. Whatever English-medium schooling was available in urban areas, was largely private. The Chinese, not only had proven to have greater initiative, but they were absolute fanatics about giving modern education to their children.

Therefore, it is not surprising that before the beginning of the second world war, the vast majority (80 per cent) of the students at these English language schools were of Chinese descent. Most of the Indians sent their children to elementary Tamil language schools at rubber plantations. Thus it was an extraordinary situation — education was compartmentalised in such a fashion that through it ethnic and cultural differences were heightened not alleviated. With the objective of forging a common national consciousness and identity, it was recommended by the Razak Report in 1956 to offer primary schooling based on a common curriculum but through the medium of four separate languages — Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. This was the start of a national (not ethnic) system of education. After independence in 1957, the government identified education as one of its top priorities. It spent vast sums of money (between 5 and 6 per cent of the GNP) on education. The results have been truly remarkable.

By early 1990s, more than 90 per cent of Malaysians had attended primary school. Education has now been made compulsory and free for all children up to age fourteen . Children over fourteen can opt for further four years' free education. Enormous progress has also been achieved in the field of higher education.

On the political front every effort was made to ease racial tensions. Even before independence in 1957, a grand coalition (The Alliance) of three ethnic parties — the United National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress was formed, where inter-ethnic differences could be worked out. In 1971, Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak broadened the party by including some opposition parties and renamed it as the National Front (a multiracial coalition of fourteen parties), which is today headed by the current Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir bin Muhammad, who came into power in 1981.

During the NEP (New Economic Policy) era (1970-1990), an affirmative action policy in favour of the Malays was pursued vigorously in the fields of education and business, which resulted into dramatic changes in the ethnic mix of employment. In many industries and professions, where, the Malays were seriously underrepresented, proportionality was achieved at least in the junior positions. But it was achieved at a price. Until 1969, government economic policy was by and large fair and impartial. Under the NEP, the government pursued a policy of intervention in favour of Malay business and employment. The intervention was not only restricted to giving support to the Malay private sector. The government gradually became involved in creating huge state-owned enterprises (controlled by the ruling party), which gave it a solid political base among the employees and associated Malay businesses.

In my opinion, strictly speaking, this policy cannot be considered as an economically efficient one. But it was perhaps necessary to bring about a kind of political equilibrium among the different ethnic groups. I only wonder how much of the current economic malaise of the country is due to this interventionist policy. The country already exported natural rubber, tin, palm oil and timber. However, heavy foreign investments, rapid industrialisation (manufacturing production went up at an annual rate of 10 per cent for a decade or so), discovery of offshore oil and gas deposits, tourism and political stability under the National Front transformed the economic panorama of the country in only twenty five years (1970-1995). The country, as though overnight, became one of the twenty largest trading nations of the world. The consequent economic boom (app. 6 per cent average annual growth from 1980 to 1992) created a full employment situation, which, in turn kept on increasing the demand for highly skilled professionals. The NDP (the National Development Policy), which replaced the NEP toned down some of the more flagrant affirmative action considerations and put more emphasis on higher scientific, technical and managerial education. The goal now is to compete in the world market by the year 2020 as a highly industrialised and technologically sophisticated country. By any standard, this has been a remarkable achievement.

The drive from Johor Baharu to Kuala Lumpur (capital city) was uneventful except that I was fascinated by luscious green vegetation all along the way and the wild beauty of the countryside. Malaysia has abundant tropical (mahogany and teak) and oak forests. Lowland forests have trees which are often 50m tall. There are eight thousand species of flowering plants and more than two thousand five hundred species of trees.

Malaysia has abundant tropical (mahogany and teak) and oak forests. Lowland forests have trees which are often 50m tall. There are eight thousand species of flowering plants and more than two thousand five hundred species of trees.

The bus driver dropped us near a Moorish-style building. It was the railway station. Later we visited the old post office, which also looked to have Moorish influence. I was puzzled. The Moors went to Spain and never came to Malaysia. Then who introduced Moorish or pseudo-Moorish architecture in a modern city like Kuala Lumpur? The guide answered the query. It was the British who introduced this style in this colonial city. Kuala Lumpur (population: app. 1.5 million), which in Bahasa Malaysia language means "muddy confluence" lies at the confluence of two muddy rivers — Kelang and Gombak. It was founded in 1857 as a settlement by 87 Chinese tin miners. Today after approximately one hundred and fifty years, KL has become the federation's largest city and principal cultural, commercial and transportation centre. Port Kelang, the country's largest seaport lies only forty km from KL. The city, although looked largely Muslim in character is predominantly Chinese.

It was already noon, when we arrived at the Merdeka (Independence) Square, which is situated at the heart of the city. It was hot and humid. The square with its immaculate lawns and formal gardens was resplendent with flowers of every description and colour in full bloom. A host of gardeners were at work. Little children and a couple of young Americans took turn in running around the water sprinklers seeking temporary respite from the heat. KL can easily be considered as a garden city. Anyone interested in botany can spend days visiting the city's parks and gardens among whom, the Orchid and Hibiscus gardens feature prominently. I was particularly taken with a red coloured mallow family flower of the hibiscus group, which, I understand is called Rose of China (Hibiscus rosa-sinensis). I found them everywhere in the city. We had a brief look at the old Cricket club and other Moorish style colonial office buildings. This central area was surrounded by structures of different architectural designs — old Chinese two-story wooden shop houses, Malay kampongs (wooden houses built on stilts), modern brick flats etc. From there we went to see the National Monument, the National Museum, King's Palace and the National Mosque. Later we went to the Golden Triangle, which houses luxury hotels, high-rise office buildings and of course, the stainless steel and glass covered Petronas Twin Towers (reputed to be the world's tallest building). I also observed that some of the buildings in this area were half-finished as though the construction work had stopped all of a sudden.

In the downtown area, wherever we went, we found lots of armed policemen and other security officers in uniform. When asked, no one wanted to give us an explanation as though they were afraid to talk to us. It gave me a certain eerie feeling. I had read in the press about the dismissal and subsequent arrest of the Deputy Prime Minister. I knew that public demonstrations had taken place in his favour only a few days ago. Were they expecting more demonstrations? I thought of human frailties and the fragility of political alliances. How could such a long lasting relationship between the Prime Minister and his deputy deteriorate so quickly?

Actually the relationship did not deteriorate so quickly or suddenly. It had been brewing for a long time and came to a head last June. The two men had fundamental differences on one very important issue—that was how to run the economy. Mr. Anwar, besides being Dr. Mahathir's deputy also controlled the Finance portfolio. This was indeed a very powerful position. But he is an ambitious man. He became tired of playing the second fiddle for so long.