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Ariff and Capitalism

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How Ariff managed to avoid the banking scandals of the 1970s is beyond me. Generally speaking, my generation took the idea of public service very seriously and I myself, when I was at The Ministry, would put in a solid three or four days work every other week or so. Even if I was unable to attend to the work in person I would leave detailed instructions with my secretary, Miss

Chin, who always knew that she could contact me at The Club if there was anything truly urgent. And besides, if it was really important I could always discuss it with Tun at the 19th hole. I had the misfortune of returning to The Ministry recently and was shocked to see that the place looked like a cross between a gynaecologist's waiting room and a hostel. Everyone was either pregnant or asleep. But it was in this very ministry where I began my working life back in the 1950s. I remember those capacious rooms, ceiling fans whirring, paperweights on all the desks, civil servants in starched white shirts, and even a few starched white civil servants. I'll always remember my first boss Roddy MacKenzie—hero of the 44th Regiment's last stand at Parit Chindai in '42. He had an eye for the ladies. Literally, one eye, because the other one was glass—taken out by a Jap. Ironically enough, not in a POW camp (from which he had emerged unscathed), but on a golf course in '53.

Ariff, from the beginning, had no desire to be a part of the civil service rat race. From those early days when we were at school together at MCKK, he had swum against the prevailing tide, constantly shocking the teachers and the boys with talk that was, quite frankly, shocking. I remember clearly one day when he told the class that he didn't want to be a civil servant. When Mr Brown asked him what he wanted to do with his life instead, Ariff answered "Rita Hayworth." I must say that Rita Hayworth had the ability to stun most of us into a reverential silence but none of us had ever thought of her as a full-time career. Ariff wanted to be in the private sector even before the concept had been imagined. During the war, he had smuggled rice from Thailand, after school, he started smuggling salt from Indonesia and it all ended when he was caught smuggling South