

Chapter II

The Man

*"We can fabricate fame,
we can at will make a man or woman well-known; but we cannot make him great"*
- Daniel J Boorsein¹

1. The Formative Years

One of the best ways to know a person, especially a politician, is through his biography or personal background. Famous, well-known, influential and great people are always appreciated and studied through their life stories, such as : Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Mao Tze Tung, H H The Dalai Lama, and even our Prime Minister – Dr Mahathir Mohammad.

Lim Kit Siang, 57, is the Parliamentary Opposition leader since 1960's, and Secretary – General of the largest opposition party in Malaysia – the Democratic Action Party (DAP). As we study the background of this well-known politician, it is hope that we are able to sketch a creditable picture of the 'who', 'why', 'what', 'when' and 'how' of Lim Kit Siang and his personality, thus enabling us to gain an insight into his thinking and what he is today. Then, we will be able to make reasonable deductions about his political influence and contributions in local politics. As Alphomse Karr had said²,

"Every man has three characters – that which he exhibits, that which he has and that which he thinks he has."

¹ (compiled by) K Das, The Things Politicians Say About Things, Kuala Lumpur : K DAS INK, 1987, p. 19.

² Kate Samperi, Silver Linings : Sally Milner, Publishing Pty. Ltd., p.3

Kit Siang was born on the 20th February 1941³. Since childhood, he had developed and cultivated a tremendous interest in public issues and politics. His pursuit and absorption of knowledge started during his formal education at Sekolah Menengah Inggeris, Batu Pahat, Johor.

In school, he was actively involved in various academic and non-academic activities. Through such active involvements, the experiences gained from many kinds of activities then had been contributory to the development of his character and personality of leadership. Indeed, this is reflective of the Chinese proverb which says that, "One's three year-old's life determine his whole destiny."

In the beginning, Lim's parents decided to send him to study in a local Chinese Primary School. After two and a half years, Kit Siang continued his education in an English school. His English education has made him a good writer, speaker, debater and orator of his own speech and ideas. But Kit Siang's command of the Chinese language today is not as good as his English. During the talk on 'Economic Crisis of Malaysia' in the Chinese Assembly Hall on February, 1998, Kit Siang had to refer to his comrade – Teresa Kok, for certain Chinese Nouns. He often resorted to the use of English terms instead of Chinese ones, if he could not think of one. It is also said that Kit Siang cannot speak fluent Malay (Bahasa Malaysia), as well as he does with English. This is obvious, especially when there is a debate between him and the Barisan National (BN) leaders in Parliament⁴. Nevertheless, Lim Kit Siang studied Chinese and Bahasa Melayu on his own efforts. It is fair to say that, as a publicly well-known MP today, Kit Siang can

³ Biodata Lim Kit Siang, Petaling Jaya : DAP, 1994, p. 1.

⁴ Told by one of the DAP's Member of Parliament (MP) to the author.

communicate with anyone from any race or any religion, by using either Bahasa Melayu, English , Chinese, Hokkien, Cantonese or other dialects, especially to discuss about problems and political issues.

Kit Siang described his father as an animal doctor, a veterinary doctor, who was conservative and traditional. He studied zoology on his own efforts too⁶. It is said that his father's achievements have inspired Kit Siang who subsequently completed his study of Law, and obtained his LLB (Hons) degree from the University of London in 1976. He had fully utilized his time to study the subject while he was detained under the ISA (Internal Security Act), from May 1969 until October, 1970, qualifying as a lawyer in 1979⁷.

According to Kit Siang, his father was a strict, firm and a good parent who was always concerned for his son's discipline. He educated his son, by his own words, behaviour and examples. This probably accounted for the influence and inspiration on Kit Siang's personality, in the image of his father. He is considered an 'iron man' by most of his comrades or other politicians. To some of them, he is always serious, firm, cool, silent and arrogant. Some even labelled him as a 'cruel dictator' in the party, who only act and work according to his own views and interests. But behind the masks, Kit Siang is also a 'simple-man', who jokes and is friendly, and communicative with some of his closest friends⁸.

⁵ Told by a DAP MP to the author.

⁶ Jiang Zheng Xuan and Chow Sao Ling, Da Feng Bao (Krisis in DAP), Kuala Lumpur : Greenland Publication and Enterprise, p. 105.

⁷ Biodata : Lim Kit Siang.

⁸ Interviews with Tan Kok Wai (DAP's MP of Cheras) and Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP's MP of Kepong).

Lim's father had always encouraged his son to study hard and cultivate a good habit of reading. Kit Siang today is a good reader, who can read or skim through articles very quickly. He is good in his 'speed-reading'. By this habitual tendency, he often finishes all sorts of readings such as papers, magazines, books on any subject in a very short time. Furthermore, he also has a powerful memory which enables him to memorize nearly anything that he has read before.

Kit Siang comes from a self-supporting, middle-class family, being the youngest amongst the other four brothers and sisters. Encouraged by his father and mother, he attended some Chinese Night Classes (college courses) and studied the Chinese language for a few years. Recalling this experience, he emphasized that⁹ "Every Chinese in Malaysia should know their mother tongue. Bahasa Melayu no doubt is our National Language, and English is our tool to gain knowledge and communicate with the world. To know the Chinese language will make one's mind more open and receptive, and to understand the ultimate essence of any phenomenon deeply and maturely, enabling us to face and handle any event more calmly and responsively".

From here, we can infer that although Kit Siang was basically English educated, he did not forget that he is also born a Chinese, who, like the Chinese proverb, cannot forget his own roots. Thus, he is traditionally a Chinese who is keen to protect, and champion the rights and birthplace of the Malaysian Chinese, in terms of preserving their language, culture, religions and political-economic accessibility.

⁹ Ibid.

According to Lim, his school life was quite funny and colorful. He described himself as a 'naughty child' – who always like to challenge his teachers and classmates. His daring, challenging and creative ideas have always created problems and misunderstandings between him and the headmaster! Nevertheless, this seems to be a forerunner of his present ride as a vocal and daring, even controversial, Opposition Leader. In fact, here is a man who seems fearless and dares to challenge or criticize anyone, from the King (Yang Di Pertuan Agong) and the Prime Minister (and his government) or to anyone at all in the streets, despite their power, status, influence, wealth or fame.

In the 1950's, Malaysia's independence had stimulated political awareness in the hearts and souls of Kit Siang and his friends. However, there was no specific event that can be considered to be a major driving force in the start of his political life. Recalling his memories, he remembered that before he graduated from high school, he and his friends had thought about forming a political party. They had discussions about it. "But", he added, "this was not serious; actually, we're only joking"¹⁰. Nevertheless, today, this remark is no longer a joke, he has already made politics his lifelong career. His old friends and classmates are scattered around the country, lending different careers and life-styles from his - a dedicated politician that Kit Siang has now become and a vocal one he has become known for.

After leaving school, Kit Siang had worked as a temporary teacher in a primary Chinese School in Senai, Johor, in 1959. After that, he became a journalist,

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 106.

working for the New Straits Times from 1961 until 1963¹¹. From 1963 until 1965, he was a reporter, working for the Singapore Radio¹². However, from 1966, Kit Siang started to involve himself fully and seriously in the local political arena. He became the Parliamentary Opposition Leader from 1973 to 74 and from 1975 to 78. He also became the first elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Malacca Town in 1969, being re-elected to Parliament in 1974 and also elected to the Malacca State Assembly for Kubu seat¹³. As an elected MP for Petaling in 1978, with 16,000 majority votes in the general elections¹⁴, he commanded a large following of middle-class families. From the birth of the DAP in 1966 until May 1969, he was the editor of the Rocket, the party journal of the DAP. He was also the National Organizing Secretary¹⁵.

In short, Lim was, and continue to be, the outspoken critic of the National Front Government in Parliament, State Assembly and university forums. His favorite topics included : exploitation, corruption, human rights, violations, abuse of power, and current issues such as economic crisis, information technology, environmental problems, and government mal-administration. This is indeed a wide range of subject matter to master and to articulate publicly.

But this was not without a price! Kit Siang was detained under the Internal Security Act without trial from 1969 until October 1970. He was also arrested in April 1978 and charged with five counts under the Official Secrecy Act, which carries a total maximum sentence of 31 years' jail, for raising inside and outside the 1976 Parliament

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lim Kit Siang, Time Bombs In Malaysia, Petaling Jaya : DAP, 1978, Back Cover.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the Royal Malaysian Navy purchase of four Swedish-made SPICA-M fast-strike crafts, especially concerning the price and suitability of these crafts¹⁶. In 1987, he and his comrades were also detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in "Operation Lalang", for instigating sensitive issues, destroying racial harmony and so forth¹⁷. He was further detained without trial for 18 months in Kamuning, Perak detention camp, but he was released on 19th April, 1989¹⁸.

As a MP for Tanjung and the most prominent Opposition Leader in Malaysia, Kit Siang is indeed a manifestation of the Leadership role and the growth of the DAP as the country's most vocal advocate of opposition politics. And his success and failures, including the ups and downs of the fortune of the DAP are reflecting of his untiring struggle for a 'Malaysian Malaysia', his ultimate political goal and vision. As Dwight D Eisenhower had said ¹⁹, "*Politics is a profession; a serious, complicated and, in a true sense, a noble one*". And for the DAP and Kit Siang, the political struggle continues into the next millennium.

¹⁶ Biodata Lim Kit Siang, PJ : DAP

¹⁷ 25 years of struggle – Milestone of DAP History, PJ : DAP, 1991, p. 91.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid.

2. Personality of Mr. Opposition

Psychologists themselves are often divided in their definitions of 'personality' standard discussion by Allport lists no less than 50 definitions. "Normally, personality can be defined as an inferred entity rather than to a direct observable phenomenon. In this context, 'personality' refers to a construct that is introduced to account for the regularities in an individual's behaviour as he responds to diverse stimulation¹. In equating 'personality' with ego defense, and 'personality and politics', with effects of personal psychopathology on political behaviour, the political scientists have identified a persisting, if controversial, strand in political and social analysis.

As for a firm and decisive political attitude and habitual tendency, the great politician Henry Miller had said, " One has to be a lowbrow, a bit of a murderer, to be a politician, ready and willing to see people sacrificed, slaughtered for the sake of an idea, whether a good one or bad one." But does a firm attitude mean cruel and not reasonable? Or is it a kind of skillful means to achieve a political objective? And can the so-called diligent 'perseverence', really bring about prosperity and development of one's country? These are the questions that we need to ponder on...

(a) *Firm : the 'Iron Man' or 'Robocop'?*

Our Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, has been viewed as being too rigid and too firm about his political views and attitude. The resignation of Datuk Musa Hitam as the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia on 26th February was really a shock, both to the Party UMNO and the whole nation. The reported conflict between Datuk Musa and Dr Mahathir was attributed to the firm and uncompromising attitude of Dr Mahathir. However, because of his strong, firm, and persevering stance, Dr Mahathir has managed to overcome the crisis wisely and confidently².

For Kit Siang, as the Secretary General of the most influential Opposition Party in Malaysia, he had to be firm about his decisions and political views too. His firm and strong ideas about himself and the party have caused resignations and the outflow of political elites from the party.

It is said that the record number of resignations and outflow of members in DAP is the highest among any political parties in Malaysia. A summary of significant resignations is as follows³ :-

1. Yong Rong Chai (Perak)

- Two years in DAP, the first leader who left DAP due to dissatisfaction with its policies. Left DAP on 28th August, 1969.

¹ Fred I, Greenstein, Personality and Politics, Chicago : Markham Publishing Company, 1969, p.3.

² Wong Ching Wei, Antara Lim Kit Siang dan Dr Mahathir : Suatu Perbandingan, p. 142.

2. Kang Chai Fatt and Ho Mong Yau (Melaka)

- Left DAP on 1st August 1971.
- Became an independent State Assemblyman after leaving the DAP.
- Kang was sacked by Kit Siang (as a leader in the DAP Melaka Committee).
- Kang said, "Although I was one of the founder members of the DAP, I had begun to lose confidence in the DAP's leadership after all these years".
- Kang and Ho viewed Kit Siang as a dictator.

3. Chan Ching Sand (Negri Sembilan)

- State Assemblyman of Negri Sembilan
- Also, a co-founder of the DAP.
- Lost confidence in Kit Siang's leadership
- Date of leaving : 12.10.1971.

4. Hj Hassan

- Negri Sembilan's State Assemblyman.
- "I'm still believe in the principles of the DAP, but since the leadership cannot reach the goals, I've decided to leave the party after a long deliberation".

5. Lee Ming Chang

- The sixth elite to leave DAP
- Left on 3rd February, 1972, to join the MCA.
- Kit Siang said that he was 'pushed' to join the MCA, due to economic reasons.

6. Richard Ho and Loh Pao Keng (Walter Loh)

- MP from Setiawan and Setapak.

³ Song Chong Ling & Tong Chang Ann, The Killer of Chinese Political Unity, p. 14.

- The most shocking resignation for Lim Kit Siang and Chen Man Hin (National Chairman for the DAP).
- According to Loh, “ I lost confidence in the leadership, its statesmanship and speeches are too *racialistic*”.
- Kit Siang accused both of them as “betrayers”, the then DAP Vice Chairman, Goh Hock Guan, also criticized them as “rubbish”. But ironically, Goh himself has also left the DAP.

7. Dr A. Soarian and Goh Hock Guan

- The ninth elites to resign
- Announced their decision on 18/6/1972
- As Goh had announced to the reporter, he has a serious relationship problem with Kit Siang since a very long time ago. As long as Kit Siang is the Secretary General of the DAP, this would definitely damage and destroy the party.
- Goh also stressed that if Kit Siang is no longer in the DAP, he would probably join the DAP again.
- Dr Soarian was sacked by Kit Siang for “not reporting to higher authority of what he knew about Richard Ho and Loh”.

8. Wong Swee Oy

- State Assemblyman of Sepang, Selangor
- Sacked on 21/6/1972
- Accused as ‘agent’ of Goh Hock Guan, a betrayer to party.
- In his letter to the disciplinary committee, he wrote that “I seek for a fair justice, hope that the ‘gang’ of dictatorial, blind and coward leaders would stop their stupid behaviour, and reflect upon the crisis faced by the DAP.

9. Yap Peng Hong

- State Assemblyman in Sepang, Selangor.
- Sacked with four other members by the DAP.
- An MP of the MCA today.

10. Lim Thian Ching

- Led 12 of the Kampung Jawa's DAP members to resign.
- Due to conflict with Lim Kit Siang and Chen Man Hin.

11. Hu Teck Onn and Wong Sue Ching

- From Sandakan and Kedah respectively.
- Left the DAP on 28 May 1976.

12. Fang Yow Teng

- International Secretary of the DAP
- MP from Perak, left on 18/5/1978.
- Criticized Lim and his leadership as cruel and cold-hearted.

Due to his uncompromising firmness and attitude, he is often criticized as 'cool-hearted' and labelled as the 'iron-man'. He often condemned by his political enemies as 'arrogant', 'egoistic' and is not concerned about what others think of him.

Due to his uncompromised firmness, Kit Siang is definitely facing a lot of problems and conflicts in his political life – either inside or outside the DAP. May be he should learn to change his attitude and behaviour into more light, human and flexible ways. Marcus Aurelius had said, "*Change your thoughts (attitude) and you Change your world*".

(b) *Perseverance*

As the famous writer and poet of India, Rudyard Kipling said, “ *Everyone is more or less mad at one point*”. So, too, it seems the case with Lim Kit Siang because of his preoccupation with his idealistic and democratic notion of a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’. He started his political career since 1960’s, and most probably, this will continue beyond the year 2000, into the 21st Century.

In 1968, there was the marathon six and a half-hour of ‘DAP - Gerakan Cultural Debate’ on 24 November at the MARA Auditorium, Kuala Lumpur, before a capacity crowd⁴. The Gerakan leader had declared that “Malaysian literature should only be written in Malay, and that it should include Indonesian literature”, Dr Sed Naguib Alatas, then Gerakan National Leader, had attacked the DAP’s advocacy of a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’⁵ and he had challenged Lim Kit Siang to a public debate. In his key-note address, Kit Siang presented his view⁶ as follows : “Malaysian literature cannot be limited to works only one language.. It must comprise all writings, whether drama, novel, short story, play or verse, written by Malaysians. By emotion, identification, description, social content and involvement, those relate to Malaysia, whether they are written in Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English”.

Although the ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ concept is good and sounds impressive, yet when the DAP fielded Kit Siang against the Alliance’s Thuan Phaik Phock and the Gerakan’s Tan Han Swee, Kit Siang and the DAP lost by a margin of 607

⁴ 25 years of struggle : Milestones in DAP History, Petaling Jaya : DAP, 1991, p. 10.

⁵ Ibid.

votes. This is indicative that the political strategies of the Socialist Front boycott and the 'spoiler' role of the Gerakan had worked against the DAP.

When the May 13 riots broke out, Kit Siang was in Sabah campaigning for the Independent Parliament candidates. He was speaking before the biggest ever public rally held in Kota Kinabalu, criticizing the dictatorial rule of the then Sabah Chief Minister, the deceased Tun Mustapha⁷. On Kit Siang's arrival at the Subang International Airport, he was detained under the Internal Security Act, held in custody for 62 days at the Kuala Selangor Police Station lock-up, and subsequently transferred to the Muar detention camp. He was released unconditionally on 1 October 1970 after 17 months of detention without trial. As a show of his uncompromising stand and perseverance in his political career, Kit Siang described his detention as "part of the anti-democratic reaction against the verdict of the people at 1969 General Election"⁸.

A notable event has marked Kit Siang's vocal political career. In 1976, he had raised the issue of the questionable purchase of four Swedish-made SPICA-M fast-strike crafts by the Royal Malaysian Navy inside and outside the Parliament. On 23 April, 1978, he was arrested on five charges under the Official Secrets Act 1972⁹ for this controversial articulation.

Nevertheless, in the past few years (before 1978), with the DAP becoming stronger, Kit Siang and DAP had continued to face the so-called 'repressive actions', one

⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

⁸ Ibid, p. 19.

⁹ Ibid, p. 37.

after another. But being strong and firm, he persevered. He had said, "In my view, to fold up and to give up the political battle is to fall into the trap which the Barisan Nasional has prepared ... For the strength of the DAP is to be found, not so much from its leaders and members, but from its policies which receive the support of the people. The only way to undercut the DAP is for the DAP to stand up for education, economics, culture or politics"¹⁰. From here, it is obvious that Kit Siang's perseverance was also due to his strong faith and belief in his and the party's political values, rather than in individual personalities.

In September, 1980, the content of the DAP's magazine – the Rocket - exposed a \$1.2 billion bit scandal involving ESSO. Kit Siang was sued by ESSO Production Malaysia Incorporated for libel¹¹. And in November 1980, the Malacca State Government initiated moves to declare Kit Siang's State Assembly seat in Kubu vacant, on the spurious ground that his one-hour absence from the Malacca State Assembly on September 23 was tantamount to six months' absence without leave¹².

These incidents, however, did not deter Kit Siang from doing his public duty, for which he was elected in the first place. He continued with his political struggle. In the eighties, Kit Siang and DAP proved their inquisition reputation, as a politician and a party respectively, which safeguards the interest of Malaysian taxpayers by exposing and campaigning against the wrongdoings of the government, including the BMF, cooperatives mismanagement, EPF and UMBC suspicious operations, and the Maminco, LPN and UEM scandals. Kit Siang opposed the BN's policies of 'one language, one

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 38.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 47.

culture', and fought for worker's rights in 1982, and opposed the BN Government's Constitutional Amendment Bill in 1983. In fact, it has been generally acknowledged that the three and a half-hour Parliamentary speech by the DAP Secretary General and Opposition leader on the BMF Report was a command performance by any standards. His decisive and confident dissection of the 13-volume 6000-page Report within a few days¹³ showed his genuine interest in his political struggle and the perseverance trait of a mature politician, indeed a characteristic hallmark of dedicated leadership under any circumstances and in any part.

Kit Siang was also detained under the mass arrest of 'Operation Lalang', without trial, together with more than a hundred dissidents under the Internal Security Act. He was released on 19 April, 1989 after 18 months of detention. His spirit remained undaunted but recharged. This is witnessed in his courageous 'Save Bukit Cina Campaign' (1984), 'Illegal Indonesian Immigrant Menace' (1984), 'Kampung Bercham Squatters Issue' (1984), 'The Papan Issue (Anti-Radioactive Dump Campaign)', 'The Bakun Issue' (1985), 'Championing Parental Rights of Non-Muslims' (1986), 'EPF-Makuwasa Scandal' (1986), and the recent 1997 'Haze', 1998 'Economic Crisis', 'IT Reform', and 'Water Supply Crisis'. All these campaigns are testimonies of a political strongman who is imbibed with fresh, strong and update inspirations to continue to fire his perseverance, imagination and fighting spirit.

This search for viable solution or strategies to correct the problems of 'elite outflow' from, and 'successor' in the DAP can be seen in the paradigms of 'public

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p. 59.

victory' which advocates that "*Seek first to understand, then to be understood*". Most of the problems and dissatisfactions faced by those who had left the DAP are best summarized by the "nobody listen to me" syndrome, reflective of what Pascal refers to as "*The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of*".

Thus, communication is vital here. Besides a firm stand and a decisive attitude, Kit Siang needs to achieve a fine balance between how to act and speak moderately, with skillful means, to bring about 'win-win' situations to all parties concerned, inside and outside the DAP and the Parliament. As Covey said¹⁴, "We have such a tendency to rush in, to fix things up with good advice, but we often fail to take the time to diagnose, to really, deeply understand the problem first... And if I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learnt in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this : *Seek first to understand, then to be understood*¹⁵. *This principle is the key to effective interpersonal communication*". Perhaps the Opposition Leader could learn from Covey's advocacy to improve his interpersonal skills beyond his political shrewdness, perseverance and fighting spirit in the interest and the welfare of all Malaysians. The fact remains that his perseverance has continued to inspire, influence and enhance the political views, actions and ambitions of his comrades such as Dr Tan Seng Giaw (MP of Kepong), and Tan Kok Wai (MP of Cheras)¹⁶.

¹⁴ Steven R Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 237.

¹⁶ Interview with Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP's MP of Kepong) and Tan Kok Wai (DAP's MP of Cheras) in February, 1998.

For Kit Siang, the struggle is unending, and the road is long and rugged. 30 years or more is relatively short time in human history. Nevertheless, 'To be firm' is a good quality, and so too 'to persevere', but sometimes these qualities need to be replenished by a balance of 'open-mindedness' and 'skillful interpersonal communication'. Then only, as Andrew Matthews had remarked, *"Things will get better. They always do. The trouble is that many people give up and go home too early. The tide will always turn,"* For Kit Siang and the DAP, as long as the country grows so, too, their services are needed. The forms may change; the personalities may come and go; the conflict and discontent will evolve and surface; and the young "Turks" may challenge the old "warriors". But the role of the Opposition remains a valued political commodity in a multiracial and multi-religious country who, in harsh times, cannot help but sympathize with opposition leaders or parties for one reason or another.

(c) *Analytic and Idealistic*

Kit Siang is an analytic and idealistic politician. "Analytic" here means an attitude of 'willingness to learn, to analyze, to study or examine in order to make a conclusion about certain phenomenon'. "Idealistic" here means an effort or personal orientation, towards satisfying one's idea of what is perfect. The analytic ability depends on one's wisdom, while the idealism of a person depends on his or her values of life, being guided by one's ideas or philosophy of living.

i. *Analytic – "who wants to clear the 'haze'"*

The analytical ability of Kit Siang can be seen from his speeches and statements in the "SG's Statements and Speeches" published by DAP. He had said, "There is something unreal in the way the Government is combating the haze problem, with the Malaysian Government saying that it would help Indonesia to fight the forest fires in South Kalimantan and Sumatra while it is itself seeking the help of France and Canada to resolve the deteriorating haze situation"¹⁷. Repeatedly, he had urged the government to immediately implement the 'Clean Air Action Plan'¹⁸, which according to him, had been drawn up by the Department of Environment to fight with air pollution, but which has been put on hold by the Cabinet since three years ago because of reportedly high costs involved to be borne by industries to meet emission-reduction standards. He had also urged the Cabinet to declare a state of environmental emergency

¹⁷ Lim Kit Siang, SG's Speeches & Statements, September Issue 1997, Petaling Jaya : DAP, p. 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

in the country so that the long-term problem of air pollution can be addressed immediately, and the country can support for sustainable development¹⁹.

In a second statement, Kit Siang had also criticized the National Haze Committee as being ineffective, inefficient and not serious in fighting the 'worst' air pollution in Malaysia history. He contended that it was childish, unrealistic and stupid the statement made by the Chairman of the Malaysia Tourism Board, Datuk Hanafi Ramli about, " the worsening haze problem that would not discourage foreign tourists from coming to Malaysia", while MAS flights are cancelled, delayed and rescheduled, causing tremendous inconveniences to the travelling public and creating havoc at airports and for ships using the Straits of Malacca. In addition, air-related ailments undermining the health of Malaysians of all ages have led to schools advising their students to stop all physical activities and sports and to keep the indoors to safeguard their health²⁰.

Stressing his concern for the quality of life and living standards, Kit Siang reiterated that for the first time in Malaysia's history, the Air Pollutant Index (API) in five towns on 14th September, 1997, had breached the very unhealthy level of 200²¹. He contended, speaking about the API ²², that "The public are entitled to know the basis for the computation of the Air Pollutant Index (API), the actual level of concentration of various parameters that are measured, the level of gases and of all the critical components of the index. In fact, there are people who are more worried about the four gases in the API than the particulates, which make up the five parameters for the API as they

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p. 20.

represent serious risk to health. The ozone pollutant may affect the functions of the lungs and result in chronic lung disease, sulphur dioxide will affect the breathing ability of asthmatic patients; nitrogen dioxide will cause acute lung disease such as upper respiratory tract infection and carbon monoxide will cause heart problem”.

From the above statement, Lim legal training is not only reflective of a critical and straight-to-the-point approach, but he is also analytical and caring like a doctor who advises on his/her patients on their health and environmental-related issues that could aggravate their health problems.

In summary, his accurate observations and critical analysis are reflected in his comments on the “Haze ‘97” issue²³ as follows :-

1. The government is slow, ineffective and even inefficient in tackling the worsening haze situation.
2. The government of Malaysia has not demanded that the Indonesia Government bear responsibility for the national haze disaster it had caused to other ASEAN neighboring countries and Indonesia cannot continue to disclaim responsibility for the transboundary pollution and the hardships it has caused to Malaysians and its neighbours.
3. It seems to be unprofessional in fighting the national haze, diluting instead of tightening the anti-haze plan and advocating a policy of “school be closed at ‘stage 4’ ” to “schools be closed above ‘stage 4’, ” that is between 30 to 400 reading of the API).

4. Worsening air pollution should be decided by scientists and environmentalists and not politicians.
5. Suharto's apology in the ASEAN Environmental Ministers' Meeting was gracious, but it was not adequate to prevent future occurrences again. Indonesia should be prepared to agree to the establishment of an ASEAN Haze Committee with full power to check raging forest fires in Indonesia and bring responsible culprits to the book.
6. There are no API monitoring stations in Sibu, Miri and Bintulu.
7. There are no regular updates on API readings.
8. Confusing statements given by cabinet on anti-haze action plans²⁴.

From these statements and political speeches given by Kit Siang, it is fair to say that although his views are not necessary always correct, his analysis and criticisms tend to create political awareness on certain important issues such as environment, culture, language, democracy, human rights and racial harmony. Most importantly, he is daring enough to reveal unknown facts and to fathom for truths. It is this quality that has tagged him as the most out-spoken and efficient opposition leader in Malaysia so far. After all, in Andrew Matthews' words, "(Critical and analytical) thoughts are invisible clouds that go out and gather up results for us. They determine what we reap". *And Lim Kit Siang seems to be a formidable owner ad practitioner of analytical applications of public issues that capture the public's imagination and sympathy most of the time, especially when these issues affect the quality of their lives and environment.*

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²³ Ibid, p. 7-16.

ii. *Idealistic – “who dares to dream and act”*

Kit Siang is also an idealistic politician in many aspects. In his ‘IT for All’ concept and ideas, Kit Siang has proposed a nationwide ‘One Family, One Computer’ campaign to catapult Malaysia into the Information Age in the next Millennium since 1996²⁵. As Malaysia aims to make the quantum leap from an industrial-based to an information-based society in the new millennium, he stressed that all Malaysians should and must be aware of our own weaknesses in the field of information technology, preparing to learn from the lessons of other countries²⁶.

Increasingly, therefore, the DAP and Kit Siang, have repeatedly called for an “IT for All” nationwide campaign to popularize IT awareness, literacy and use throughout the country. Admittedly, the government has made a very high-level commitment to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor in order to propel Malaysia into the orbit of the digital society in the next millenium, with Dr Mahathir himself as the top national ‘salesman’, Kit Siang’s proposal has yet to be accepted by the authorities concerned²⁷. Idealistically, of course, Kit Siang is dreaming and hoping for a better Malaysia and better informed generation of Malaysians who can compete at par with the world’s most advanced nations and people who have made IT their way of life. After all, the DAP has the first of all local parties to create its website and to embark on its political campaigns via the internet. Apparently, this method is not only contemporary, it also has a larger and more extensive audience-reach, even beyond the shores of Malaysia.

²⁴ Ibid, October 1997 (SS50), p. 6.

²⁵ Lim Kit Siang, SG’s Speech & Statements, Petaling Jaya : DAP, September 1997 (SS46) p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

In this regard, Kit Siang has used France as an example. Compared with Malaysia, France is much more superior position in terms of IT development and usage. This is evident from the recent Information Imperative Index 1997 which was released August, 1997 which ranks 55 countries on the basis of their ability to access, absorb and effectively utilize information. In this Index, France is ranked No. 18 (out of 55 countries), compared to Malaysia which ranked No. 35²⁸. France overall score for the Information Imperative Index was 2,374 compared with Malaysia's 1,060²⁹. The important point stressed by Kit Siang here is that, although France is ranked quite high by the Information Imperative Index compared with Malaysia, the French leaders are far more concerned with the fact that it is still lagging behind other countries³⁰, especially in Internet usage rate among its people, compared with other countries. The French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin publicly spoke of his worry that France was falling behind and he has called for stepping up the efforts to promote greater use of the Internet.

In Malaysia, however, Kit Siang contended that we have not shown sufficient concern for the fact that our Internet take-up rate has fallen sharply, especially with the introduction of time-based telephone rates by Telekom in June 1996³¹. He stressed that realistically we're far behind the others; idealistically, we should be willing to learn and progress with more open-mind, that is, to master IT so that we are as efficient and agile in the use of the new information and communication technologies as those in the advanced IT nations such as Singapore, United Kingdom and United States of America.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

³¹ Ibid.

In short, 'reality' and 'ideal' are two sides of a coin. You accept one of them, you have to accept the other side too. Kit Siang has demonstrated this through his criticisms of the IT industry and its impact on the future development of Malaysia. He has alerted us to the "ideas" of the Information Age and the "reality" of living and growing up in the Information Technology (IT)-based society at the turn of the century. He is in some ways a living example of someone who not only dares to dream but also dares to act. He has urged that, "All schools be online by 2000 and through the IT revolutions develop the 'New DAP/New Generation' for the DAP's reform, and create the "Smart Community" for the campaign on "One Family, One Computer". He has also advocated the "Abandon ISA Mentality" to facilitate greater press freedom and the dissemination of new knowledge and information. It remains, however, to be seen if his words and deeds will bear fruit in the years to come.

As a statesman and a well-known Opposition leader and a controversial politician, Kit Siang is of course a very daring person in speaking out his mind. He is resolute, decisive, firm and full of confidence in his speeches and statements. His ideas and paradigms are always new, challenging, critical and expressive. He is also famous for his ability to exaggerate certain issues, skillfully manipulating issues to draw public attention and awareness, in favor of debating – either inside or outside the Parliament. He was once accused by a politician who denounced that “the DAP and Lim Kit Siang are the biggest obstacles to national unity, and that without the DAP and him, national unity would have succeeded”³². However, Kit Siang has something to say about this, that is, “If Dr Mahathir’s diagnosis of the ills of Malaysian nation building is correct, then the solution is very easy. Ban the DAP, and put me back in the detention camp – and hey presto! Like magic, national unity in Malaysian is created”.

From here, it is observed that Kit Siang’s statements are sometimes humorous yet sarcastic (even caustic). When emphasizing a point, he always utilizes his hand gestures and body language to express it. While debating or speaking in the Parliament, his voice tone is extremely loud and high, accompanied by sharp and ‘shocking’ words that he often used. His confidence about himself and his own ideas sometimes gives the impression of that he is indeed ‘arrogant’. Invariably, this always happens especially he is trying very hard to articulate his opinion and to clarify the roles

³² Lim Kit Siang, *Malaysia – in the Dangerous 80’s*, Petaling Jaya : DAP, 1982, p. 46.

and functions played by his party. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he was once labelled as the 'fanatic follower of democracy'³³.

Nearly all injustices or weaknesses of the Government have been raised by Kit Siang. A sampling of these aspects are recorded in books such as 'Malaysia – Crisis of Identity', 'Time Bombs in Malaysia', and 'Battle for Democracy in Malaysia'. They cover a spectrum of issues, ranging from national problems which affect public's interest (for example, nation building and unity amongst races) to specific focus problems such as the Maika Scandal, Economic Crisis, and Haze Concern, including even mundane problems such as traffic jams and rubbish. Seemingly, therefore, Kit Siang is a 24-hour 'watch-dog' for his party, the government and the people, with few rewards that should have made him a very rich man!

'One Statement A day' has become Kit Siang's habitual call since many years ago³⁴. Actually, on hindsight analysis, the one or two statements by him are often not empty ideas. In effect, his ideas are quite constructive with supportive evidents. They contain clear argument and viable solutions to certain doubts or problems raised by him³⁵. In this way, he has garnered a lot of public support and sympathy for his cause, even though not all may agree with him, especially in the ways he does things in the party.

His out-spoken political character has caused problems for himself and the party. Treading on sensitive issues, considered by the government as 'causing the danger to racial relationship', and threatening religious harmony, Kit Siang has been detained

³³ Wong Ching Wei, op-cit., p. 104.

³⁴ Known by conversation with Kit Siang's comrade, Dr Tan Seng Giaw.

under the ISA (Internal Security Act) twice, from May 1969 till October 1970, and again from October 1987 till April 1988. But he looks back with little regret, knowing that his speeches and ideas are challenging³⁵. He said, "I challenge the authorities to prove that I have used the words as alleged. I admit, however, that I have been strongly critical of the government's "One Language, One Culture" policy for its having ignored the multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural realities and sensitivities in Malaysia. My criticisms stem from my conviction that the task of nation – building is not well-served by any narrow, sectarian pursuit or a 'One-language, One-culture' policy which can only intensify racial and national disunity". He reiterated his belief that " In any situations, under the purview of the constitution and in the parameter of democracy, criticisms of the government and its policies should not be regarded as 'causing the racial sentiment' in anyway". This, in fact, is a useful insight into Lim's political belief and consistency of political advocacy in his search for a "Malaysian Malaysia".

Towards this end, for more than 32 years, Kit Siang has tried to make a life by what he and other people think and speak, confirming Winston Churchill's wisdom that *"One makes a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give"*. In fact, we can say that Kit Siang's political contributions can be viewed as a kind of art, that is, the art of perseverance, sacrifice, and danger for the sake of political ideas. As R M Rilke said, *"Works of art are indeed always products, of having-been-in-danger-of-having-gone-to-the-very end in an experience, to where man can go no further"*. The unfair treatment given by the government in the "Operation Lalang" is illustrative of what Lim has called 'social injustice'. Stressing that his political comments were fair and

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The Real Reason, Petaling Jay: DAP, 1982, p.3.

correct, without any racial sentiment in them, he said that the speeches and statements given by UMNO leaders in their mass-gathering were far more racially sensitive. In this regard, he is always questioning³⁷, "Why the DAP MPs are being caught when and they are still far away from any action?"

The bravado of Kit Siang is illustrated by his numerous challenges to open debate and even "legal recourse" to Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, Dato Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik (the MCA leader), and Datuk Samy Vellu (the MIC leader). For example, when Liong Sik accused him of being a corrupted person, he contended that if this accusation was true, then Liong Sik would have defeated him easily in the election. On the contrary, he laughed at the MCA which he claims, has always depended on Malay votes to win its election³⁸. He also contended that the MCA should contest against the DAP in areas where the Chinese constitutes more than 60% of the total voters³⁹. According to Kit Siang, MCA did not and will never gain any positive support from the Chinese. In 1990 election, MCA only gain 25% of the total Chinese votes⁴⁰. At one time, when UMNO asked, "What do the Chinese really want?", Kit Siang replied that, "What they requested is very simple, the same and fair position and status as other citizens of Malaysia." Certainly, this kind of attitude and presentation style would be considered as inappropriate and sometimes dangerous, especially in a multi-racial country like Malaysia. Of course, the Malays who usually prefer a more moderate and softer view would definitely reject this type of personality and blunt approach.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 30.

³⁸ Nanyang Siang Pau, 15 November, 1993.

³⁹ Nanyang Siang Pau, 29 November, 1993.

⁴⁰ Nanyang Siang Pau, 15 November, 1993.

Besides his out-spoken quality, Lim also likes to insult his political opponents sarcastically. He had challenged Lim Liong Sik for more than 22 times, due to some 'small-matter' issues⁴¹. He thought that Liong Sik didn't have the 'qualification' or 'quality' to debate with him⁴², and in order to maintain the standard of political forum in Malaysia, he would feel ashamed and funny if he would have a debate with him⁴³. Perhaps, too, from a different perspective (and a less sympathetic one), one would hasten to label Kit Siang as "arrogant" and "without sensitivity". And continuing his attack on Liong Sik, regarding the 1992's disasters, Lim said that this was due to human factors, no accountability and management problems. According to him, what the government could have done was to set up an investigation committee for any disaster, ensuring that Dr Mahathir appoints Liong Sik as the "Minister of Disaster Investigation", and placing other candidates who are more capable to take over Liong Sik's post as the Minister of Transport⁴⁴.

Samy Vellu was not spared his sarcasm, too. When the national blackout occurred in 1992, Kit Siang criticized Samy Vellu as an irresponsible minister who was short-sighted, 'tiada otak' (without brain) and without a scientific view. This was because the Minister had said that the blackout was due to 'God's will'! Lim said that Samy Vellu is a vision-less Minister, and attending tuition classes would teach him about 'What is Vision 2020', and to avoid using 'God's name to cover one's own mistakes'⁴⁵!

⁴¹ Nanyang Siang Pau, September 6, 1993.

⁴² Nanyang Siang Pau, August 15, 1993.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lim Kit Siang, Battle for Democracy in Malaysia, Petaling Jaya : DAP 1992, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Sin Chew Jit Poh, October 5, 1992.

Teasing Liong Sik on his public campaign trails, Kit Siang was amused that Liong Sik had to go everywhere to 'char kway teow' (fry rice noodles) in order to collect some donations for the TAR College Fund. He added that Mahathir never had to make 'mee goreng' (fried noodles), and Samy Vellu need not make 'roti canai' (a pan-fried Indian bread) to collect funds and grassroots support⁴⁶! This type of terse humour is loaded with racial insinuations that often associate a specific trade occupation with a particular racial group as well.

Also, when he was criticized by a local journalist named Kunta Kinte (a columnist for *Berita Harian*) in his essay called "Kit Siang dares to criticize, but never accept any criticism", Kit Siang fought back by calling the writer names like 'penulis pelacur' (prostitute writer), 'penulis najis nasional' (Nasional shit writer) and 'penulis pelacur utama di negara kita' (our country's principal prostitute writer)⁴⁷. For Gurunathan who left DAP, he called him a 'rotten apple'. Besides that, Kit Siang also called the Chief Minister of Penang, Dr Koh Tsu Koon a 'young bat' (*Kelawar muda*) who was born with a 'silver political spoon',⁴⁸ since he ascended his political career quite fast through Lim Chong Yew's patronage as the then Chief Minister of Penang. Of course, these blunt, rude and derogatory remarks merely showed the sarcastic humour and personalized insensitivity of Kit Siang to fellow human beings for who he may not have any regards at all. Perhaps, this is yet another insight into his arrogance?

In spite of his apparent insensitivities in human relations, as the Opposition leader in Parliament, Kit Siang once praised the 1994 Budget, announced by Finance

⁴⁶ Lim Kit Siang, op-cit., p. 39.

⁴⁷ *Berita Harian*, August 9, 1993.

Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for allocating 1.4 billion ringgit to solve the 'low-cost housing' problems in Malaysia⁴⁹. His uncanny ability of obtaining the "truths" (e.g. in terms of actual facts and figures) was again demonstrated on 18th October, 1993, when the Supreme Court announced that Kit Siang's observation of Bank Pertanian's one million ringgit loss was correct, withdrawing its order in restraining Kit Siang from intervening and speaking out⁵⁰. In this lawsuit, Bank Pertanian had to pay cost to Kit Siang⁵¹, making him the first politician in Malaysia to get compensation through the court by asserting his rights to free speech and truthful facts. Indeed, this is also a testimony of his righteousness – fighting for what he believes to be right!

Regarding the economic situation faced by the government recently, Kit Siang had urged the use of the word 'economic crisis' rather than 'economic problems'. In the recent issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review, the Executive Director of the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), Tun Daim Zainuddin, had said that Malaysia was facing 'the worst crisis since the Second World War' and 'the primary task of the NEAC is to restore confidence'⁵². This again has proven that Kit Siang's previous viewpoints are correct⁵³. In fact, what he had said was, "Firstly, discerning Malaysians would have noticed that the words 'economic crisis' have not appeared in the local mass media in the past few months, having become the new 'sensitive' words in the country. In their articulations, government leaders and the local mass media use the term 'economic problems', and this is why the MCA has organized seminars not on the nations' 'economic crisis' but its 'economic problems'. Secondly, it is a sad commentary that

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Utusan Malaysia, November 2, 1993.

⁵⁰ Sin Chew Jit Poh, October 19, 1993.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lim Kit Siang, SG's Speeches and Statements, February/March 1998, Petaling Jaya : DAP.

eight months into the national economic 'crisis', we are still talking about restoration of confidence as the 'first primary task', although the Prime Minister has already given assurance that the national economic recovery would be in six months. Of course, the Transport Minister, the MCA President, could not help but support the forecast, reducing the recovery period to three months"!

Kit Siang's own prediction is far from those of Dr Mahathir and Dr Ling Liong Sik. He is more realistic and avoids putting a recovery time frame, stressing that the "roots" of the crisis must be dealt with first. His colleagues, Tan Kok Wei (MP of Cheras), and Tan Seng Giaw (MP of Kepong) are in concert with him, hand in hand together and moving towards creating a democratic and progressive homeland – A Malaysia for All Malaysian⁵⁴ despite prevailing economic woes. As Theodore Roosevelt had said, "*The most successful politician is he who says what everybody is thinking, most often and in the loudest voice.*" And Kit Siang is exemplary of this axiom.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Interview with MP Tan Kok Wai and MP Tan Seng Giaw on February, 1998.

3. *Significant Observations*

A person's childhood and his background often determined the formative years of his early life and his personality, including his political orientations and thinking. As Erikson, who suggested that if the child is to develop a meaningful sense of personal control, or autonomy, observes, "It is necessary that he experiences over and over again that he is a person who is permitted to make choice. He has the right to choose, for example, whether to approach a visitor or to learn against his mother's knee, whether to accept offered food or reject it. At the same time, he must learn some of the boundaries of self-determination... that there are walls he cannot climb... objects out of reach, and about all, commands enforced by powerful adults⁵⁵."

When growing up, Kit Siang, for example, was actively involved himself in various academic and non-academic activities in the school. These types of experiences had provided the important stimulus for his political motivation and development. Mastering three languages – Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin (and other dialects) has also fortified his communication ability and confidence, endowing him with uniqueness to operate in a multi-racial political environment effectively. His LLB (Hons) degree from University of London in 1976 has reinforced his professional credibility as a legal-minded politician who knows the law and the rights it protects. Also, his retention ability and reading capacity have made him more inquiring, penetrating, critical and knowledgeable. He is the author of his own ideas and his ideals, often overshadowing those of his party – the Demonstratic Party (DAP), some of its members

⁵⁵ E Erikson, "A Healthy Personality for Every Child : A Fact Finding Report : A Digest", in J Seidman (ed.), The Adolescent : A Back of Readings, New York : Holt, Rinchart & Winston, 1953, p. 108.

and public observers have thus labelled him an autocratic, even dictatorial, leader despite being Opposition Leader in Parliament and an effective DAP Secretary General.

The impact of one's childhood on one's adulthood is an acknowledged fact. What a child learns is a basic belief in controlling the world in general and his ability to control it in particular (political power). This belief has the most profound implications for political life. Pye, for example, in his discussion of the inability of the Burmese adult to develop stable political identities, traces the origin of this problem to childhood. He notes⁵⁶ that "Brought up to feel that he has no control over the ways in which he is treated by other ... Thus, from the time of his earlier experiences, the child exists in a world which there is no national relationship, no recognizable connection between his powers of action and choice and the things that he most desperately wants. *From the beginning* the Burmese child comes to feel unconsciously that the world is a fickle place *[He] thus learn the most present of his life.*" In this regard, of course, Kit Siang had supportive parents who, directly and indirectly, contributed well to his personality development that subsequently affected his political life later on. In essence, the formative years had carved a core of characteristics which is reflective of Kit Siang's personality, viz., the qualities of being firm, perseverance in the face of adversity, analytic and idealistic, vocal and articulate on issues and problems that matter to the general public and the country.

Over the years, Kit Siang has matured as a man and an effective politician who is now a household name. His previous childhood environments provided him the

⁵⁶ Stanley Allen Renshon, Psychological Needs and Political Behaviour : A Theory of Personality and Political Efficacy, New York : The Free Press, 1974, p. 63.

backdrop for developing his stoic personality. And his current and party environments continue to shape and reshape the influences that affect his political personality. As Lazarus had observed, "The sources of man's behaviour (his observable action) and his subjective experience (such as thoughts, feelings and wishes) are two-fold. The external stimuli that impinge on him and the internal dispositions that result from the interaction between inherited physiological characteristics and experience with the world. When we focus on the former, we note that a person acts in such-and-such a way because of certain qualities in a situation. For example, he attacks a friend because the friend insulted him... It is evident that a man's behaviour varies greatly from moment to moment, from circumstance to circumstance, changing with the changing conditions to which he is exposed".

The fact remains that as we recognize the dependency of one's behaviour on outside stimuli, we are also aware that it cannot be accounted for on the basis of the external situation alone, but that in fact it must arise partly from personal characteristics⁵⁷. Kit Siang's case is illustrative of this phenomenon, too. As Walter Lippmann admits⁵⁸, "To talk about politics without reference to human beings... is just the deepest error in our political thinking." And to talk about Kit Siang – the man and his political philosophy or orientation, without acknowledging him as a human being too, is to miss the point that behind his many unpenetrating, serious and often stern personality lies a nationalistic politician who cares about what happens to people and society, class status, race and religion aside.

⁵⁷ Freed I Greenstein, Personalities and Politics, Chicago : Markham Publishing Company, 1969, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.