

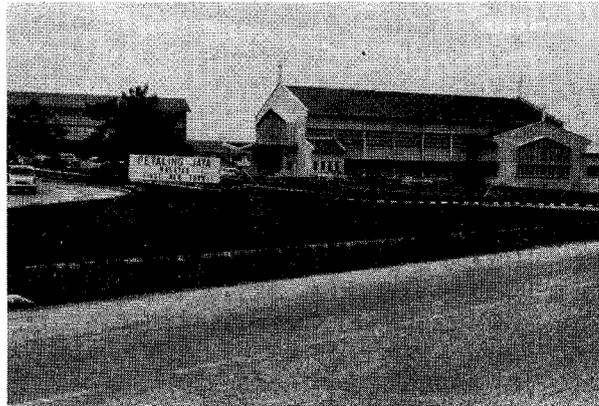
GDN-1
 Modern Malayan Suburb

Kuala Lumpur
 Malaya
 2 May 1961

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
 Institute of Current World Affairs
 366 Madison Avenue
 New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Malaya's newness as a nation is nowhere more evident than in Petaling Jaya. Seven miles out of the new capital, Kuala Lumpur, on a new divided highway, lies Petaling Jaya, Malaya's first new town. The turn-off is appropriately marked by a new church and an ultra modern office building. On my first drive through the curved streets, I found it difficult to distinguish Petaling Jaya from Park Forest, or any of its hundreds of other American suburban counterparts. There is the same newness, the same tract-house development, the same sameness characteristic of much of American suburbia. Unlike its American counterpart, however, Petaling Jaya is a paradox in Malaya. It is both unique and typically Malayan. Although there is no other community like it in Malaya, it reflects the country's recent history, its orientation to industrialization, and its explosive race relations problems more clearly than do the far more numerous kampongs (villages).



"Petaling Jaya, Malaya's First
 New Town"

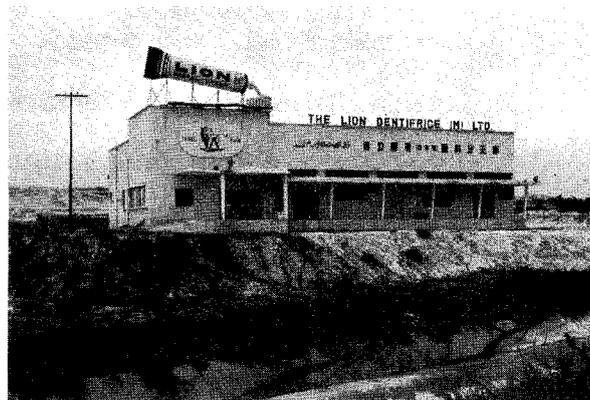
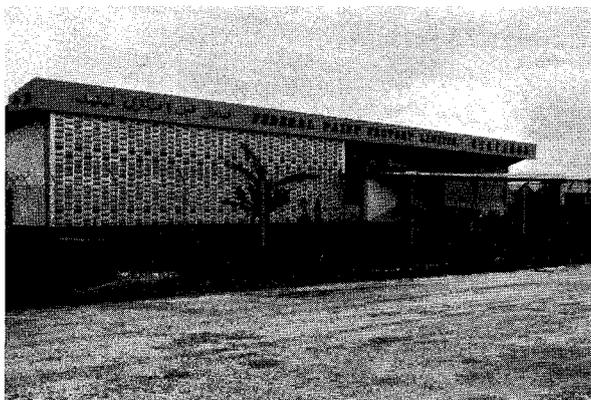
As many communities in modern Malaya, Petaling Jaya was born during the Emergency, the Communists' bid to take the country by terrorism from 1948 to 1960. A major line of attack on the terrorists was the resettlement of squatters. These small farmers, largely Chinese, provided (willingly and unwillingly*) supplies and information for the terrorists who operated from the cover of Malaya's dense jungles. In 1952 Petaling Jaya was carved out of old rubber estate to provide a relocation center for squatters in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur. Almost as soon as the area was cleared, the demand for squatters' land gave way to the demand

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* See Han Su Yin, And The Rain My Drink, for a sensitive account of the squatters, caught between the terrorists and the police.

for a higher class of residential land. As a result, the Petaling Jaya Authority was created by federal ordinance in 1954. This began the work of making Petaling Jaya into a middle class residential estate. Greater peace and prosperity were also reflected in a rising demand for light industries sites. In 1956 the Authority made the decision to develop Petaling Jaya into a modern industrial-residential estate. Coinciding with the beginning of the first five-year plan, this was only a part of the general spirit of growth that was permeating the country. Now, at the beginning of the second five-year plan, Petaling Jaya is an almost completely developed estate. A modern shopping center is going up and only a few acres of land remain for either homes or factories.

Malaya's basic orientation to industrialization is also reflected in Petaling Jaya. As most of the new underdeveloped countries, Malaya is committed to a program of economic development, which means at least in part industrialization. To attract foreign capital Malaya offers such advantages as "pioneer" status that brings up to a five year moratorium. In Petaling Jaya Malaya also offers developed industrial sites. All sites are leveled, provided with water, electricity, and metalled road. Unlike many of the new nations, however, Malaya is not committed to a program of massive industrialization. Steel mills, the temples of modern industrialism, are absent from Petaling Jaya and from Malaya's development plans. Malaya is also unique among the new nations in her commitment to a laissez-faire form of industrialization. The government has consciously decided to use the unseen hand of the market place to determine the pattern of industrial growth. The only ideology expressed here is that the consumer knows best. In Petaling Jaya the unseen hand is producing a light industries structure similar to that in many western countries. Here one finds everything from paint to piano factories and from lumber mills to liquor distilleries. The latest plant to be opened with a great fling of ministers was

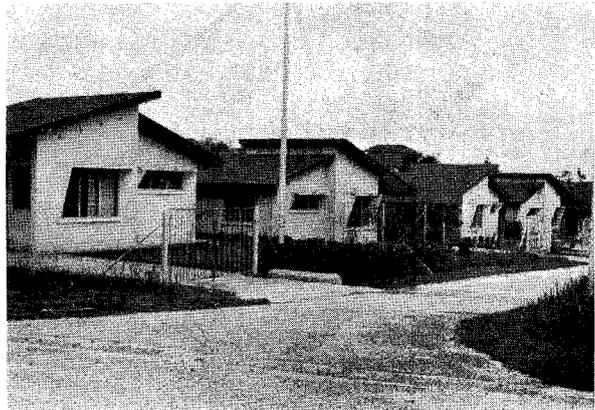


Modern Malayan
(tri-lingual) Industries

the Lion Dentifrice factory, 51% Japanese and 49% Malayan owned.

Petaling Jaya is not without its critics. In this age of criticism of laissez-faire industrialization, it is expected that Malaya's basic orientation would be criticized from the left. To Malayan Socialists Petaling Jaya is a failure. Champions of the poor, the Socialists note that what began as an estate for squatters has been bought out by the capitalists. True to their intellectual tradition, the Socialists deplore industrialization that results from the whim of the entrepreneur rather than from careful planning by a responsible authority. Here the private sector is developed while the public sector stagnates. Although many people, including most readers of The Affluent Society might agree with the tenor of this criticism, it carries little weight here. To a country hungry for investment and industries, Petaling Jaya is a great success. Criticism from the left can make little headway against this hunger and this success. Now every state wants its own Petaling Jaya and active steps are being taken to create similar estates in Perak, Johore, and Penang. Perhaps later when Malaya is more affluent, and the object of the hunger has changed, this criticism will find a more sympathetic audience; but not now.

In its communal (ethnic or racial) structure, Petaling Jaya is typical of urban Malaya. Of the town's 30,000 inhabitants about 25,000 are Chinese. The remainder is almost equally divided between Malays and Indians-and-others. Only the proportion of Indians here is roughly equal to its proportion in the total national population. The Malays are highly under-represented and the Chinese are highly over-represented. Most of the 129 shops in town are Chinese. In the new factories, most of the capital, directors, managers, and workers are Chinese. In the new Kuala Lumpur branch of the University of Malaya, located in Petaling Jaya, most of the students and staff are Chinese. The market, which gives this American-type suburb the look of a French provincial town, is largely Chinese. Significantly, the administrator of the Petaling Jaya Authority is a Malay. He is the capable Inche Osman bin Ali, a man with 23 years of varied service in the Malayan administration. All of this illustrates the most



Malayan tract-houses; weakening of the Chinese extended family?

explosive problem of the new nation. Its Malay population, 50% of the total, is predominantly rural and agrarian. The Chinese population, 37% of the total, is predominantly urban and commercial. (Indians make up about 11% of the population.) A protective policy, introduced by the British, keeps the upper levels of the administration staffed largely by Malays. The greatest problem for this new nation is to build a viable political unit out of this great diversity.

There is a close connection between Malaya's communal diversity and its basic orientation to industrialization, both of which are evident in Petaling Jaya. The first is the major fact with which the government must deal. The second represents in part the government's attempt to deal with that fact. The government gives highest priority not to industrialization, but to rural development. (Petaling Jaya also hosts a cooperative college and a rural industries training center, symbols of the rural development program.) The second five-year plan is conceived as a plan to launch the rural sector into a condition of sustained growth. There is a good deal of foresight, as well as some sheer opportunism and fanaticism involved in this orientation. Economic conditions aside, the gap between the Chinese and Malay communities is already large. The differences in language, religion, and location might by themselves be sufficient to give rise to communal strife and regional block-voting which could paralyze the government in its developmental efforts. When to these differences is added the great difference of economic position, the mixture becomes explosive. If the economic differences between the Chinese and Malays can be reduced, in the course of which the Malays will be brought into closer contact with modern urban life, the prospects for political stability will be considerably enhanced. As it is the harmony that does exist between the communities is one of the most significant and respected achievements of the new Malayan leadership. Unless a breakthrough is made in the rural sector, it may also be one of the most volatile achievements. This is all largely conspicuous by the homogeneity of Petaling Jaya. Here there are essentially no Malays.

Unique among Malayan towns, Petaling Jaya has no elective body, nor have there been any serious moves by the residents to form one. This illustrates two features of modern Malaya. The first is what I choose to call development by bureaucracy. Though Malaya's industrial development is of the laissez-faire type, the total development plan is a creature of agencies of the central government. Appropriately, Malaya's first new industrial town is a planned bureaucratic venture. It is governed by an appointed body. Although two of the members of this government are to be selected from the residents of the town, this is still a community whose needs are attended to in a rational, if

paternalistic, manner by the state bureaucracy. After the town reaches 50,000, a town council might be formed - by the state government. Such planned towns are not uncommon today, but they are a far cry from the fiercely free towns of western Europe that played an instrumental role in the early development of industrial capitalism. I do not attach any value to this observation. The problems are different today. The entrepreneur in Petaling Jaya does not have to fight for independence to be able to run his business according to his own desires. He merely has to fill out an application, make a few careful calculations and he is provided with a developed industrial site in a modern economy offering all conveniences plus political stability. Nonetheless the difference in town structures does exist and it suggests that the course of industrialization here will not follow that of industrialization in the west during the last century. I hope to be able to say more about this in future letters.

Second, this lack of an elective body reflects what appears to be the quiescence of the Chinese community here. The Chinese seem to have accepted a political situation that puts them at a formal disadvantage in government, education, and even in some economic pursuits. This has resulted in some agitation for more equal treatment, but not nearly as much as might be expected. At present there are three forces which I think might account for this quiescence. In large part it can be attributed to the acceptance by all communities of national unity as the most important (and perhaps most precarious) value in modern Malaya. Second it can be attributed to the ease with which entrepreneurs generally accept any political situation that allows them to make a profit. In Malaya entrepreneur and Chinese are almost synonyms. Finally there is a more pervasive, but more subtle, force which is amply evident in Petaling Jaya. For the moment I shall call this bourgeoisification, though that is a loaded term. What is most evident in Petaling Jaya today is comfort. The inhabitants of these single family tract-houses are comfortable white-collar workers who utilize their energies primarily in developing their tastes as consumers. (Even the ancient and powerful Chinese extended family seems to be giving way to the independent nuclear family here.) These people own their homes



In the shadow of Federal Building
a modern shopping center within
a year.

and drive automobiles. They buy stoves, refrigerators, air-conditioners, and hi-fi sets on the installment plan. There are as many organization men per square foot here as in Park Forest. And they all go to church on Sunday. The town's many churches are as new and prosperous-looking as the modern government buildings. These are the people who least of all wish to see a split in the government that might jeopardize their way of life. If their own sense of comfort were not sufficient to make them cautious, they have close at hand in Indonesia an example of the fearful chaos that Malay-Chinese conflict could bring.

Seen from this picture window, the only thing needed to enhance the already enviable political stability of Malaya is more Malays in Petaling Jaya. This might be a sensitive indicator of the success of the rural development plan. Increased rural incomes will almost certainly result in increased migration to the towns. If the migrants become a partially unemployed urban proletariat, the plan will have succeeded only partially. This would be indicative of an increased imbalance in income distribution and would certainly result in increased social, economic, and political instability. On the other hand, if the migrants become inhabitants of some Petaling Jaya, it will be an indication that Malaya is achieving the balanced growth it desires, and the prospects for continued political stability will be considerably enhanced.



Prosperity in the churches, too.

Sincerely,

Gayl D. Ness
Gayl D. Ness