

The misconception of political lessons : how UMNO perceives the fall of LDP in Japan

著者	Takiyuddin Ismail Muhamad, Abdul Hamid Ahmad Fauzi
権利	Copyrights 日本貿易振興機構 (ジェトロ) アジア経済研究所 / Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) http://www.ide.go.jp
journal or publication title	IDE Discussion Paper
volume	377
year	2012-12-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2344/1205

IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments

IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 377

The Misconception of Political Lessons: How UMNO Perceives the Fall of LDP In Japan

Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail*

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid**

December 2012

Abstract

2012 marks the thirtieth anniversary of Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP). This article argues that the strong relationship between Malaysia and Japan is stimulated by symbiotic ties binding together both countries' respective major political parties, viz. the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). UMNO, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003), derived political lessons from developments affecting LDP in Japan. Two forms of lessons may be discerned. First, emulation of Japan's success in economic development, which become the basis of LEP launched in 1981. Second, on which our article focuses, lessons from the failure of LDP to retain power twice in 1993 and 2009. Since 1993, DP's defeat has been a poignant reminder for UMNO to be in alert mode in facing any electoral possibility. When LDP was again ousted from power in 2009, UMNO was a most psychologically affected party owing to the unprecedented setback it suffered at Malaysia's Twelfth General Elections (GE) of 2008. Yet, although LDP's reversal of fortunes served as a landmark for UMNO in situating changes to its trajectory since 1999, the analogical reasoning and political lessons applied by UMNO leaders were, to a large extent, flawed. Arguably, politicians frequently do misjudge in analogising between different situations which at a glance seem to be comparable.

Keywords: exports, information technology, FDI

* Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the Centre of History, Politics and Strategy, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia. The author stayed at IDE from October 1 to November 29, 2012 as a Visiting Researcher.

** Associate Professor of Political Science at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia.

The Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) is a semigovernmental, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute, founded in 1958. The Institute merged with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) on July 1, 1998. The Institute conducts basic and comprehensive studies on economic and related affairs in all developing countries and regions, including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Eastern Europe.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute of Developing Economies of any of the views expressed within.

INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN

©2012 by Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the IDE-JETRO.

THE MISCONCEPTION OF POLITICAL LESSONS: HOW UMNO PERCEIVES THE FALL OF LDP IN JAPAN

Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail*
Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid*

Santayana's aphorism must be reversed: too often it is those who *can* remember the past who are condemned to repeat it.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.¹

ABSTRACT

2012 marks the thirtieth anniversary of Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP). This article argues that the strong relationship between Malaysia and Japan is stimulated by symbiotic ties binding together both countries' respective major political parties, viz. the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). UMNO, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003), derived political lessons from developments affecting LDP in Japan. Two forms of lessons may be discerned. First, emulation of Japan's success in economic development, which become the basis of LEP launched in 1981. Second, on which our article focuses, lessons from the failure of LDP to retain power twice in 1993 and 2009. Since 1993, LDP's defeat has been a poignant reminder for UMNO to be in alert mode in facing any electoral possibility. When LDP was again

* Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, Ph.D. is a Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the Centre of History, Politics and Strategy, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia. He expresses gratitude to sponsors of this research: the Sumitomo Foundation, Japan and Young Researcher Fellowship Scheme, UKM. He would also like to acknowledge the support of Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO) Japan for providing him opportunity as a visiting researcher from October to November 2012.

*Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia. He extends appreciation to the Sumitomo Foundation, Japan and USM's Incentive Grant scheme for funding this research.

The authors would like to acknowledge Masashi Nakamura, Khoo Boo Teik and Nobuhiro Aizawa, all from the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE)-JETRO, Japan, and Soda Naoki of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS), for engaging in stimulating discussions towards the preparation of this article. Any remaining errors and omissions are wholly the responsibility of the authors.

¹ Quoted in Ernest R. May, *Lessons of the past: The Use and Misuse of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 179.

ousted from power in 2009, UMNO was a most psychologically affected party owing to the unprecedented setback it suffered at Malaysia's Twelfth General Elections (GE) of 2008. Yet, although LDP's reversal of fortunes served as a landmark for UMNO in situating changes to its trajectory since 1999, the analogical reasoning and political lessons applied by UMNO leaders were, to a large extent, flawed. Arguably, politicians frequently do misjudge in analogising between different situations which at a glance seem to be comparable.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of Malaysia's 12th General Elections (GE) of 2008, which saw the ruling National Front (BN: *Barisan Nasional*) coalition dispossessed of its dignified two-thirds parliamentary majority and conceding defeat in five states to a hastily assembled People's Pact (PR: *Pakatan Rakyat*) coalition, a quote frequently employed by leaders and supporters of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) is Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana's remark: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.² Ironically, in that very same year of BN's most disastrous electoral performance, a group of scholars studying dominant party systems had reminded parties like UMNO that the primary challenge confronting them lies in their willingness of 'learning to lose'.³ Although BN still won the 12th GE, and despite the fact that the majority Malay-Muslim support for UMNO remained strong,⁴ instantaneous reaction from conservative UMNO quarters such as former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, known to be obsessed

² Cf. Najib Razak, 'Junjung tradisi, zahir perubahan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 16 October 2009; Mahathir Mohamad, 'Democracy in Political Parties', 23 November 2009, <http://chedet.co.cc/chedetblog/2009/11/democracy-in-political-parties.html> (accessed 12 June 2010).

³ Diane K. Mauzy and Shane J. Barter, 'Learning to lose? Not if UMNO can help it', in Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong (eds.), *Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose* (London: Routledge, 2008), 211.

⁴ Edmund Terence Gomez, 'Umno still strong in Malay heartland', *Malaysiakini*, 4 June 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/83920> (accessed 22 July 2012).

with retention of the symbolic two-thirds majority, appeared to indicate the onset of a previously unheard of defeatist mentality within UMNO.

Hence, this article looks at UMNO's application of political lessons derived from the downfall of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan on 30 August 2009, in the wake of Malaysia's changed political scenario following the disastrous results befalling UMNO and BN in March 2008. LDP's loss of the reins of government slightly a year after Malaysia's 12th GE, at a time when UMNO was struggling to rehabilitate itself, greatly affected the present crop of UMNO leaders. Throughout 2010 and 2011, UMNO President-cum-Prime Minister Najib Razak repeatedly reminded UMNO to take heed of LDP's fall from power. UMNO also invited former LDP politician who defected to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Tamura Katoro, to share his experience on LDP's change of fortune. In his meeting with Yukio Hatoyama, Japanese Prime Minister from DPJ, in January 2010, Najib also broached the question of factors contributing to LDP's defeat to his counterpart.

Our discussion is divided into three parts. The first part elaborates the concept of 'political lesson' or also known as 'analogical reasoning'. The second part deals with relevant comparisons between UMNO and LDP, exploring how the good relationship between Malaysia and Jepun had been boosted at the dominant party level. Finally, the most important part of this article deals with how UMNO perceives LDP's downfall since 1993. We look in particular at how UMNO leaders and members utilised analogical reasoning in an effort to contextualise UMNO's present predicament.

POLITICAL LEARNING AND POLITICAL LESSONS

Political learning is defined by Nancy Bermeo as 'the process through which people modify their political beliefs and tactics as a result of severe crises, frustrations, and dramatic

changes in the environment'. According to her, 'crises often force people to reevaluate the ideas that they have used as guides to action in the past'.⁵ Within this context, UMNO as a comparable entity is seen as being in crisis mode after the 12th GE. In its self-introspection, UMNO is compelled to refer to the vicissitude of LDP, also arguably in crisis mode, following its defeat in 2009.

International relations scholars in the United States of America (USA) developed the concept of political lessons in their research into how American decision makers learned from history in framing contemporary and future policies. Two path-breaking works in this direction are the studies by Ernest May⁶ and by Robert Jervis.⁷ To May, Jervis and other researchers, a consensus has emerged that international history serves as the most vital resource for the powers that be. Thus, policy makers are often influenced by history and frequently resort to analogical deduction from past events in projecting and devising present and future programmes. Usually, however, such historical application and analogical reasoning have been subject to shallow contextual usage, poorly chosen methodology and overgeneralisation. The limited context in which such applications operate is evidenced by their practitioner's tendency to confine their analyses to images and facts acquired at first impression.⁸ Such a myopic inclination often drives decision makers to formulate faulty hypotheses, due to inadequate information to interpret factual happenings in the real world.⁹

But when do the decision makers then apply political lessons? Scholars generally treat 'perceived lessons of the past' as assuming more significance in critical or novel situations for

⁵ Nancy Bermeo, 'Democracy and Lessons of Dictatorship', *Comparative Politics*, 24, no.3 (1992), p. 274.

⁶ May, "*Lessons of the past: The Use and Misuse of History*."

⁷ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁸ See also David H. Petraeus, 'Lesson of History and Lessons of Vietnam', *Parameter*, XVI, 3, (1986), p. 44; Khong Y.F, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam decisions of 1965* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.12.

⁹ May, "*Lessons of the past: The Use and Misuse of History*", especially Preface and chapter VII; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, chapter 6, especially pp. 217-218 and 281-282.

which there is lack of precedence.¹⁰ Within this context, the denial of BN's two-thirds majority in 2008 could be regarded as unprecedented for UMNO as the ruling party. The most important question however is: Can the application of political lessons, hitherto overwhelmingly applied by American scholars to fit American experiences, be judiciously undertaken in different national and political party contexts i.e. that of UMNO and LDP? As May argues, 'examples from other countries could also be cited' as a source of learning.¹¹ Research by Zimmerman and Axelrod for example analyses how the Soviet Union regime heeded lessons of the Vietnam War in investigating its foreign policy. To them, 'one's perception can be influenced by one's experience.'¹² Based on such precedence, we are therefore of the view that a nation state's political and historical developments may not only become lessons for decision makers of that particular country, but can also be benefited by policy makers from other states.

UMNO AND LDP: A NEGLECTED MODEL OF COMPARISON

In the context of political lessons, analogy is 'a comparison between one thing and another, where two things are held to exhibit structural similarities in some or all of their properties'.¹³ This definition is directly relevant in depicting UMNO and LDP as a neglected model of comparison in analyses of dominant parties. On why such a comparison has hitherto been marginal might owe to the differential fact that LDP operates within a democratic Japan, while UMNO exists within Malaysia's semi-democratic paradigm. Researchers have thus been more comfortable comparing Japan with other 'uncommon democracies' such as

¹⁰ Houghton, D. P, 'The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign-Policy Situations', *British Journal of Political Science*, 26, no. 4 (1996), p. 525; Petraeus, 'Lesson of History and Lessons of Vietnam', p. 44.

¹¹ May, "*Lessons of the past: The Use and Misuse of History*", p. x.

¹² William Zimmerman and Robert Axelrod, The "lessons" of Vietnam and Soviet Foreign Policy, *World Politics*, 34, no. 1 (1981), p. 2.

¹³ Houghton, 'The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign-Policy Situations', p. 524.

Sweden, Italy, Israel and Germany.¹⁴ Malaysian parties, on the other hand, are levelled at par with parties of other semi-democratic regimes, such as that of the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore.¹⁵ We nonetheless prefer argument that the logic of comparing political systems does not necessitate that subjects be of the same class.¹⁶ Available literature on dominant party systems has numerously classified dominant parties into narrower sub-types. Some scholars adopt the view that such categorisation restricts 'comparative imagination'¹⁷ and is potentially conducive to conceptual confusion.¹⁸ Following Pempel,¹⁹ we regard both UMNO and LDP as 'dominant conservative regimes' i.e. regimes that have ruled for such a prolonged period that conservatism as an ideology has been firmly institutionalised in their political practices. Herein lies the underlying theme of this article: studying the interaction between reformism and conservatism in two dominant conservative regimes currently undergoing reform fatigue.

For analytical purposes, let us highlight a few similarities between both parties. First, both parties were founded by the same generation of political leaders. LDP was established in 1955 whereas UMNO, though founded nine years earlier, entered the domestic electoral fray in 1955. Second, both parties are heritage parties, which in UMNO's case is served by its position as the party that fought for national independence. Third, both parties drove the

¹⁴ Cf. T.J. Pempel (ed.), *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Cf. Dan Slater, 'Strong-state Democratization in Malaysia and Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, 23, no. 2 (2012), pp. 19-33.

¹⁶ E. Gene De Felice, 'Comparison Misconceived: Common Nonsense in Comparative Politics', *Comparative Politics*, 13, no. 1 (1980), pp. 123-124.

¹⁷ Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong, 'Dominant parties, dominant party systems, and their transitions', in Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong (eds.), *Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 2-4.

¹⁸ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.13-14.

¹⁹ T. J. Pempel, 'Learning to lose is for losers: The Japanese LDP's reform struggle', in Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong (eds.), *Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 111.

nation state along the developmental state orientation.²⁰ Fourth, both parties were at the commanding heights of nation states well-known for an Asian-style democracy which emphasised stability, continuity and consensus – elements which later formed bases for the Asian Values discourse popularised in the mid-1980s by both parties' leaders.

Fifth, both parties, in holding power for relatively lengthy durations, had successfully forged 'epochs', whose traits are as outlined by Maurice Duverger.²¹ In other words, it would be quite out of place to discuss Japan vis-à-vis Malaysia without mentioning the role of LDP and UMNO. Sixth, as stressed by Manjit Bhatia; 'Both Malaysia and Japan are in essence one-party states [in which] structures and institutions of patron-client relations are entrenched, with all the accouterments of factionalism, machine politics, corruption, cronyism, nepotism, patrimonialism, populism, fictive kinship and brokerage'.²² The major influence upon such conditions is the nexus connecting politics and business. The involvement of business concerns in Japanese politics is crucial to the formation of the iron triangle between LDP politicians-bureacracy and vested interests.²³ UMNO, on its part, controls business activities directly or indirectly via various corporate asset management techniques. This is among the most significant parallels available to both UMNO and LDP through intricate interlocking mechanisms between business and politics.²⁴

²⁰ For the case of Japan, see Chalmers Johnson, 'The Developmental State: Odyssey of a concept', in Meredith Woo-Cumings (ed), *The Developmental State* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 32-60. For Malaysia, see Abdul Rahman Embong, 'Developmentalist State in Malaysia: Its Origin, Nature and Contemporary Transformation' in Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meerman dan Abdul Rahman Embong (eds.), *Globalization & National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies & IKMAS, 2008), pp. 27-58.

²¹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1963), pp. 308-309.

²² Manjit Bhatia, 'Malaysia's new premier: Altered stakes', 13 November 2003, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/EK13Ae06.html (accessed 23 August 2012).

²³ Cf. Richard Colignon and Chikako Usui, 'The Resilience of Japan's Iron Triangle', *Asian Survey*, 41, no. 5 (2001), pp. 865-895.

²⁴ Cf. Jomo K.S., quoted in 'Can Anyone Save Malaysia?', *Asiaweek*, 28 August 1998, p. 23; Khoo Boo Teik, 'The Real Threat To Malaysia's Stability', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 18 November 1999,

Along similar lines, in administering the state, both UMNO and LDP work hand in glove with a powerful burueaucracy friendly to the ruling party. Such understanding is based on the presumption that it is advisable to harmonise relations between government and big business in a non-antagonistic way. Malaysia, for instance, established the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) as a mirror of its powerful counterpart in Japan. Existence of Malaysia Inc. and Japan Inc., regardless of orientational differences between their structures,²⁵ renders both political systems susceptible to problems of inertia and malaise, hence throttling any endeavour at systemic reform.

Seventh, in spite of their positions as dominant parties, UMNO and LDP allow opposition challenges to filter through the political system not merely as ‘fronts’ to legitimise authoritarian politics.²⁶ Eighth, the support base for both UMNO and LDP is situated in rural constituencies, thus giving rise to such neo-patrimonialistic practices as dispensation of patronage, clientilism and pork barrel politics. Although winds of change have been observable in Japan since the 2009 elections which saw LDP losing its safe rural base to DPJ, observers tend to view such developments as ephemeral.²⁷ Finally, despite the association of UMNO and LDP party-states with an agenda full of ‘menus of manipulation’, both are still distinguished by a cohesive organisational structure, an uncanny ability to accommodate motley demands and an amazing perseverance in clinging to power, admittedly assisted by disarray in the opposition forces.

<http://aliran.com/archives/highi9911a.html>; Khoo Boo Teik, ‘Look, who’s afraid of a second coalition?’, *Malaysiakini*, 25 February 2001,

<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/1047> (both accessed 11 October 2012).

²⁵ Lee Poh Ping, ‘Japan Incorporated’ And Its Relevance To Malaysia’, in Jomo K.S. (ed.), *Mahathir Economic Policies* (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 1988), pp. 35-37.

²⁶ William Case, ‘Umno Paramountcy: A Report on Single-Party Dominance in Malaysia’, *Party Politics*, 2, no. 1 (1996), p. 116.

²⁷ See Steven Reed, ‘New ballgame in politics’, *The Oriental Economist*, October 2009, p. 9.

In all the afore-mentioned comparisons, the underlying factor giving them symbiotic dimensions is the penetration of party politics in the bilateral relationship between Japan and Malaysia. Literature on Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP), written from myriad aspects, has so far failed to factor in how connections between UMNO and LDP have had any impact on Malaysia – Japan bilateral relations.²⁸ Mahathir, for instance, had implicitly utilised LDP for the purpose of ideological consolidation. His platform was an understanding he developed with the influential former LDP parliamentarian, Shintaro Ishihara, who is also former mayor of Tokyo. Through their jointly authored book *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss The Coming Century* (1995), both leaders are insistent that the authoritarian dimension in Asian Values can triumph over Western ideas. The Mahathir–Ishihara collaboration was outstanding in many senses. Ishihara is well-remembered for his controversial and ultra-nationalist views at both domestic and international levels. Mahathir had in the formative stage of his political career already been branded a Malay ultra-nationalist. While his overall stance had indeed been moderated during his tenure as Prime Minister, his rightist ideas kept cropping up in his pro-Bumiputera economic policies and his avowed aversion of the political reformation foregrounded following his retirement in 2003.

Apart from that, official visits by both Malaysian and Japanese leaders would also be conventionally accompanied by 'party delegations' from BN component parties and LDP.²⁹ Thus, it is hardly surprising that the BN-UMNO led government sometimes could not hide its preferences pertaining to the ruling government in Japan. In 2000, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar frankly admitted, in commenting on LDP's victory then:

²⁸ Some important literature on the LEP are Jomo K.S., *The Sun Also Sets: Lessons from Looking East* (Petaling Jaya: INSAN, 1983); Lim Hua Sing, 'Japanese Perspectives on Malaysia's "Look East" Policy', *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1984), pp. 231-245; Kit G. Machado, 'Malaysian Cultural Relations With Japan and South Korea in The 1980s: Looking East', *Asian Survey*, 27, no. 6 (1987), pp. 638-660; Khadijah Khalid and Lee Poh Ping, *Whither the Look East Policy* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 2003).

²⁹ 'Japan's LDP representatives pay courtesy call on Ting', *The Star*, 30 August 2001.

We are very happy with the result of the election. I think they have chosen, once again, in the true tradition of Japanese who opt for stability and continuity...Our leaders are very familiar, very close with the Japanese leadership.³⁰

We are not postulating here a tangential change in Malaysia–Japan relations as a consequence of LDP’s downfall in 2009. As with LDP’s earlier defeat in 1993, relations forged on a state to state basis are hardly interrupted with the passing of baton from one ruling party to another. For instance, tangible collaborative institutions such as the Malaysian Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIT) programme cement Japan’s affirmation to raise cooperation with Malaysia via the LEP. We merely propose that insofar as extant political variables are concerned, symbiosis in relations between both countries are more conspicuous during LDP’s regime.

LDP’S DOWNFALL AND UMNO’S EMPLOYMENT OF LESSONS

This section looks in more detail at how LDP’s fall from power was made a landmark event by UMNO in its application of political lessons. We shall focus more on LDP’s most recent setback in 2009, even though we also intermittently consider lessons to be learnt from LDP’s earlier removal from power in 1993. This is in line with the scholarly perception that more recent events produce powerful predispositions with greater impact.³¹ We have discerned 16 lessons that UMNO and its supporters have employed, as enumerated and detailed in Table 1. The following discussion elaborates seven misconceptions pertaining to UMNO’s application of political lessons from LDP’s downfall in Japan.

³⁰ ‘Most Southeast Asian gov’ts welcome LDP win’, *Kyodo News International*, 26 June 2000, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Most+Southeast+Asian+gov'ts+welcome+LDP+win.-a063141546> (accessed 18 November 2011).

³¹ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p. 269.

No.	Item Lessons	Number of Citations	Figures & Individuals ³²
1	Japan changes more easily due to greater homogeneity of its society. If translated into the Malaysian context, Malays will encounter problems and the post of Prime Minister might fall into non-Malay hands	5	Noh Omar (May 2000), ³³ Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (May 2008), ³⁴ Mohd Khuzairi Ismail (September 2009), ³⁵ Zaidi Muda (September 2009), ³⁶ Daim Zainuddin (March 2012) ³⁷
2.	The need to steer away from factionalism and intra-political rivalry	4	Mahathir Mohamad (November 1994), ³⁸ Najib Razak (May 2010), ³⁹ Mustafa Kamal Yusoff (October 2010), ⁴⁰ Najib Razak (November 2011) ⁴¹
3.	That an independence party may still be rejected despite having done many good deeds	4	Rosol Wahid (September 2009), ⁴² Zaidi Muda (September 2009), ⁴³ Mohamad Annuar Arifin (January 2010), ⁴⁴ Najib Razak (November 2011) ⁴⁵
4	The pre-requisite of eradicating patronage politics, cronyism, corruption, scandals and	3	Isa Samad (June 1997), ⁴⁶ Abdullah Badawi (October

³² At times, each individual may present more than one different lesson.

³³ 'Rope in ACA, police to combat money politics', *New Straits Times*, 13 May 2000. Noh Omar is presently Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry.

³⁴ 'Ku Li: Umno is here to stay', *Sunday Star*, 11 May 2008. Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah a former UMNO Vice-President and long-time Member of Parliament for Gua Musang, Kelantan.

³⁵ Mohd Khuzairi Ismail, 'Revolusi Politik Jepun' [Japan's Political Revolution], *Utusan Malaysia*, 4 September 2009. Mohd Khuzairi is a journalist for *Utusan Malaysia*, the UMNO-linked newspaper which also functions as the main platform for party conservatives to air their views.

³⁶ Zaidi Muda, 'Mari kita pakat fikir weh' [Let us think together], 4 September 2009, <http://zaidimuda.blogspot.jp/2009/09/mari-kita-pakat-fikir.html> (accessed 12 September 2012). Zaidi Muda is Development Officer for the state constituency of Bukit Payung, Marang, Terengganu.

³⁷ 'Daim warns Chinese voters of risks of their choice', 21 March 2012, <http://www.thesundaily.my/news/327027> (accessed 25 July 2012) Daim Zainuddin was Malaysia's Minister of Finance during Mahathir's era.

³⁸ Mahathir Mohamad, 'Ucapan Dasar Perhimpunan Agung UMNO 1994' [Keynote Address to the 1994 UMNO General Assembly], 18 November 1994, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=746> (accessed 18 October 2012).

³⁹ 'It's not the time to relax, says Najib', 12 May 2010, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/5/12/nation/6243577&sec=nation> (accessed 23 February 2012).

⁴⁰ 'Jangan jadi seperti parti LDP di Jepun' [Don't be like LDP in Japan], *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 October 2010. Mustafa Kamal Yusoff is UMNO Youth Chief of Seputeh, Kuala Lumpur.

⁴¹ 'Full transcript of Bernama interview with Najib', 27 November 2011, <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/66974> (accessed 11 January 2012).

⁴² Rosol Wahid, 'Merdeka Ke 52...Dan Tumbangnya LDP Jepun' [52nd Independence Anniversary... And LDP Falls in Japan], 2 September 2009, <http://drosol.com/?p=128> (accessed 13 March 2012). Rosol Wahid is former UMNO Secretary of Terengganu.

⁴³ Zaidi Muda, 'Mari kita pakat fikir weh' [Let us think together].

⁴⁴ Mohamad Annuar Arifin, 'Anwar, 2011, 1511 dan Sejarah Melayu' [Anwar, 2011, 1511 and the Malay Annals], 19 January 2010, <http://pemudaumolarut.blogspot.jp/2010/01/anwar-2011-1511-dan-sejarah-melayu.html> (accessed 6 October 2012). Mohamad Annuar Arifin is UMNO Youth Chief of Larut, Perak.

⁴⁵ 'Full transcript of Bernama interview with Najib'.

⁴⁶ 'Usah guna parti untuk kekayaan diri' [Don't use the party to enrich oneself], *Berita Harian*, 30 June 1997. Isa Samad, a former UMNO Vice-President and long-time Chief Minister of Negeri Sembilan (1982-2004), is now state legislative assembly member for Bagan Pinang, Negeri Sembilan.

	money politics		2003), ⁴⁷ Abdul Kadir Jasin (June 2005) ⁴⁸
5	The pre-requisite of separating political from business relationships which have left UMNO under the warlordship of corporate figures, marginalising the professionals	3	Abdullah Badawi (October 1993), ⁴⁹ Kiau (February 2001), ⁵⁰ Abdul Kadir Jasin (April 2012) ⁵¹
6	The pre-requisite of approaching the people and avoiding the sense of arrogance, elitism and having lost touch with the grassroots	3	Mahathir Mohamad (September 2009), ⁵² Najib Razak (January 2010), ⁵³ Ku Seman Ku Hussein (May 2012) ⁵⁴
7	The pre-requisite of prioritising party interests rather than those of interest groups such as party warlords, king makers and power brokers	3	Abdullah Badawi (October 2003), ⁵⁵ Najib Razak (May 2010), ⁵⁶ Abdul Kadir Jasin (April 2012) ⁵⁷
8	If change of government or national leadership happens more frequently as in Japan, the country will face problems in continuity of development	3	Mahathir Mohamad (May 1997), ⁵⁸ Mohd Khuzairi Ismail (September 2009), ⁵⁹ Abang Johari Openg (April 2011) ⁶⁰
9	LDP's downfall confirms UMNO paramourcy	2	Abdullah Badawi (May 1997), ⁶¹ Napsiah Omar (June 1997) ⁶²
10	The pre-requisite to reform and not being	2	Najib Razak (May 2010), ⁶³ Najib

⁴⁷ 'Pemimpin Perlu Bersih' [Leaders Must Be Clean], *Utusan Malaysia*, 9 October 1993. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was Prime Minister of Malaysia and UMNO President from 2003 to 2009, and is still Member of Parliament for Kepala Batas, Penang.

⁴⁸ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Where truth is stranger than fiction', *Malaysian Business*, 16 June 2005. Veteran journalist and pro-UMNO conservative blogger Abdul Kadir Jasin was Group Editor-in-Chief of New Straits Times Press Berhad (1988-2000) and is now Editor-in-Chief of the magazine publishing company, Berita Publishing Sdn Bhd.

⁴⁹ 'Pemimpin perlu Bersih'. [Leaders Must Be Clean].

⁵⁰ Kiau, 'Perihal tok guru dan ahli politik perniagaan' [On religious gurus and business-based politicians], *Berita Harian*, 4 February 2001. At the time of publication of this article, Kiau was a columnist of the UMNO-linked newspaper, *Berita Harian*.

⁵¹ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Politik Dinasti Semakin Ketara' [Dynastic Politics Becoming More Obvious], 11 April 2012, <http://kadirjasin.blogspot.jp/2012/04/politik-dinasti-semakin-ketara.html> (accessed 27 June 2012).

⁵² Mahathir Mohamad, 'The lesson from Japan', 11 September 2009, <http://chedet.cc/blog/?p=319> (accessed 10 May 2011).

⁵³ 'Juara Rakyat Programme Returns To Win People's Heart', 10 January 2010, http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=newslist&news_id=981&news_cat=13&page=1731&sort_year=2010&sort_month= (accessed 23 November 2011).

⁵⁴ Ku Seman Ku Hussein, 'UMNO dinamik dan tetap relevan' [UMNO still dynamic and relevant], *Utusan Malaysia*, 13 May 2012. Ku Seman is an *Utusan Malaysia* reporter.

⁵⁵ Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 'Managing success', 17 June 2003, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=paklahtpm&id=3256> (accessed 23 April 2009).

⁵⁶ 'It's not the time to relax, says Najib'.

⁵⁷ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Politik Dinasti Semakin Ketara' [Dynastic Politics Becoming More Obvious].

⁵⁸ 'I am still here', 9 May 1997, <http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0509/cs3.html> (accessed 13 March 2012).

⁵⁹ Mohd Khuzairi Ismail, 'Revolusi Politik Jepun' [Japan's Political Revolution].

⁶⁰ 'Hanya kamek layak perintah Sarawak' [Only we qualify to rule Sarawak], 10 April 2011, <http://www.bharian.com.my/bharian/articles/HanyakameklayakperintahSarawak/SarawakPraya/article.html> (accessed 19 June 2012). Abang Johari Openg is Deputy President of the United Heritage Bumiputera Party (PBB: *Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu*), a major BN component party in Sarawak.

⁶¹ 'Jadikan Umno pilihan muktamad' [Make UMNO your final choice], *Berita Harian*, 5 May 1997.

⁶² 'Hayati sejarah demi perpaduan UMNO' [Internalise history for the sake of UMNO unity], *Utusan Malaysia*, 24 June 1997. At the time of giving this speech, Napsiah was national Wanita UMNO Vice-Chief.

	bound by the old mode of thinking		Razak (November 11) ⁶⁴
11	The need to consolidate party strength by practising the concept of party controlling the government and by opposing political liberalisation	2	Annuar Musa (2000), ⁶⁵ Mukhriz Mahathir (2009) ⁶⁶
12.	The syndrome of hereditary politics which obstructs incoming talents and destroys the democratic process	2	Abdul Kadir Jasin (2005) ⁶⁷ (2012) ⁶⁸
13	UMNO is seen as risking losing power after reaching a fifty-year threshold	2	Aziz Ishak (2003), ⁶⁹ Mysuara.net (2011) ⁷⁰
14	LDP's exit from power is seen as ensuing from the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) interference, UMNO can thus face a similar fate	1	Abdul Hamid Othman (1999) ⁷¹
15	The pre-requisite of main leaders' listening to controversial grassroots requests	1	Mohd Faizal Ramli (2011) ⁷²
16	The pre-requisite of reducing developmental politics	1	Najib Razak (November 2011) ⁷³

Table 1: Lessons applied by UMNO in making sense of LDP's defeats in 1993 and 2009.

1. Fallacious Lessons

Four lessons are involved here, viz. lessons 9, 11, 14 and 15. In lesson 9, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when still UMNO Vice-President in May 1997, had asserted UMNO's

⁶³ 'It's not the time to relax, says Najib'.

⁶⁴ 'Full transcript of Bernama's interview with Najib'.

⁶⁵ 'Pemimpin MT UMNO Perlu Bersedia Terima Kritikan' [UMNO Supreme Council Members Should Be Ready to Accept Criticism], BERNAMA, 12 May 2000. Annuar Musa, at the time of this speech, was chairman of UMNO Liaison Committee, Kelantan.

⁶⁶ 'Being Mahathir's son', 12 March 2009, <http://www.thenutgraph.com/being-mahathirs-son/> (accessed 27 February 2010). Mukhriz Mahathir, fifth child of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, is currently member of Parliament for Jerlun, Kedah, and Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry.

⁶⁷ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Where truth is stranger than fiction'.

⁶⁸ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Politik Dinasti Semakin Ketara' [Dynastic Politics Becoming More Obvious].

⁶⁹ Aziz Ishak, 'Cabaran politik nasional' [National political challenges], *Utusan Malaysia*, 1 January 2003. Aziz Ishak is presently Editor-in-Chief of the staunchly nationalist daily *Utusan Malaysia*.

⁷⁰ 'Beware the-curses-of-the-third-generation', 11 October 2011, <http://www.mysuara.net/beware-the-curses-of-the-third-generation/>. Mysuara.net is a pro-government news portal.

⁷¹ 'Kerajaan memantau ejen kuasa asing' [Government is monitoring agents of foreign powers], *Berita Harian*, 3 May 1999; 'US bid to recruit 12 as CIA agents', *New Straits Times*, 3 May 1999. Abdul Hamid Othman, at the time of this speech, was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department responsible for Islamic affairs. He became Religious Advisor to the Prime Minister from 2001 to 2009, and died in December 2011.

⁷² 'DUN Bagan Pinang: Isa calon sesuai, kata Pemuda Umno' [Bagan Pinang state constituency: Isa is the suitable candidate, says UMNO Youth], 23 September 2009 (accessed 12 January 2010), http://www.mstar.com.my/berita/cerita.asp?file=/2009/9/23/mstar_berita/20090923133952&sec=mstar_berita.

Mohd Faizal Ramli is UMNO Youth Chief of Teluk Kemang, Negeri Sembilan.

⁷³ 'Serve without expecting a reward, says Najib', *New Straits Times*, 9 November 2011.

position as one of the world's primary political parties, following the failure of several parties in maintaining their grip on power, referring particularly to the fragmentation of LDP in Japan. UMNO's claim to eminence rests on its protracted capacity of power retention. In a similar vein, a month later Napsiah Omar urged UMNO members to prioritise unity, insisting that only UMNO among the world's major parties remain united after the break-up of the Soviet Union-led communist bloc and LDP's defeat in Japan. Both these analogies are no more than vain attempts to highlight UMNO's superiority in public discourse. A lot of dominant parties were in fact basking in the heights of power in 1997, such as the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore, Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan and even the Communist Party of China (CPC). The UMNO spokesmen also apparently forgot that LDP had regained the reins of government by the time they made their speeches, notwithstanding the fact that its domination of Japan's political scene was not as all-encompassing as before.

In lesson 11, proposals from two UMNO leaders following LDP's defeat were of reactionary rather than progressive quality. First, Annuar Musa, then chairman of the UMNO Liaison Committee of Kelantan, speaking in May 2000 in the aftermath of the 10th GE which heralded the arrival of an ethnically transcending 'new politics,'⁷⁴ insisted on UMNO's strengthening the concept of 'party controlling the government' as a guarantor of strong government. If the party weakens, UMNO may fall in the manner of LDP. This was a misleading prescription. In the aftermath of Malaysia's 10th GE in November 1999, UMNO should have loosened its understanding of 'party controlling the government' in order to regain its much eroded political legitimacy. As Shamsul Amri Baharuddin commented for that period, UMNO ought to 'change substantially, actually reform but they don't know how'.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Francis Loh Kok Wah and Saravanamuttu, J. (eds). *New Politics in Malaysia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

⁷⁵ Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, quoted from 'Damage Control', *Asiaweek*, 17 December 1999, p. 24.

As party leader, Mahathir then seemed to acquiesce to Annuar's suggestion by declining to implement reforms and tightening instead democratic space in UMNO.⁷⁶

Like Annuar Musa, Mukhriz Mahathir in March 2009 expressed the 'scary thought' that UMNO would follow the footsteps of defeated dominant parties such as LDP in the event that it resisted change. But at the same time Mukhriz criticised what he characterised as 'western thinking' practised by UMNO. Referring to several attributes of Abdullah Badawi's leadership such as openness and transparency, he regarded them as superfluous as compared with the need for economic and political stability. In fearing UMNO's loss of power but retaining a measure of discomfort against political reform, Mukhriz was almost dabbling in political non sequitor. To UMNO conservatives, the idea that no alternative to internal reform existed if UMNO were to have any reasonable chance of retaining power in a democratic environment boosted by advances in information and communications technology (ICT), was slow to sink in. It was precisely the two democratically appealing changes advocated by Abdullah which had incited vehement opposition from conservative UMNO diehards.

In lesson 14, Abdul Hamid Othman declared in May 1999 that the government was keeping close tabs on a few individuals suspected of being CIA agents out to destroy Muslim unity in Malaysia. He clarified that, being in fifth place in the list of the world's longest serving ruling party, UMNO had become the target of USA after the fall of LDP and India's Congress Party. His allegations were formed upon the background of increasing American support being thrown behind former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's reformation movement, as visibly demonstrated by Vice President Al Gore's open advocacy of the cause during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Kuala Lumpur in November 1998. Abdul Hamid's extravagant claims portrayed that parties such as LDP and India's

⁷⁶ William Case, 'Malaysia's General Elections in 1999: A Consolidated and High-Quality Semi-Democracy,' *Asian Studies Review*, 25, no. 1 (2001), pp. 35–55.

Congress Party had fallen as a consequence of USA's interference in the internal affairs of Japan and India rather than their democratic norms. We could not find any academic evidence that support this contention. While it was true that there arose revelations in 1994 that the CIA was embroiled in espionage activities in Japan in the 1950s and 60s, its involvement was strictly to expunge LDP from communist influence rather than to bring down the LDP regime in any way.⁷⁷

A similar fallacy was committed in lesson 15 through UMNO Youth Chief of Teluk Kemang Mohd Faizal Ramli's statement in September 2009. In backing former UMNO Vice-President Isa Samad's candidacy for BN in the forthcoming by-election, Mohd Faizal appealed to Isa's record of party loyalty, downplaying the fact that Isa's suspension from party activities for involvement in money politics had just been lifted. To Mohd Faizal, there lurked the fear that UMNO would lose out in the same way as LDP did if it ignored the voice of delegates, notwithstanding Mahathir's unease at the choice of Isa. Yet, Mohd Faizal's analogy, resembling an 'intimidation' to the party leadership, was grossly out of place. Mohd Faizal faulty logic was a typical manifestation of UMNO warlords' retrogressive thinking which contributed to UMNO's loss of seats due to internal sabotage during the 12th GE. In applying such reasoning, he was unwittingly advocating the continual hegemony of warlords in UMNO's decision making, regardless of the reality that it was just such a phenomenon that was increasingly alienating UMNO from the masses.

2. **Lessons in shallow contexts**

⁷⁷ 'C.I.A. Spent Millions to Support Japanese Right in 50's and 60's', *The New York Times*, 9 October 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/09/world/cia-spent-millions-to-support-japanese-right-in-50-s-and-60-s.html> (accessed 20 September 2012).

Ironically, two lessons applied in shallow contexts are the ones that received the highest citations. In both lessons 1 and 8, LDP's downfall was used to implant the sentiment of fear especially among Malays. For advocates of lesson 1, the Japanese were more inclined towards change as a consequence of their society's homogeneous character. If the prevailing circumstances in Japan were to be translated into the Malaysian context, Malay political problems, or so the argument goes, will multiply to the extent that the post of Prime Minister may be lost to non-Malays. Supporters of lesson 8 magnify such sentiments by adding that if there were frequent changes of the country's administration or political leadership as obtaining in Japan, Malaysia's development process will be regularly truncated. Inculcation of the culture of fear had indeed been UMNO's popular weapon for time immemorial. Mahathir himself had alluded to the longevity of LDP's rule to justify his protracted hold on power. To him, too frequent a change in the Premiership as has happened under LDP may potentially hand over the driving seat of managing the nation to unelected civil servants. Yet, such logic was arguably flawed. In Japanese politics, placing trust in the bureaucracy had never come close to devolving decision-making power to bureaucrats, who were by and large still bound to political conventions and norms of the ruling party.⁷⁸

Lesson 3, referring to the fact that an independence party may still be rejected despite having done many good deeds, is the second highest employed by UMNO. This argument seems to imply repayment of good deeds of a party which grew out of the independence movement by voting it into power. Yet, the question arises as to how long such a repayment should continue, and what if the party reneges on its promises to continually repay the people's trust in them via even nobler deeds. Ever since securing the position of the most

⁷⁸ Cf. Michio Muramatsu, 'Post-war Politics in Japan: Bureaucracy versus the Party/Politics' in Michio Muramatsu and Frieder Naschold (eds), *State and Administration in Japan and Germany: A Comparative Perspective on Continuity and Change* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1996), p. 14; Jose Antonio Crespo, 'The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan: Conservative Domination', *International Political Science Review*, 16, no. 2 (1995), p. 201.

pivotal playmakers of Malaysian politics, BN and UMNO have incessantly resorted to the narrow rhetoric of the moral obligation of repaying their good deeds at the ballot box. Such a rhetoric was particularly psychologically powerful within the context of a Malay-Muslim audience. Yet, even the appeal of similar rhetoric had significantly waned among the LDP rank and file. For example, amidst much speculation of an impending LDP defeat in 2009, LDP Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosoda was still heard appealing to the ‘good deeds’ rhetoric to persuade the Japanese to retain the status quo.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Rosol Wahid, an upholder of such rhetoric, relates:

I chatted with adolescents and youngsters... why they lack gratefulness to the government which had done many good deeds to them...their answers are similar and consistent...‘building roads, schools, bridges and improving infrastructure...those are duties and obligations of the government anyway’. In Korea, they say, the government does what BN implements in Malaysia. Even on a grander scale...and so does the Japanese government which has just lost power [in 2009]... And similarly with the Chinese government...What we seek now are leaders who have integrity, are trustworthy and can ‘get along’...

3. Deficit between lesson and implementation

The first example in this context, lesson 16, refers to the requisite of reducing dependence on developmental politics ala-LDP, as reminded by Prime Minister Najib Razak in November 2011. Politics of development takes place when equally competing parties retain significant support in rural areas by offering and trading development projects in exchange of votes. In the 1970s, LDP under Kakuei Tanaka enacted this strategy as an important strategy which contributed in no small measure to the expansion of pork barrel and patronage politics.⁸⁰ In UMNO’s case, Mahathir’s enthusiastic embrace of developmental politics has

⁷⁹ ‘INTERVIEW - Japan's LDP fears voter frenzy for change’, 14 August 2009, http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/8/14/worldupdates/2009-08-14T145815Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-417580-2&sec=Worldupdates (accessed 14 June 2010).

⁸⁰ Chalmers Johnson, ‘Tanaka Kakuei, Structural Corruption, and the Advent of Machine Politics in Japan’, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 12, no. 1 (1986), pp. 1-28.

been much documented. Josh Hong, an alternative media columnist in Malaysia and University of London graduate, asserted Malaysia's position as 'a state under construction' under Mahathir's leadership:

New buildings were mushrooming regardless of their eventual occupancy, while contracts were constantly being churned out by Umno to plaster the country with roads, highways and bridges to nowhere. Perhaps I should also mention bus stops that no buses pass by. This was exactly how the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had been ruling Japan until it was routed in the general election last September...For years, Mahathir was fascinated by the LDP's firm hold on power, and secretly hoped to replant the model in Malaysia. His party ended up exactly where the LDP has been over the last few decades: plagued with cronyism and factionalism.⁸¹

Hence, although Najib deserves credit for openly admonishing such Mahathir-like prescriptions, we ought to be mindful that this lesson scores the lowest frequency with only one citation. Such a situation is understandable in view of the embeddedness of such practices within the whole range of UMNO's strategy. More importantly, Najib seems to have forgotten to acknowledge that the continual prevalence of patronage politics in UMNO remains a bane to the party. A fortnight after LDP's downfall, Malaysian financial analyst Cheong Khat Hock wrote in the mainstream newspaper *The Star* on the imperative of Malaysia's learning from the failures of LDP's policies in Japan. Among issues which Khat Hock touched on was the utilisation of fiscal stimulus to revive the economy. As he saw it, such an approach was ineffective, being more of a means to reward cronies. The LDP government had employed it to benefit its allies in the construction and rural sectors. In consequence, Japan's ratio of government debt to gross domestic product (GDP) rose from 60% in 1990 to 182% in 2008. Detecting worrying parallels with the case of Malaysia, leading to increasing deficits since 1998, Choong questioned the wisdom behind the need for

⁸¹ Josh Hong, 'Fascinated by Japan, but fixated on the West', 22 July 2010, <http://archive.freemalaysiatoday.com/fmt-english/opinion/comment/8231-fascinated-by-japan-but-fixated-on-the-west> (accessed 12 September 2012).

such new mega projects as the RM12 billion double tracking railway from Ipoh to Thailand and the fast speed railway from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore.⁸² Points raised by Choong highlighted Japan's main problems under LDP's leadership. Between 1992 and 2002, Japan launched 18 different stimulus packages, all of which failed to engender novel ideas and ended up as financial waste.⁸³ LDP frequently thought that monetary stimulus would cure economic problems and act as a primary prescription in structural reform. In fact, it could at best function as a pain-killing 'morphin', a far cry from being a remedy which necessitated a 'surgery'.⁸⁴

This lesson entangles Najib and UMNO in a dilemma, for they seemingly still hold to the belief that patronage politics is essential to maintain support. It has been argued that 'patronage-based strategies aimed at staying in power can turn over time into a boomerang by undermining the cohesion, the principles, the autonomy, the flexibility, and finally the ability of parties to win votes'.⁸⁵ Najib's reluctance to address this malaise has been accentuated by his continual reliance on developmental politics on an even larger scale as the 13th GE looming. Not only has he assented to the erection of another sky-scraper in the Warisan Merdeka edifice, but Najib has also rebranded the Tun Razak Exchange to the value of RM25 billion. On a more populist note, Najib keeps on promising the people with attractive financial goodies of short-term utility. It seems that when Najib pointed to LDP's failure to struggle for the people (lesson 6), he was advocating solutions through the more conventional formula of

⁸² Cheong Khuat Hock, 'Look East no more?', 14 September 2009, <http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/9/14/business/4701178&sec=business> (accessed 14 October 2012)

⁸³ Takashi Yokota, 'How Koizumi Did In The LDP', 14 August 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/08/14/how-koizumi-did-in-the-ldp.html> (accessed 19 October 2012)

⁸⁴ Richard Katz, *Japanese Phoenix: The Long Road To Economic Revival* (New York: An East Gate Book, 2003), p. 20.

⁸⁵ Carolyn M. Warner, 'Political Parties and the Opportunity Costs of Patronage', *Party Politics*, 3, no. 4 (1997), pp. 533-548.

showering them with material development rather than pursuing a more holistic development agenda.

In the same vein, lesson 10, referring to the urgency for reform without being tied to the old mode of thinking, has twice been voiced out by Najib. Credit is due to him for his candid call to re-examine aversion to reform which became widespread during the twilight years of Abdullah Badawi's era. Najib has admittedly accomplished few reforms such as the abolition of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and loosening of political controls. As the leader who can merely speak out for reform, whether he can engineer the adaptation of a new political culture in UMNO is speculative if not the product of wishful thinking. We take for instance Tamura's reminder to UMNO on the need to be receptive to the media. In his speech as quoted by *Berita Harian*, Tamura stressed:

Frequent political changes in Japan owe to the media's role in too actively conducting polls on the internet such that leaders have had to resign for failing to perform. However, we steadfastly hold on to him as the size of readership and votes serve as early indicators of early elections.⁸⁶

In view of Tamura's statement, media freedom, although frowned upon in Japan, remains reliable as a source of electoral analysis. For example, imminent losses to be conceded by LDP in 1993 and 2009 were so masterfully predicted by the Japanese newspaper polls.⁸⁷ In Malaysia, the state consistently cold-shoulders such opinion polls, exhibiting the denial syndrome. The state is willing to pay heed only to conformist polls, as presented by institutions, academicians and think tanks willing to toe the establishment's line. Whenever results of polls conducted by independent bodies are released, the state shows contradictory

⁸⁶ 'Berwaspada ancaman media baru' [Beware of threats from the new media], 11 May 2010, <http://www.bharian.com.my/bharian/articles/Berwaspadaancamanmediabaru/Article> (accessed 26 June 2011).

⁸⁷ Purnendra C. Jain, 'A New Political Era In Japan', *Asian Survey*, 33, no. 11 (1993), p. 1077; Takashi Yokota, 'How Koizumi Did In The LDP', 14 August 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/08/14/how-koizumi-did-in-the-ldp.html> (accessed 24 November 2011).

reactions. If the outcome favours the government, the mainstream media will give wide coverage of the polls. If negative results are otherwise publicised, the polls' legitimacy will be greatly questioned by the state on multiple excuses.⁸⁸ More surprisingly, during the Bersih 3.0 street gathering to demand electoral reform in April 2012, media personnel from progressive news agencies were roughed up by the police.

4. Overgeneralised lessons

The second highest lesson employed by UMNO revolved around the issue of factionalism, also twice mentioned by Najib Razak in his rationalisation of LDP's exit from power. Whilst advocates of lesson 2 are crystal clear on factionalism as a scourge which could potentially bring about UMNO's downfall, the whole question seems to have been overgeneralised to the extent of factionalism becoming UMNO members' favoured escapist explanation in lieu of addressing more fundamental problems affecting the party.

Academically speaking, factionalism is inevitable in most political parties of modern democracies.⁸⁹ The reformist-inclined Abdullah Badawi himself conceded that factionalism within UMNO had become a normal manifestation of internal politicking along the lines of LDP.⁹⁰ But the character of factionalism could be ascertained as to whether it was competitive, cooperative or degenerative.⁹¹ Whether in UMNO or LDP, degenerative factionalism is conducive to more serious crises. LDP's setbacks in 1993 and 2009 owed in part to

⁸⁸ 'Govt Dismisses Merdeka Centre Survey On PM's Popularity', 30 August 2011, http://www.ntv7.com.my/7edition/local-en/GOVT_DISMISSES_MERDEKA_CENTRE_SURVEY_ON_PM_S_POPULARITY.html; 'Ignore Musa ratings dip, Shafie Apdal tells Sabah voters', *The Malaysian Insider*, 7 October 2012, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/ignore-musa-ratings-dip-shafie-apdal-tells-sabah-voters/> (both accessed 8 October 2012).

⁸⁹ Robert Harmel, Uk Heo, Alexander Tan and Kenneth Janda, 'Performance, Leadership, Factions and Party Change: An Empirical Analysis', *West European Politics*, 18, no. 7 (1995), p. 7.

⁹⁰ 'Options Cover Story: The mellow life', 7 February 2011, <http://www.theedgemalaysia.com/features/182809-cover-story-the-mellow-life.html> (accessed 23 June 2011).

⁹¹ Françoise Boucek, 'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism', *Party Politics*, 14, no. 4 (2009), p. 16.

factionalism,⁹² as was the case with UMNO's internal infighting in 1987 and 1998. Nonetheless, in LDP's case, factionalism was far from extraordinary, being the outcome of Japan's system of single-non transferable vote (STNV) which encourages intra-party competition (before changing to the mixed member system in 1994). More importantly, factionalism within LDP also functioned as a check and balance on prime ministerial power and thus bolstered political accountability.⁹³

In UMNO's case, the claim of wanting to rid UMNO of factionalism can be disputed as its top lieutenants are themselves factional leaders, including Najib Razak. A more practical exhortation would be for UMNO's factionalism to acquire the cooperative or competitive spirit. What we see now is UMNO's intra-elite conflicts assuming degenerative character. Mahathir, notwithstanding his own reminder in 1994 of the dangers of factionalism to the party, himself fell victim to it when orchestrating his tirade against Abdullah Badawi in 2006. Not only did he emerge as Abdullah's most vicious critic, but Mahathir also played the role of factional king maker among UMNO conservatives to demand his successor's resignation. Far from showcasing statesmanlike qualities, Mahathir behaved in the manner of the Shadow Shogun popular in LDP politics, as had been done by the likes of Tanaka Kakuie and Ichiro Ozawa among others.

A most important lesson that UMNO should learn is located in the sphere of politics – business connections, in which there exists striking parallels between it and LDP. The level of factionalism in UMNO is closely related to its ability to eradicate corruption and money

⁹² Jain, 'A New Political Era In Japan', pp. 1073-1076; Ellis Kraus and Robert Pekkanen, 'The Rise and Fall of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, no. 1 (2010), pp. 5-15.

⁹³ Jose Antonio Crespo, 'The Liberal Democrat Party in Japan: Conservative Domination', *International Political Science Review*, 16, no. 2 (1995), pp. 205-206; Kentaro Okada, 'The Transformation of Japanese Conservatism and Koizumi Revolution', Paper presented at Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2007, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, p. 11.

politics. Scholars agree that factionalism in UMNO worsened as a direct consequence of its serious involvement in business.⁹⁴ But only three citations are recorded for lesson 5. The failure to separate political from business-based relationships has resulted in effective control of UMNO falling into the hands of corporate warlords, relegating professionals to the periphery.

5. The ‘Santayana’s aphorism must be reversed’ syndrome and contextual mistakes

The depraved linkages between politics and business, identified by many as UMNO’s gravest ailment in recent times, have been blamed for the diffusion of lessons 4 and 7: the spread of patronage politics, cronyism, corruption and money politics, and the penetration of iniquitous warlords, king makers and power brokers into UMNO’s leadership. The solitary UMNO leader to have paid any serious attention to these lessons, Abdullah Badawi – as expressed in 1993 well before becoming President, fits unfortunately into the ‘Santayana’s aphorism must be reversed’ syndrome. Taking over the stewardship of UMNO in 2003, Abdullah’s attempt to distance himself from nefarious elements creeping into UMNO was short-lived. Within a few years, his administration was marred by allegations implicating his family members such as his son Kamaluddin, son-in-law-cum-UMNO Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin, and close confidante Kalimullah Hassan with numerous dubious business wheeling and dealing. These contributed to the deficit perception of his leadership during the 12th GE in 2008.⁹⁵ Another example, Isa Samad, had reminded UMNO members in June 1997 to not turn UMNO into a money-making enterprise if they were to avoid imitating

⁹⁴ Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K.S, *Malaysia’s Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 123.

⁹⁵ ‘Malaysia’s electoral upheaval’, James Chin and Wong Chin Huat, *Journal of Democracy*, 20, no. 3 (2009), p. 77.

LDP's fate, only to be suspended from the party in 2005 after being found guilty of money politics during the previous year's hustings for party Vice-Presidency, which Isa won with the highest vote.

In this regard, scholars have noted that frequent misapplication of lessons takes place when politicians periodically get drawn into the pitfall of myopically applying lessons based on observable variables surrounding their own circumstances and experiences. In Abdullah's example above, his heeding the lesson of separating politics from business was influenced by his own bid for UMNO's Vice-Presidency in 1993. Upon losing to candidates representing the 'Vision Team' led by aspirant for Deputy President Anwar Ibrahim, Abdullah heaped blame on money politics for eroding his support.⁹⁶ Anwar was then infamous for having spread his political influence throughout UMNO's network by implanting his proxies in the corporate sector, the media and think tanks.⁹⁷ Hence, although Abdullah's lesson was genuine, he might well have been influenced by his own circumstances, relatively isolated from the rough and tumble of realpolitik, corporate wire pulling and mainstream media reporting.

Long-standing UMNO *numero uno* Mahathir Mohamad was also guilty of contextually misapplying political lessons. Five days after LDP's downfall in 2009, Mahathir wrote an article on 'the lesson from Japan'. He regarded the beating experienced by LDP as proof that the populace are becoming increasingly nonchalant about the sacrifices of independence or heritage parties. But rather than castigating the whole of UMNO's degenerative political culture as the cause of its decline, Mahathir focused instead on his successor Abdullah Badawi's shortcomings in allowing graft-ridden mores to take hold in UMNO. He pin-pointed for instance Abdullah's alleged use of RM250 billion of the national oil company PETRONAS's income with hardly any tangible returns. Yet, it is widely

⁹⁶'Kita tidak serius berubah' [We are not serious in changing], *Mingguan Malaysia*, 17 July 2005.

⁹⁷Gomez and Jomo, *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*, pp. 124-128.

accepted that UMNO's corruption-ridden culture had been ingrained during Mahathir's era, and it was on the promise to eradicate corruption that Abdullah achieved the biggest ever mandate by an incumbent Prime Minister in 2004. When Abdullah fell several steps behind in this direction, his electoral fortunes were dramatically reversed in 2008.

Veteran journalist and pro-UMNO blogger Abdul Kadir Jasin is similarly guilty of contextual flaw in his personal reflection below:

In the 1980s, I visited the headquarters of the LDP in Tokyo. LDP was then ruling Japan. During the visit, I met Tsutomu Hata who was given the task of reforming LDP or Jiminto in Japanese. Hata told me that LDP had become increasingly feudalistic, money-orientated and controlled by big business. He was tasked with reforming LDP in line with changes in contemporary Japan. Hata's efforts, however, were defeated by LDP "warlords". As Prime Minister later, his administration lasted only nine weeks. In 2009, LDP lost the general elections after ruling for 54 years. In our country, similar circumstances are becoming more evident. Political parties are becoming more feudalistic, nepotism is more widespread and political dynasties are tightening their grip.⁹⁸

Abdul Kadir, however, was reluctant to dissect UMNO's predicament in a more incisive manner. Surprisingly, he thereafter rambles on about rumours surrounding Rosmah Mansor, Najib Razak's influential wife. His implicating UMNO's present malaise with dynastic tendencies observable among UMNO's top leadership echelon masks the more pivotal issue of politics– business nexuses which themselves give rise to the phenomena of warlords and nepotism. Rather than using Hata's case to contextualise UMNO's main problem, he limited his analysis to justify his personal criticisms. Other than the fact that Abdul Kadir is long known as a stern critic of Abdullah Badawi, he was also embroiled in business-based politics as Anwar Ibrahim's man during the latter's effective takeover of the New Straits Times Press in 1994.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Abdul Kadir Jasin, 'Politik Dinasti Semakin Ketara' [Dynastic Politics Becoming More Obvious].

⁹⁹ Gomez and Jomo, *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*, pp. 68, 126.

6. Neglecting more fundamental lessons

Apart from careless oversight of politics – business intertwining connections, UMNO has also been wont to neglect two other pressing problems, viz. hereditary politics and the inability to attract leaders from the younger generation. In this regard, lesson 12 has only two citations, provided by Abdul Kadir Jasin in 2005 and 2012. His lapse in 2012 has been explained above. In a previous article of 2005, Abdul Kadir sought to explain UMNO's democratic deficit, as shown by the lack of competition during party elections in 2004, as reflective of family-based politics intruding into UMNO (most controversial was when Abdullah's ambitious son-in-law, Khairy Jamaluddin, being elected unopposed to the position of UMNO Youth deputy chief).

Regardless of Abdul Kadir's contextual mistakes, his analysis of hereditary politics in UMNO has its own merits. Hereditary politics has been virtually synonymous with LDP politics. In 2011, an analysis showed that nearly 40% of LDP members were hereditary politicians. This syndrome deprived LDP of new ideas as *kanban* (name recognition) factored significantly for an aspiring politician to climb the party hierarchy.¹⁰⁰ While the hereditary politics syndrome in UMNO is not as chronic as in LDP, its prevalence at important decision-making levels does give UMNO a lackadaisical image. According to Nik Nazmi, a young budding politician from PR, one of the most vital lessons of DPJ's triumph in Japan is the urgency of offering to the public youthful and energetic figures whose constant emergence prevents a party from degenerating into regressive dynasties.¹⁰¹ Such a scenario is also

¹⁰⁰ Kosuke Takahashi, 'Ten reasons for Japan's revolving door', *Asia Times*, 11 June 2011, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/MF11Dh01.html> (accessed 12 August 2012).

¹⁰¹ Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, 'Kemenangan DPJ di Jepun: 4 pengajaran untuk Pakatan Rakyat' [DPJ's victory in Japan: 4 Lessons for PR], *The Malaysian Insider*, 4 September 2009, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/litee/opinion/article/Kemenangan-DPJ-di-Jepun-4-Pengajaran-untuk-Pakatan/> (accessed 11 August 2010).

captured by the PAP in Singapore. In a speech in 2010, its Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, himself son of former Premier Lee Kuan Yew, presented for his party colleagues' reference the cases of LDP and UMNO as two dominant parties currently in crisis mode. LDP, he argued, has declined due not only to economic stagnation, but also because of its failure to engineer self-renewal and attract new talents in the midst rampant dynastic politics.¹⁰²

In the light of LDP's downfall in Japan, hardly any senior UMNO leader has dwelled upon the importance of enticing young upstarts as an early measure to avoid UMNO deteriorating into a collection of dynastic families ala-LDP. As it stands, there are simply too many bottlenecks in the way of aspiring young politicians to rise through UMNO's hierarchy. Abdullah Badawi had probably an inkling of what was required to arrest UMNO's decline, hence his bringing in a coterie of young advisors led by Khairy Jamaluddin into his policy-making team. Notwithstanding the controversy which erupted as a result of such individuals' abrupt rise to power, their presence gave some important theoretical dimensions to the reformist endeavours of Abdullah Badawi's era.¹⁰³ Abdullah's political guru, Musa Hitam, former Deputy Prime Minister (1981-1986) before his fallout with Mahathir, is another UMNO veteran who is aware of the party's shortcomings in this sphere. A widely respected figure ever since steadfastly sticking to his principles at the cost of antagonising Mahathir in the mid-1980s, Musa has often cautioned UMNO that continual hold on power could only come about if it were willing and able to stoop, befriend and welcome promising youngsters with open arms.¹⁰⁴

7. Not heeding enough lessons from LDP reformist leader Junichiro

¹⁰² 'PM's Speech Pointers For Party Convention:Turning Challenges Into Opportunities', http://www.pap.org.sg/uploads/ap/5705/documents/speech_by_secretary_general_lee_hsien_loong_english.pdf (accessed 2 October 2012).

¹⁰³ See Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Malaysia's Neo-conservative Intellectuals', *Pacific Affairs* (forthcoming in 2013).

¹⁰⁴ 'Musa: Umno perlukan pemimpin muda' [Musa: UMNO needs young leaders], *Malaysiakini*, 2 October 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/91782> (accessed 12 September 2012).

Koizumi's successful reformation programme

In April 2001, the reform-minded and relatively young Junichiro Koizumi was elected as Japanese Prime Minister. Not only did he rely on a group of well-educated, eloquent and media-savvy LDP Young Turks to carry his reform mission, but he also pledged to 'change LDP' in his goal to 'transform Japan'. LDP's conservative doyen and close friend of Mahathir Mohamad, Shintaro Ishihara surprised friends and foes alike by backing Koizumi's efforts, which he deemed as the only available way left to save Japan. So popular was Koizumi during the early phase of his administration that his approval rating reached a staggering 90%.¹⁰⁵ Far from treating Koizumi's support from his fellow Japanese as a lesson in rehabilitating political legitimacy of UMNO after 1999 general election, Mahathir by and large ignored such warning signs to the detriment of UMNO's posterity.

It was left to Mahathir's handpicked successor, Abdullah Badawi, to attempt to reform UMNO ala-Koizumi. Five months before assuming the coveted Premiership in November 2003, Abdullah again referred to problems besetting LDP such as scandals, corruption and power brokering. Distancing himself from excesses of Mahathir's era, Abdullah recruited young, highly educated, eloquent and media-friendly upstarts as trusted advisors in his quest for reformation. A promising first few months, even if only declaratory and aspirational in character, were sufficient to convince Malaysians to deliver BN an overwhelming mandate of 64% of popular votes and 91% of parliamentary seats in the 11th GE of March 2004. Nevertheless, as time passed, most of Abdullah's reform programme elicited stiff opposition from the UMNO warlords. These included the proposal for the establishment of an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC), large-scale war

¹⁰⁵ 'Koizumi: Twilight of a Reformer?', 18 November 2001, <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2001-11-18/koizumi-twilight-of-a-reformer>; 'Will the Young Turks Revolutionize Japanese Politics?', 23 June 2002, <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2002-06-23/will-the-young-turks-revolutionize-japanese-politics> (both accessed 29 September 2012).

against money politics and relaxation of the political system. The overturning of Anwar Ibrahim's conviction for sodomy in 2004 and his subsequent release from jail worried conservatives who felt threatened by the loosening of party controls over government. Abdullah, disappointingly, relented to such pressures. In April 2007, a commentator using the pseudonym 'LKS', believed to be DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang, noted:

When ABB [sic] won the last election, I thought at the time that he had a lot of similarity [sic] with Japan former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. Koizumi was elected on massive public support for his political reform against the will of his own ruling party, LDP, which like UMNO, has been the ruling party of Japan since the World War 2. He promised to fight against money politic, construction industry pump-priming that helps its owned [sic] supporters etc. During his time at the office, he faced much resistance from its own party but he always managed to "go to the people" and even threaten [sic] to campaign against his own party. Japanese people were charmed and re-elected him again with another landslide.¹⁰⁶

'LKS''s comparison between Koizumi and Abdullah Badawi was more attuned with reality. In order to ensure success of his reform programme, not only did Koizumi fill his cabinet with reform-minded politicians – action which Abdullah failed to do – but also dismissed opponents to reform as in his privatisation of Japan Post. Koizumi exploited the new media to the fullest to maintain popularity and warm voters' hearts to win a second term – no mean feat in Japanese politics.¹⁰⁷ Abdullah and his administrative colleagues' unwarranted hostility against the new media, on the other hand, practically cost them the 12th GE – the slender majority providing ammunition to Abdullah's adversaries within UMNO.¹⁰⁸ During his first press conference following the 12th GE political tsunami, Abdullah

¹⁰⁶ See the commentary section in M. Bakri Musa, 'Looking For Some Jantans', 8 April 2007, <http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2007/04/08/looking-for-some-jantans/#comment-7730> (accessed 21 February 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Literature on Koizumi is vast. See for example Patrick Kollner, 'The Liberal Democratic Party at 50: Sources of Dominance and Changes in the Koizumi Era', *Social Science Japan Journal*, 9, no. 2 (2006), pp. 243-257; Ikuo Kabashima dan Gill Steel, 'How Junichiro Koizumi seized the leadership of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 8, no. 1 (2007), pp. 95-114; T. J. Pempel, 'Learning to lose is for losers: The Japanese LDP's reform struggle'.

¹⁰⁸ 'Abdullah: Big mistake to ignore cyber-campaign', *Malaysiakini*, 25 March 2012, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/80354> (accessed 13 April 2012).

retorted: 'We must learn from this [verdict]. I have always believed there are lessons to learn. Even in the worst of tragedies, there are lessons to be learned'.¹⁰⁹ Abdullah consequently tried to prove himself as a man of lessons. He awarded hefty *ex gratia* payments to judges sacked by Mahathir during the judicial crisis of 1988, inducted the critical voices of Zaid Ibrahim, Shahrir Samad and Saifuddin Abdullah into the cabinet and pledged to accomplish his final institutional reforms, viz. the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) and the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC).

Yet, the one year between BN and UMNO's disastrous performance in March 2008 and Abdullah Badawi's handover of power to Najib Razak in April 2009 was a period of lame duck Premiership for Abdullah. Amidst incessant calls to hasten Abdullah's relinquishment of the UMNO presidency, party warlords manoeuvred to water down both his reformist legacies, viz. the MACC and JAC. Backed by Mahathir, conservatives led by Muhyiddin Yassin pressured Abdullah to fast-track his transfer of power to Najib. As with 'LKS', Malaysia's foremost Chinese language newspaper *Sin Chew Jit Poh* commented; 'He should look past UMNO and go to the people. The people would back him and the result would be different'.¹¹⁰ The whole episode of Abdullah's eventual ouster was a pitiful case of not heeding enough lessons from Koizumi's reform trajectory. He recognised the loophole and tried to emulate the early phase of Koizumi's lesson, but as Abdullah himself later confessed, he forgot its more important application of steadfastly upholding reformist principles and remaining in full control of the reformation scheme.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ 'Pak Lah: We've learned our lesson', *Malaysiakini*, 10 March 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/79593> (accessed 11 April 2009).

¹¹⁰ 'Exclusive Interview With PM: An Epilogue', 20 December 2008, <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/19440> (accessed 25 December 2008).

¹¹¹ 'Pak Lah admits should have been forceful with reforms', *The Malaysian Insider*, 21 September 2011, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/pak-lah-admits-should-have-been-forceful-with-reforms> (accessed 19 July 2012).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is an understatement to say that lessons which UMNO applied or rather misapplied with respect to LDP were merely rituals. Because of the cordial relationship between both countries, tragedy befalling Japan's dominant party was bound to affect its Malaysian equivalent in no uncertain terms. Our analysis, however, suggests that politicians are inclined to apply political lessons in a most skewed manner, bearing a slew of misconceptions. A variety of implications therefore arise. In UMNO's case, notwithstanding calls from within the party to always learn from the past, a weak application of historical lessons would engender inaccurate trajectory of change so painfully needed of UMNO. Intermittent opinion polls during Najib's tenure indicate that support for his reformation efforts is asymmetrical with support for UMNO as the ruling party. In short, UMNO as an institution is seen as too embedded with problems inherited from an insidious past for it to effect large-scale reforms with minimal internal bottlenecks. The way UMNO adapts to the new environment, engages the public and vilifies political adversaries signifies an adamant attachment to the concept of 'government knows best' and to the politics of divide and rule along ethno-religious lines. This is given credence by the recent appearance of issues greatly damaging to national unity: the 'cow head' protest against the relocation of a Hindu temple to a Malay-dominated residential area, the usage of the word 'Allah' for God in Malay language Christian publications, the government's heavy-handed action against Bersih 2.0 and 3.0 protestors demanding electoral reform, the aggressive approach of Malay supremacist non-governmental organisation *Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia* (PERKASA: Society for Empowered Indigenous Malaysians) apparently sanctioned by the powers that be and given wide publicity by the state-linked mainstream media, and the intimidation tactics employed against trans-

ethnic human rights organisations such as *Suara Rakyat Malaysia* (SUARAM: Voice of Malaysians).

We do not go so far as to suggest that only UMNO needs to carefully apply lessons from LDP's downfall. The Japanese example, while of significance to Malaysia, cannot be pushed too far. In any national context, *sui generis* factors operate, although the extent and timing may vary according to country. It is equally important to ask whether PR can employ the lesson from Japan appropriately. While the eclipse of LDP is of great inspirational value to PR's aspiring pretenders to government office, their imitation of DPJ's success has to be piecemeal. DPJ was swept into power on a populist manifesto which pledged to break the iron triangle and vested interests prevalent in Japan's political economy. PR has seemingly followed DPJ's footsteps by offering populist prescriptions such as an attractive minimum wage, free education, drastic reduction of car prices and promises of greater structural and institutional reform. But DPJ's record until today remains mixed due to systemic complexities involving entrenched interests and institutional resistance to change. Paradoxically, DPJ has even begun to implement policies which mirror LDP's many Achilles' heel, including frequency of leadership changes.¹¹² Hence, the widespread speculation of DPJ being trounced in Japan's upcoming elections in December should by itself be taken as a lesson by PR on the difficulties of being the incumbent power. Should PR be voted into power in the oncoming elections, PR's trajectory will not be immune from the 'various LDP lessons' such as corruption, dynastic politics, covert political funds and the nexus of business-politics.¹¹³ Even before grabbing power at the federal level, some of PR's state governments have already been

¹¹² J.A.A. Stockwin, 'Political Leadership in Japan: Are Effective Leaders Possible?', <http://jsaa.org.au/attachments/AJSOL2.pdf> ; Masuzoe Yōichi, 'Iron Triangle' of Policymaking Persists Under DPJ Government', 12 July 2012, <http://www.nippon.com/en/column/g00040/> (both accessed 4 October 2012).

¹¹³ Cf. 'Pakatan, too, must come clean on 'covert funds'', *Free Malaysia Today*, 30 September 2011, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2011/09/30/pakatan-too-must-come-clean-on-covert-funds/> (accessed 11 January 2012); Chandra Muzaffar, 'Winds of change may blow hot air', *The Star*, 16 February 2012.

riddled by such snags. Whether PR would then also join the list of ‘Santayana’s aphorism must be reversed’ remains to be seen.