

Book Review

New Thinking for Malaysian Public Administration

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A review of Latheef N. Ahmed, *New Thinking for Malaysian Public Administration: Some Social Science and Behavioral Concepts, Theories and Operational Questions, An Introductory Essay* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, 1975), 329 pp.

The book must be read to enable one to appreciate its clear presentation of public administration with Malaysian examples. It minimizes the use of public administration jargon, while at the same time makes a substantial presentation of public administration to a newcomer in the field.

The first four chapters are a review of the literature on American public administration which focuses on management methods and approaches using Malaysian illustrations.

The author attempts to give basis for a new thinking of Malaysian students and practitioners of public administration. He tries to stimulate, tease, and disturb the new minds by drawing attention to the creation of a new Malaysian administrative thinking, which has an indigenously imaginative orientation. He approaches the subject with an international and comparative perspective.

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The real "meat" of the book is found in the last four chapters. Here the Malaysian situation is discussed with references to American authors. Chapters 5 to 7 contain discussions of the behavior, personality, and strategies of the Malaysian civil servant.

In Chapter 5, Professor Latheef N. Ahmed discusses different kinds of behavior: administrative, administrative group, organizational, political, economic, and cultural. Of these, the author spends much time in discussing organizational behavior and presents a good review of theories on this well-studied area of concern. The following chapter contains a discussion of the individual personality of the civil servant in the Malaysian context. There is a general discussion of a professional personality and values. Creativity, presented as an ideal for the Malaysian civil servants, is discussed in Chapter 7. The main question raised is: "Does the civil servant use the same type of strategies and tactics in securing his administrative goals as he does for his private goals?" The author's position is that the civil

servant may use his personal values and skills toward strategies and tactics needed to achieve administrative ends.

In Chapter 8, the author quotes a definition of public administration as a "commensal activity" in which all "similar" organisms and organizations exhibit both competitive and cooperative behavior which can be logical and illogical. He also discusses the future of Malaysian public administration as a cross-cultural administration. The appendix "Further Sample Reading" taken from Robert A. Dahl's *Modern Political Analysis* provides useful references.

The presentation of Professor Latheef N. Ahmed is clear and understandable. The book, however, suffers from a lack of analysis. It is merely a review of existing literature with Malaysian instead of American examples. As the author states in the preface, without these Malaysian examples, "this essay would be an exclusive repetition of what other authors

and researchers have already said." In spite of his examples, the author does not give an overall picture of Malaysian public administration to help the reader appreciate the examples. His examples are also rather loosely given as in pages 159, 165, and 173. The discussion of his examples are couched in terms of "may never be," "that we seem to hear," "can be brought under organizations," "as elsewhere." There is a need to give support to his examples.

It is difficult to determine whether or not the author has succeeded in giving basis for a new thinking for Malaysian students and public administrators. What is certain is that he has succeeded in giving an interesting presentation of public administration in the Malaysian environment.

The book is a good introduction to the study of public administration. The author must be congratulated for his efforts in writing a pioneering book on Malaysian public administration.