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ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIFE IN MALAYSIA: WHAT PROSPECTS FOR THE MASSES?

Lim Teck Ghee

Centre for Policy Research
University Sains Malaysia
Penang, Malaysia

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Johan Galtung

It is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

INTRODUCTION

Before any discussion can begin on alternative ways of life in Malaysia, it is necessary to know what the dominant way of life there is.[1] Perhaps the best way to start is by enumerating the vital economic and social statistics of the country. Malaysia in 1977 had a population of 12.53 million spread over 127,581 square miles, giving it a density of 98 people per square mile or 38 people per square kilometre. The most important feature of its population is its multiracial character. In Peninsular Malaysia in 1977 it was estimated that there were 5.4 million Malays, 3.6 million Chinese, 1.0 million Indians, and smaller numbers of Eurasians, Ceylonese, and others. East Malaysia similarly has a polyglot population of indigenous natives and recent immigrants. The plurality of race, culture, and religion is reflected in many aspects of life but they are all well-integrated with the dominant life styles and should not be regarded as comprising alternative ways of life.

Economically, Malaysia, although considered as a developing country, enjoys a high international standing. Favourably endowed with natural resources and a soil and climate conducive to growing some of the major primary commodities entering the world market, the country at first impression appears materially prosperous. In 1977, it produced 50 per cent of the world's total production of rubber, 64 per cent of the palm oil, and 36 per cent of the tin, besides also being the world's largest producer of sawn timber and pepper.[2] The export of these commodities and other products was worth US$6,664 million, giving a per capita export value of US$532 compared with Japan's $595, the United States' $535, Greece's $283, Spain's $242, Portugal's $181 and Turkey's $474.[3]

Among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Malaysia's GNP of US$860 in 1976 is second only to Singapore's $2,700 and far ahead of Thailand's $380, the Philippines' $410, and Indonesia's $220. Internationally, in terms of its economic performance, Malaysia appears better off as compared with the medium range of Latin American countries or the poorer countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with an economic well-being roughly between Portugal's and Turkey's as table 1 below shows.

TABLE 1. Area, Population and Per Capita Gross Domestic Product of Malaysia and Poorest OECD Countries, 1976

Country	Area (000 sq. km.)	Population (000s)	Inhabitants (per sq. km.)	1976 GDP Per capita (US$)
Malaysia	320.7	12,530	38	1,335
Spain	504.8	36,240	72	2,890
Greece	132.0	9,167	69	2,400
Portugal	92.1	9,694	105	1,630
Turkey	780.6	41,039	53	1,000

In the latest World Bank publication of World Development Indicators, Malaysia is ranked 34th in a group of 58 middle-income countries and is estimated to have reached an average annual per capita growth rate of 3.9 per cent compared with the median of 2.8 per cent for middle-income countries and 3.4 per cent for industrialized countries between 1960 and 1976.

The Average Malaysian

A number of other indicators also give the impression of a country and its people moving away from the ranks of the developing countries to join the developed. Compared with his counterpart of two decades ago the average Malaysian today stands a much better chance of being born alive as can be seen from table 2. The infant mortality rate has been reduced

by 53 per cent from 75.5 per thousand births in 1957 to 35.4 in 1974 and compares favourably with Portugal's rate of 37.9 in 1974. At the same time toddler mortality has gone down more drastically by 70 per cent from 10.7 to 3.13 during the same period. Overall the crude death rate has declined by 55 per cent from 12.4 per thousand in 1957 to 6.8 in 1971. Meanwhile life expectancy has increased to 65 years for males and 69.6 years for females compared with 56 years and 58 years twenty years ago. The crude birth rate, although showing a significant fall since 1960, still remains high at 31 per thousand compared with Portugal's and Spain's rate of 18.3 and Greece's rate of 16.0. Malaysia has a population growth rate of 2.7 per cent per annum.

TABLE 2. Birth, Mortality, and Death Rates in West Malaysia, 1957-1974

Year	Crude Birth Rate (per thousand)	Crude Death Rate (per thousand)	Infant Mortality Rate	Toddler Mortality Rate
1957	39	12.4	75.5	10.7
1967	n.a.	7.5	45.1	5.4
1968	n.a.	7.6	42.2	5.4
1969	n.a.	7.2	43.2	4.9
1970	n.a.	7.3	40.8	4.2
1971	n.a.	6.8	38.5	4.0
1974	31	6.6	35.4	3.13

The average Malaysian would receive at least six years of primary education (97 per cent of the 1.65 million Malaysian children in the age group 6 to 11-plus in 1975 were enrolled in primary schools) and some years of secondary education (62 per cent of 910,000 children in the age group 12 to 14 in 1975 were enrolled in secondary schools). Only 20 per cent of young Malaysians between 15 and 18 years received upper and post-secondary education in 1975 compared with Portugal's 29.6 per cent and Turkey's 12.7 per cent. The young population as shown in the above figures and the high age dependency ratio of 84 per cent indicate that the substantial demand for the basic necessities of life and services in education, health, and

housing will continue to increase over the next decade. For the adult population, 68 per cent was considered literate in 1970 compared with 51 per cent in 1957, the increased rate being reflected in the increase from 61 copies per 1,000 population in 1960 to 74 in 1969 in the number of major newspapers circulating daily.

About one in every three Malaysians in 1975 lived in an urban centre compared with one in every four in 1957, giving an urban population growth rate of 4.6 per cent annually. Estimates for 1990 are for an urban population comprising more than 42 per cent of the total population, due to both natural increase and migration from the rural areas. The average Malaysian would be employed, the unemployment rate in the country being 7 per cent in 1975 although for the age group 15-19 it was as high as 18.8 per cent in the urban areas and 15.6 per cent in the rural areas. Of the estimated work force of 3.6 million in 1970, 42.8 per cent were classified as employees, 30.8 per cent as self-employed, 22.5 per cent as unpaid family workers, and 3.9 per cent as employers.

Poverty in Malaysia

GNP figures and statistics providing means often fail to convey an accurate picture of reality. In Malaysia a rather different view of the lives of the majority of the people is obtained when we consider another set of statistics. In 1970 a comprehensive survey conducted in Peninsular Malaysia found that about half of all households had incomes below an established poverty line. This poverty line was defined as the household income required for minimum nutrition, clothing, sanitation, health, education, and other basic socio-economic requirements to sustain a decent standard of living. As seen in table 3 these poverty households were distributed among all sectors of the economy and among all races, although their incidence was greatest in agricultural and rural areas where the indigenous community predominates.

The findings of the survey came rather as a shock to the authorities and planners who had been misled by the increasing number of motor vehicles,

radios, and television sets into thinking that most of the people in the country had benefited from the economic and social developments taking place since independence. Even more disturbing was the finding that between 1957 and 1970 the bottom 60 per cent of the population had suffered an absolute decline in their real income, with the income of the bottom 10 per cent declining by as much as 31 per cent.

Other socio-economic data from the same study confirmed that the dominant way of life in Malaysia, despite the advances recorded in twenty years of independent rule, was still characterized by material poverty and deprivation. In the rural area, 69 per cent of private occupied living quarters were found to be sub-standard (using the Guttman scale of housing quality), 69 per cent of all dwellings had no electricity, 63 per cent had no provision for water supply in or outside the living quarters, and about 10 per cent were dependent on untreated water from rivers, streams, and canals for meeting their consumption needs. Even in the urban areas, which are supposed to have better quality houses and amenities, there are wide disparities as will be evident in the discussion on squatter settlements.

TABLE 3. Sectoral Distribution of Poor Households in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970

Sector	Total Households			Rural Households			Urban Households		
	Total (000)	Total poor (000)	Poverty (%)*	Total (000)	Total poor (000)	Poverty (%)*	Total (000)	Total poor (000)	Poverty (%)*
Agriculture	852.9	582.4	68.3	816.2	560.2	68.6	36.7	22.2	60.5
Mining	32.4	11.1	34.3	27.0	9.3	34.4	5.4	1.8	33.3
Manufacturing	150.2	48.5	32.3	66.2	28.8	43.5	84.0	19.7	23.4
Construction	35.0	12.8	36.6	15.5	6.9	44.5	19.5	5.9	30.2
Utilities	12.8	4.7	36.7	5.6	2.3	41.1	7.2	2.4	33.3
Commerce	162.3	49.2	30.3	74.1	30.8	41.6	88.2	18.4	20.9
Transport	61.3	22.4	36.5	26.1	11.7	44.8	35.2	10.7	30.4
Services	299.1	60.7	20.3	136.0	33.7	24.8	163.1	27.0	16.6
Total	1606.0	791.8	49.3	1166.7	683.7	58.6	439.3	108.1	24.6

* (%) refers to the percentage of poor households in the total.

Source: Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1976, p. 161.

Life for the Rural Masses

Although much can be made of the tranquillity and quality of life in the unspoilt pastoral countryside, some of the grimmer facts of rural life, at least as it is found in the Third World, should also not be forgotten. Fifty-three per cent of the estimated 3.34 million employed people in Peninsular Malaysia today earn their living from agriculture, forestry, and fishing. A large proportion of these rural people has yet to enjoy the basic necessities of life and services taken for granted in developed countries. In one of the major rice-producing areas of Malaysia, a study conducted in 1968 estimated that only 5 per cent of the estimated 22,000 households had electricity and 99 per cent obtained their domestic water from wells which were mostly shallow and unlined.[4] Fifty-one per cent of farm houses had no toilets and nowhere was there organized disposal of water and waste matter. It was also found that 72 per cent of the farmers were indebted, with the average debt amounting to US$158 or approximately half of the estimated annual family income which was estimated at US$312.

A more recent study conducted in 1976[5] among fishermen, who comprise 2.4 per cent of the economically active population (90,500), found 90 per cent of fishing households on the east coast and 40 per cent on the west coast living in poverty. About 70 per cent of them did not own any land and only about 42 per cent owned some poultry. About 81 per cent owned houses which were mostly of a low standard, and 55 per cent of these houses were without piped water, electricity, and toilet facilities; 39.4 per cent of the fishermen did not own land vehicles of any kind, 7.5 per cent owned television sets, and 58.2 per cent owned radio sets. Ninety-four per cent of them spent less than six years in school and only 3 per cent had received some form of specialized training in fishing.

Other studies are available which confirm the existence of much long-standing rural poverty. It is not expected that there will be much progress in the near future in improving the lives of the rural masses. Even the government's optimistic forecast for a reduction in rural poverty through a programme of enlarging the access of the poor to productive assets,

essential production inputs, training, credit, processing and marketing facilities, and basic social services envisages that half of the agricultural households in 1980 will still be poor.[6] This poverty figure could very easily swell, should there be a fall in the prices of agricultural commodities or should the increases in the non-agricultural sector on which the government is pinning much of its hopes fail to materialize. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to find large numbers of the rural masses making the trek to the towns and cities to improve their lives.

The Urban Poor

But what awaits the rural poor in the urban areas is not very different from the lives they have fled. Some reference to the position of the squatter population in Kuala Lumpur is illustrative. In the capital city of Malaysia, the squatter population,[7] or landless and houseless people who illegally occupy land and set up homes, has been estimated at 21 per cent of the city's population although some unofficial estimates indicate that it could be as much as 40 per cent of the population. Occupying about 15 per cent of the total land area of Kuala Lumpur, many squatter settlements are located in low-lying areas prone to flooding or along railway reserves and consist of poor quality huts or shacks cramped with people, built very close to one another, and lacking most if not all of the amenities taken for granted in a city, that is, piped water supply, electricity, toilets, and garbage-disposal facilities. In one study of 250 squatter households it was found that 91.2 per cent had come from rural areas, driven away by the economic hardships of working on the land and attracted by the bright lights and opportunities of the city.[8] Once in the city a familiar cycle of unemployment or unskilled employment, lack of access to public services and resources, and continuing poverty ensures that they and their children remain at the bottom of the barrel. The perpetuation of poverty among squatters in Kuala Lumpur has been observed to have lasted for three generations already, with the possibility of it being continued for many more generations to come.[9] It seems clear therefore that the shift of people away from agriculture to

the industrial sector which is normally regarded in developed countries as an indication of economic and social transformation into higher income employment and a better quality of life is only resulting in a transference of poverty.

In 1970 it was estimated that urban poor households in Malaysia totalled 108,000, or about 25 per cent of the 439,000 urban households. Since then their number has been considerably increased by the excess labour influx from rural areas and in 1975 they were expected to total 127,807, an increase of about 20,000. Further increases in the absolute numbers of urban poor households are expected in the next decade and the future for the urban poor looks as bleak as it is for their rural counterparts.

Poverty and Its Impact on the Young

For the children of the poor, the struggle for life begins even before they are born. A study of the intra-uterine growth patterns of Malaysian babies has shown that foetal growth is very much influenced by maternal health during pregnancy, maternal nutritional experience, and the socio-economic status of the mother.[10] In table 4 it is seen that women in the upper social classes have bigger babies than those in the lower social classes, implying that poorer mothers have not achieved the same nutritional health and status during pregnancy. Babies in these social groups even after surviving the nine months of pregnancy have not achieved their full growth potential as dictated by their genes and appear to have been subjected during their intra-uterine life to a form of disguised malnutrition.

If intra-uterine malnutrition is severe enough, these babies may be still-born or die during their early neonatal life. The pattern is found not only in rural areas but also in urban areas wherever poverty is severe, as is shown in the results of a study of rural migrants to Kuala Lumpur. In Table 5 we can see clearly the tendency to a greater number of child deaths among the poorer urban classes, the proportion being four times as high when compared with births among the more affluent classes.

TABLE 4. Relationship of Foetal Weight of Babies to Social Class

Social Class of Mother	Mean Weight of Baby (grams)		
	Malay	Chinese	Indian
I (highest)	3,144	3,175	3,131
II	3,046	1,150	2,956
III	3,058	3,113	2,936
III & IV (lowest)	2,915	3,140	2,838

Source: Khairuddin Yusof and T.A. Sinnathuray,[10] p. 44.

The finding also contradicts the popular notion that migration to urban areas brings about an increase in the standard of living through access to better public facilities, more job opportunities, and higher quality housing and nutrition.

TABLE 5. Relationship of Parents' Income to Malay Children Births and Deaths

Cash Income of parents (Mal. $)	No. of births	No. of deaths	Percentage of children died
<150	128	11	8.6
150-500	812	37	4.5
>500	321	7	2.2

Source: Khairuddin Yusof and T.A. Sinnathuray,[10] p. 50.

The grim spectre of poverty pursues the poor relentlessly. Living in crowded or poor quality houses with parents unemployed or engaged in low-paying employment, the children of poor people are more exposed to faecally transmitted and air-borne diseases and eat poorly. Malnutrition tends to continue for the poor after birth. A study of children below five years old, conducted between 1969 and 1972 in rural villages, found significant malnutrition in 49 per cent of the cases. Growth retardation

was also found and ascribed to an association with a history of chronic malnutrition and parasitism. In the urban areas, although severe malnutrition cases are rare, less severe forms which affect the health of the victims without its symptoms or accompanying diseases being clearly visible are common. Another recent study found that the most common severe infections affecting toddlers admitted to one of the country's leading hospitals were pneumonia and diarrhoeas. One third of these children had underlying malnutrition and they tended to come from poorer homes with large families.[11]

Under such conditions it is not surprising that the children of the poor are unable to take full advantage of the education which is supposed to act as a social leveller. In primary school the children of parents from lower socio-economic status are enrolled in smaller numbers compared to children of more well-to-do parents (71 per cent compared with 99 per cent) and their drop-out rate is very high. The situation at secondary school is even worse. If enrolment of poor children takes place it is due to the great sacrifice made by the parents and their perception of education as offering their children an opportunity for a better life. A recent study found that 79 per cent of the lowest population quintile spend an average of a fifth of their income to keep their children at school. The figure is high because although schooling is nominally free in Malaysia, household out-of-pocket (OP) expenditure to send children to school, which includes the costs of transport, uniforms, shoes, supplies, snacks, books, informal school fees, etc., is substantial and increases with educational level. Table 6 shows the mean burden for households with children at school increasing as income goes down. Clearly, for many households in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution, burdens of the magnitude indicated simply preclude putting children through secondary school.

This sheer inability of the poor to keep their children at school is partially reflected in the drop-out rate, which is highest for the poor at every schooling level. Furthermore even if they do not drop out, the absence of a conducive home environment, lack of parental education, and poverty make it difficult for all but a small minority of the children

of the poor to succeed in schools. With low levels of educational attainment, poor youths as they grow up gravitate to the low-paid jobs with limited avenues for improving their lives. Thus, the familiar vicious circle of poverty continues in another generation.

TABLE 6. Educational Burden by Income and Population Quintile

Quintile of household per capita income	OP Schooling Expenses + Income	Per cent of quintile burdened
1	.180	79
2	.104	69
3	.096	71
4	.075	60
5	.055	50
Mean	.104	65

Source: "Meeting Basic Needs in Malaysia: A Summary of Findings," World Bank Staff Working Paper No. 260 (April 1977, Washington), p. 9.

The above picture is not meant to convey the impression that nothing has been done to improve the condition of the poor over the past twenty years. As indicated in the earlier part of this study, health statistics show a healthier population. The expansion in rural health clinics and the carrying out of immunization, sanitation, and disease-control programmes have resulted in significant reductions in major infections and parasitic diseases such as diphtheria, dysentery, fever, enteric fever, tuberculosis, and malaria, although the last has started to make a come-back recently. Other statistics available show the increase in public services; between 1970 and 1976, the number of rural inhabitants connected to electricity supply increased from 115,000 to 215,000 while an estimated 60 per cent of the population is expected to be provided with treated water before the end of 1980. Clearly the expansion of such programmes to meet the basic needs of the people in health, education, housing, and especially nutrition remains the major task in the struggle to significantly improve the quality of life in the country. The uphill nature of the struggle faced is shown by the fact that 20 per cent and 40 per cent of the

population respectively do not obtain the minimum daily requirement of calories and proteins.[12] Meeting these basic needs, however, constitutes only the first step forward, for if opportunities for economic and social advancement beyond the minimum livable standards for the masses are not widened substantially and quickly enough, then the tragedy of death at birth for many is merely replaced by a life of unremitting and hopeless poverty.

Affluence in Malaysia

While poverty is pervasive in Malaysia, much affluence and material wealth also exist. It is such affluence which makes more glaring the poverty of the masses. Affluence in the country is currently enjoyed by a small minority comprising the owners and managers of the plantations, mines, and businesses, professional people - such as doctors, accountants, lawyers, engineers, and architects - who service the modern economy, and members of the administrative élite. In 1975 the upper class of professional, technical, administrative, and managerial workers numbered 204,438 out of 3,317,200 workers,or 6.16 per cent of the total labour force. The extent to which this minority class has been able to avail itself of the economic opportunities since independence is indicated by national accounts data which show the top 10 per cent of households increasing their average income by 48 per cent between 1957 and 1970 at the same time as the bottom 60 per cent experienced a decline in income. Also, the highest population decile of the country received 38 per cent of the total income compared to the lowest decile's figure of 1.8 per cent.[13]

Many of the well-to-do in Malaysia live at a level of material existence which is on a par with that of the wealthy in rich countries. Owning luxurious mansions with many servants to cater for their every whim, frequenting discotheques, golf courses, and expensive restaurants, sporting the latest imported cars, it is this group which largely engages in the life style of conspicuous over-consumption. The results of one study conducted among members of the administrative élite are instructive.[14] It found them spending from US$76 to US$265 per month on their motorcars

and having a penchant for bush-jackets and James Bond-type briefcases. The pride and glory of this group was reported to be the home, with the sitting room, living room, dining room, and bedroom all put on show. In the houses and private clubs of the élite, a private culture aping the former colonial masters, the British, was followed, including the consumption of liquor, the playing of golf, and the accumulation of status-value material possessions.

Affluence and Its Problems

Much more research needs to be done on the Malaysian upper class, on how it has accumulated wealth, how the wealth is spent, the extent of political and economic power wielded by its members, and so on. The research should include the monitoring of trends of welfare and identity fulfilment, for it is by no means clear that gross material affluence even for the privileged few has produced higher levels of satisfaction. In fact it is becoming more noticeable in Malaysia that growing affluence, even though still confined to the upper and middle classes, has started to produce the same problems of security, identity, and other aspects of mental health found in the developed countries. Increasing car ownership, for example, has resulted in an increasing incidence of violent deaths. Between 1969 and 1975 the number of motor vehicles in West Malaysia increased from 213,247 to 398,014. During that same period the number of admissions to government hospitals due to accidents, mainly motor accidents, increased by 49 per cent from 58,125 to 86,731, as can be seen in table 7. In 1974 the death ratio for every 10,000 motor vehicles was a terrifying 21.1 in Malaysia compared with 10.4 in Singapore, 5.9 in Australia, and 0.04 in Britain. In the near future the situation can only get worse. Kuala Lumpur, which already has a vehicular accident rate six times higher than what officials describe as "the maximum acceptable," and in some streets 35 times higher, will see a three-fold increase in the number of private motor vehicles from 127,000 in 1973 to 335,000 in 1990.

TABLE 7. Principal Causes of Admissions to Government Hospitals, Peninsular Malaysia

Causes	Admissions 1969		Admissions 1971		Admissions 1973		Admissions 1975	
	No. of cases	% of total	No. of cases	% of total	No. of cases	% of total	No. of cases	% of total
Accidents	58,125	11.8	67,493	16.8	76,882	13.6	86,731	14.0
Gastro-enteritis	17,952	3.6	15,913	4.2	19,531	3.5	21,846	3.5
Mental illness	11,727	2.4	13,850	3.4	17,903	3.2	18,712	3.0
Heart diseases	11,594	2.4	14,326	3.6	16,296	2.9	16,347	2.7
Cardio-vascular diseases	-	-	9,703	2.4	12,024	2.1	11,705	1.9
Others	393,493	79.8	279,277	69.6	420,891	74.7	464,353	74.9
Total Admissions	492,891	100	400,562	100	563,527	100	619,694	100

Note: The high figures of admissions in 1969 are due to the bloody racial riots in the country.

Source: Department of Statistics, Social Statistics Bulletin, Peninsular Malaysia, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1975.

Mental disease statistics have also shown a marked increase, with the number of admissions to mental hospitals increasing from 3,106 to 5,735 between 1966 and 1974. Mental illness currently ranks as the fourth principal cause of admission into government hospitals but given the extremely low psychiatrist/population ratio of 1 to 1.5 million, it can be assumed that much more mental illness exists in the country and is yet to be detected. No direct statistical correlation between affluence and mental disease has been drawn in Malaysia, but it is commonly acknowledged that rapidly changing life styles, urbanization, excessive stress, and overwork have a lot to do with the increasing number of psychological disorders.

At the same time the country's private doctors, whom the middle and upper classes patronize, have noticed a growing incidence of alcoholism, cancer, arterio-sclerosis, obesity, and heart attacks; a trend as in the developed countries related to over-consumption and wrong consumption patterns. Cancer especially is a serious problem. In 1975 there were 1.25 million smokers in Malaysia or 20 per cent of the total population above 15 years old. Cigarettes sold in the country deliver at least twice the cancer-causing tar as the same brands sold in the rich world[15] and several times the nicotine content. With no attempt made by the government to regulate tar and nicotine content, the likelihood is further increases in cancer cases.

More worrying is the rapid spread of drug addiction. Presently there are an estimated 200,000 addicts in the country, more than half of whom are below 25 years of age. Practically all the young drug addicts have picked up the habit in the last ten years, so that the rate of increase has been quite phenomenal. A recent study of drug abuse among secondary-school children in Penang found a wide range of drugs in use, including sedatives, tranquillizers, amphetamines, LSD, marijuana, heroin, morphine, and opium, with over 11.5 per cent of school children out of a total of 16,166 interviewed admitting to use.[16] Among the wider population, "pill-popping" is also on the increase, with reports estimating three out of ten patients who frequent clinics to be on some kind of drug. The reasons for the rapid increase in drug addiction are similar to those found in the

developed countries. With increasing affluence, permissiveness, and material comfort, large numbers of people want to try unusual experiences while others use drugs to escape from the harsh reality of life around them. Development has helped provide material affluence, but ironically, it has created stress situations which large numbers of people find difficult to cope with.

Finally, even though the rate of suicide, perhaps the ultimate negative expression by an individual of his state of mental health, has remained relatively stable at 11.5 per 100,000 people, criminal offences as a manifestation of social discontent and insecurity have increased sharply, as seen in table 8.

TABLE 8. Crime Rate per 1,000 Persons

Year	Crimes against property		Crimes against people		Offences against other laws		Total	
	No.	Annual % change	No.	Annual % change	No.	Annual % change	No.	Annual % change
1974	4384	+24	156	+18	380	+3	4920	+23
1975	5144	+18	167	+7	455	+20	5766	+17
1976	5082	+14	178	+7	584	+28	5844	+10
1977	5271	+4	198	+11	691	+18	6160	+5

Source: Ministry of Finance, Economic Report 1978/79, p. 175.

Of the total of all the various kinds of criminal offence, crimes against property - including robbery, theft, and cheating - constitute the largest proportion, comprising 66,118 out of 77,193 cases or more than 85 per cent of the total. Crimes of violence, that is, murder, attempted murder, and assault, comprise a small minority of total offences, amounting to 3.1 per cent in 1977, but their numbers are on the rise, increasing from 1,533 in 1974 to 2,101 in 1977, or a 37 per cent increase.[17] These figures are hardly surprising in view of the great inequalities of income distribution described earlier and the existence of a core of urban and rural poor, who, unable to obtain upward economic mobility in what appears

as an open-class system, give vent to their frustrations and discontent by anti-social or criminal acts.

The discussion of the state of mental and physical health of Malaysians would not be complete without some consideration of what is happening to the country's environment. In Malaysia today the natural resources of land, forests, sea, and rivers are being subjected to unprecedented exploitation. The facts are disconcerting. Malaysian forests, among the oldest in the world, are being so rapidly depleted that by 1990, at the current rate of depletion, the country which presently is one of the world's largest producers of sawn timber will be a net importer. Mangrove swamps, which occupy much of the western coast of Peninsular Malaysia and constitute one of the most productive ecosystems known to man, are being destroyed by reclamation and by gross pollution. In 1977, 42 of the main rivers in the country were found seriously polluted to the point of not being able to sustain fish or any other form of aquatic life, while 16 other rivers were classified as moderately polluted. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of tons of pollutants, including toxic gases such as carbon monoxide, sulphur oxides, and nitrogen oxides, are released into the atmosphere each year and floods, drought, land slips, and oil spills occur with increasing frequency. Everywhere in the country, due to human greed, ignorance, and folly, the living ecosystem is being unnecessarily chipped away. The resulting environmental deterioration is not only harmful to the aesthetic, mental, and psychic well-being of Malaysians. It has also harmed the interests of poor people dependent on the renewability or purity of the natural resources: villagers unable to use the waters of the river because of pollution, fishermen who cannot earn an economic livelihood from fishing because the seas have been contaminated by industrial pollution, aboriginals unable to hunt and use the forest because it has been cut down or bulldozed into extinction. The government's planners have yet to devise a scale for relating environmental quality to needs satisfaction in the country but, when it is done, there will be no doubt what the communities who depend on the environment will have to say.

How much importance should we accord to the negative trends above? It is true that in Malaysia problems of mental illness, alcoholism, obesity, and violent deaths which in the First World are associated with over-development are not of the same magnitude as the basic welfare-needs problems affecting the poor. Identity and security problems, it can be argued, mainly affect the middle and upper classes who comprise a minority of the population and can afford a second rung of needs satisfaction after the first rung of welfare needs has been met. However, consideration of them at this juncture of Malaysian societal development is not really all that premature. For one thing, it cannot be assumed that mental health problems generated by increased material affluence are confined only to those who are wealthy. The poor suffer equally from them, if not to a greater degree. Hostility, apathy, fantasy: these are the poor's reactions to the contemptuous, disdainful, or patronizing attitudes held by the more well-to-do, and to the material affluence which surrounds them and which they cannot acquire. In extreme cases, these reactions can result in severe psychological illnesses, though unfortunately no figures are available to show their incidence in Malaysia. At the same time, concern for the deterioration of the environment, even if such deterioration arises from legitimate development activity in the interests of the community, is never too soon to voice, for it uncovers the hidden social costs of development which the society should be aware of. Finally, these problems merit attention because they will undoubtedly increase when the country's standard of living goes up and if the present culture associated with development and affluence remains unchanged. Thus, they are a portent of what the future holds for the life style in the country should no alternative be actively pursued.

A Broader Framework for Change Required

In conclusion it must be borne in mind that a viable approach to alternative ways of life in Malaysia, even if it is posed as an academic exercise, must go further than identifying the problems of poverty and affluence in the prevailing situation. It must also try to locate the basic socio-economic dynamics which generate them. In Malaysia, no less

than in other Third World countries, poverty and affluence exist side by side because of long-established and deeply entrenched systems whereby the large mass of people are exploited, do not own sufficient resources and assets, and are denied equal access to services, inputs, and organization while a small élite group obtains a disproportionate share of the resources and assets, and extracts large surpluses. As an example, hundreds of thousands of Malaysian peasants own or operate small farms which are below the minimum size regarded as providing a living above the poverty line. Of this number, only a few thousand each year are able to benefit from the land development schemes set up by the government. For the others, so long as family numbers grow and the size of farms remains stagnant, they are condemned to declining incomes. In contrast to the land hunger of peasants, huge tracts of land, mainly alienated during the colonial period, are owned by plantation companies, many of them foreign-owned and bringing much wealth to a small body of shareholders. The land hunger among the peasantry and concentration of ownership among a small group of plantation companies which has resulted in poverty and affluence in the agricultural sector, although anomalous, cannot be seen in isolation from each other. They are interconnected parts of a system of land ownership and control which is intrinsically linked to a wider national system of economic and social production and relations.

At the same time it must be cautioned from the experience of other countries that reform of land ownership and control is but one of several steps required before development becomes a permanent rather than a temporary condition. No less important are access to more productive technology, improved marketing facilities, credit provision and the like at the local level, and broad-based institutional reform redistributing economic and political power at the national level. Some idea of the magnitude of the anomalies contained in the present national system and its adverse impact on the lives of the people can be deduced from table 9 which sets out the racial composition of ownership and participation in the key sectors of the Malaysian economy.

TABLE 9. Peninsular Malaysia: Ownership and Participation[1] in Key Sectors, 1972/73 (percentage share in each sector)

Sector	Malaysians	Others[2]	Foreigners
Modern agriculture (planted acreage, 1973)			
Rubber and oil palm	49.9	7.9	42.2
Coconut and tea	30.7	0.4	68.9
Industry (value of fixed assets 1972)			
Mining	36.0	9.5	54.5
Manufacturing	41.2	14.0	45.8
Construction	89.2	3.8	6.8
Trade (turnover value, 1973)			
Wholesale	58.5	0.6	40.9
Retail	85.7	0.2	14.1
Professional establishments[3] (annual revenue 1973)	67.7	18.4	13.9

1. In corporate and non-corporate sectors. Establishments are categorized on the basis of majority ownership.
2. Includes Malaysians other than Malays, Chinese, and Indians as well as establishments where no particular group owns more than 50 per cent of the assets.
3. Private establishments only. It includes doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers, etc.

Source: Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan, p. 183.

From the figures above, it can be seen that foreigners still own a large part of the key sectors of the Malaysian economy[18] so that the greater portion of profits and other benefits generated from ownership and control will continue accruing to non-Malaysians. Such a situation is clearly inimical to the country's development and a restructuring of the ownership must be the minimal sine qua non before Malaysians can look forward to a better life. Finally reforms at the local and national levels need to be matched by a corresponding reform of the present international structure which discriminates against poorer countries in much the same way that poor people in a country are discriminated against, and which reinforces the economic, technological, and financial domination

of First World countries. Without reforms in the international order, the difficult gains achieved by peasants planting rubber, for example, will be frittered away by deteriorating terms of trade.

How to bring about the transformation of the existing system and structures without incurring violent trauma is the crucial challenge facing Malaysia. It is a challenge fraught with many dangers because of the delicate racial balance, strength of vested interests, the uncertain international climate, and other factors. However, it is a challenge which must be faced, for failure to meet it will only mean a continuation of the prevailing way of life, its contradictions, and the unhappiness and suffering it entails for the masses.

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NOTES

1. Malaysia was formed in 1963 with the merger of Malaya (which had earlier become independent from British colonial rule in 1957), Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. Singapore subsequently left the Federation in 1965. In this paper the substantive discussion will focus on Peninsular Malaysia, or West Malaysia as it is otherwise known.

2. Figures for Malaysia used in this text, unless otherwise indicated, were obtained from the series of Economic Reports, Vols 1-7, Ministry of Finance, Kuala Lumpur, 1972-1978.

3. OECD figures were calculated from export values found in the OECD Observer, no. 91, Paris, March 1978, pp. 22-23.

4. S. Selvadurai, Ani bin Arope, and Nik Hassani bin Mohammad, Socio-Economic Study of Padi Farms in the Kemubu Area of Kelantan, 1968, Kuala Lumpur, 1969.

5. Malaysian Centre for Development Studies, Value Orientation Study of Fishermen in Peninsular Malaysia towards Change, Kuala Lumpur, 1976.

6. In absolute numbers, it is estimated that the total number of agricultural households will increase from 852,900 in 1970 to 957,500 in 1980 while the number of poor households will be reduced from 582,400 to 471,800 during the same period. See Third Malaysia Plan, p. 163.

7. Although there is a close relationship between slum and squatter areas, not all squatter areas are slums and not all slums squatter areas.

8. Ishak Shari, "Squatters: The Urban Poor in Kuala Lumpur," in Poverty in Malaysia, eds. B.A.R. Mokhzani and Khoo Siew Mun (Kuala Lumpur, 1977), p. 111.

9. K.W. Toh, "Urban Poor: The Case of the Cheras Road Flat Dwellers," in Mokhzani and Khoo, op. cit., p. 111.

10. Khairuddin Yusof and T.A. Sinnathuray, "Medical Index of Poverty," in Mokhzani and Khoo, op. cit., pp. 41-52.

11. S.T. Chen, "Pneumonia and Diarrhoeas: Killers of toddlers in developing countries," Tropical Geog. Med., 27, 1975, cited in Economic Report 1978/79, Ministry of Finance, p. 167.

12. This finding emerged from a study comparing the calorie and protein per capita availability against the recommended daily per capita for the period 1957-75. The study showed that although there was a caloric and protein surplus, this would only allow three-fifths and four-fifths of the population respectively to consume the minimum daily requirement, thus leaving the remainder without any certainty of getting a proper daily diet.
See Economic Report 1978/79, Ministry of Finance, pp. 165-166.

13. The government's wage policy for the public sector reflects the wide disparity in income distribution in the country and consequently of levels of material existence. Prior to 1977 the differential between the maximum and the lowest salary point for civil servants was 22.3 times. A revised scheme in 1977 reduced the differential to 16.9 times.

14. Nordin Selat, "Kelas Menengah Pentadbir Melayu" [The Malay Administrative Class], Ph. D. dissertation, University of Malaya, 1975.

15. Malaysia is a very profitable market for the major tobacco multinationals, Rothmans, British-American Tobacco Company, and Reynolds. Malayan Tobacco Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of British-American Tobacco, had a turnover of M$466 million for the year ended September 1976, a figure which works out to US$17 worth of tobacco per person in the country.

16. C.P. Spenser and V. Navaratnam, A Study of the Misuse of Drugs Among Secondary School Children in the States of Penang and Selangor, Centre for Policy Research Monograph No. 3, University Sains Malaysia, Penang, 1976, p. 163.
A hospital study showed that heroin was the first drug of choice among patients, marijuana the second, opium the third, and morphine the fourth, an identical pattern to court/prison findings. Ministry of Finance Economic Report 1976/77, p. 117.

17. The increasing crime rate has led the government to plan for the expansion of what is already a large police force from 42,194 men in 1978 to about 71,000 in 1980. The expansion will bring down the overall ratio of all policemen to total population from its current figure of 1:285 to 1:180 and undoubtedly consume large amounts of public revenue which could have been allocated instead to eradicating one of the major causes of crime - poverty.

18. In 1975, foreigners were estimated to own 54.9 per cent of the US$4,300 million share capital in limited companies in Peninsular Malaysia, a value of US$2,363 million. Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan, p. 184.