

Malay Political Leadership

MALAY POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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*To my wife whose inspiring
support is lovingly acknowledged*

Acronyms

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia)
ALIRAN	Aliran Kesedaran Negara (National Consciousness Movement)
AMCJA	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation
ASA	Association of South-East Asia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASN	Amanah Saham Nasional (The National Trust Corporation)
BA	Barisan Alternatif
BARJASA	Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak (Sarawak Native Association)
BBM	Barisan Bertindak Melayu (Malay Action Front)
BERJASA	Barisan Jemaah Islamiah Se-Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Assembly Front)
BERJAYA	Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (Sabah United People's Party)
BERSATU	United Group
Bhd./Berhad	Ltd./Limited
BISAMAH	Parti Bisamah
BMA	British Military Administration
BMF	Bumiputra Malaysia Finance
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CJA	Council of Joint Action
DAP	Democratic Action Party
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
FMP	First Malaysia Plan

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GERAKAN	Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement)
GNP	Gross National Product
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
HAMIM	Hizbullah Muslimim Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Association)
HICOM	Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia
ICA	Industrial Coordination Act
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
IMP	Industrial Master Plan
ISA	Internal Security Act, 1960
LUTH	Lembaga Urusan Tabung Haji (Islamic Pilgrims Management and Fund Board)
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat (People's Trust Council)
MAS	Malay Administrative Service
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union
MIC	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPHB	Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad
MSC	Malaysia Solidarity Convention
MTUC	Malaysian Trades Union Congress
NCC	National Consultative Council
NECC	National Economic Consultative Council
NEP	New Economic Policy
NIC	Newly Industrializing Country
NOC	National Operations Council
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAJAR	Parti Anak Jati Sarawak
PANAS	Parti Negara Sarawak
PAP	People's Action Party
PAS	Parti Islam Se Malaysia (formerly Parti Aislam Sa-Melayu or Pan-Malayan Islamic Party)
PB	Parti Bumiputra (Sarawak)
PBB	Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu (ex Parti Bumiputra Bersatu)
PBDS	Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (Sarawak Dayak People's Party)

PBPR	Parti Bebas Progressif Rakyat (Independent People's Progressive Party)
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah (United Sabah Party)
PEKEMAS	Parti Keadilan Masyarakat Malaysia (Social Justice Party of Malaysia)
PENA	Malay National Writers' Association
PERKIM	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (Islamic Welfare and Missionary Association of Malaysia)
PERMAS	Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak
PERNAS	Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (The National Trading Corporation)
PESAKA	Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak
PETRONAS	Petroleum Nasional Berhad (The National Petroleum Corporation)
PKMJ	Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Johor
PMCJA	Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action
PMIP	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party
PNB	Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Corporation)
PNRS	Parti Negara Rakyat Sarawak
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PROTON	Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (The National Automobile Industry)
PSRM	Parti Socialis Rakyat Malaysia (Socialist Workers Party of Malaysia)
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat
RISEAP	Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific
SAPO	Sarawak People's Organization
SCCP	Sabah Chinese Consolidated Party
SDP	Socialist Democratic Party
SEDC	State Economic Development Corporation
SERU	Social and Economic Research Unit
SMP	Second Malaysia Plan
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
TMP	Third Malaysia Plan
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UDP	United Democratic Party
UEM	United Engineers Malaysia
UMAT	Parti Umat Sarawak

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UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UMNO Baru	New UMNO
UNKO	United National Kadazan Organization
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

Chapter 1

Introduction

This book proposes certain notions of the evolution and modernization of Malaysia's Malay political leadership and they are explained in terms of historical and political experiences. The account of such experiences, far from any entrapment of nostalgic romanticism, is a progression of ideas and practices not unlike that experienced in other societies. What is different about Malay political leadership is that there is no leadership of its kind anywhere that has been able to maintain indigenous primacy in a fairly even multi-racial environment and one that subscribes to western democracy for its governance while retaining conservative Islamic values. In describing leadership notions, the author argues that there is an intrinsic value in the way we perceive certain things in life and much of it is innate. That value translates into a pseudo perceptual knowledge that gives rise to such impressions as predestination, illusion, etc., elements that are applied to prophetic beliefs and in the revelation and inspiration of leadership. These philosophical arguments that are offered in the author's doctoral thesis from which this book is drawn and expanded, have been left out for brevity and a more general readership.

The book hopes to show that despite its adherence to *adat* (custom and traditions) and religious practices, Malay leadership is generally speaking not traditionalist in its outlook. Indeed, an important part of the Malay cultural ethos is its pre-occupation with modernization. The Malaysian bureaucracy and its social institutions are decidedly one of the most modern of post-colonial societies moulded arguably from considerable western influence. Successive Malaysian leaders had striven hard to project themselves as progressive and innovative as any leader of the modern era while still maintaining their own distinct cultural identity and embracing traditional values. This view portends a duality of modernism and tradition that will be examined in this

book but suffice to say, Malay leadership has been remarkably successful in harmonizing a variety of idiosyncrasies in its path to modernization.

Why study leadership?

To begin with, leadership is a bewitching subject as it conjures imagery of power, supremacy, pre-eminence and all those elements that give one the dominance or advantage over others. Leadership is important to society when we consider that it has to do with a few powerful people who have great influences on the outcomes of our lives. As a study it poses an enigmatic challenge since – as unpredictable as human nature – we never seem to know enough about it. As a subject leadership has been written about, researched and discussed possibly more than any other single topic. Leadership is a self-perpetuating social phenomenon and hard to quantify as there is no matrix upon which we can ascribe a universal prescription. It is probably not very well understood despite the mass of literature on it. What do we seek in a leader? Inspiration? Guidance? Can society not exist without a leader? Broadly speaking no – this has certainly not been the experience of history.

Collective human behaviour and its views of leadership obviously vary from society to society. For example, Fidel Castro is alright for the Cubans but quite a different matter with the USA. What about Hitler or Stalin? How did the rest of the world see the disgraced Nixon and the vindicated Clinton? And what of Marcos, Suharto, Estrada, Abdurrahman Wahid or even the steely magnetism of Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad, would they have survived had they been in the west with their brand of leadership? History has more contradictions than simplistic generalizations of great visionaries and wise men. In the absence of defining leadership in some measurable terms, we can hypothesize that a perception of leadership is moulded by cultural or ideological experiences. As has been suggested, perception is innate too. This is the thrust of leadership concepts that are offered in this book.

At this point it would be useful to address briefly some contextual issues. A question could be asked if leadership theories in the context of history and politics have any relevance to religious or corporate leadership. In general terms, leadership theories have a commonality; the difference is only in the application and the method of appointment. The qualities of a corporate leader could well be similar to that

of a prime minister. In addition, corporate leaders, like religious and military leaders, have shown themselves to be able leaders in the political realm. The tendency to fashion prime ministers as 'chairmen of the board', points to the more business-like and corporate quality that is demanded of political leaders these days. Governments are 'corporatized' and 'meeting the needs of the market' and the functions of government too are modelled along 'rules of accountability' of the private sector. The distinctions it seems are small. But a corporate chief is anything but a 'leader' in the real sense of politics.

There is a difference. Bennis says 'To survive in the twenty-first century, we are going to need a new generation of leaders – leaders, not managers . . . Leaders conquer the context – the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seem to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them – while managers surrender to it.'¹ 'Leader' is ambiguously used in business and rarely used to refer to the boss of a company. A prime minister too is functionally quite a different person from a chief executive of a corporation. It would serve little purpose to argue this point. What is important is the interpretation of leadership within the specific theory. The author maintains that the term 'leadership' in this book is specially bound on a theory within the realm of history and politics. A corporate leader therefore is not a leader for the purpose of this theory.

There is ample literature on leadership studies but it is sufficient to say that in its simplest form, leadership can be seen as a partnership or a state of co-existence between a person and a group of people. This group of people, we can safely assume, looks to their leader for some *corporeal* economic benefit. It would be fair to say too that until the leader delivers this expectation, the people only believe *intuitively* that their leader can satisfy their needs. It would follow that a continuing leadership therefore rests on a partnership of mutual benefit where the leader will have the right to power so long as the needs of the people are satisfied. In some political systems this leader-people partnership can continue indefinitely so long as mutual expectations are satisfied.

We can agree that it would be unimaginable to have certain types of leaders of the past in our midst but if one should emerge, as it could possibly do, it belies the assumption that the masses know everything there is to know about leadership. In the same way, leaders of some countries today whom we find totally unacceptable to our way of life are hugely popular and revered almost divinely in their own countries.

Call it cultural variance or idiosyncratic perception but that is not to say there is no universality in definition as nearly all societies would generally describe and regard leadership in nearly the same way. History has shown us many types of leaders and while each has a uniqueness of its own, they also share certain common patterns. In the case of Malaysia, the subject of this book, the author argues there is a certain psychological virtue, one that *innately* imbues society with a mindset of a predestined leader. It also has a sociological aspect, one that expresses the *corporeal* functions of leadership. These two aspects, the psychological and the sociological, are the primary concomitant imperatives for the perpetuation of leadership. As society's expectations grow, so also will its demands on the leadership which then evolves and adapts to the new challenges for its survival. The equilibrium that is required in the leader-people partnership poses an interesting insight, if not more challenging, in the case of Malaysia where the modern and relatively young Malay leadership is surrounded by the complexities of race politics, *kampung* nationalism, Islamic zeal and non-Malay patronage. An analysis of Malay leadership within these aspects and its path towards maturity is a contribution to what is now a limited pool of relevant scholarly literature.

The Malays and the Malay World

Who are the 'Malays'? The Malays as we generally know are the indigenous people of Malaysia. In the historical sense when national boundaries were undefined and with freer maritime movements, there was probably some logic in calling these areas the Malay World in the collective sense but apart from this, there seems little relevance today. Anthropology has tended to define ethnicity along cultural traits and 'concentrated on areas of major social interaction or sense of identity'.² However, it is the intention of this book to show that Malay leadership concepts took root at the very cradle of the traditional Malay World; and for this purpose a simplified demarcation of the Malay World will be suggested according to historical origins. Before we come to any agreement on the location of the Malay World, a set of parameters is presented for argument. The Malay World can be defined in three ways namely linguistically, geographically (ethno-culturally) and historically/politically.

Linguistically means all those areas where the Malay language is linguistically common and adopted as the National Language such as Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia and identified by such

terms as *Bahasa Melayu*, *Bahasa Malaysia*, *Bahasa Kebangsaan* (Singapore's National Language) and *Bahasa Indonesia*. The Malay language spoken and written in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei is almost common. Some variation of Malay is also found among the peoples of Okinawa and Ryukyu islands, the Philippines, the Alishan of Taiwan, the Cape Malays of South Africa and among a Javanese/Malay community in Sri Lanka, Surinam and Madagascar. Because they are not common to the 'mainstream' Malay language, they have not been identified as part of the Malay World in this discussion.

Geographically and more accurately ethno-culturally, the peoples of Southeast Asia are collectively classified as Malayo-Polynesian of the Austronesian group but this description is too diverse to be useful. It is only in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei where the word 'Malay' or *Melayu* is used officially. In Malaysia it refers to the local-born native *bumiputra* (literally son of the soil) specifically the Malays but not the aboriginal *bumiputras* or *orang asli* or proto-Malays e.g. Sakais, Negritos, Ibans, Dayaks, Kadazans, etc., who are not considered Malay primarily because they are not Malay-speaking people. Since Javanese is the mother tongue of the greatest number of Indonesians and *Bahasa Indonesia* adopted wholly from Malay, the National Language of Indonesia, it begs the question if Indonesia can be appropriately categorized as a constituent of the Malay World.

There are sufficient grounds to argue otherwise: language alone does not pre-qualify; for instance English has persisted in former colonies but they can hardly be called part of the 'English World' or 'Spanish World' for the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, since, in the main, these countries are not culturally 'English' or 'Spaniard'. Indonesia is a country of many different ethnic groups of both Polynesian and Melanesian origins and they are as distinct as the Achenese in the north of Sumatra and to the frizzy-haired Papuans of Irian Jaya. Given that, the Indonesians have fewer cultural similarities than the largely homogeneous Malays of Malaysia.

Still it has to be acknowledged that there was great cultural exchange between the coastal communities of Java, Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago and the Malaysian islands where Malay had since time immemorial been the main language and should likewise be recognized as part of the Malay World. And due to their close proximity to Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia, the peoples of these coastal communities have a striking resemblance in their cuisine, arts, music, attire, custom and traditions to that of their Malay neighbours.

There are aspects of Javanese history especially with regard to the Majapahit-Sri Vijayan kingship that was the precursor to the Melakan-Malay Sultanate which should be similarly acknowledged for their contribution to the legacy of the Malay World. Southeast Sumatra is regarded as the 'original' home of Malay kingship if we look at its historical origins as being from the Palembang-based Sri Vijayan kings according to the Malay Annals. A point of debate is Singapore whether it can be properly said to be a constituent of the Malay World. While it is well within it as far as geography goes, it has a minority Malay population and Malay is less spoken though it is its National Language. The same can be said of the Patani Malays of southern Thailand. Writers such as Young, Wolters, Andaya, Winstedt and Hall have all made similar assumptions about the Malay World but they have tended to confine the 'proper' Malay World to Malaysia, the eastern coast of Sumatra and Brunei.

In the final analysis the Malay World would be – linguistically, geographically, historically and politically – demarcated along the coast of Sumatra, Riau-Lingga Islands, Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, the Sulu Islands and peninsular Malaysia. By today's reckoning there is no question that the ideal home and heart of the Malay World is Malaysia populated in the main by people who are recognized internationally as Malays. Malay identity has always been a question – ever since the time of the early Melakan rulers with their *masuk Melayu* meaning really someone who had converted to Islam rather than the literal translation of 'becoming Malay' – over who really is a 'Malay'. Islamic conversion, it seemed, was a traditional pre-qualification to being accepted as Malay. But the practice is followed even now. A *bumiputra* who is not a Muslim is not regarded Malay. Folklore puts the origins of the Malays from Palembang, Sumatra and the Riau-Lingga archipelago.

Whatever it is, Malay was a convenient holistic term applied to all those migrants from neighbouring states into peninsular Malaya. However, the Malays were not content and sought to clarify (finally) just what constituted the Malay identity. At the turn of the twentieth century the issue took on a more nationalistic stance. Emotive terms such as *Melayu jati* (true Malay) and *perasaan kebangsaan* (nationalist feeling) added a qualitative dimension to the question of identification. In 1940, a 'Malay Blood Purity Campaign' backed by Malay associations all over the country including Singapore resolved that a Malay 'is a man whose male parent is a native of this Malay Peninsula or any of the neighbouring islands of the Malay Archipelago [thus

excluding Malays of patrilineal Indian or Arab descent and Javanese or Balinese]'.³ This was obviously quite problematic for many. The Malaysian Constitution identifies a Malay as one who embraces Islam, speaks Malay and practises Malay culture. Soon after Singapore's separation from Malaysia, Singaporean Malays were encouraged by their relatives, friends and Malaysian political leaders to immigrate to mainland Malaysia. But many were upset as they were not allowed entry because they could not be properly identified as Malays. Singapore Arabs were the most vociferous among them who had, for the most part, thought they were indistinguishable from the Malays. Many of Indonesian origin especially Javanese and Boyanese too were upset because they believed the Malaysian government ought to let them in since they were Muslims, spoke the Malay language and in all respects Malay even though not *Melayu jati* or of Malay ancestry. As one's race was noted in the Singapore identity cards, such as Javanese, Boyanese, Batak, Arab, etc, the Malaysian authorities refused to accept them as Malays and declined them entry as new migrants.

Singapore now refers to all these people collectively as *Malay-Muslims* ostensibly to distinguish them from the many people of Indonesian origin in Singapore who are not Muslims. A moot point is that one supposedly cannot be Malay if not a Muslim and the description of a *Malay-Muslim* would suggest that they are Malays who are not Muslims – an issue that has moved neighbouring Malaysia to consider the Apostasy Bill with ramifications for Singapore Malays and we can only guess how they would feel being described differently from their kith and kin across the causeway. Ironically, there are many Malaysians of Arabic ancestry who regard themselves nothing less than Malays notably the late Syed Dato Ja'afar Albar, one-time UMNO secretary-general who was not even Malaysian-born. Equally, there are many local-born Arabs and other *peranakan* who, in fact, never properly regarded themselves as Malays.⁴

This is an issue particularly with the *peranakan* Indian/Malay mix. Indian Tamils especially those who were part Malay often described themselves as *peranakan* or DKK or *Darah Keturunan Keling* or the Melakan *Chitty*. They did not, especially during the colonial days, seem to readily declare themselves as Malays although many had Malay blood. One of the problems was the unfortunate image of the Malay in colonial times – he was often perceived to be lazy, poorly educated, a peon, a *wak kebun* (gardener) or a chauffeur.⁵ Even if one was only mildly mixed and looked more Malay, it was somehow more fashionable to be regarded as 'mixed' rather than Malay especially if

one was English-educated and an anglophile at that. There was therefore this reluctance of these people of mixed ancestry to carry the Malay identity tag. A Malay was teased as *orang ulu* if he did not know English. This sort of stereotyping was not only confined to the Malays: the Chinese had their *sinkeh*s and the Indians their *mamaks*.⁶ Cultural identification is not always definable, for instance, the *peranakan* Chinese or Indian or the Eurasians cannot be accurately grouped within their own ethnic origins.⁷ People of mixed parentage especially the English-educated tended to identify themselves with the image of the westernized person or the anglophile usually with anglicized names that were freely adopted. In a climate of strong colonial and Christian environment, indigenous passions were sometimes forgotten. Malays too were affected as traditional names such as Hassan, Ali, or Salleh were less favoured for more exotic-sounding names. Royal behaviour also contributed to changes in traditional Malay norms during the colonial period. Many sultans were unashamedly anglophiles and some like Sultan Ibrahim spoke more English than Malay.⁸ Somehow there was a perception that the ability to speak English identified one with the English-speaking upper class.

Hindu-Buddhism

An animistic belief system preceded the coming of Hinduism. Much of the Hindu rituals fitted with indigenous custom and in time Sanskrit terminology was adopted for local custom. Hinduism was practised as a ritualistic religion of the royal court in the Malay World and because it was not a proselytizing religion, it imparted little or no religious teachings in the way Islam did. Buddhism found easy acceptance in the Hinduized Malay World partly because it was Indian in character and shared many of Hinduism's basic doctrines. The Malay World practised Buddhism while keeping Hindu rituals and mythologies. This was possible since Buddhism is atheistic and did not conflict with the spirit belief system of Hinduism. The symbiosis between these two Indian-based religions is described as Hindu-Buddhist in the period before Islam. For simplicity 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' will be used in this book to mean Hindu-Buddhism.

Gender

The male gender will be used throughout in this book since rulers and leading political leaders of Malaysia have been males. The author

acknowledges that there were and still are several female monarchical and political leaders but none are subjects in this book. The theories and suppositions that are used to describe male leaders apply equally to female leaders.

Structure of the research

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction of the objective and theory this book offers and defines the different terms used. Material on traditions and concepts of leadership are analyzed principally from primary writings in Malay literature, pre-history, modern history, religion and politics. The book spans chronologically from the Indianization period from about 1 AD to about early 2001.

Chapter 2 will discuss the traditional concepts of Malay leadership with the object of providing an empirical view of contemporary leadership that will be compared with the typology of Malay leadership. Brief commentaries on western leadership theories will be offered to see their relevance to Malay leadership concepts. The chapter also discusses the hypothesis that Malay society had been conditioned by culture to perceive matters about power and authority as a phenomenon predicated by predestination. Notions of pre-Indianized Malay leadership will be drawn into the discussion to explain first how they were merged with concepts of Hindu-Buddhist kingship and second, to illustrate how ideas of divinity and the cult of spirits formed the basis of Malay society's perception of the predestined leader. Progressing along, the chapter will discuss the transition of leadership from Hinduism to Islamization. It will argue how Islamization re-emphasized historical perceptions by accommodating the symbolisms of spiritual leadership and harmonizing Hindu-Buddhist traditions despite their contradictions to Islamic orthodoxy.

In Chapter 3, the book will examine in what way have concepts that have been established in the previous chapter influenced leadership development in the periods before and after independence. This book contends that the idea of modern leadership did not evolve until colonization when the challenges of nationalism and sovereignty took root. Colonization also brought about the awareness of power outside the realm of royalty that introduced an impetus for self-determination and the emergence of a national elite. Colonialism impacted profoundly on Malay society and conditioned the Malays well for independence. It toughened the resilience of traditions in the face of *kafir* (infidel or non-muslim) British rule and united the Malays under

one nation. With a system of delegated authority and power more evenly shared among administrative levels, there was no danger of Malaya ever returning to the royal-absolutist leadership of the past. An atmosphere of consensus prevailed and power transferred to a multi-racial coalition party with a Malay leader. However, Malay anxiety about nationhood marked a symptom of more serious problems initially of regional hegemony and communalism. Independence had meant a reassertion of *bangsa* (race) and *negeri* (country) for the Malays and an assurance that there was always a Malay at the helm of leadership. But the events leading to the formation of Malaysia, Indonesia's Confrontation and Singapore's Separation, presented an awesome challenge to the leadership.

Chapter 4 will follow with a discussion on the progressive political events and leadership style of Malaysia's past prime ministers beginning with Tunku Abdul Rahman (Tunku) and following respectively in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 on the leadership of Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (Razak), Dato Hussein Onn (Hussein) and Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Mahathir). As a means of measuring their leadership strength, these chapters will examine their leadership vision and guidance in aspects of national unity, the economy and foreign affairs.

In Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957–70) whose crowning achievement was Malaya's independence, we see qualities of charisma and the fatherly image that are described as strong features of Malay leadership. But his leadership came under attack for its reluctance to adapt to the more combative style of the 1960s that had characterized the tumultuous period leading to the Separation of Singapore and the inter-racial riots a few years later. Tunku tried to keep a tight hold on the racial differences in parliament but the Malays felt he did more for the Chinese than for them. His preference for a more consensual and accommodating style illustrates a much-misunderstood picture of the docile Malay leader who was blamed for the problems that preceded his untimely retirement.

So when Razak (1970–76) assumed the leadership there were predictably far-reaching schemes to appease Malay expectations. His ground-breaking economic reforms that sought to selectively uplift the economic development of the Malays, are now entrenched in state economic ideology. He was also credited for his diplomacy with Malaysia's neighbours but Singapore eyed him with great suspicion as he was believed to be truly the architect of Singapore's ouster from Malaysia. Razak's interventionist leadership style which did much to the economy however left the party in disarray on his death.

Razak's brother-in-law Hussein (1976–81) succeeded him. Party in-fighting dominated much of Hussein's leadership. Some say Hussein's appointment was a matter of prerogative rather than a party choice. Whatever it was, many would believe he had a weak political base. But Malaysia under Hussein had stable economic growth that saw several government initiatives in corporate relationships. He had a likeable diplomatic temperament and along with creating many important milestones in foreign relations, the government under Hussein had its best relationship with Singapore. His leadership however was coloured by a rise in Islamic extremism owed, in a way, to the lack of Islamic zeal in the government. Still Hussein had the most peaceful leadership among all Malaysia's leaders despite some minor political events and the unsettling relations with UMNO coalition partners in the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front, *Barisan*, for short).

Continuing factionalism within the party saw the re-emergence of aspiring leader, Mahathir Mohamad. He had been consigned to political wilderness for the temerity in asking Tunku to resign soon after the May 13 Riots in 1969. Razak saw in Mahathir a man who could help him tackle the country's education problems and promptly installed him as minister of education when he became prime minister. On Hussein's retirement Mahathir (1981–) who was then deputy prime minister, assumed the nation's leadership. Mahathir's chequered path to his ascension is a classic case of a man predestined to be leader. Mahathir has been fortunate to enjoy the longest leadership of all and is singularly credited for many of the reforms that have made modern Malaysia what it is today.

Chapter 7 on Mahathir will discuss how he radicalized modern Malay leadership in defiance of traditions. The chapter will also discuss his leadership style in a number of issues such as party factionalism, crises with the rulers and the judiciary and his management of the economy in the wake of the 1997–98 Asian economic crisis.

Chapter 8 will bring the discussion up to date with recent developments of Mahathir's leadership following the Asian economic crisis, the 1999 general elections, the UMNO party elections and the closing of the Anwar Ibrahim trial in August 2000 and events through March 2001. Most analysts will agree that the events of the last four years were the most testing for Mahathir's leadership. That he survived, underscores the resilience of his leadership. But much more as this book suggests, the survival was an augury that propitiously suggested to him that he was to stay in office – indefinitely. As if he needed that assurance, there was no doubt in anyone's mind, least of all his that he

was *ever* going to step down barring serious illness. But there are ominous signs amidst growing racial and religious factionalism which is clawing at the very core of Mahathir's power and is threatening to shred asunder not only the long-standing multi-ethnic compact of his government coalition but also the unity of the Malays. As he reflects on his future he sees terrifying similarities of the turbulent circumstances that led to the ouster of Tunku on whose painful back Mahathir was to rise decades later.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter of the book, will summarize the discussion on the relevance of the theory of *innate perception of . . . predestination* as explained in Chapter 2 to the leadership of Malaysia's four prime ministers. It will compare traditional concepts with contemporary leadership experiences with an assertion that leadership is perceived in psychological and sociological factors – the intrinsic faith in leadership in return for tangible benefits.

Chapter 2

Traditional Malay concepts of leadership

Malay leadership ideas have their roots in early historical and cultural experiences that played an important role in influencing many of the elements of perceptual knowledge. The objective of this chapter is to identify how those elements became the guiding standards for societal behaviour and their influence in the conceptualization of Malay leadership. Much of the discussions which centre on historical Malay literature are not merely a recounting of the past but are rather nuances and subtlety in institution-building, behavioural norms and diplomacy. By explaining traditions in the context of leadership, this discussion hopes to clarify the basis of the theories offered in this book. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part will explain how Malay society's perceptual knowledge of predestined leadership had evolved from indigenous notions and merged with Hindu kingship ideas of divinity. The second part of the chapter will discuss the transition of leadership to Islamization. It will argue how Islamization re-emphasized historical perceptions by embracing the symbolism of traditions despite their apparent contradictions with Islamic orthodoxy.

Indigenous notions of leadership

The belief in the emergence of the pre-destined leader is as old as any ancient history of prophesies and often romanticized in traditional folklore and in this respect, the Malay World shares some similarities with other traditional societies. But there is a certain uniqueness in the Malay belief system and it is in the interpretation of this uniqueness that we are concerned with here. The author maintains that this quality of distinctiveness can be traced to an inherent perceptual knowledge of the Malay psyche. As the idea of perception is at the core of

this argument, it is important to explain how this is seen. As a subject, theories of perception have evoked great philosophical controversy and are sometimes, whether correctly or incorrectly, equated with 'perceptual knowledge', 'phenomalism' and 'phenomenology'. In general terms, perception as Dancy puts it is 'the sort of knowledge that we get about the things around us by looking at them, feeling them, tasting them and so on'.⁹ Kant sees perception as awareness that has sensation as its concomitant. George Moore introduces 'sense datum' that says that we cannot perceive things rather we perceive only sense-data. He adds that what is perceived can be whatever is given and that could only 'resemble' the 'thing'. 'Imagine' is perhaps a better word because we apparently, according to Moore, simply cannot see the 'thing'. Bertrand Russell and C. D. Broad are advocates of this theory as well. On the other hand, Gilbert Ryle and John Austin believe we do indeed perceive things and they consider Moore's theory as confusing invention. We perceive nearly in the same way as we imagine episodes in which we have had no prior experience or knowledge. The study of perception is especially important in epistemology. Plato distinguishes between what one can do through sensory perception and what one can do with the mind. Sensory perception he says is how we sense reality in a real world situation. Mind perception is how we sense reality in an intelligible world that can be apprehended only by the intellect not by senses. But Aristotle develops the view that the intellect can only attain knowledge after the senses provide the images.

Locke in his theory of Representative Perception says it is questionable if we are born with any innate ideas. He believes such ideas are gradually fed to us entirely by our sense perception. What Locke is saying is that while we may not be born with innate ideas, we have the mechanism (sensory perception) to receive ideas. But surely that mechanism must have pre-existed at birth just as we are provided with all our senses but only to use them fully much later. In that sense we can conclude that sensory perception is innate. Another way to look at perception is in *causal* terms. Knowledge about perceived objects depends on causal inference, for example, we perceive fire from smoke or death from abject starvation. Grice offers two ways of looking at the Causal Theory of Perception. Firstly he says while appearance is ultimately the only guide to reality, what appears to be the case cannot be assumed to correspond with what *is* the case. Secondly perception is something to be judged primarily on its intrinsic merits and not merely as a part of a solution to a prior epistemological problem.¹⁰ In

other words we cannot be said to be perceiving something when we are clearly influenced by some earlier experience – that according to Grice is pre-knowledge not perception.

The hypothesis of perception of predestination offered in this argument is defensible if we accept that some things are innate and intrinsic in the human psyche without the slightest benefit of prior knowledge. Perception therefore is sensory knowledge learnt by sense or influence that is sometimes difficult to reason about scientifically. But that is not to suggest that it is impossible to verify. If we regard perception as a theory it should at least be capable of being tested even if a conclusion is not entirely possible. Perceptions of Malay leadership have a cultural and ideological quality and because the quality is expressed in narratives and mythology, it too faces a similar difficulty. But it should not be. Popper says 'the task which science sets itself (that is the explanation of the world) and the main ideas which it uses are taken over without any break from pre-scientific mythmaking'. Invention of cosmological myths he says was necessary to understand and explain the structure of the Universe.¹¹ Malay narratives on which much of Malay mythology and ideology are based are euhemeristic that is they explain myths on a historical basis and adapt them for their leadership role-models such as in the folklore heroics of *Hang Tuah*. Alluring myths like idealistic visions, miracles and prophetic images are often necessary for the mystification and professed truth of the celestial. They are impossible to prove yet responsible for setting moral precedence.

As well as myths and intrinsic suppositions, the Malay World too had many extrinsic merits by which the right to leadership was determined, such as by lineage, descent, legitimacy, conquest, usurpation and in modern times since independence, through an elective process. An example of lineage or descent would be hereditary kings who ascended the throne because of blood links to a founding ancestor. In traditional Hindu society kingship by descent was the right of the *kshatriya* (person of noble caste) who was said to be the only one according to the *varna* (class system)¹² to possess the spiritual strength to claim the right of power and leadership – such as Asoka perhaps the greatest Hindu king in history who alluded to himself as the '*Devanampriya*', the supreme ruler in '*Priyadarshin*'.¹³ Notions of democratic rights of leadership were therefore foreign to the traditions of the Hinduized Malay World.

Long before the coming of the Europeans, the maritime states of the Malay World had been of particular interest to Asiatic seafaring

traders for their lucrative coastal trade in spices and religious aromatics. The Malay World had been known to India long before it was Indianized. Indian sources from the Buddhist *Jataka* tales refer to the Malay World as '*Suvannadbbhumi*' (land of gold) and Malay rulers had sailed into Indian territory before Indians arrived in sizeable numbers. Indigenous concepts of leadership in the Malay World were gradually modified by ideas from India. The earliest evidence of Indian influence was in the fourth century AD with the discovery of the *Mulavarman* inscriptions in Kutei, Borneo followed by those of *Purnavarman* about fifty years later in west Java. From migratory and linguistic patterns, it is believed that the southeast coast of Sumatra was one of the earliest Indianized settlements in the Malay World. It was here where the Saivite-Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya (7-11 AD) arose and became the source of many of the concepts of Malay leadership.¹⁴ At the time blood and spiritually-right relationships were the most important means of claiming the right to rulership.

An example would be of Melaka's first ruler in the fourteenth century, Parameswara, the refugee Palembang prince. He declared himself ruler according to his spiritual descent of the mythical kings of Bukit Si Guntang according to *Sri Vijayan* traditions.¹⁵ Another example of traditional legitimacy would be that of Sultan Muzaffar Syah, the first ruler of Perak but the last sultan of the Melakan dynasty whom the Malays revered as the original king of the Malay World.¹⁶ He was installed by the people by virtue of his being the genuine *raja mahkota* (crown prince) though his father had unfairly relegated him to *raja muda* (young king but not the heir apparent). An example of leadership by conquest would be that of Raja Kecil, a Minangkabau prince from Siak. He legitimized his claim to the Johor throne by the overthrow of the previous ruler, the *Bendahara*-king. He also staked his claim on the ground that he was the posthumous son of the last Melakan king, Sultan Mahmud. He asserted that as a descendant of Mahmud he possessed the spiritual powers inherited from the ancient kings of Bukit Si Guntang. This claim was sufficient to gain the allegiance of the *orang laut* (sea warriors of the Melakan kings) and to wrest the throne from the *Bendahara*-king.

The elective process of leadership as it is now in Malaysia is typically by party and parliamentary elections, a western concept induced by colonialism. Weber describes the elective process of leadership as 'legal-rational' as it ensues from the legal order and formal institutions. Elected leaders he says are rational in the sense that they are objective, impersonal and linked to the growth of bureaucracy.

However, this is a simplistic view of elected leaders akin more to the occidental mode. There are elected leaders who have justified their long stay in power by supernatural claims, such as 'mandate from heaven', '*mahdi*', or the coming prophet, etc., all ostensibly chosen by the same 'democratic' method Weber has in mind. Their leadership is hardly rational if we are to assume Weber's view of leadership. Modern governments too have retained non-elective leadership which, though largely symbolic, does have powerful constitutional prerogatives. A good example is the monarchy of Malaysia which not only has these powers, it also professes spiritual lineage that it symbolically suggests in royal ceremonies by the recitation of the *ciri* (acclamation of supernatural genealogy). Occasional insinuation of such invulnerabilities are not entirely unknown even by modern-day politicians.

By whichever method leadership is attained, the number of followers who are willing to be led measures its success. This willingness indicates that the leader and the people have coinciding and reciprocal interests. Ideas of reciprocity were known in ancient times in the Malay World. A simple story is told about Hang Nadim, a *pahlawan* (warrior). He agreed to abduct Tun Teja, a princess of the Pahang royal court, for his master the sultan of Melaka Sultan Mahmud Syah. Hang Nadim agreed to undertake the dangerous mission because he had hoped to redeem himself from the disgrace he had incurred from the sultan for failing in an earlier mission. For the successful accomplishment of the Pahang mission, Hang Nadim was rewarded with the title of *Laksamana* and the sultan happily married Tun Teja.

Besides having coinciding interests, most leaders tend to be culturally similar to their people in race, language, custom and most importantly religion, whereby spiritual and political protection was offered in return for loyalty. In this respect, traditional Malay society was unique in that there was immense loyalty towards its rulers as evidenced by the fact that the Malays did not abandon their sultans when they were overcome by colonization, political or economic problems.¹⁷ To this day loyalty is held as an important element in alliances and treasured strongly by the Malays in all aspects of relationships. According to the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) 'Malay subjects are never disloyal . . . I may be put to death . . . for I have no wish to serve another master.' It is assumed that so long as the leader is fair to his people the more likely he would be given loyalty. Malay literature has many examples of rulers who fell because they were not only manifestly unfair to their people but also betrayed the sacral protection they were destined to provide and the trust expected of them.

Weber talks about another type of leadership quality that he calls 'charisma' meaning 'gift' in Greek. Charismatic leadership rests upon certain magical qualities of the leader which attract the masses. According to Weber, leadership in Hinduism is charismatic by nature and is characterized by leaders who are perceived as exceptional spiritual individuals. These qualities according to Weber are not ordinary human virtues and set the leader apart from ordinary people. Weber's view implies that the charismatic quality of Hindu kings was probably the most important of their leadership attributes and this, perhaps, explains the more pronounced reverence that was placed on rulers in the pre-Islamic era of the Malay World. Hinduized Malay kings were regarded as reincarnate deities of *Shiva* and *Kali*, objects of reverence and fear.¹⁸ They were believed to be divinely appointed, as they were, according to Moertono 'identified with a God'. All rulers in old Java according to Anderson were charismatic and permanent since they were not subject to the pressures of political dynamics. The people's perception of spirituality in their king apparently never changed.¹⁹

Many aspects of charismatic leadership from this view can be said to be inherent in Malay society before Hindu ideas were adopted.²⁰ However, if we consider that leadership in the Hindu Malay World was the exclusive preserve of descended rulers, there appears hardly any opportunity for charismatic leadership to emerge. Weber and Moertono would be quite wrong to assume that ancient Hindu-Malay rulers were necessarily charismatic. Granted that charismatic leadership has always been present, charisma should only be taken as a personal quality not an assumed strength. Furthermore, it is doubtful if charisma really played any role in traditional leadership especially if we consider that the Malay decision-making process has traditionally relied on *muafakat* (consensus) in royal *majlis-bicara* (meeting council) rather than any special quality in the leader's personality. However, it is possible that in the days when affairs of the royal court were more sacramental, the ruler's decisions were believed to be divinely-inspired and personified from an 'inherent' charismatic quality.

The charisma Weber talks about is suspiciously different with rulers of old from what we understand of the word with present-day leaders. With old rulers the power of his spirituality or the charisma was such that he was never physically close to his subjects who respectfully kept a distance from him. The ruler's presence was more felt than seen thus providing an air of mystery in his personality. The ruler bridged this distance by rituals and court ceremonies that were held frequently in which the people participate enthusiastically. It was supposed to be a

great blessing to be able to see the Hindu ruler during these occasions; in the same way as deities that were taken out from temples for public display were great moments of blessing. Occasions such as these served to uphold the aura of the ruler's divine legitimacy and together with his ability to provide protection and livelihood, confirmed the enduring belief in his supernatural attributes.

According to Paul Mus, Southeast Asian indigenous belief systems had several features in common with Indian religions including spirit-belief and ancestor-worship and the veneration of soil-gods. He says that a cult of spirits pre-existed Hinduism in autochthonous societies and believes that 'it makes more sense to speak of a religion of the monsoon zone of Asia than to speak of Indian religion or Chinese religion prior to the civilizations which were later to give meaning to these words.' Mus suggests that Indianization was a matter of putting Sanskrit words on local custom 'which the Hindu and Buddhist intruders lightly wrote their signatures on before they passed away.' There is sufficient evidence to support the view that an indigenous concept of charismatic leadership had preceded Indianization.²¹ Such a concept according to Mus arose from the worship of soil-gods or *yaksa* through the ritual-making shaman-king in pre-Brahmannic times. The Malay World was already a thriving civilization before the Indians came as can be seen by its skill in *sawah*, the cultivation of irrigated rice-fields and its knowledge of metal tools. The Malays were skilled seamen who had ventured far beyond the Indian seas, such skills that were made possible by their own knowledge of nautical science.

Villages had established social systems of *adat* and in places like Minangkabau, a wholly indigenous system of matrilineal law survived even after patriarchal practices appeared with the coming of Hinduism. The cultural vitality of the *wayang-lakon* (puppet show-drama) which was adapted to show the *Ramayana* epics, the instruments of the *gamelan* orchestra and the fabric innovations of *batik* and *ikat*, all indicate that the Malay World had attained a high level of creative sophistication. There were also ideas of power and leadership that according to Anderson were intrinsically indigenous although they approximated elements of Indian cosmology.²²

Though Anderson's discussion centres on Javanese concepts, the Malay World was similarly influenced by ideas from the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He says that fundamental to the idea of power was fertility and order. Fertility was identified with the sexual virility of the ruler that was an essence

of his dignity. His 'seed' was the microcosmic expression of power and he was seen simultaneously evoking the fertility of the land and expanding the vitality of his kingdom: the more virile he was the more productive the land would become it was believed. It augured well for the fertility of the land if the ruler fathered many children who are considered a *rezeki* (good fortune) even these days by Malays and Indians. Malay rulers perpetuated the ancient belief of fertility by keeping concubines beginning with the first legendary Malay king of Bukit Si Guntang. According to the Malay Annals: 'When Sri Tri Buana was established on the throne he wished for a consort; and wherever there was to be found a beautiful daughter of a prince he took her to wife . . . to no less than thirty-nine princesses had this happened.'²³ Instances of the ruler's excesses were so common that the 'palace became a scene of scandals' but they tended to be tolerated even when it was patently immoral as was the case of Sultan Mahmud Syah's infidelity with the wife of a close aide. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese chronicler says '[the ruler] took all the beautiful daughters . . . to be his concubines'.²⁴ Another aspect of power was order that was measured by the maintenance of harmony in society. The ruler maintained harmony by 'absorbing' his adversaries by *cerdek* (cunning) and *kehalusan* (subtlety), the former by out-witting and the latter by polite and subtle language and self-control. Both are forms of non-aggressive means of diplomacy that are applied today.

The Malay Annals relates several instances when the power of absorption was applied. One instance was the *cerdek* of Sultan Mansur Syah who coached his envoy with clever answers to prepare the latter for an audience with the emperor of China. So impressed was the emperor that he presented his daughter to Sultan Mansur Syah thus ending China's threat to the Melakan kingdom. In *kehalusan*, proper leadership demands virtuous and politeness in character. The ruler had to show himself as peace-loving, god-fearing and benevolent. According to custom, a leader who chooses warfare when diplomacy appears a better option manifests a weakness in his leadership.²⁵ An instance of *kehalusan*, according to the Malay Annals, was seen in Sultan Muzaffar Syah's success in preventing a Siamese attack. Through diplomatic words he subtly conveyed through his envoy his peaceful but not obsequious approach to the Siamese king that '(since) he was preserved by God from his enemies . . . all the men of Melaka were invulnerable.' But he said he would not fight because Siam faced west '[as] it is the custom of us Muhammadans to face the west when we pray. We cannot therefore face that way when we are fighting'. The

Siamese king was so impressed with the message that he rewarded the envoy with a Siamese princess.

Another feature of indigenous power according to Anderson was control of the *pusat-mandala* (centre of power). Control of the centre was achieved by a centripetal process in which minor chiefs converged toward the ruler at the centre in a spirit of *anak-bapak* (child-father) accord. The core of the traditional polity had always been the ruler who personified the unity of society with his *wahyu*²⁶ (divine radiance) which was central to the symbol of power. One of Perak's most illustrious rulers in the eighteenth century, Sultan Iskandar Syah, built a *mahligai* (palace) as 'the exemplary centre . . . to disseminate civilisation'. The sultan's palace was his *tanda* (symbol) of his reign from where he conducted royal affairs. In the traditional sense the centralization of power in the centre also meant the concentration of large populations required for intensive rice cultivation and the mobilization of human resources for buildings and armies. An example of how this process of centralization was achieved was with the Majapahit king Hayam Wuruk (1350-89). First he made sure that the centre was harmonious and any public display of friction was strenuously avoided. Second he decreed that all heads of princely families lived in *dharmas* (religious domains) in the capital city to ensure the close unity of the court. For officials outside the family and further away from the capital he required that they attend the *Phalguna Caitra* (annual court festival) when rewards were customarily made. This was an event designed to emphasize the importance of the *pusat-mandala* by inducing the princes to come personally to the centre to declare their loyalty to him. The event also provided an opportunity for everyone to feel the ruler's *darshan* (holy personage) that was said to emanate from the ruler's *cahaya* (protective blessing of his majestic light).

In the Malay World an event such as the enthronement ceremony was also an occasion when the process of *pusat-mandala* was displayed where subjects paid homage to the ruler to reaffirm their loyalty and to receive the ruler's *cahaya*. However, it was to Indianization that Malay divine leadership owed its spiritual shape and concepts. One of the concepts was the definition of the Malay ruler as a *kshatriya* as was the case with Parameswara Melaka's first ruler. When Parameswara underwent the *abiseka* (reaffirmation rite) ceremony he was deemed to have rejected Javanese over-lordship and asserted his right by virtue of his divine descent as a ruling *kshatriya* to re-establish the Srivijaya-Palembang dynasty.²⁷ The other was his