

Kua Kia Soong

MAY 13

Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969



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About the Author

Dr Kua Kia Soong is the Principal of the New Era College, a non-profit tertiary-level institution run by Dong Jiao Zong, the two major associations associated with the Malaysian Chinese education movement. He first joined the movement in 1983 as an education adviser and became Research Director of Huazi Resource & Research Centre when it was set up by the fifteen major Malaysian Chinese organisations in 1985.

He was arrested under the Internal Security Act during “Operation Lalang” in 1987 and detained for 445 days without trial. Upon release in 1989, he helped to found SUARAM (Suara Rakyat Malaysia), which is the leading human rights NGO in Malaysia today. He is still a director of SUARAM.

Together with other civil rights activists, he joined the Opposition Front in 1990 and was elected Opposition Member of Parliament for Petaling Jaya from 1990 to 1995.

He was a prisoner of conscience for a second time in 1996 when he was arrested and detained for six nights with other activists for organizing the Second Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor after it had been disrupted by a mob from the ruling coalition.

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MAY 13

**Declassified Documents on the
Malaysian Riots of 1969**

By Kua Kia Soong

SUARAM

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Kua Kia Soong

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*Dedicated to those who lost their lives in the 1969 riots
and to our children*

Hidden Hands

by Said Zahari

*Once again
History repeats itself
By savage deeds
In a civilized age*

*Once again
Hidden hands appear
Seeking the blood
Of the poor and the wretched*

*Once again
Colour, race, religion and language
Become sharp blades
To use in the carnage*

*It has happened
In every corner of the earth
Where the few eat bread
And the rest sand*

*It has happened
Where the few clothed in velvet
Sleep in palaces
The rest go naked, squeezed into shacks*

*It has happened –
Then Hidden Hands reappear
Spilling the blood of the poor
To cling on to power*

May 1969

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I would like to thank the staff and management at the Public Records Office, London for their excellent service in making these documents available; the Far Eastern Economic Review for their CD Rom of back issues, and Said Zahari for allowing me to use his 1969 poem 'Hidden Hands'.

'For the PM (Dr Mahathir) to repeat the story of the May 13 Affair as a warning of what would have happened if the Government had not taken appropriate action is like telling ghost stories to our children to prevent them from being naughty...The tale should not be repeated because it shows us to be politically immature.'

(Tunku on Operation Lalang, 1987)

Introduction

Questioning Official History

As recently as July 2006, the Malaysian public sphere was rocked by a controversy over the official history of the “May 13 Incident” of 1969 in a tertiary education textbook on “Ethnic Relations”. It exposed the reality that many Malaysians do not believe the official version of this dark episode of Malaysian history which has pinned the blame on the opposition parties for inciting the post-1969 election riots.

This “official history” also infers that such racial riots will occur “spontaneously” if, or when the status quo is shaken. This study shows how the status quo has shifted from pre-1969 Malaysia to the present day. At Independence in 1957, Article 153 on the “special position of the Malays” was mainly concerned with their access to land; admission to public services; issuing of permits or licences for operation of certain businesses; scholarships, bursaries or other forms of aid for educational purposes.

On the other hand, the status quo since the imposition of the National Operation Council in 1969 has been one of “*Ketuanan Melayu*” (Malay Dominance), a racist concept that is alien to the spirit of the Federal Constitution and that tries to justify all kinds of racial discrimination. ⁽¹⁾

It is therefore not surprising that the call by some quarters to “rewrite history in Malaysia” ⁽²⁾ has struck a chord among the liberal intelligentsia. One can point to several important junctures in Malaysian history in which the official version leaves much to be desired. This includes the Second World War, the Independence struggle, the Emergency and especially, the racial riots of May 13, 1969.

The author has already researched and written on the Emergency as part of his PhD thesis which was published in 1983. ⁽³⁾ In this volume, he attempts to put together the yet unwritten analysis and record of the “May 13 Incident” of 1969. The real circumstances surrounding the worst racial riot in the history of Malaysia have so far not been made available to the Malaysian public. The official version ⁽⁴⁾ is fraught with contradictions and inadequacies to which few pay credence.

Since the incident, any discussion of this dark episode in Malaysian history has been discouraged by the ruling powers. Yet this “spectre of May 13” continues to be raised by the ruling party in Malaysia whenever there is a threat to the status quo at general elections, as in 1990, or when civil rights issues are raised by the non-Malay communities, as in 1999.

The latest UMNO general assembly in November 2006 was no exception. There we once again saw the UMNO Youth chief playing to the gallery by ritualistically kissing the unsheathed *keris* (Malay dagger) and issuing threats to any who would dare to raise civil rights issues. In the course of the proceedings, Malaysians were warned not to question the status quo “or else...May 13 may happen again!” One UMNO delegate after another proceeded to issue racist and patently seditious threats to non-Malays in the country. ⁽⁵⁾

Class and Communalism

As a social scientist, the author looks at history from a political economic perspective. In his analysis, the May 13 1969 racial riots in Malaysia were by no means a spontaneous outburst of racial violence in a multi-ethnic society – these declassified documents clearly show that there was a plan to unleash this racial violence. Nor does it necessarily follow that there will be conflict when different ethnic communities coexist, as is implied in pluralist analyses. The role of the state has to be analysed in the particular historical conjuncture. ⁽⁶⁾

The author maintains that the “May 13 Incident” was above all, a coup d’etat by the then emergent Malay state capitalist class to depose the Tunku who represented the outdated Malay aristocracy. It was a critical political putsch which changed the course of Malaysian political history and ensured the rise and entrenchment of the new Malay capitalist class through the New Economic Policy. Tunku himself has alleged:

“You know Harun was one of those – Harun, Mahathir, Ghazali Shafie – who were all working with Razak to oust me, to take over my place...” ⁽⁷⁾

Subky Latiff, a journalist at the time, wrote in 1977:

“The May 13 Incident did not occur spontaneously. It was planned quickly and purposely. The identity of the planners of the incident cannot be stated with accuracy. But whatever it was that happened, the May 13 Incident was a form of coup d’etat directed against Tunku Abdul Rahman. The Tunku’s power in fact ended from then onwards. Although he continued to be Prime Minister and President of UMNO, he was no more than a figurehead.” ⁽⁸⁾

Subky Latiff's observations in 1977 are certainly borne out in the documents unearthed in this publication.

The first chapter discusses the contradictions of the racial "Alliance Formula", which was a neo-colonial political solution hatched and blessed by the British colonial power. Thus at Independence, this communal arrangement was established and the compromised civil and political rights and social inequalities were left to fester into the sixties.

This chapter also looks at the rise of the Malay state capitalist class and their pitch for power in 1969. Social scientists who attribute the May 13 riots to a breakdown of "moderate" politics fail to see the ascendancy of this class and their appeal to Malay-centrism as the mobilizing ideology. Their vehicles for economic power were the state agencies, especially those providing marketing, credit and processing facilities for the Malay farmers, as well as facilities for urban businesses and banks. As long as the old aristocratic class headed by the Tunku was in power, this stood in the way of the ambitions of this ascendant Malay state capitalist class.

By 1969, post-colonial developments were leading to discontent among the workers and farmers as well as sections of the middle class, disgruntled at the state's discriminatory policies, not only in employment but also in education, access to scholarships and licences.

The eclipse of the Alliance's predominance in the Malaysian political landscape at the 1969 general elections and the perceived threat to UMNO's supremacy provided the signal for the state capitalists to implement their plan to seize state power in the name of "Malay dominance".

Chapter Two examines the 1969 general elections at which the opposition managed to agree to an electoral pact and it was clear well before the elections that the Alliance would suffer its worst

defeat since Independence and that it would even lose control of some state assemblies. But as observers have noted, the jubilation and celebration by the opposition parties after the election results could not possibly be sufficient excuse for the hoodlums to run riot.

The Declassified Documents

In Chapter Three, a chronology of events after the 1969 elections has been pieced together using material uncovered from the Public Records Office, London. With the lifting of the thirty year veil of secrecy over documents of the time in the Public Records Office at the Kew Gardens, London, an invaluable opportunity has been provided to uncover official documents, hitherto classified. These records of communications in the British and other foreign diplomatic circles, including confidential intelligence, give us important perspectives on the prevailing conditions at a time when local documents are lacking because of official censorship.

These declassified documents include the stories fielded by foreign correspondents who were in Kuala Lumpur at the time; dispatches by the British High Commission personnel who kept a close watch on events and who had their ears to the ground; dispatches from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office covering the South-west Pacific countries, e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore; press releases by the Malaysian Red Cross Society providing a picture of the scale of the refugee situation, fatalities and injuries.

Chapter Four further examines the confidential memoranda of the time to see how the British High Commissions in West, East Malaysia and the region, the British Cabinet Office, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office as well as the Ministry of Defence reacted and assessed the "Malaysian civil disturbances". They contain information gathered in the course of diplomatic meetings;

private intelligence gathered by embassy staff; reports by British embassy personnel around the world (Bangkok, Singapore, Jakarta, Peking); media coverage of the 1969 riots, as well as views of British expatriates in Kuala Lumpur at the time.

From these documents, we also see the rationalization by the British and other foreign officials as they try to justify a policy of “business as usual” by selling arms to a regime they knew to be culpable in the civil disturbances and to be amassing undemocratic powers under the cloak of emergency powers. This was despite the strong opposition to the arms deal by British expatriates who were appalled by the blatant discrimination of the security forces during the riots.

Chapter Five looks at the speed and intensity of the regime change soon after the riots had taken place – the implementation of the National Operation Council, the rise and rise of the new Malay ruling class with their complete control over the whole state apparatus, including the police and the armed forces. From these documents we also see that the controversial economic and cultural policies of the seventies and eighties were being planned very soon after the riots as the new “Malay agenda”.

This volume will also examine dispatches by foreign correspondents, notably those from the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, covering the riots of 1969 and which were banned by the Malaysian authorities at the time. Thus the vast majority of Malaysians will no doubt be reading these reports for the first time.

Questionable Role of the Police & Army

From these documents, it is also clear that the police and the army were not impartial in dealing with the rioters of 1969. Since then, there have been other incidents in which the behaviour of the police and the defence forces has raised questions about their professionalism. In recent years, the Youth Wing of the de facto ruling party UMNO has taken upon itself the role of storm troopers in carrying out threats to any who would demand civil rights. The following are some salient examples of this fascist trend which threatens to sabotage democracy in Malaysia.

In 1987, as the UMNO leaders orchestrated racial tension over the transferring of non-qualified administrators to Chinese primary schools, UMNO Youth organized a rally at the Sultan Sulaiman Stadium in Kuala Lumpur at which racist and seditious slogans were carried in banners which read: "MAY 13 HAS BEGUN", "SOAK THE KRIS IN CHINESE BLOOD".⁽⁹⁾ UMNO leaders who were on stage to fan the flames of communalism included the then UMNO Youth Chief and present Deputy Prime Minister.⁽¹⁰⁾

Another relatively recent incident in which the role of the police was suspect, was the assault on the Second Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor at Asia Hotel, Kuala Lumpur by a 600-strong mob of UMNO Youth in 1996. It took the police two hours to arrive, by which time the mob had torn down the dividing door of the conference hall and was harassing conference participants. Then, instead of apprehending the mob for their violent criminal actions, the police arrested some 59 conference participants who had been victims of the mob.⁽¹¹⁾

The resort to such fascist tactics to disrupt democratic fora continues to the present day. On 18 August 2000, some 300 UMNO Youth members boorishly demonstrated in front of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur over the Chinese

Associations' 1999 *Suqiu* election appeal for civil rights. They threatened to burn down the Assembly Hall. ⁽¹²⁾

The most recent racial incident was at Kampong Medan, Petaling Jaya from 8th to 23rd March 2001. The victims of this more recent racial incident were from the Malaysian Indian community. In all, six persons were killed and over a hundred others suffered grievous bodily injuries at Kampong Medan. It took the Royal Malaysian Police fifteen days to restore order while a small band of armed thugs went on a rampage. ⁽¹³⁾ A recent publication highlighting this affair has been banned by the authorities. ⁽¹⁴⁾

When we compare this surprising ineptitude with the speed with which the same police force took to disperse tens of thousands of *Reformasi* demonstrators after Anwar Ibrahim's detention in 1998, a stark contrast emerges. To date, this recent Kampung Medan racial incident remains a state secret and there has been no public enquiry conducted by the government or Suhakam, the National Human Rights Commission.

On 15 March 2006 at 9.30 pm, some 50 UMNO Youth members delivered an 'ultimatum' to the Kelana Jaya MP, Loh Seng Kok at his service centre. The MP had spoken in Parliament on the concerns of non-Muslims in the country including among other things, that the history textbooks had ignored the contributions of non-bumiputeras and only emphasized Islamic civilization. Loh had suggested a religious department be set up to help resolve religious misunderstandings. These suggestions had not raised any controversy in the House but these UMNO Youth members threatened to take action against the MP if he failed to respond to their letter within several specified days. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Then on 14 May 2006, a forum organised by the Article 11 Coalition on "Federal Constitution: Protection for All?" in Penang was asked to be abandoned by the police after it was disrupted by an unruly mob claiming that the inter-faith forum was "anti-Islam". When another forum on the issue was organized by the NGO

coalition in Johore Baru on 22 July 2006, another mob similarly tried to disrupt the proceedings. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The racist and fascist taunts by delegates at the UMNO general assembly on live television in November 2006 came as a rude shock for many even though they had been standard fare at such UMNO assemblies in preceding years.

This trend and the persistent threats by UMNO leaders whenever their monopoly of political and economic privileges is questioned have at least established one thing, and that is, the May 13 riots in 1969 were by no means a spontaneous outbreak of violence between ordinary Malaysians in the street. They also bring into question the impartiality of the forces of law and order in the country ever since 1969.

Truth and National Reconciliation

The official figures indicate that during the 13 May 1969 civil disturbances, 196 persons lost their lives, 180 were wounded by firearms and 259 by other weapons. According to the report by the National Operations Council, 9,143 persons were arrested, of whom 5,561 were charged in court. ⁽¹⁷⁾ In the process, 6000 persons were rendered homeless, at least 211 vehicles were destroyed or damaged while 753 buildings were damaged or destroyed by fire. ⁽¹⁸⁾

International correspondents at the time calculated a much higher number of fatalities, as we can see from the documents uncovered. The authorities were concerned to cover up the ethnic identity of the victims but it was common knowledge that the majority of the victims of the racial violence were ethnic Chinese.

This volume is an effort to honour the victims by unveiling the truth and pointing the way forward toward national reconciliation. History cannot be written with bias. There is a need for a Special Commission to unearth the truth of the 1969 racial riots before there can be a genuine national reconciliation.

Chapter 1

The Alliance Racial Formula

To understand the racial tension building up to the 1969 general elections, it is necessary to trace the genealogy of the Alliance racial formula and its intrinsic contradictions. We also need to understand the nature of the post-colonial economy and the conditions for the rise of the state capitalist class which used Malay-centrism as its ideology to rally support against the old aristocratic class.

During the Emergency (1948-60), the colonial state ensured that the mantle of political power would pass to the local Malay ruling class. The traditional Malay rulers were easily co-opted since they had been groomed by the British from the early days of colonialism, but some accommodation still had to be found between them and the non-Malay capitalist class who formed a decisive link in the chain of imperialist exploitation of the Malayan economy.

The shifting alliance of the upper stratum of the Chinese and Indian societies had been noted by the colonial government and the latter had not been slow to appoint some of its representatives to the legislative and other advisory bodies. The Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) had eclipsed their traditional influence in the non-Malay communities during the war. With the Emergency Regulations and the banning of the CPM, the rich Chinese leaders with the help of the colonial authorities began to take advantage of the vacuum created in the leadership of the Chinese community. As

early as 1948, the idea of a Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) as the counterpart of the UMNO (United Malay National Organization), had been conceived by Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner. ⁽¹⁾

Thus, on 27 February 1949, the MCA was formed, sponsored by 16 Chinese businessmen who were also members of the Federal Council and dedicated to pro-British policies. The British High Commissioner himself openly stated that he wanted the MCA to be "*stronger than the CPM and to provide the Chinese with an alternative standard to communism.*" ⁽²⁾ The MCA Constitution even provided Chinese members of the Legislative and Executive Councils with an automatic qualification to be officers of the Association. Throughout the remaining years of the Emergency, the colonial government secured the help of the MCA in the operation to remove Chinese squatters into the 'New Villages'. The MCA also helped to recruit Chinese members into the police and armed forces and carried out the government's anti-communist propaganda. In time, the MCA did succeed in winning over sections of the Chinese middle class through communalist appeal of "*fighting for Chinese rights within the government.*" ⁽³⁾

The hallmark of the MCA was its use of patronage to create a social base in the Chinese community. During the 1950s, the government allowed it to sponsor multi-million dollar 'Social Welfare' lotteries whereby it could render financial assistance in order to increase its influence. In addition to the lotteries, the upper stratum of the Chinese business class could use its economic muscle to bestow patronage regarding employment, charity, and social and cultural services within the Chinese community.

The next step in the political strategy of the colonial state was the establishment of the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC). This had made its debut in January 1949 as the 'Sino-Malay Goodwill Committee', an informal closed-door forum for the upper

classes of all three communities. The communal bargaining within the CLC predated the similar secret negotiations within the later Alliance National Council while the agreements within these were presented as ‘non-communal’ solutions to the rest of the country:

“The Committee never developed a genuine non-communal approach to the problems confronting Malaya, but it did demonstrate that significant communal compromise was more likely to emerge from semi-secret and ‘off-the-record’ negotiations conducted by communal leaders.” ⁽⁴⁾

From these negotiations, the bare bones of the ‘Alliance Formula’ began to take shape, rife with contradictions from its inception. Dato Onn had been won over to the British view that they had to accommodate the non-Malay upper class, especially when the Emergency was proving to be more than just a ‘mopping-up’ operation and it was evident that the majority of the non-Malay masses were on the side of the guerrillas.

The lessons of the Emergency awoke the dominant Malayan politicians to the dangers of perpetuating an arrangement in which political power was concentrated in the hands of one racial group, while another, almost of the same size, was left with perceptibly less access to that power. ⁽⁵⁾

At the time, the crucial issues facing the non-Malays revolved around those of citizenship. Onn had to try very hard to persuade the conservative elements in UMNO to relent on the citizenship question and to accept the CLC recommendations to reduce the residential requirement for citizenship for non-Malays from 15 to 10 years. It will be recalled that Dato Onn had led the first revolt over the British Malayan Union’s proposals in 1946 to grant citizenship rights to the non-Malays. After a melodramatic resignation from the UMNO Presidency, Onn succeeded in getting the CLC recommendations accepted by UMNO.

Within the Malay community, Onn was accused of being a 'traitor to the Malays'.⁽⁶⁾ Meanwhile, an ultra-communalist *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung* (Peninsula Malay Union) had been formed to oppose Onn's policies. Similarly, a 'Malay Union of Singapore' was formed. Tunku Abdul Rahman, a prince from Kedah, who represented the dominant traditional Malay rulers, became the new President of UMNO. Onn left to form a new Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). Until then, and indeed until the IMP had shown itself to be a spent force, there is no doubt that the British had cultivated Onn to represent what they had hoped would be seen as more liberal tendencies in the neo-colony that was being created.

Colonial Communalist Strategy

From the beginning of the 1950s, the British colonial state began to introduce reforms in a gradualist fashion, in an attempt to detract from the anti-colonial movement's influence. First, a selective ministerial system was permitted to present a facade of local custodians taking over from the colonial power.⁽⁷⁾

Secondly, the colonial government had to make some concessions regarding the granting of citizenship rights to the non-Malays; this was one of the main demands of the nationalist movement. In 1950, only 500,000 Chinese and 230,000 Indians had Malayan citizenship⁽⁸⁾: a mere fifth of the total Chinese population despite the fact that by 1947, more than three-fifths of the Chinese and half the Indian population in Malaya were local-born.⁽⁹⁾ In 1952 therefore, the colonial authorities made some amendments to the Federation of Malaya Agreement Ordinance. Instead of the 15-year residential requirement and the stipulation that both parents of the non-Malay would-be citizen must have been born in Malaya, the amendments permitted citizenship on slightly better terms:⁽¹⁰⁾

It can be seen that the British colonial state was reluctant to abandon its communalist strategy. The amendments fell far short of the demand for citizenship based on the jus soli principle, whereby all who are born in the country can claim automatic right of citizenship; the conditions were also more stringent than those in the Malayan Union proposals of 1946. This, after all, was in accordance with the demands of the conservative Malay rulers, who refused to accept basic democracy and especially equal political rights for the non-Malays.

Without doubt, the amendments did enable more Chinese and Indians to acquire Malayan citizenship. V. Purcell estimated that between 50 and 60 per cent of the Chinese and 30 per cent of the Indians would have become eligible. ⁽¹¹⁾ By the end of 1953, 1,157,000 Chinese and 255,000 Indians had become citizens, representing a slight increase in the fraction of the total numbers of non-Malays over that under previous regulations. ⁽¹²⁾

By 1952, most of the UMNO leaders who had opposed citizenship for non-Malays had, in one way or another, been co-opted into the Administration, and appointed either as Ministers or Legislative Councillors, *Mentri Besars*, State Councillors, or members of various advisory boards. Furthermore, any protests or demonstrations were impossible while the Emergency Regulations were in force.

The next 'safe' reform introduced by the colonial power was elections to the Local Councils and Municipalities, but even at this level, no real democracy was permitted: the British High Commissioner had the power to revoke the elections as he saw fit; the *Mentri Besar* (appointed by the High Commissioner) could appoint up to one-third of the members; there was no fixed tenure of office, since the Ruler-in-Council could dissolve the Council as he deemed fit; and lastly, the Local Councils themselves had no autonomy, since all policies and regulations needed ratification by the High Commissioner or the State Government.

The Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council Elections in February 1952 largely decided the configuration of the political set-up in the would-be Independent Malaya. Accordingly, the apparently unlikely alliance between the two communalistic parties, the UMNO and MCA, won nine out of the 12 seats in the elections, while the IMP won only two seats. Essentially, the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Elections were an indication to the colonial government of the political forces in Malaya. The IMP, after their poor showing at the polls, lost its credibility. Soon, with the successful application of this electoral 'Alliance Formula' in the other areas of the country, the arrangement became institutionalized.

During the Emergency, there was reason enough for the Malay rulers in UMNO and the Chinese big businessmen in the MCA to form an alliance in order to defend the status quo and defeat the workers' revolt. At the same time, great strain was placed on the Alliance, since, as basically communalist parties, the leaders of the UMNO and MCA constantly had to assuage their respective social bases in the middle class. Within the Alliance, the communalist politics continued on the issues of immigration, educational opportunities, and legislation on the registration and licencing of businesses.⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless, the two parties maintained their common electoral front in all the subsequent polls while keeping the issues at hand as vague and as broad as possible.

While the UMNO and MCA still lacked ministerial positions in the government, the IMP was the party preferred by the British. The UMNO and MCA then demanded that elections to the Federal Legislative Council be held by 1954, but the British would not oblige "while the primary task was the restoration of law and order", and "self-government could only be contemplated after the Emergency was over."⁽¹⁴⁾ It is noteworthy that throughout all this, UMNO and MCA never openly conflicted with the colonial authorities.

When the Federal election campaign began in earnest, the country had a full taste of the communalist politics that was to feature in the years to come. Meanwhile, the Alliance was complete when the MIC joined this communal formula. The strain on the Alliance was most severe during the allocation of seats for the elections. In all three member parties, there were protests at what each saw as concessions to the other parties, and the familiar allegations of the leaders having 'sold out their race'.

The Alliance leaders had to impose strict internal discipline to keep the electoral front intact, while at the same time they each had to secure the support of the very same communalist base; such was the contradiction of the 'Alliance Formula'. For example, on the one hand the Tunku appealed to the Malays by stressing the 'alien danger' posed by non-Malay immigration, and on the other, he defended the Alliance manifesto compromise of marginally less restrictive citizenship requirements, arguing that the 'loyal' MCA and MIC members did not constitute this alien threat.

The Alliance managed to keep the contentious communal issues as nebulous as possible between themselves, and had to play the role of opposition to the colonial power to suit the prevailing political climate. They capitalized on all the misgivings relative to the colonial power, but failed to present the electorate with any clearly defined alternatives. They even orchestrated some protests and boycotts, such as the resignation of the three main Alliance leaders from the Legislative Council in May 1955. ⁽¹⁵⁾

The question of amnesty for the guerrillas (included in the Alliance manifesto) was intended to appease a war-weary population. Their manifesto, however, made no reference to the eventual union of Malaya and Singapore. Above all, this omission resulted from fear of Singapore's strong left-wing labour movement, as well as fear of the threat to the Malays' numerical edge should Singapore become part of the Federation.

The 1955 election gave a landslide victory to the Alliance, which won 51 out of the 52 seats. The remaining seat was lost to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) in the Krian rice district of Perak, which was mainly composed of Malay padi farmers. Afterwards Party Negara became a spent force, leaving the Alliance as the only political party worth supporting by the British colonial state, of which the Tunku became Chief Minister. Subsequently, the Alliance announced the target date for Independence as four years hence and also undertook to negotiate amnesty for the guerrillas.

But the British were not prepared to hand over power until they were assured of the ability of the Alliance to deal with the CPM and the insurgent masses. Western imperialist interests had to be ensured while the Emergency was still in progress. Only after the Baling talks between the Alliance and CPM leaders had broken down in December 1955 and the former reneged on its amnesty proposals, were the British assured of the Alliance's reliability as the neo-colonial custodians. Soon, negotiations between the British Government, the Alliance, and the Malay Rulers began. The result was a foregone conclusion. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The Independence Agreement allowed the British High Commissioner overriding powers 'if in any case he considered it expedient in the interests of public order, public faith and good government of the Federation'. ⁽¹⁷⁾ The conduct of the war against the guerrillas remained in British hands, which also retained the right to maintain a military presence. The Agreement also guaranteed Western imperialist interests against nationalization and any obstacles to free repatriation of capital and profits. The role of foreign capital in the newly Independent Malaya was assured.

MERDEKA: The Communal Formula Enshrined

While 'Merdeka' was the militant slogan of the Indonesian nationalist movement, it was also adopted as the slogan of the imperialist-groomed 'Alliance Party' in Malaya. Before the Merdeka Mission set off for London, the Malay rulers had obtained a guarantee from the Alliance leaders that their status as Constitutional heads of state would be defended; this was in return for promising to back certain Alliance proposals for self-government. The Merdeka talks in January and February 1956 were remarkable for their lack of contentiousness. Only technical points regarding administration during the transition to Independence had to be resolved; most of these pertained to defence, internal security, public services, finance and economics.

The Constitutional provisions included in their terms of reference: '...the safeguarding of the special position of the Malays'.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Reid Commission that was set up at the Merdeka Conference to prepare a Report on the Independence proposals relied mainly on the recommendations of the Alliance. These comprised the following main proposals:⁽¹⁹⁾

- (a) Special privileges for Malays in the public services, permits and licences in business and trade, government scholarships for education;
- (b) English and Malay to be the only official languages;
- (c) The principle of *jus soli* citizenship for all born after 1957. All those over the age of 18, who were born in the country and who had lived for at least five out of the preceding seven years in Malaya, would be granted citizenship if they had elementary knowledge of Malay. For individuals born outside the country, a residential requirement of eight out of the preceding twelve years would be needed to qualify for citizenship. No dual citizenship would be permissible.

The Commission endorsed almost all the Alliance recommendations, but in order to placate the pressure for democratic rights in the rest of the country, suggested that special privileges for the Malays be reviewed by the Legislature after 15 years. ⁽²⁰⁾ No sooner was this announced than communalist elements within UMNO began to attack this limitation on Malay special privileges, while the same provisions created misgivings in the Chinese community. Ultimately, however, the pressures from within UMNO prevailed, for, as Means put it:

“The Alliance remained more sensitive to Malay criticisms of the Report, particularly since the Malay voters out-numbered all the others.” ⁽²¹⁾

This ensured the UMNO’s decisive political edge over its other two partners in the Alliance during the post-colonial era.

Thus, no time limit was placed on the matter of Malay special privileges; instead it was to be periodically reviewed by the Malay Head of State. Substantial concessions were also made to the Malays regarding the issues of language and religion: Islam was declared as the official state religion on 31 August 1957. Responsibility for the administration of Muslim affairs was to lie with the Keeper of the Ruler’s Seal, who was answerable to the Council of Rulers. Within each state, Islamic proscriptions binding on all Malay persons would be enforced by the Sultan’s Council of Islamic Religion and Malay Custom. The Constitution’s designation of Malay as the official language laid it open to being interpreted by UMNO as being the main language in the years that followed.

When the ‘Razak Report’ on Education was enacted in 1957, large sections of the Chinese community saw this as an attempt to curb their mother tongue education in the Chinese-medium

schools. There were disturbances in many of the Chinese schools in Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Seremban. Chinese education became the chief issue in the Ipoh-Menglembu by-election in November 1957, but the MCA adopted the same position as the government.

The Chinese associations and guilds voted in favour of the PPP candidate, D.R. Seenivasagam, who, two years earlier, in the 1955 elections, had lost his deposit against an Alliance candidate. This time however he beat his Alliance rival by a substantial majority, due to the overwhelming support of the Chinese community.

The Merdeka Constitution had effectively institutionalized communalism as the state ideology; additionally it reflected the balance of forces within the Alliance. For the newly Independent Federation of Malaya, the basic provisions of 'juridical equality' had to be compromised simply because the Malay rulers were strongly opposed to it. These feudal elements, preserved by the same colonial strategy, were still a dominant force with political-ideological influence over the Malay masses.

The Alliance, on the other hand, had to accommodate the upper strata of the non-Malay capitalist class because of their important role in the post-colonial economy. Not only were there problems of sharing political and economic power between the three communal parties in the Alliance, but the ruling strata within each party had to accede to the demands of their respective social bases, especially among the middle classes. Without doubt, the communalist politics had exacerbated these struggles. The various factions involved have never failed to appeal to communalist sentiments in building up their class bases. This has taken the predictable form of charging the respective UMNO, MCA, and MIC leaders with having 'sold out their race'.

The Federation of Malaya adopted a 'Constitutional Monarchy' with a royal Head of State (*Yang di-Pertuan Agong*) elected by and

among the nine Sultans. On Independence Day, the ordinances and regulations of the Emergency remained in force. The 'checks and balances' built into most liberal democracies were circumvented by two Articles of the Merdeka Constitution: Article 149, giving Parliament special powers to deal with subversion; and Article 150, giving the Executive special powers to deal with an Emergency.

'Free' elections largely concealed traditional feudal loyalties and duties binding the Malay peasantry to the aristocratic leaders. Apart from the economic bonds familiar to rural institutions, the political-ideological domination by the aristocratic landed interests of the peasantry was further effected by the special charge on the rulers as protectors of Malay religion and custom. This domination was further enhanced by the institutionalization of Islam as the state religion and so incumbent upon each and every Malay person in the country.

Social inequality was unchanged at Independence, and continued to be interpreted in communal terms. The masses in all three main national groups still found themselves segregated in the same communal division of labour. Only in the white-collar occupations (the teaching profession, civil service) was the division slightly minimized. The only free socializing between Malays, Chinese and Indians seemed to exist at the top, between the triumvirate in the Alliance – what has been referred to as 'horizontal solidarity' by pluralists. Intermarriage is still rare, religion and the law being inseparable in Malay jurisprudence: a non-Malay would first have to embrace Islam before marriage to a Malay could be considered.

A noteworthy feature of the Alliance was that from its inception, there was never any doubt that UMNO was the dominant partner. This was linked to the special position of the Malay rulers in the colonial set-up, the predominance of the Malays in the electorate, as well as the state's political strategy. This has been an important factor

in subsequent state policies, and it has also facilitated the ascendancy of the Malay state capitalist class. Consequently, whatever compromise was reached within the coalition, UMNO always had the upper hand regarding 'Malay Special Rights' and the definition of citizenship and education policy.

Rise of the State Capitalists

The communal riots of 13 May 1969 were the tragic outcome of the contradictions inherent in the Alliance Formula. Social scientists who designate the cause as the breakdown of 'moderate' politics clearly fail to look at the evolving class configuration and at the tight political reins maintained by the Alliance which strained almost to breaking point. It is noteworthy that, while the state's communalist strategy serves to divide the masses, simultaneously it creates contradictions among the various ruling factions who appeal to their respective social bases in communalist terms.

With Singapore's withdrawal from the Federation 1965, the political balance within Malaysia as a whole was also altered. The ruling class on the mainland could exercise economic and political power virtually unimpeded, thus arousing anxiety in Sabah and Sarawak. Not only were the political leaders in Sabah and Sarawak (let alone their people) not consulted over the Singapore expulsion, but the financial assistance for East Malaysia expected to come from Singapore was now curtailed. The threat of increasing domination from Kuala Lumpur became even more alarming since the 'East Malaysian' states now featured less in the political balance of Malaysia's communal equation.

Indeed the communal politics of the pre-Malaysia period was in no way diminished. The PAP and its opportunistic slogan of 'Malaysian Malaysia' to catch non-Malay votes was superseded by the DAP (Democratic Action Party). Within the dominant

Alliance itself, the rival communalist demands between UMNO, MCA, and MIC again surfaced in view of the removal of the PAP challenge. In all this, the Tunku played the role of arbiter, a role that became increasingly eroded as the emergent Malay state capitalist class began to assert themselves in the new balance of forces. Within UMNO there were calls for more stringent citizenship laws for non-Malays and a speedier implementation of Malay as the sole official language.⁽²²⁾

The ascendancy of this state (bureaucratic) capitalist class can be seen in the contents of the Malaysian Plans. The First Malaysia Plan (1966-70) saw even more agricultural institutions emerge at both federal and state levels. These were aimed at providing further alternative channels for credit, marketing, extension services, and so on, in order to accelerate commercial services in the rural sector. Among these were: the expansion of Bank Pertanian (Agriculture Development Bank); the establishment of Lembaga Padi Nasional (LPN, National Padi Authority); Food Industries of Malaysia (FIMA); MAJUIKAN (Fisheries Development Authority); MAJUTERNAK (Livestock Development Authority); RISDA (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority); FOA (Farmers Organisation Authority), and various State Agricultural Development Corporations, including MARDI (Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute). The vastly enlarged bureaucracy that had been created for the management of all these rural schemes provided abundant opportunities for corruption and manipulation as well as a Malay middle class base for the state capitalists.

The interests of the rich Malay farmers and state capitalists were further boosted in the latter half of the 1960s by the Green Revolution – the World Bank-inspired scheme for increasing agricultural productivity. The ‘miracle rice’ was accompanied by the construction of water conservancy work since it performed well

only under ideal conditions. Thus the Muda (Kedah) and Kemubu (Kelantan) Schemes were built largely with World Bank funds. ⁽²³⁾ In addition, the necessary nutrients, fertilizer, and pesticides essential for the HYVs (high-yielding varieties) were all supplied by the multi-national agribusinesses. For example, all the fertilizer in the country was supplied by a subsidiary of ICI, Chemical Company of Malaysia at Port Dickson. The association of ICI with the Department of Agriculture and the Rubber Research Institute was longstanding. The nitrogen fertilizer plant was also linked with Esso. The Agency Houses, Harrison and Crosfield, and Guthrie, helped to market and distribute their products on the local market.

To a great extent these inputs had been provided to the farmers at subsidized costs, but studies have shown ⁽²⁴⁾ that they have mainly profited the rich farmers. A Guaranteed Minimum Price for padi was introduced by LPN (Lembaga Padi Negara-National Padi Authority) to encourage production and productivity. But all these subsidies have been at the expense of the consumer, and this was another way by which the Malay state capitalists ensured the loyalty of the Malay peasantry to maintain its communalist policy. In terms of increasing productivity, the Green Revolution did achieve its aim: from 1957 to 1972, the acreage of land under padi production increased by only 28 per cent, while padi production actually increased by 170 per cent. ⁽²⁵⁾

By the start of the Second Malaysian Plan in 1971, almost 70 per cent of the local rice consumption had been met by domestic production. But in terms of easing rural poverty, the Green Revolution in fact accentuated class differentiation.

From the 1960s, there was clearly a struggle within the Malay ruling class, between the 'Old Guard' aristocratic class who were content with their economic interests in private capital of the non-Malay and foreign capitalists (even if this only meant sitting

on the boards of directorship) and landed interests, and those elements who wanted to expand state capital still further in order to create a strictly Malay state capitalist class.

The Cabinet crisis which led to the dismissal of Aziz Ishak in 1962 can be seen as a manifestation of that struggle. Ishak was the Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives who favoured measures to establish marketing, credit and processing co-operatives in the rural sector, thereby cutting off the economic hold of the non-Malay merchant class on the Malay peasantry. His dismissal at the time showed that the 'Old Guard', symbolized by the Tunku, still had the upper hand within the Malay ruling class and were reluctant to disturb the status quo. The latter were satisfied with gradualist measures, such as providing economic and social amenities and utilities as piecemeal electoral rewards to the rural Malays, while allowing the non-Malay capitalists free rein in the private sector. Thus, at the end of the 1960s, Malay capital was negligible.

Contradictions in the rural sector and peasant discontent had resulted in the electoral victory by the PMIP (Pan Malayan Islamic Party) in the east coast states of Malaya in 1959. The PMIP's leadership was provided by the Malay middle class, both in the urban and rural areas, who were dissatisfied with the performance of UMNO. Their ideology was that of Islamic fundamentalism and their main criticism of UMNO leaders and followers (who were branded as *kafir* or infidel) was their profligate lifestyle, and compromise with the non-Malays.

But the Malay middle class within UMNO provided the social base for the ascendant Malay state bourgeoisie since they had gained from the preferential policies toward Malays and hoped for further economic gains. In 1965, the First Bumiputra Economic Congress was held, during which the government's record was vociferously criticized for failing to aid the formation of Malay

capital. The ideology they propagated in order to achieve their ends was predictably communalistic. Consequently, MARA (*Majlis Amanah Rakyat* – Council of the People’s Trust) was created out of RIDA (Rural Industrial Development Authority), together with other state enterprises such as Bank Bumiputra and FAMA (Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority), to actively foster Malay business interests.

By the Second Bumiputra Economic Congress in 1968, the clamour by these same elements within UMNO for a vast expansion of state capital to aid Malay interests was overwhelming. It became evident that the section of the traditional Malay ruling class that was satisfied merely with their positions on the boards of the non-Malay companies was rapidly becoming a minority. With increasing state intervention in the economy, the appetite of the Malay state capitalists was whetted accordingly. The growth of this class out of the traditional Malay ruling class had been facilitated by the configuration of political forces since Independence. Above all, the communalist strategy of using Malay Special Rights allowed the Malay ruling class to tip the balance of class forces in its favour. As a result, its incursion into the economy has been presented as a *fait accompli* to the other class forces in the country.

After the Generals’ coup in Indonesia in 1965, the demands of the ultra-communalistic Malays within UMNO became even more aggressive. This was partly the response to the cue from General Suharto:

“Our intention is to build a greater Maphilindo, which means we would like to unite with the Malay race and other friendly neighbouring countries.” ⁽²⁶⁾

The expulsion of Singapore also had ensured the Malays’ position as the largest ethnic community in the Federation. The predominance of UMNO within the Alliance was thus guaranteed, and the

communal bargaining within it had to be on terms acceptable to the top leaders of UMNO. All non-Malays who failed to abide by these rules of co-operation with UMNO by disregarding these “sensitive issues” of ‘Malay Special Rights’, language and religion, were barred from access to the political system.

On 31 August 1967, Malay became the national language and sole official language, and the enforced use of Malay in the government service and education system was to further ensure the retention of Malay privileges and special rights. Whereas at Merdeka in 1957, there was the assumption that these Malay privileges were only a temporary measure to be maintained for approximately fifteen years in order to “raise the economic and educational level of the Malays to parity with the non-Malays”,⁽²⁷⁾ these special rights were now institutionalized. This provided the setting for the General Elections of 1969.

Summary

The Alliance formula at Independence contained contradictions which exacerbated ethnic tensions right up to the general elections of 1969. The British colonial power had backed UMNO’s demands for Malay “special privileges” while the anti-colonial nationalist movement was forced into a defensive position on Non-Malays’ citizenship and cultural rights.

The post-colonial economy also provided the conditions for the rise of the state capitalist class which used Malay-centrism as its ideology to rally support among the Malay masses. During this period, social inequality was maintained and continued to be interpreted in communal terms.

Chapter 2

The 1969 General Elections

The official version of the 13 May 1969 riots puts the blame for the riots on the provocation by opposition parties after they had made significant gains in the 1969 general elections. From correspondents' dispatches, we find little evidence to support this allegation. Nor is there evidence that ordinary Malays and Chinese "spontaneously" rioted after the general elections were known.

Communist wrangling reached an unprecedented pitch by the end of the sixties. Post-Independence developments were leading to discontent among the workers and farmers, as well as sections of the non-Malay middle class. Income distribution figures showed worsening conditions for the workers and peasants, including an absolute decline in real household income. ⁽¹⁾ The non-Malay workers and middle class were even more disgruntled by the state's discriminatory bumiputra policies, not only regarding employment, but also in education, scholarships, and licence grants.

These various sections of the population displayed their grievances against the Alliance during the 1969 elections. With the virtual proscription of the left through the mass arrests of their leaders in 1968, ⁽²⁾ the main opposition parties in the elections comprised only those which preyed upon communalist sentiments and took advantage of the mass disaffection towards the Alliance. The Labour Party decided to opt out of constitutional politics. Parti

Rakyat was one of the few political parties that rejected the communalist appeal but concentrated strictly on 'class solidarity'. Its manifesto pointed out that:

"The Malay feudalists and the big Chinese and Indian capitalists within the Alliance Party with the support of the international capitalists, have always and continue to exploit the peasants, workers, fishermen, petty officials and traders, etc. of all races in this country." ⁽³⁾

The DAP, successor to Singapore's PAP championed the interests of the urban non-Malays. The PMIP's basic aim was "to establish through constitutional means an Islamic state for the benefit of the Malays." ⁽⁴⁾ Its ideology of the imposition of a Malay community on the whole nation was fervently propagated by Malay school-teachers and *ulamas* (religious teachers) in the rural areas. Their dedication was in strong contrast to and posed a threat to UMNO's rural organization and power base, and this opposition within the Malay community still exists today. The PPP (People's Progressive Party) was dominated by two lawyer brothers, the Seenivasagams. It attracted non-Malay voters, mainly in Perak state. Parti Gerakan Rakyat (Gerakan), was formed only in 1968 by a number of opposition leaders and intellectuals from their Penang stronghold.

These opposition parties made an electoral pact not to split the votes even though they were at opposite ends of their respective communalist propaganda. The results of the 1969 General Elections shook the status quo, for it completely demolished the Alliance edifice that had stood unchallenged since Independence: UMNO lost 17 parliamentary seats mainly to Parti Islam (PMIP), and won only 51; MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) won only 13 seats, conceding 20 to the opposition; while MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) won only two out of the three allocated to the party. ⁽⁵⁾

At the state level, the results were even more surprising: Kelantan was again lost to Parti Islam; the Alliance was beaten in Penang and Perak; the seats were evenly distributed in the capital state of Selangor; while the Alliance managed only 13 out of 24 in Trengganu. The worst defeat was suffered by MCA, whose candidates won only in constituencies with a strong Malay representation.

As the 1969 general elections approached, there was no doubt that the ruling Alliance would cease to enjoy the overwhelming power it had enjoyed since Independence. This was Malaysia's third general election since independence in 1957.

In 1959, before the inclusion of Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah in the Malaysian Federation, the Alliance had gained a two-thirds majority in the Federation of Malaya general election. In 1964, a year after the founding of Malaysia (including Singapore), and during the crisis of the Indonesian Confrontation, the Alliance coalition was returned to power with an even greater majority.

However, during the 1969 hustings the Alliance was put on the defensive and the championing of civil rights by opposition politicians was met by communalist breast beating in the ruling party, UMNO. So accustomed to governing with a comfortable two-thirds majority enabling it to amend the Constitution at will, this time the Alliance was apprehensive about any reduction in its electoral support.

Pundits were predicting the loss of the state legislature of Sarawak to SNAP (Sarawak National Party) and SUPP (Sarawak United People's Party), perhaps Penang to Gerakan, and Perlis to PMIP (Pan Malayan Islamic Party). In Trengganu and Kedah, it was also feared that the influence of UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) would be reduced.

A major change was the drop in popularity of the MCA (Malay Chinese Association) among the Chinese electorate. But it was the challenge to UMNO, the de facto ruling party of the Alliance by

PMIP in Kedah, Perlis and northern Perak that shook its erstwhile claim to Malay dominance and defender of Islam. PMIP had been steadily winning appeal in the northern traditionalist, rice-growing areas where the Malay peasantry found difficulty identifying with the well-off “Westernised” Malays in charge of the government in Kuala Lumpur.

MCA had fared well in 1964 in the face of PAP competition mainly due in part to the Confrontation scare and its reliance on Malay votes. In 1969, it faced the prospect of the PMIP splitting the decisive Malay vote in the west coast constituencies. It also faced stiff competition from DAP in Negri Sembilan.

Faced with the possibility of three states in opposition hands, the Alliance was forced to re-think many of its policies. The election was also a vital test for the Gerakan Party which was trying to establish itself in a handful of parliamentary constituencies as well as in the Penang legislature. The sharp struggle between MCA and DAP had led UMNO to rethink how it would maintain the “Alliance formula”.

Thus, on the eve of the 1969 general election we saw on the one hand, PMIP accusing UMNO of having “sold out” the Malays to the Chinese and betrayed Islam; on the other, DAP accusing MCA of having “sold out” non-Malay rights to UMNO.

Finance Minister and MCA leader Tan Siew Sin accused DAP of an “unholy alliance” with PMIP since both parties had an electoral understanding for PMIP to split the Malay vote in Perak and DAP to split the Chinese vote in Malay-majority areas.

On the eve of the election, UMNO was already pessimistic about MCA’s ability to hold the Chinese vote. MCA was faring badly in its campaigning. Tan Siew Sin was troubled by hecklers at Petaling Jaya and Brickfields in the 81,000-strong Bangsar electorate where MCA’s Lew Sip Hon was standing against DAP’s Secretary General, Goh Hock Guan.

The DAP was also fielding strong candidates in Negri Sembilan and Perak and hoped to take at least five parliamentary seats. Education Minister Khir Johari claimed that PAP and the Communists in southern Thailand had sent infiltrators to Malaysia to assist DAP and PMIP respectively.

The MCA used communal appeal to warn that it was the only Chinese party with which UMNO would work and that if the Chinese community responded to DAP's electoral appeal, it would mean the end of the multi-racial formula in government. Tan Siew Sin called on the Chinese not to split the Chinese vote, maintaining that it was the only party capable of looking after Chinese interests in the governing of the country.

Thus the keenest tussle in the 1969 general election was that between MCA and DAP, with MCA accusing the DAP of taking money from Singapore while the DAP in turn, accused the Alliance of having obtained money from the CIA for its campaign. ⁽⁶⁾

Although Gerakan, DAP and PPP had come to an electoral arrangement, there was no agreement on a basic political platform. Gerakan could not agree with its allies on the question of the Internal Security Act and a common policy on the language issue.

The Labour Party boycott of the 1969 election left a vacuum which was avidly filled by DAP, Gerakan and PPP. It had been the major component of the Socialist Front which won 14 per cent of the votes in 1964 and had looked like emerging as a strong, non-communal alternative. It had then become practically defunct as a national organisation although its branches were still active throughout the country. During 1967, the party had debated whether to take part in the elections but many of its leaders were detained during the Penang riots and more of its members were detained in November 1968.

Towards the end of 1967, its leaders, Dr Tan Chee Khoon and trade unionist V. David resigned from the party to join Gerakan.

The Gerakan Party, which Tan formed with Dr Lim Chong Eu and the Alatas brothers in April 1968, did not succeed in gaining mass support but relied on the personalities of Tan Chee Khoon and Lim Chong Eu.

The Labour Party justified the boycott on the grounds that the Alliance could not tolerate the existence of a non-communal opposition party with leftist tendencies and that to participate in these elections would be to condone communal politics. The consequence of that boycott continues to be debated to the present day.

The Alliance, during the campaign warned the voters that there was no point whatsoever in voting for opposition parties. Tan Siew Sin, for example, told a rally in Bungsar that the price for electing DAP's Goh Hock Guan would be "neglect". He said,

"The ordinary voter should remember that while a bigger opposition is alright in theory, in practice it means that those voters represented by opposition members will suffer, and suffer hideously, merely to enjoy the luxury of having someone there in Parliament scolding the Government on their behalf." (7)

Penang voters were told that they would suffer economically unless they returned the Government to the Alliance and in Kuching, the Transport Minister Tan Sri Sardon emphasised that the Central Government would find it difficult to deal with an opposition government in Sarawak. One Alliance leader even admitted publicly that PMIP would have no chance of developing Kelantan unless it gained control of the Central Government first.

One explanation for the Alliance's behaviour was that the style of politics in Malaysia obliged it to behave as if everything was at stake. Electors were being told that a bloodbath would develop if the Alliance was not returned. (8)

The question surrounding the Tunku's continued domination of the political scene began to circulate. Before the elections, he announced that it would be his last election and Tun Razak promptly asked the nation to return the Alliance at the polls in final tribute to the Tunku's sacrifices over the years. According to *Time* magazine, the Tunku had earlier named Tun Razak as his heir and Tan Siew Sin had set his seal to the arrangement, but still, he had given no clear indication of when the Deputy Prime Minister would come into his inheritance.

At 66, the Tunku was not an old man and he had lost none of his political shrewdness. But was he prepared for a coup d'état? As the Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent, Bob Reece put it:

"The Tunku continued to exploit the belief that he was a kind of tranquilliser keeping Malaysia peaceful and prosperous. But the longer he held on, the more difficult it was for Tun Razak to reach the top of the ladder. Power had not corrupted the Tunku but it had made possible a life which he enjoyed immensely and showed no signs of abandoning." ⁽⁹⁾

An analysis of this Parliamentary election when compared with the electoral patterns of Alliance and Opposition support in the 1959 and 1964 elections provides considerable insight into the unresolved tensions and problems of West Malaysia. Such tensions also existed in the territories of East Malaysia, but there was not enough time to undertake remedial policies.

To understand these conflicts as they emerged in the electoral patterns, it is necessary to briefly sketch the demographic, social and economic features of West Malaysia. In 1966, the Malays made up 50 per cent of West Malaysia's population, while the remainder was composed of Chinese (37%), Indians (11%) and other racial groups (2%). Malaysia's unique multi-racial situation was complicated

by the fact that the Malay masses, traditionally located in rural areas, were poorer and less educated than the predominantly urban Chinese (63%) who, as a whole tended to be economically better-off.

Secondly, the distribution and allocation of constituencies ensured a dominance of Malay rural constituencies at the expense of the more heavily-populated Chinese urban constituencies. Since this original constituency demarcation, there had been several changes in parliamentary constituencies' boundaries but this basic inequality has not been corrected. For example the urban electorate of Bangsar won by the DAP (Democratic Action Party) in the 1969 elections had a valid vote of 46,698 compared with the Hilir Perak constituency which had a valid vote of 12,221 won by the Alliance. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Since Independence in 1957, there had been an increasing trend of rural-urban migration. The growth of towns had already been accelerating between 1947 and 1957. In particular, Kuala Lumpur the capital had experienced very rapid growth and many of those moving to the city had been rural Malays who could not find employment opportunities in the kampungs. In addition, lack of adequate housing had forced them into squatter settlements such as overcrowded Kampong Baru, the scene of some of the worst communal clashes in 1969.

In other parts of the Malayan Peninsula, the same problems of unemployment existed also for the Chinese and Indians; particularly in George Town (Penang), Malacca, Ipoh (Perak) and Seremban (Negri Sembilan), all areas of non-Malay disaffection with the Alliance Government.

In the last chapter, we saw how the Alliance Party had attempted to follow a policy of government investment in the rural sector to uplift the standard of living of the Malay population while providing incentives for private enterprise to invest in the industrial expansion of the cities. It had also attempted to ease Malays into the urban

sector by providing government positions and industrial jobs. Despite some success in this venture, the pace had clearly not been sufficient to create labour opportunities for urban workers, and a growing dissatisfaction in both communities was growing.

Thus, among the Chinese, the Alliance Party's policy was seen as excessively favouring Malays, while among the Malays, the Alliance Party's policies were regarded as not getting results fast enough. It is against this background of growing communal polarisations that the results of the 1969 election must be analysed.

In 1959 the Alliance Party was already clearly entrenched in Johore, Pahang, Kedah and the Malay constituencies of the West Coast states of Penang, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. The Pan Malayan Islamic Party controlled the states of Kelantan and Trengganu. The Socialist Front and the People's Progressive Party were dominant in the urban areas of the West Coast states.

Ten years later, the Alliance Party had gained Trengganu at the expense of the Pan Malayan Islamic Party. The latter party had made substantial gains in Kedah, a dominantly Malay Alliance stronghold. Despite these changes, the pattern of electoral support for these two parties was not radically different. The DAP and the Gerakan had merely inherited the Socialist Front's strength in the mixed and dominantly Chinese urban constituencies of Penang, Negri Sembilan and Selangor. The PPP (People's Progressive Party) still retained its position in its urban stronghold of Ipoh and the surrounding areas.

Earlier elections had revealed strikingly the influence of the communal structure of Malaysian society. For instance the Alliance Party had usually followed a policy of nominating from its three-fold party alliance a candidate whose race was that of the dominant race in each constituency. The PMIP drew practically all its support from the Malay constituencies but also increased its votes in mixed constituencies principally among the Malays in the West Coast states of Selangor and Perak.

The Socialist Front's appeal in the mixed and Chinese constituencies during the sixties had benefited the DAP and the Gerakan. The other parties appeared to have declined in Chinese areas despite the fact that the PPP, the principal party of this group, won four seats in the 1969 election. Overall, the pattern seemed to reflect the 1959 pattern of communal support.

The 1969 election results pointed to a growing polarisation which indicated that the policies of the Alliance Party had not succeeded in convincing the majority of the West Malaysian population of the need for continuing to support the ruling party's policies.

The important thing to note is that despite the election results, there was absolutely no reason for any spontaneous outbreak of communal rioting as a result of the elections. This was observed by FEER correspondent T.G. McGee:

"On the face of it, the results of the 1969 election should not have provided a catalyst for the communal rioting which ensued. True, the MCA had lost the support of the majority of Chinese. True, UMNO had lost some support among the Malays. But these trends should merely have served as indicators to the Alliance Party of the inadequacy of its policies for building a multi-racial society. They need not be interpreted as an irrevocable disenchantment with the Alliance Party or the successful manoeuvring of another party or parties to overthrow the existing Government." (11)

Summary

The Alliance coalition suffered a stunning defeat at the hands of the opposition parties which had made an electoral pact in the 1969 general elections. The official version of the “May 13 Incident” puts the blame for the riots on provocation by the Opposition parties. From correspondents’ dispatches at the time, we find little evidence to support this allegation.

There was certainly widespread discontent among the workers, farmers, middle classes as well as urban settlers. The state’s racially discriminatory policies only served to create further divisions among the people and the 1969 election results clearly reflected this growing polarisation.

Record Of The Riots

These declassified documents from the Public Record Office and foreign correspondents' dispatches show that there was a plan in place to assemble young Malay hoodlums from all over Selangor at the residence of the Selangor Mentri Besar's residence and that mischief was afoot. Once the rioting had started, the security forces did not keep order impartially but stood by while these hoodlums were allowed to burn and kill indiscriminately. Troops also fired indiscriminately into Chinese shop-houses and were partial in making arrests. Consequently, the casualties were preponderantly Chinese.

These documents also show that Razak was in complete control from the start of the riots and with the emergency in place, had a free hand in planning the post-1969 political makeup with the backing of the armed forces.

The worst racial rioting the country had ever experienced flared up in Kuala Lumpur on the evening of May 13, and within days, the official number of dead stood at 137, with more than 300 injured, hundreds of houses gutted and scores of vehicles burnt.

The actual figure of fatalities has been a matter of dispute but from the various sources garnered from the documents at the Public Record Office, London, we can see that the official statistics were grossly understated and the ethnic distribution of casualties disguised.

Chronology of Events

When the results of the 1969 general elections became known, it was obvious that the ruling Alliance Party had received a major setback in the general election although it had managed to retain a simple parliamentary majority. They had lost Penang to the Gerakan Party; Kelantan to the PMIP (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), and Perak and Selangor were at the brink of falling into Opposition hands.

The Alliance had almost certainly lost its two-thirds majority which had enabled it to amend the Constitution at will ever since Independence; three of its ministers and two parliamentary secretaries had lost their seats; its share of the valid votes had dropped by 9 per cent since 1964 to 49 per cent; and it faced the prospect of a vociferous Opposition in the Federal Parliament for the first time since Independence.

Exultant supporters of the Democratic Action Party and the Gerakan filled the capital's streets on Sunday and Monday night with their flag-waving convoy of vehicles. Immediate reaction to election results was jubilation in the Opposition and deep shock in the Alliance. The election campaign had served to fuel racial tension. In Kuala Lumpur on the eve of the poll, a large funeral procession for a Labour Party youth shot by police earlier in the week went through the town centre.

On the night of 11th and 12th May, the Opposition celebrated their victory. In particular, a large Gerakan procession welcomed the left-wing Gerakan leader V. David back from winning the federal seat in Penang.

Foreign correspondents in Kuala Lumpur who observed the elections filed dispatches praising the Malaysian democratic process and predicting five years of peace, prosperity and more efficient government. The Tunku's initial reaction was naturally one of

disappointment, but he conceded that the people had wanted a strong opposition, which had been realised.

The following day, the events that followed would tend to suggest that elements within UMNO had laid plans to teach a lesson to those who would challenge the predominance of UMNO. In this operation, it would also appear that they had the connivance of the police and the army.

May 13: UMNO Youth Gather at MB's Residence

On Tuesday, the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), which had suffered badly at the polls, announced that it would withdraw from the Cabinet while remaining within the Alliance. The Chinese voters had been warned by Tun Razak before the elections that unless they voted for the MCA, they would forfeit all Chinese representation in the Government.

At UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) headquarters in Batu Road, the feeling was that democracy had gone too far – in other words, that the political hegemony of the Malays was in real danger. A non-Malay Mentri Besar in both Selangor and Perak seemed dangerously likely.

From this dispatch by Bob Reece, correspondent for the FEER at the time, it is evident that there was a plan for youths mobilized by UMNO elements to assemble at the residence of the Selangor Mentri Besar, Dato Harun Idris. The ensuing carnage at Kampung Baru and Batu Road quickly spread elsewhere in Kuala Lumpur. The curfew that was imposed was not fairly applied on all communities and the army was alleged to have fired indiscriminately into Chinese shop houses.

“Late on Tuesday afternoon (May 13), young Malays from the whole of Selangor began to assemble outside the residence of the Selangor Mentri Besar, Dato Harun. A retaliatory march

had been planned by the UMNO youth to end in a rally at Suleiman Court near Batu Road, but police permission was withheld. While people were still assembling for this parade, trouble broke out in the nearby Malay section of Kampong Baru, where two Chinese lorries were burnt. By 6.30 pm, a crowd was raging down Jalan Raja Muda towards Batu Road. Another group came out of Kampong Baru into Jalan Hale, another exit from the Malay section into the Chinese areas.

“By 7.15pm I could see the mobs swarming like bees at the junction of Jalan Raja Muda and Batu Road. More vehicles were smashed and Chinese shop-houses set on fire. The Chinese and Indian shopkeepers of Batu Road formed themselves into a ‘district defence force’ armed with whatever they could find – parangs, poles, iron bars and bottles. I watched one old man pathetically grasp a shovel. Men, standing in the back of a truck travelling up and down the road, urged the people to unite. A 16-year-old boy tore strips from a piece of cloth to be used for identification. When the Malay invading force withdrew as quickly as it had arrived, the residents took their revenge. Shop-fronts and cars suspected of being Malay-owned were smashed or burnt. Several attempts were made to set fire to the nearby UMNO headquarters where three propaganda jeeps had already been set on fire. A bus, whose Malay driver had allegedly knocked over two Chinese on a bicycle, was also attacked.

“The police arrived at about 9pm but did not remain in the area. Later, truck-loads of Federal Reserve Units (riot squads) and the Royal Malay Regiment drove past. The Chinese in the street ran into their shop-houses as soon as the convoy came into sight, but were quickly out on the streets again when they had passed. By midnight, I found the street almost deserted but sounds of gunfire and the glows of fires showed that trouble had flared up elsewhere.

“From my own observations, the curfew was not imposed on Tuesday night with equal rigidity in all areas. In the side streets off Jalan Hale, I could see bands of Malay youths armed with parangs and sharpened bamboo spears assembled in full view of troops posted at road junctions. Meanwhile, at Batu Road, a number of foreign correspondents saw members of the Royal Malay Regiment firing into Chinese shop-houses for no apparent reason. The road itself was completely deserted, and no sniping or other violence by the residents had been observed by the journalists.”⁽¹⁾

The violence, which the Tunku described as triggered off by the behaviour of opposition supporters after the announcement of the election results, had provided, he said, a situation which the communists “had always tried to create”. As if to demonstrate this, it was announced on Friday night that “93 hardcore terrorists” had been arrested in a building in Batu Road with home-made arms and were alleged to have confessed to the intention of attacking innocent people. It was also announced that another 60 “armed communists” were taken into custody over the weekend.

Razak likewise tried to avert suspicions of UMNO’s role in the disturbances by pinning the blame on the communists:

“In response to some prodding by the Australian High Commission, Razak denied that it had ever been Umno’s intention to organize a large procession through the town on the evening of 13 May. They had simply assembled in front of the Selangor State Chief Minister’s house to demonstrate support and trouble had started when two bus loads of Chinese youths came by and provoked them. Thereafter Communist elements had taken full advantage of the situation and it was they who were responsible for the continuing violence.”⁽²⁾

May 14: Casualties Were Mainly Chinese

The following day, the riots continued but on a smaller scale compared to the previous day. The curfew was only lifted to allow people to buy food. This dispatch from the British High Commission (BHC) shows that the casualties were mainly Chinese:

“Violence continued throughout the night according to eye witnesses and official reports. However it was much more sporadic, more quickly contained and less widespread. Security forces were much better organized to contain and check violence. It is hoped this morning that the back of the communal rioting may be broken. Curfew is being lifted over staggered hours in various districts of the city to allow people to get food. Curfew is to be rigidly reinforced this afternoon but indications are that it will be lifted for a few hours on a daily basis for the next few days if the situation permits.” ⁽³⁾

In another dispatch, we see that the army had been called in to play a bigger role:

“Police have called out all possible reserves and have handed over the northern part of the city to the Army. Last night’s casualties are now put by police at 44 killed and about 150 injured.” ⁽⁴⁾

The preponderance of ethnic Chinese among the casualties was clear from the start:

“...that of 77 corpses in the morgue of the General Hospital on 14 May, at least 60 were Chinese.” ⁽⁵⁾

The Tunku said the riots were due to an attempt by disloyal elements to overthrow the Government by force of arms. In a second speech, he said that a great deal of money had been poured into the country by communist agents, adding that the communists had earlier tried to prevent the elections. They had taken the opportunity of parading in their thousands for the funeral procession of a youth reported to have been killed in self-defence by police when he was discovered pasting anti-election posters.

Nevertheless, the observations of the procession by foreign journalists give a very different picture:

“While it was true that some Mao-slogans and flags were seen during this parade, the discipline of the 14,000-strong crowd in their eight-mile march may have been due to genuine restraint rather than to communist organisation.” ⁽⁶⁾

Blame on Communists Disbelieved

The Malaysian government’s attempts to blame the communists for the riots were not taken seriously by the officials of the British High Commission who could see that the Tunku was not prepared to blame his own people for the riots. Nor was he going to blame it on the Chinese “as a whole”:

“The only comment that occurs to me...the theory that the Tunku may have chosen to lay the blame on the ‘communists’ deliberately, because he was not prepared for political reasons to blame his own people (the Malays) but wished to avoid explicitly blaming the Chinese because that would have been a sure way of provoking racial feelings.

“If this is a plausible theory (and I am not convinced that it is) the effectiveness of the ploy was considerably weakened by the failure of several of the Tunku’s colleagues to take some

care to avoid explicitly or implicitly blaming the Chinese. Their several statements that the disturbances were due to "bad elements" and secret societies could only have been taken as reference to the Chinese, particularly when the speakers professed to want to avoid racial misunderstanding by adding that of course not all Chinese were bad." (7)

This secret dispatch to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) puts paid to the claim that the communists were responsible for the riots. By the end of May, first Dr Ismail, then the Tunku, followed by Ghazali Shafie had to admit that their earlier attribution of the riots to the communists had been incorrect:

"For some three weeks now the SCO and I have been trying to assess the degree of communist involvement in the rioting which began on 13 May. The short answer is: none.

The communist hare was started personally by the Tunku who, in a highly emotional broadcast on 15 May, blamed the whole affair on "communist terrorists" and spoke of their plans "to take over power and to overthrow the Alliance by threat and intimidation." Tun Razak and Dr. Ismail (the recalled Minister of Home Affairs) later repeated these allegations several times over many days. Although on 17 May, the Tunku admitted in another broadcast that "bad elements" and "paid saboteurs" had also been involved, there is evidence that even as late as 29 May he was still voicing his conviction that communists had been behind the trouble: he spoke in these terms to the American Ambassador on that day.

But on the same day, Tun Dr Ismail was admitting that he had been wrong to ascribe the riots to the communists, and during the New Zealand Defence Minister's visit on 30 and 31 May, the Tunku admitted that the earlier accusations had been incorrect. Three days later, Tan Sri Ghazali followed suit and since then this has been the line followed in private

discussions by Malaysians. It has, however, only been admitted publicly in an unattributable briefing (Ghazali's).

Two large groups who, at the time of their mass arrest, were described as "communist terrorists" have now been admitted by the Police to be ordinary Chinese thugs. No document of any kind has been produced indicating either pre-planning or involvement in the riots. The Head of Psychological Warfare, who was charged with trying to produce evidence of pre-planning, has been able to turn up nothing better than a leaflet issued in January 1968." (8)

Some problems attributed to the communists in Sarawak were likewise debunked. There were several arson cases alleged to have been started by the communists but the culprits turned out to be Malays instead:

"Commissioner of Police has told me in confidence that he is now satisfied from evidence from secret sources within SCO that arson cases were perpetrated not by communists but by Malays and that he now knows the names of the Malays responsible. The commissioner also told me that he had been criticized by Tun Razak for his handling of security situation in Sarawak since 7 June and his failure to take stricter measures such as imposition of curfew which in his view could only have exacerbated the situation." (9)

May 15: State of Emergency Proclaimed

On Thursday, May 15th, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong proclaimed a State of Emergency under Section 150 of the Constitution. This gave the Government powers similar to those which it assumed in 1964 during the Indonesian confrontation. The Government Gazette of 15 May 1969 printed the following:

- A. Proclamation of Emergency under Article 150 of the Constitution.
- B. Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance. All uncompleted elections are suspended.
- C. Directive under Article 150(4) of the Federal Constitution. Suspension ...of any state legislatures until further notice.
- D. Proclamation ISA 1960. The whole federation declared a security area for purposes of part 2 of the Act.

That afternoon, the local press was suspended until censorship regulations could be drawn up but no attempt was made to supervise reports sent out by foreign correspondents. However, on Saturday, some overseas journalists had their curfew passes removed by armed troops.

Straits Times editor-in-chief, Tan Sri Hoffman, made an impressive plea against these official moves at a press conference. This was particularly significant both because of the standing of his newspaper and because of his own reputation. He remarked to Information Minister Hamzah that only Malaysians were to be prevented from finding out what was going on. In reply, Hamzah's explanation was that the ban was due to the inflammatory nature of articles printed by the local press, before and during the elections. Hoffman protested:

“Is a civil servant going to tell me what is inflammatory and what is not inflammatory?”⁽¹⁰⁾

Tun Razak revealed that the National Operations Council, of which he was the head, would consist of the Ministers for Information and Home Affairs as well as representatives of the police and the armed forces. A mini-cabinet was also to be formed, including MCA ministers Tan Siew Sin and Khaw Khai Boh, but it was not clear what its relationship would be with the Council. Tun Razak was still responsible to the Tunku, but all the powers under Emergency Regulations were vested in him. The Council had responsibility for restoring law and order and would be built on a hierarchy of councils at state and district levels.

In Penang, Dr Lim Cheong Eu was sworn in as Chief Minister, and in Kelantan, PMIP's Dato Asri announced immediately after the election results that people of all races in his state were to be considered as “Kelantanese”.

Razak said that the curfew had been lifted temporarily in Kuala Lumpur that morning but the situation had rapidly worsened and more sporadic fighting had broken out. He had therefore re-imposed the curfew and did not intend to lift it at all for the next two or three days. Unfortunately, food was very short.

Press releases by the Malaysian Red Cross (MRC) during the time are quite revealing of conditions prevailing, especially the extent of casualties:

“Three Red Cross ambulances and Red Cross personnel have been working round the clock since the curfew was imposed in Selangor at 8pm on 13 May 1969. Numerous cases were taken to the General Hospital which includes the seriously wounded and expectant mothers.

“Mobile kitchen serving hot drinks was set up at the GH for casualty patients, evacuees and helpers which functioned throughout. In response to the urgent appeal made by the Red Cross for blood donors, 300 pints were collected at the Blood Bank. Over 200 donors were placed on the reserve list.

“Miss Maureen White, Field Delegate of the League of Red Cross Societies together with Mr. Alan Werner, Secretary of the National Junior Red Cross of the Australian Red Cross Society have been assisting the Malaysian Red Cross Society continuously...” (11)

May 16: Military Biased Against Chinese

The military that had been called in to maintain order from the start of the riots behaved in a discriminatory fashion against Chinese Malaysians. This is clearly borne out in the BHC telegrams.

By Friday, May 16th, the situation was still tense in Selangor with cars and houses being burned and fatalities rising. In Penang and Perak, the situation had improved although the curfew remained in force, as is clear in this telegram by the BHC that day:

“English and Chinese language press reported situation in Selangor as tense but under control. More cars and houses were burned this morning in Kuala Lumpur. Death toll had risen to 89 with over 300 injured. 24 hour curfew remained in force in Selangor and had also been imposed on the State of Malacca. Curfew in Penang had been further relaxed following an incident-free night. In Perak, where the situation was reported to be improving, curfew was lifted for three-and-a-half hours this morning. The Malay-language press has not appeared.” (12)

At 2200 hrs, the Tunku made a broadcast in which he announced the setting up of a National Defence Force to be manned by volunteers. Young men were urged to come forward in order to demonstrate their loyalty. The new Minister for Information, Hamzah Abu Samah, and Tun Abdul Razak gave press conferences pinning the blame for the riots on communist infiltration of the opposition parties. According to Deputy Prime Minister Razak, the Labour Party boycott of the elections had only been a feint. The real strategy of the communists had been to “intimidate” people into voting for the opposition parties.

In another BHC telegram that day, there were reports of looting by the largely Malay military and their bias against the Chinese Malaysians. We also see the increasing numbers of refugees:

“There were a number of reports of looting in Kuala Lumpur, including some looting by the military. We have further eye witness reports of bias by the Malay military against the Chinese. For example, that they are turning a blind eye to actions by Malay rioters and showing partiality in arrests. These reports come from British loan service officers, whose general impression is that the Malays are the main perpetrators of the trouble.

“The authorities are clearly facing an increasing refugee problem as members of both communities who have been burned or turned out of their houses are seeking shelter. Some of them are assembling in police stations and in sports stadiums.”⁽¹³⁾

There was at least one racial incident in Malacca as well:

“Tan Sri Ghazali has told us that there is now considerable concern about this situation in Malacca, where a Malay rickshaw man was killed this morning by Chinese. The Tunku

flew there today to assess the situation. Ghazali stressed that the food situation in Selangor was now the government's gravest problem."⁽¹⁴⁾

In most of the west coast cities up to Malacca, there were curfews and the police and army were in total control throughout the country:

"By Friday, curfews had been imposed in Malacca, Negri Sembilan, parts of Perak, southern Kedah, and Penang as well as Selangor. Six battalions of the Royal Malay Regiment together with Federal Reserve Units and police were spread very thinly over this large area, and all army and police reserves were mobilised. The formation of a Civil Defence Corps was announced, and 'loyal' youths were asked to volunteer. Hundreds of houses, deserted during the panic, were set on fire, but by Thursday the Fire Brigade appeared to be on the job. The presence of the police and the army had restored a measure of confidence by Saturday morning, although the Government ignored earlier offers by opposition party leaders to co-operate in damping down the violence."⁽¹⁵⁾

May 17: Professionalism of Security Forces Questioned

If the security forces had acted professionally, the riots could have been controlled from the outset. It is well bearing in mind that by 1969, the Malaysian police and armed forces were already well tested and trained in controlling civil disturbances having been through greater challenges during the Emergency (1948 to 1960).

From the BHC telegram of Saturday May 17th, we see the skepticism among British officers toward the official figures for fatalities and the preponderance of Chinese casualties among the dead. There was reported Malaysian naval activity in the Johore Straits and Straits of Malacca:

“Last night passed more calmly although there were continuing isolated burnings and some shots. The police estimate of the dead is now about 100. The figure is clearly higher...A notable feature is the very high proportion of Chinese to Malay casualties. The proportion is about 85 to 15 (estimates by British officers).

“We have had reports of Malaysian naval activity. Two ships are patrolling the Singapore Johore Causeway in order to prevent infiltrators. A naval detachment is also proceeding to Port Swettenham (Klang).” ⁽¹⁶⁾

The press censorship invited criticism not only from the local press but also in diplomatic circles, especially when official statements lacked clarity and credibility:

“The Straits Times editorial welcomed the assurance that newspapers would re-appear in Kuala Lumpur tomorrow. The suppression of newspapers was a blunder made worse by the inadequacies of the official information media.

“The English press today reports formation of Alliance caretaker Cabinet to include the MCA.

“Tunku’s statement last night..mentioned arrest yesterday of a group of 93 terrorists. The press seemed confused over whether this arrest had taken place in Malacca or Kuala Lumpur.” (17)

In this confidential BHC memorandum to the FCO, the coup d’etat has been acknowledged and it has effected the transfer of power not only to “Malay hands” but also to the security forces. The latter’s professionalism is questioned and there is a sense of despair over the extent of the tragedy. There is clearly a crisis within the police force faced with this imposition of military rule:

“With shifts of power to Malay hands there is also a transfer of power to security forces and the security forces do not emerge from the last four days of terror with a shining record. Its organization to act quickly to the emergency was poor..Its responses have been slow and ineffective in many instances. For the first 24 hour period, sections of the police force simply became demoralized due to the impact of widespread violence and the regular police forces are a key element in maintaining any long range security in this country. There have been examples of bias in the early stages shown by Malay security forces..some of the military leadership in this country has a weak capacity for decision...

“But the tragedy is immense. In the past few days from our windows we have seen burnings, destruction on a wide scale, and bodies in rivers, fighting, machine gun fire on crowds and above all, a sense of fear and horror in what a week ago was a relatively happy city. Children have been killed. Hospitals are full, blood supplies have run short, the social order has broken down, and a political experiment has been destroyed. When some normalcy is restored this country

is going to have to start all over again and the people in this country are going to have to start all over again to learn to live with each other. It isn't going to be easy.” ⁽¹⁸⁾

From this BHC telegram, we get an idea that the Federal Reserve Unit, which at the time was multiracial in composition, was the more impartial of the security forces, while the Malay troops were discriminatory in enforcing the curfew:

“We have considered whether the emphasis on the activities of ‘communists terrorists’ might not be an attempt to embroil us, if not at once then as a possibility for the more distant future. We discount this and believe that there are other plausible reasons (on which I will commit in other telegrams).

“There is no doubt that some of the security forces are discriminating in favour of the Malays. For example, Malay troops are guilty of this whereas the Federal Reserve Unit (ie. riot police) is not. Discrimination takes the form, for example, of not, repeat not, enforcing the curfew in one of the most violently disposed of the Malay areas in Kuala Lumpur (Kampung Baru) where Malays armed with parangs, etc. continue to circulate freely; with the inevitable result that gangs slip through the cordon round the area and attack Chinese outside it. In Chinese areas the curfew is strictly enforced.” ⁽¹⁹⁾

May 18: Not Communists but Assorted Bad Elements

We will never know how much the Tunku knew about the “hidden hands” behind the riots. ⁽²⁰⁾ But when the riots broke out, the government was in denial and their knee jerk reaction was to blame the communists. The Tunku then qualified his earlier assertion that the disturbances were caused by communists, putting the blame instead on assorted “bad elements”. He also announced the deferment of the Sarawak elections and the continuance of the restrictions on the movement of foreign journalists.

The situation by Sunday 18 May was still unsettled in some parts of the capital city as can be seen in this BHC telegram:

“Situation Report 1200 hrs 17 May to 1800 hrs, 18 May.

“Reconnaissance yesterday showed trouble concentrated in the northern urban area of Kuala Lumpur but still some outbreaks in the western area. Following yesterday’s successful three hour lifting of curfew some arrangements are being made today from 0700 to 1000 hrs.

“Tunku broadcast again last night 2230. To some extent he qualified his earlier criticism of ‘communists’. He put the blame on assorted bad elements comprising communists, terrorists, saboteurs and secret society members.

“Tunku claimed that there had been attempts to spread the trouble to Sabah and Sarawak. He made an unfortunate reference to the ‘backwardness’ of the people in these territories in justifying the deferment of elections there.

“Tunku also criticized foreign correspondents for alleged exaggerated reporting. He said the best service they could do Malaysia was to return home..Foreign correspondents were given a briefing by Tun Razak last night which made clear that restrictions on their movements would continue...

“Some local newspapers are appearing today.

Tun Tan Siew Sin announced measures for food supply last night. These include arrangements for wholesale supply of food to shops.” ⁽²¹⁾

The Sunday Times came out to defend the state of emergency, calling it “the people’s own emergency”!

“The objective of the proclamation of a state of emergency was to recover as soon as possible all that has been lost. There was no other aim. No other purpose. This was the peoples’ own emergency: Only with the aid of the people could the government end it...Malaysia must not be too fearful of ‘Emergency’. It is not a new factor in the life of the country.” ⁽²²⁾

Indeed it was not, but events since then have shown that this was not so much “the people’s own emergency” as the ascendant state capitalists’ own emergency. To the present day, the state of emergency still has not been annulled.

May 19: Razak Completely in Control

Less than a week after the riots, the reins of power had effectively passed to Razak, the then deputy prime minister, indicating that there had been a plot to bring about the coup d'état.

By Monday, May 19th, the extent of the refugee problem as a result of the violence can be seen in this dispatch; the local press was allowed to publish under censorship; foreign journalists had their curfew passes withdrawn; some opposition politicians were arrested, and there continued to be speculations about the Tunku's receding powers:

"There are reported to be some 10,000 refugees. Local newspapers had been suspended but have now been allowed to resume publication under censorship. Foreign correspondents have had their curfew passes withdrawn for alleged partiality of reporting. There is some evidence that the military but not the police discriminated in favour of Malays in enforcing the curfew. Some opposition political leaders are said to be among those arrested.

"The exact relationship between Tun Razak and the Tunku is not clear. In public Tun Razak says he is directly responsible to the Tunku but he has made it clear privately that he is completely in charge of the country. This could mean the beginning of a process of withdrawal by the Tunku as an effective PM." (23)

May 20: No Role for Opposition Leaders

If, as the government maintained, there was an urgent need for goodwill and national unity, then it was expected that opposition leaders would be asked to join hands with the government in appealing to their people for calm and cooperation. The following dispatch shows an interesting exchange between the Australian High Commissioner and Tun Razak in the presence of Ghazali Shafie on May 20th, revealing a time when foreign diplomats still felt free to proffer advice to Malaysian leaders. The former's suggestion that opposition leaders should be given a role as peace maker was however, not accepted by Razak and Ghazali:

“Summary of what Australian High Commissioner said to Tun Razak on 20 May. Ghazali was also present. Eastman pointed out that, attempts by government spokesmen to present what was evidently a racial clash as a violent communist revolt would be disbelieved in practically every overseas capital and as a result Malaysians might well lose trust and sympathy they hoped for. He suggested careful and comprehensive statements which would put the whole position in realistic balance and perspective. Razak and Ghazali showed some signs of accepting this thesis but did not commit themselves to issuing statement. Eastman further suggested that opposition leaders should be allowed to appeal to their followers for calm and restraint, but Razak and Ghazali were firmly against this. They considered opposition leaders would simply use such an opportunity to promote their own political views.” ⁽²⁴⁾

The refugee situation as at 20 May 1969 can be glimpsed in this MRC press release:

“The Malaysian Red Cross Society is continuing its daily feeding programme for refugees in Merdeka Stadium, Victoria Institute, Stadium Negara, Shaw Road, Chin Woo, in conjunction with the social welfare authorities, municipal officers, civil defence personnel and other voluntary organizations.

“Over 5000 people have received food supplies in addition to the continued feeding of refugees at the evacuation centres.” ⁽²⁵⁾

May 21: Official Estimates of Casualties

From the declassified documents, it was widely known that the number of casualties were far higher than stated in the official statistics. Still, the official sources showed a preponderance of non-Malay fatalities.

On 21 May, limited passenger train services resumed between Kuala Lumpur, Butterworth and Singapore; Malaysia-Singapore Airlines resumed normal operations, while international flights were still over-flying West Malaysia. The official statistics of casualties were:

“137 killed – 18 Malays

342 injured

109 vehicles burned

118 buildings destroyed

2912 persons arrested, mostly curfew breakers” ⁽²⁶⁾

May 22: New Censorship Regulations

The 1969 promulgation of Emergency was the second state of emergency after the 1948-60 communist insurgency, during which the political arrangement of the new independent nation was cobbled together. The coup detat which suspended Parliament in 1969 was likewise accompanied by strict censorship regulations to ensure compliance.

The Straits Times reported promulgation last night by Malaysian Government of censorship regulations covering news reporting and comment, publication matter and postal services. The paper stated that the regulations under the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance 1969 were signed by the Director of Operations, Tun Razak. Those failing to submit to the new regulations were liable to fines of RM10, 000 or three years imprisonment, or both. ⁽²⁷⁾

Radio Malaysia reported that Tun Razak at a meeting of the National Operations Council yesterday announced the setting up of a committee to consider ways of re-organising the government information services and mass media. Members of the committee were Tun Sambanthan, Hamzah Abu Samah, Khaw Khai Boh and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie. ⁽²⁸⁾

The food shortage and situation in the evacuation centres was as follows:

“The Red Cross is continuing the supply of family food packs to houses in the following areas: Ipoh Rd, Chow Kit Rd, Batu Rd, Sentul, Klang Rd (1st to 10th mile), Kampung Baru, Setapak, Klang Gates, Hot Springs, Kg pandan, Jinjang, Brickfields, Cheras Rd, Pantai Valley, and other isolated areas. Today 1436 family packs were distributed to about 7500 inhabitants. The daily feeding at the five evacuation centres is continuing, and today about 4500 evacuees at these centres received soft drinks and other supplementary foodstuffs.” ⁽²⁹⁾

May 23: Trigger-Happy Royal Malay Regiment

The declassified documents reveal that Malay troops were not only fraternizing with the Malay thugs but were discharging their firearms indiscriminately at Chinese shop houses as they went through the city.

On May 23rd, another foreign journalist, Ian Ward of the London Daily Telegraph filed this report highlighting racial discrimination by the army against the ethnic Chinese and imposition of Malay rule by decree:

“The initial stages of the government crackdown produced glaring discrimination against the Chinese. Two forms of curfew resulted. In the Chinese district the population cowered behind doors as trigger-happy Malay troops from the Royal Malay Regiment prowled the empty streets outside, periodically shooting into the homes. In kampungs, on the other hand, Malay soldiers chatted and joked with armed Malay thugs.

“As the hours dragged by, flames engulfed Chinese shops on the edges of Malay sections of the capital city. Likewise, Chinese vehicles were gutted by fire and looting broke out in the buildings supposedly under guard by Malay troops.

“Opposition leaders pleaded with the security authority to remove Royal Malay Regiment forces from Chinese districts, replacing them by the more multi-racial Federal Reserve Units. All offers by Chinese Opposition leaders to speak over television and calm public fears were rejected.

“When confronted by foreign correspondents with reports of racial discrimination, the deputy prime minister Tun Razak, flatly denied them. Following this, curfew passes issued to foreign journalists were withdrawn and reporters were ordered to remain indoors ‘for their own safety’”. ⁽³⁰⁾

Malays Also Hostile toward the Hooligans

The 1969 riots were the works of Malay thugs orchestrated by politicians behind the coup d'état. The violence did not happen spontaneously between “Malays” and “Chinese” as the official history tries to paint it. In the same report, Ian Ward intimated that these Malay hooligans were detested by the law-abiding Malays of Kampung Baru. He also makes it clear that the state of emergency had established de facto Malay rule through the NOC with Razak as the head. Furthermore, the suspension of the East Malaysian elections was seen as a move to maintain absolute control:

“By the weekend, the steam had gone from the rioters, except perhaps for Kampung Baru where the ‘Commandos al Allah’, a movement of Malay extremists, had set up their headquarters. There the extremists threatened even fellow Malays, who by this time were openly hostile towards the hooligans.

“But, as the Chinese feared, the state of emergency had established what amounted to Malay rule by decree through the NOC, headed by Deputy PM Razak, who had emerged as the country’s supremo.

“The suspension of the Sabah-Sarawak portion of the General Election had the effect of freezing the entire democratic process, which had produced undisputed evidence of strong anti-government feelings..All indicators point to a determination by the ruling clique to maintain absolute control.”⁽³¹⁾

It was during this time that the new regime already considered making amendments to the Internal Security Act in order to allow them to make detentions without trial for other than communist activities:

“The Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security, Tun Dr Ismail, indicated today that the ISA would in future be amended to ‘counter changing communist tactics’. It was disclosed that of the 3,699 arrested during the crisis, 952 were members of secret societies. The first World Bank loan for education in Malaysia was announced. The loan – \$8.8 million – is for ‘technical and vocational education’. It is for 25 years with a 10-year grace period and at the rate of six-and-a-half per cent.” ⁽³²⁾

24 May: Government in Denial

By 24 May, law and order had been re-established in Kuala Lumpur and the atmosphere in the town had improved. People were going back to work (in non-curfew hours) and the government offices were limbering into action. The curfew remained in force (from 3 pm to 6.30 am of the following day). Still the government would not admit that it was armed Malay youth who had caused the disturbances:

“Government statements on communist responsibility for the disturbances have become rather more rational, but this is negative rather than positive and there is still no sign of the government being ready to admit publicly that the trouble was basically racial and the disturbances occasioned by armed Malays.

“The figure of nearly 4000 under arrest seems to consist, as to more than half, of ‘rumour mongers and curfew breakers’.” ⁽³³⁾

May 27: Tunku under Pressure to Resign

The 1969 coup was obviously not executed in the usual swift manner seen in other countries. Still, in terms of real power, it was only a matter of time before the Tunku would have to accept the new state of affairs.

Two weeks after the outbreak of the riots, the refugee situation was still serious:

“The daily feeding of about 3000 evacuees at the four centres in Merdeka Stadium, Victoria Institute, Shaw Road School, and Chin Woo is continuing...87 cases of missing persons are being investigated.” ⁽³⁴⁾

On 27 May, the Tunku who was clearly incensed by foreign journalists’ speculations about his weakening position got his private secretary to write a protest note to the British High Commission:

“Letter from the Prime Minister’s Office to Mr. Duff, 27 May 1969.

“The Prime Minister and I read the Daily Telegraph of 16th May, a report entitled ‘Tunku Declares Emergency as Violence Rocks Malaysia’ by Mr Ian Ward, its foreign correspondent, and I quote the offending section – ‘Before the Tunku’s broadcast western diplomats saw growing pressure within government circles for his resignation. It appeared that the Tunku had to present a riot-free situation by the weekend or face party charges that he was no longer in touch with political realities.’

“It is appreciated that a journalist is entitled to report on events for information of the readers but to invent as was done in this case a story which puts a person in such bad light is without justification or excuse.

"I shall be glad if it is possible to know how he came by this information. The effect of it on government servants is disturbing and I am requested by them to refer this matter to you." ⁽³⁵⁾

The British response was typically stiff upper lipped:

"Nor do I know how Mr Ward came to think up this piece of misinformation. Since he quotes "western diplomats", I should perhaps say that I have never met Mr Ward nor had any contact with him; and enquiries amongst my staff demonstrate that he could not have based his report on anything they had said to him during the one or two visits or telephone calls he has made to this High Commission during the last two and a half weeks." ⁽³⁶⁾

British Expatriates Complain of Racial Discrimination

The records reveal the strong revulsion felt by British expatriates toward the racist nature of the riots and the bias shown by the security forces. Among the papers at the Public Record Office are enquiries from British Members of Parliament, anxious to get satisfaction for their constituents' complaints of racial discrimination:

"Letter from Mrs. April Thacker to Sir Malcolm Stoddart-Scott, MP, 24 May 1969.

"I personally know a Chinese shopkeeper who had to open his doors at gunpoint to four armed policemen (Malay) who came in and took what they wanted and left without payment. We ourselves sheltered 15 Chinese peasants in our garage one night because bands of Malays were going round setting fire to Chinese property and slashing people with their parangs.

“Conversation with Yong Pung Haw, Chairman of MSA. Yong said that he had that day been shown an official list of homes destroyed in and around Kuala Lumpur. The total number was 678, far in excess of any published figures.” ⁽³⁷⁾

May 28: Attempt to Justify Authoritarian Powers

This is a confidential report by the British High Commission to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the 28 May 1969, giving an overview of the civil disturbances and the feelings on the ground among the peoples in West and East Malaysia. It confirms what has been noted in the foregoing. This report is insightful in its observation that the government’s attempts to blame the communists for the disturbances were really an attempt to justify their new authoritarian powers:

“It is not yet possible to establish the extent to which the Malay counter demonstration on the evening of 13 May was organized by certain leading members of UMNO but we know that they were given a police licence for a victory procession that evening. There is evidence that groups of Malays came into KL during the day from fairly distant areas and that some of them were armed. Tension grew during the day and erupted in the early evening in violent clashes between Malays and Chinese. By dawn next day many were dead in the centre of town and in kampungs that ring KL on the north and East. There had been a great deal of firing of houses and vehicles.

“The official figures for dead and injured are put at 173 and 337. 116 vehicles are said to have been destroyed and about 200 houses burned. There have been some 5000 refugees and homeless persons. Total published arrests now stand at 5680, of whom more than half have been arrested for curfew breaking and rumour-mongering. It is widely believed, but has not been admitted, that newly elected MPs and other politicians are

amongst those arrested. All of those figures are certainly under-estimates – and the arrests are continuing.

“There was certainly some jealousy between the Army and the police – the former in many cases regarded the latter as insufficiently tough in dealing with the disturbances. There were also reports, many of which are reliable, of individual instances of partiality by Malay military and police personnel against the Chinese.

“To blame the disturbances on communist terrorists gave added justification for the assumption of authoritarian powers. But it was also an attempt to duck the fact that these were essentially racial clashes. In particular, the government drew a veil over the undeniable fact that in this case the Malays were the chief aggressors. The breakdown of the casualty figures into races has not been given, but it is clear from our contacts in hospitals and elsewhere that the proportion of dead Chinese heavily outweighs that of the Malays, the ratio may be as great as 85:15.

“UMNO leaders have also been unwilling to acknowledge the significant contribution made to stability by the Gerakan when they refused to join the DAP and PPP to form an opposition government in Perak and Selangor.

“This concentration of trouble in the capital does not mean that the federal authorities will not have serious problems in their relations with the states. Outstanding is likely to be the difficulty of dealing with the new PMIP government in Kelantan. This state can now be regarded not simply as an isolated area of extreme Malay feeling but as a base for the development of a nationalist movement in favour of more pro-Malay policies.

“Penang will be another problem. There the Gerakan wrested the state government from the Alliance. So far, the new Chief Minister, Dr Lim Chong Eu has apparently co-operated with the Alliance.” (38)

Direct Rule from KL Alienates East Malaysians

The same report also notes that the imposition of direct rule from Kuala Lumpur threatens to exacerbate discontent among the Chinese and indigenous peoples of East Malaysia:

“The two territories of East Malaysia have remained calm during the riots. In the long term, the ambitions of the Chinese and Kadazan peoples to throw off the dictatorship of Tun Mustapha will be encouraged.

“In Sarawak, the prospects for the two opposition parties, if the elections had been allowed to continue, looked good. The imposition of direct rule from KL will not only further exacerbate the discontent among the Chinese population and so worsen the endemic communal problem but, unless most skillfully implemented, runs the risk of alienating in due course, the indigenous Ibans too.

“Official government handouts continue to stress that tension persists in some areas. In particular a 24-hour curfew was specially imposed on the evening of 31 May in Kuala Kurau, Krian District, and North Perak.

“So far as Kuala Lumpur is concerned, there must be some doubt as to the extent to which continuing tension is the cause or result of the maintenance of the curfew. The government is using the daylight hours of curfew to conduct search and clear operations. But there is a considerable psychological problem in reconciling this with their assertion that the general picture is reassuring and that harmony is being restored.

“The government is also certainly building up trouble in the economic field by keeping the curfew on. This will certainly not do much to appease Chinese resentment at the interruption of economic life.”⁽³⁹⁾

Bad for Investors' Confidence

The attitude of foreign capital toward the 1969 riots in Malaysia betrayed their double standards. While they expressed disapproval of the racism and racial discrimination against the Chinese, they preferred "business as usual" to applying sanctions against the offending regime.

Thus, in spite of all the objective reporting by its journalists, the Far Eastern Economic Review' editorial of 25/31 May 1969 was more concerned about investors' confidence and the country's image as a profitable haven for capital than about rule by decree and racial discrimination:

"The nomination of members of the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) as Cabinet Members represents an important compromise to give the Government a valuable breathing space. Although the MCA was forced to abdicate from the role of spokesman for the Chinese community after its losses in the general elections, the inclusion of men like Tun Tan Siew Sin in the Cabinet will allay immediate Chinese fears of an all-Malay regime. But the compromise is only a temporary measure; in the long run, the Alliance Government has to solve the problem of paying reasonable heed to the demands of all racial communities whilst avoiding the perils of a confrontation between a largely Chinese-based Opposition and a Malay Administration. The need for a breathing space makes it inevitable that the Government should want to continue to rule on an emergency, non-Parliamentary basis for some time.

"But rule by decree offers no permanent solution to the communal problem, and the Alliance must seek a modus vivendi with the Opposition. At the moment, most opposition leaders seem anxious to co-operate in reconciling the races rather than to make life impossible for the Alliance Government. However, if the authorities fail to demonstrate publicly their

determination to move from suppressing violence to restoring the nation's racial harmony, the crisis will threaten not only the nation's political stability but its economic ambitions as well. The initial economic costs of the riots have been marginal, despite serious destruction of private property. The Malaysian Central Bank has all the weapons it needs to deal with any serious outflow of funds. The one danger which cannot be countered by government decree or martial law is the threat to business confidence. The riots have raised a new unknown which potential investors must allow for in estimating their prospects in Malaysia. Yet even after the upsurge of racial hatreds, Malaysia remains a more inviting economy for new investment than most other parts in Asia.

"Nevertheless, if it appears that racial bitterness will be allowed to remain a permanent feature of Malaysian life, investors must inevitably grow more nervous. In a racial tug-of-war, the position of the key Chinese elements in the business world would be in jeopardy, and few investors would be foolhardy enough to risk their money in a developing economy which failed to exploit all its talented entrepreneurs. Such nervousness would not be confined to foreign businessmen; Malaysia's Chinese would scarcely wish to tie up their funds in new projects if their future looked bleak.

"Happily, the crisis has not yet reached these dire proportions. Malaysia's past record of reasonable compromise in tackling communal problems and its reputation for sensible financial and commercial policies still stand to its credit. But the country's image as a sound and profitable haven for capital will quickly disappear unless the racial temperature falls significantly in the immediate future. The economy is not a problem which Kuala Lumpur can afford to ignore: any serious slow-down in either the agricultural or industrial sectors must inflame mutual hatreds and recriminations to an intolerable degree." (40)

Singapore Government Acts to Stem Trouble

The May 1969 riots in Kuala Lumpur clearly affected the ethnic Chinese and Malay sentiments in neighbouring Singapore and the Singaporean authorities dealt with the problem sharply with police sweeps and tight immigration controls and with no-nonsense equanimity.

“Singapore: Moving with expected vigour, the Government by the weekend had arrested or detained more than 700 people since clashes between Chinese and Malays began in earnest the previous Saturday night. Officially, four people had died and 41 had been hospitalised. This number may have been larger, but not by very much. Government news management during the disturbances has been very tight, with the briefest factual confirmation of events which occurred as much as 24 hours previously. But independent observations by foreign correspondents in troubled districts have left the Government’s credibility reasonably unimpaired.

“Ever since the Malay-Chinese riots which wreaked havoc in Kuala Lumpur and have caused what could be the gravest political and social crisis in Malaysia’s history, Singapore has been preparing for the inevitable reverberations across the Causeway which links the two countries. Singapore and Malaysia are tied by more than a bridge: families are spread between the two countries as are friendships, businesses and most important during the present racial troubles – telephone lines.

“The Kuala Lumpur post-election riots which began May 13 and caused at least 200 deaths severely strained the always tentative relations between Malays and Chinese in this part of the world. The majority of those killed in Malaysia were citizens of Chinese origin, a fact instantly known in Singapore where about 75% of the population is ethnic Chinese.

“Against this background, it is not surprising to find Chinese in Singapore seeking private vengeance through violence. The troubled situation is ready-made for secret societies, criminal gangs, hooligans, bad elements, not to mention the leftist agitators who are now undoubtedly at work capitalising on a condition not of their making (but to their liking). After all, Chinese secret societies were originally designed for, among other things, self-defence.” ⁽⁴¹⁾

Racially Balanced Security Forces Crucial

There were a few racially motivated incidents in Singapore as soon as news spread of the riots in Kuala Lumpur but the government there managed to control the situation. The racial balance among Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian officers in the Singapore security forces seem to have been crucial in convincing Singaporeans that the law would be enforced impartially:

“As soon as the rioting began in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore’s police went on to full alert. They have remained in this condition ever since, and are now receiving additional help from a partial mobilisation of the army. A few incidents broke out immediately following the outbreak of violence in Kuala Lumpur which could have been racially motivated, including the shooting to death of a Malay motorcyclist by a Chinese gang. But the real clashes began on May 31.

“The telephone system between the two countries has been working overtime, and rumours still travel at lightening speed with geometrically increasing exaggerations. Stories of butchery of Chinese schoolchildren by Malay mobs in Kuala Lumpur are rife in Singapore, just as a driver from the Malaysian information Department in Kuala Lumpur told a foreign correspondent three weeks ago not to go near the Federal Hotel (where the correspondent was staying) because ‘Chinese

refugees are sniping out of the second floor windows'. Singapore's Government undoubtedly believes that brief official announcements once a day have helped in preventing panic and an increase in tension here. But others believe that such official brevity has left the field open to even more incendiary rumours, and thus is not assisting in calming the tense atmosphere and racial animosities.

"Despite the still widespread rumours, the Government managed to prevent a riot all last week. Well-publicised surprise police sweeps netted a number of potential trouble-makers. These included an undetermined number of Chinese and Malays from Malaysia who could give no satisfactory explanation for their presence. Some had entered Singapore illegally, and some were found with weapons. Only four officially confirmed deaths plus a containment of violent incidents is, for many independent observers, dramatic proof that the Singapore Government's policies have been, so far at least, effective in preventing a duplication of the tragedy at Kuala Lumpur.

"Most important, Singapore security forces, which appear to have a fair balance among Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian officers and enlisted men, seem to have convinced Singaporeans that the law will be enforced impartially without regard to racial origin. Although some Malay families took refuge at the RAF's Seletar Base (to the discomfiture of the British who wished to be compassionate to their local employees without being accused of taking sides), no evidence exists that Singapore's Malay citizens doubt the determination of their Government to protect them from Chinese vengeance coming from any quarter. On a single day, Government announced that it had arrested 53 Chinese and 38 Malays – to make this point very clear. 'This Government undoubtedly will hang the Chinese responsible for the murder of the Malays here,' said a diplomat. 'It won't be easy for them, but

they'll do it to establish their absolute impartiality on racial questions.'

"Relations between Singapore and Malaysia have been publicly correct but certainly not cordial in recent weeks. The Governments exchanged rather sharply-worded diplomatic notes last week stemming from a Malaysian complaint about Singapore's contention that some Chinese had come into the Republic to make trouble. Singapore's announcement never directly mentioned Malaysia as the country of origin for the troublemakers and this constituted the gist of its reply to Kuala Lumpur. Heavy immigration controls have been imposed at each side of the Causeway with a number of citizens from each country being turned back." (42)

Singapore's Views on the Military Takeover

While some may dispute that the May 1969 Affair was in fact a coup d'état, the Singapore premier Lee Kuan Yew could see then that this was a military takeover. Premier Lee's concern about the ousting of the democratic government by a military regime, an obvious reference to the demise of parliamentary democracy in Malaysia is seen in this correspondent's dispatch:

"Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who has been notably subdued in public comment recently, delivered a vital and forthright talk to University of Singapore students last Thursday night. Admitting surprise at the suddenness with which Malaysia's racial troubles exploded, he said: 'The events of the past few weeks have crushed time like a concertina.' He added that not in his 'wildest imagination' did he think that the events would have taken place now. The Singapore Prime Minister's overall prognosis for Malaysia's recovery was not optimistic.

“Lee dwelt at some length on the nature of military regimes throughout the world, noting that once a democratic government had been ousted or deposed, it was not restored to power. This seemed an obvious reference to the present suspension of parliamentary democracy in Malaysia where the country is being ruled by emergency decree. Lee is not the only one to express concern over the increasing political role now being played by the Malaysian Army. He made specific reference to the military governments of Pakistan, Burma, Nigeria and Ghana. His remarks to the students seemed to several observers an expression of resignation over what was going to happen in Malaysia.

“However, despite a number of differences with the Government in Kuala Lumpur, exacerbated by the post-riot policies being followed there, senior Singapore officials realise they must retain a modus vivendi with Malaysia. Singapore obviously hopes that by acting in concert with Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the US, the Malaysian Government can be influenced to adopt policies that will repair a grievous breach between the country’s races.” (43)

June 1969: Sporadic Outbreaks of Violence

By June 1969, the riots had been under control and in an interview with the news agency Bernama on 10 June; Tun Razak covered a number of aspects of the present situation:

- “(a) The situation was only slowly returning to normal. It was impossible to say how long the emergency would continue. Night curfews would certainly be necessary for some time;*
- (b) The government was working ‘all out’ to promote inter-racial goodwill;*
- (c) They were also working to bring all trouble makers to book. Those who were not citizens would be deported. Those*

who were citizens would be deprived of their citizenship if there were sufficient evidence.” ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Nevertheless, there were still sporadic outbreaks of civil disturbances:

“On June 28, 1969 at 5.55 pm at Jalan Chow Kit, KL, two persons were involved in a drunken brawl. This sparked off a chain reaction that there was an imminent major disturbance.

Rumour mongers and irresponsible persons exploited this situation and at 6.40pm at Jalan Raja Muda a person was assaulted by a gang of hooligans. The victim sustained injuries and was admitted to the General Hospital. Subsequently, a house at Sentul Pasar was set on fire by person or persons unknown.

“At 8.25pm, one male person was seriously injured. He subsequently died at the hospital. Following a report of fire, police assigned to cover the Sentul areas visited Sentul Pasar and found a large crowd involved in an affray. Police fired into the air to disperse the crowd which dispersed immediately. From the scene, police found two dead and four injured persons.

“Meanwhile in the interior of Sentul Pasar, a row of dwelling houses was set on fire. A fire brigade was summoned and attended to the fire. Within the close proximity to the fire were a number of injured persons who were subsequently removed to the hospital. Of these, two died and the rest were admitted to the hospital.

“Simultaneous to the incident at Sentul Pasar, two houses located at the fringe, off Kg Dato Kramat, were set ablaze by persons unknown.” ⁽⁴⁵⁾

This is a confidential report of the situation by the British High Commission at the end of June 1969:

“Of the approximately 7500 people rounded up in the aftermath of the bloodshed in May, some 900 still remain under investigation. Further arrests are still taking place... So far as one can tell, those arrested have been largely Chinese, although there are now signs that the government is turning its attention to the Malays and Indians as well...”

“Violence erupted again in one part of KL on the night of 28/29 June: a number of houses were burnt and the casualties were officially given as five killed and 25 injured.

“In Malacca, there was a similar recrudescence on the night of 30 June/ 1 July, when four people were killed.”

East Malaysia –

“Generally speaking, things remain under control there, although there were three cases of arson in Kuching at the beginning of June. These were originally ascribed to Chinese or communist dissidents but are now thought by the local police to have been the work of Malays. If the state of emergency is unduly prolonged and Sabah and Sarawak have to suffer for what the people will regard as the misdemeanors of West Malaysia, separatist tendencies in the two states could increase and complicate the security situation still further.”⁽⁴⁶⁾

Incidents Involving Ethnic Indians

Although the ethnic Chinese were the main targets of the thugs unleashed by the perpetrators of the coup detat, some disturbances toward the end of June 1969 did involve ethnic Indians:

“Fresh incidents between 28 and 30 June led to further casualties in KL and Malacca. It is indicative of the widespread mistrust of the government that no one believes the official figures of 5 killed in KL and 4 killed in Malacca.

“The immediate result has been a severe set-back to public confidence in security. Streets have been deserted by late afternoon although the authorities did not attempt to reimpose the evening curfew in areas of KL other than those directly affected. It is also important and disquieting that Indian communities were the main targets in both cases. We cannot tell whether or not the incidents were provoked by criminal gangs or by communists, with the deliberate intention of involving the Indian communities. But the net result has been to align the Indians more firmly than before with the Chinese against the Malays.

“The basic curfew relaxation hours in all five west coast states were extended to midnight on 21 June and to 1 am on 29 June. The 24 hour curfew in the Thai border area of Perak remains in force for security operations.”⁽⁴⁷⁾

Racism against ethnic Indians in Malaysia has been seen in increasing instances, the most serious of which was the “March 8 Incident” in 2001 when at least six Indian Malaysians and over a hundred others were grievously hurt at Kampung Medan in Selangor.⁽⁴⁸⁾

July 1969: The Security Forces Playing Their Rightful Role

It has already been stressed in the foregoing that the Malaysian security forces had been tested and tried during the war against the communist insurgency between 1948 and 1960. In fact, the Malaysian Special Branch and security forces had earned a reputation of being one of the best in the developing world. Thus, if there had been no connivance between the security forces and the perpetrators of the 1969 coup, the thugs who carried out the racial slaughter could have been stopped and apprehended forthwith.

In one of the last incidents in early July 1969, the police acted in a way they were expected to do so when the troubles broke out in May:

“Renewed trouble in which one policeman was killed was quickly stopped from spreading in KL last night by the kind of positive police action many observers expected but failed to see on May 13 and 14.

“Rumours were rife throughout KL in the latter half of last week of either Chinese retaliation or further Malay attacks. Late yesterday afternoon, a Malay police recruit from Sabah in civvies was stabbed to death in the Chinese Chow Kit area of town – scene of much of the trouble in May.

“Soon after, an indefinite curfew was clamped on the area, while police carried out a security sweep from door-to-door. Last night, some 300 young Chinese were taken from their homes for questioning. 49 were arrested, but most were allowed to return home.

“Today with the curfew continuing in the area, riot police carried out further such sweeps. 20 more arrests were made and helicopters patrolled over Chow kit and the nearby Malay area of Kg Baru. Sweeps such as this have been a long standing feature of police activity in Penang and Singapore. Reliable

observers point out that had such sweeps been carried out before, the situation might have improved much earlier.

“Apart from a couple of minor fires, there was no other activity or violence last night. But the situation remains tense and the killing of the policeman scarcely dampens communal emotions.” (48)

Tun Ismail’s firm stand and the Tunku’s announcement of a National Goodwill Committee made up of politicians of all parties went some way toward allaying the fears of the people:

“Meanwhile also last night, the Minister for Home Affairs and Internal Security, Tun Dr Ismail, made a forceful appearance on radio and television, repeatedly stressing that he had ordered the security forces to act firmly ‘without favour or discrimination’ to any communal group. Tun Ismail revealed that with the latest arrests as a result of troubles last weekend, total arrests since May now stood at 8114, comprising people ‘from all the major racial groups of this country.’

“Of these, 4192 had been charged in court, 675 released on bail, 1552 unconditionally released, and 1695 preventively detained.

“Tun Ismail – making a further shift in the various explanations offered by the government for the May riots – ascribed the events of May 13 as being the result largely of the communal election campaign.

“‘The explosion was spontaneous,’ he said, ‘and caught all of us by surprise.’ But more recent incidents were premeditated by undesirable elements in society and could be ‘vigorously stamped out.’

“Tun Ismail’s firm stand plus the Tunku’s indication that a national goodwill committee could comprise politicians of all parties both came as welcome signs to political observers. The Tunku has recovered from his operation in

early June and has indicated that he intends to do a goodwill tour of the country fairly soon.” ⁽⁴⁹⁾

The situation in West Malaysia had improved substantially by July 1969 but there was still tension in some parts of the country:

“West Malaysia – Improvement in situation with no major incidents reported. Tension remains high in sensitive areas of Malacca, Perak and Selangor.

“Continuing boycott by Chinese tradesmen in KL of produce from Malay farmers causing concern. In other parts of the country, evidence of one community boycotting activities of the other.

Curfews – Trengganu, Pahang and Johore: No curfew.

All other states: 0100 to 0500

Penang : 0100 to 0400

Sentul Pasar: 1800 to 0600

Grik & Kroh: 2100 to 0600

Certain jungle areas: 24 hour curfew” ⁽⁵⁰⁾

Mahathir Expelled from UMNO

The Tunku’s slow exit from the political stage began to create renewed tension within UMNO and it led to one of the key players, Dr Mahathir being expelled from the party. This led to agitation among the Malay middle class who were the supporters of the state capitalist class which was behind the coup. It demonstrated that most, if not all supposedly “racial conflicts” in Malaysia have their origins in internal UMNO ruling class struggle:

“Malaysia: Internal Affairs – Civil Disturbances following general election.”

“Tension had begun to ease until last weekend, but Malay agitation connected with the Tunku’s return to a position of influence and the removal of Dr Mahathir from UMNO’s general committee on 12 July has heightened it again.

“Malay university students have petitioned for Tunku’s resignation and demonstrated on the campus. Malay university lecturers have helped disseminate a spate of pamphlets which in turn have put Kampung Baru on edge, the Malay reserve in KL where the 13 May disturbances began. Malay frustration could provoke fresh inter-racial trouble. But the authorities are aware of the risk and have taken strong security measures since last weekend which should be enough to contain any attempts at disorder.” ⁽⁵¹⁾

Summary

The records show incontrovertibly that the riots of May 1969 were carefully planned and organized and that they were an excuse for the new regime to declare an emergency to effect the regime change. The security forces did not act professionally and impartially but allowed the thugs to go about their slaughter of ethnic Chinese.

These documents also show that Razak, the then deputy prime minister was in full control from the start of the riots. With the state of emergency, he could implement the agenda of the ascendant Malay state capitalist class for political and economic dominance in the post-1969 Malaysia. In this plan, they received the full backing of the police and army.

Chapter 4

Foreign Assessments Of The Regime Change

Documents declassified at the Public Record Office, London after the thirty-year secrecy rule also contain confidential memoranda written by the respective British High Commission officers in West and East Malaysia, the British Cabinet Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well as the Ministry of Overseas Development.

They contain information gathered in the course of diplomatic meetings; private intelligence gathering by embassy staff; reports by British embassy personnel in other capitals around the world, notably Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Australia, New Zealand; choice selections of media coverage of the Malaysian riots of 1969.

Through a study of these documents, we get to know not only the reality behind the strongly censored official version of the events but also how the Malaysian riots were perceived by the officials in different capitals around the world. Together they build up a picture of disapproval by regional and other foreign capitals of the racial discrimination and slaughter of ethnic Chinese in the May 1969 events. The Indonesian regime was the only exception; indeed, we learn from the records that General Suharto was the only foreign leader to have sent a congratulatory note to the new Malaysian regime over the May 1969 Affair.

In the BHC in Kuala Lumpur, the suspension of the Sarawak state elections was regretted since it was clear that this was part of the plan by the new regime in Kuala Lumpur to control political development in East Malaysia. We look at further documents showing how the arms lobby in Britain and Australia tried to justify giving military equipment to a country ruled by emergency decree and practicing racial discrimination. In the end, British pragmatism dictated that supporting the dominant Malay ruling party in Malaysia would serve British interests better. Dissenting British volunteers in the Volunteer Service Organisation (VSO) were given a tongue lashing for their “ignorance of racial favouritism in any racially mixed community”.

The Thai press could clearly see through the racially discriminatory policies of the Malaysian regime and they were sure that the rioters of May 1969 had acted with a purpose. The views of Premier Lee Kuan Yew are always note worthy. In the records, we find that he still had hopes that the Tunku would continue to play a father figure role in the new set-up, but Razak had gone down in his esteem by playing the role of “an evil genius”. The Chinese government in Beijing was more cautious since they probably did not want to create any more anti-Chinese feelings in the region after the events of 1965 in Indonesia.

Suspension of the Sarawak State elections

The plan by the new regime in Kuala Lumpur to use the May 1969 riots to justify a total change in Malaysian politics and economy became evident when it quickly announced that the anticipated state elections in Sarawak had been suspended. The response to this in Sarawak is clear from this memorandum by the British High Commission in Kuching:

“The decision to suspend the election was apparently taken without reference to anyone in Sarawak and was certainly not justified by the security situation in this country. The Sarawak Police are of the opinion that the security problem has been worsened not improved by this decision...”

“Ong Kee Hui of SUPP was most anxious to form a firm partnership with the new Alliance government..It is one of the tragedies of the last week that the actions of the Malay politicians may have rendered untenable the position which moderates such as Ong Kee Hui were taking up with their own party.

“The political leaders of all parties in Sarawak have met and pledged support for the preservation of peace and racial harmony but they have also gone on record as stating that the suspended elections should not long be delayed. From the evidence available it would seem that it is not the Chinese Opposition but rather the Malay leaders of the Alliance who are threatening to export revolution to Sarawak. Malays here account for less than a quarter of the total population. Both the Iban and the Chinese which together form the overwhelming majority are in varying degrees opposed to what they have regarded in the past government as Malay domination.

“There was real hope that the 1969 state elections in Sarawak would make possible a new relationship between Kuala Lumpur and the hitherto disaffected and alienated

Chinese community in this country. The events of the last week may have destroyed that possibility. At worst, it may be that Kuala Lumpur is no longer interested in such a relationship.”⁽¹⁾

Razak Formalizes Malay Rule

From this secret document from the British Cabinet Office, we note that barely a week after the riots flared, the CIA had figured out what Razak was planning, i.e. to change the Constitution to formalize Malay dominance, sideline the Chinese and shelve the Tunku:

“In introducing Adrian van Huizen to speak to us on this subject at today’s CIA briefing for the Commonwealth Liaison Officers..he expressed their main conclusions as follows.

“He said that the Malaysian government was faced with two broad alternatives. They could come to their senses and seek some accommodation with the moderate Chinese elements and draw new forces into the government from the Chinese community. Alternatively, they could continue with the present Malay-dominated emergency rule, possibly toned down a little, but leaving the Chinese unable to improve their political position and so probably driving them further towards the Left and the use of violence. As of now, van Huizen thought it likely the Malaysian government would follow the latter course.

“From all Razak had said it seemed he believed that any attempt at accommodation with the Chinese would cause the Malays to lose the “power-edge” they maintained over the Chinese. If the Malays lost this, Razak seemed to believe that the more dynamic Chinese would eventually take over. This, Razak seemed determined to prevent and it seemed possible he might propose changes in the Constitution to formalize Malay rule. Van Huizen also said that the Tunku’s position was very important. He thought the Tunku would probably be shelved, although not just yet.”⁽²⁾

Malaysian Government's Request for Arms

Soon after the riots broke out, the Malaysian government made requests from the British and Australians for small arms, ammunition and communications equipment for the Home Guard type of force which was being formed after the post-election bloody racial clashes. Britain had a defence agreement with Malaysia. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) made these observations of the Australian position on this issue while they pondered the British response:

“The Canberra Times of 21 May carried a front page dispatch by Southeast Asia correspondent Neil Jillett. The Malaysian request for equipment posed serious questions for Australia, chief of which was: Could they morally or politically justify giving military equipment to a country in which parliamentary democracy had been suspended and replaced by a body which had dictatorial powers? Also, could they help to expand and equip security forces that have already shown a bias against Malaysian citizens of Chinese descent?”

“Spokesman for Prime Minister Gorton said that there was no question of request being for anything other than equipment. Malaysia was not asking for Australian troops and such a request would be unacceptable.”

“‘The Age’ of 21 May quoted the Malaysian High Commission in Canberra, Dato Donald Stephens who stated the day before that communists in Malaysia were getting financial and propaganda support from communist China. Mr. Freeth, Australian Minister for External Affairs had said: ‘I think you would need some stronger evidence.’”

“The leader in ‘The Age’ of 21 May: ‘A Time to say No’ stated request for arms to put down any future riots was one in which the Australian government must reject politely but firmly.”⁽³⁾

Nevertheless, the British were quick to justify a turn around, first, by arguing that the discrimination against the Chinese was by the Malay security forces and not by the government; secondly, that there was a law and order threat by the communists:

“Though there have been substantiated cases of discrimination by some of the Malay security forces against the Chinese, this is clearly not government policy and we should not allow these cases to affect our response to a request for military equipment, for which we have been hitherto a traditional supplier. Therefore, as seen from here at present, we should do what we reasonably can to help the authorities to maintain law and order. We must bear in mind that not only is there a law and order problem in Kuala Lumpur and other centres, but Malaysians must also reckon with the possibility of an increased threat from the communist terrorist organization. They therefore need to raise units which are fully equipped for all purposes and are interchangeable for normal purposes of rotation and are not merely designed to perform specialist internal security duties.. In short, I think it would be reasonable to supply this equipment on repayment, either from FARELF stocks, or, if necessary, from the UK.” (4)

The New Zealand Herald called for fair racial representation in the government and was not in favour of acceding to the Malaysian government’s request for arms. The main issue, it said, was still the question of supplying a police and security force which was not impartial in maintaining law and order:

“The real cause lies in the disruption of the balance of representation caused by the election itself. This paper points out that racial issues have been in precarious balance for a decade. Concern is expressed at the ‘partiality’ reported by the news agencies on the part of the police and armed services in restoring law and order.

“Hope for rapid return to peace will remain slim unless Malay leaders give the Chinese and Indians what one paper calls ‘effective representation in the Emergency Council now ruling Malaysia.’

“Unanimous support is expressed for Mr Holyoake’s recent statement that New Zealand forces cannot be employed to settle internal dissension and one paper claims that a negative answer to such a request from the Malaysian government would receive support from all New Zealand people.”⁽⁵⁾

True British pragmatism is displayed in this secret and personal note by the local operative to the Secretary of State. It reflects the original strategy of the British colonial power in handing over political power to the Malay ruling class at Independence. It also shows their sensitivity to “Malay arrogance and stubbornness”, “Chinese sentiments”, “British vulnerability” but ultimately, it was British interests that counted. The choice of supplying the arms from Singapore stocks was ruled out because of the possible risk of retaliation against British forces still stationed in Malaysia and Singapore:

“Our first task must surely be to sustain the only group capable of providing a government and making order. This will require some handling. We must be firm but sympathetic. The Malay is an arrogant and a stubborn character and to seek to apportion blame at this stage will only bring out the worst in him and lose us any influence that we may have.

“I would strongly recommend that all (repeat all) equipment be supplied from UK. Equipment may be available in Singapore, and it may be thought convenient to supply some from our existing stocks there. But in my view the political dangers are too great to risk this since the source of such supplies would soon become known. Apart from the difficulties which might

confront Lee Kuan Yew, should we supply from Singapore, we must also remember that so far the racial divisions are between Chinese and Malays and we must avoid any risk of retaliation being taken against our own people who are very vulnerable in being widely spread throughout Malaysia and Singapore. I believe a straight commercial arms transaction from UK, if carried by air in commercial aircraft, would reduce the risk.

“I do not underestimate the difficulties but I am clear in my own mind that we must support the present Malaysian government. Failure to do so would not prevent them getting arms from other sources, but would lose us any influence in what could be a most dangerous situation in SE Asia and could also affect our withdrawal.”⁽⁶⁾

The View from Bangkok

The editorial in the *Bangkok World* of 26 May 1969 is a good reflection of how Malaysia's northern neighbour looked at the situation. There it is clear that the racially discriminatory policies were responsible for the dissension; the riots had a design and plan to them, and that the post-election euphoria was not the cause of the riots.

“The Lessons of Kuala Lumpur

“For Malaysia's new emergency government to charge that the cause and blame for the recent bloody riots and continuing dissension lies with the Chinese minority indicates that the majority Malays, in their search for a scapegoat, are ignoring the realities of the situation and continuing the same discriminatory policies which led to the violence in the first place.

“That 90 per cent of the casualties were suffered by the Chinese is some indication that the Malay rioters were more than a little aggressive and obviously moved with purpose and

direction.

“Reports from the scene, including that of Felix Abisheganathan, Malaysia’s most distinguished newspaperman, published in Sunday’s World indicate that in their post-election exuberance the Chinese and Indian minorities may well have created the initial stimulus but hardly were so offensive as to inspire the carnage that followed.

“The Tunku’s claim that political demonstrations by the Chinese and Indians offended ‘the people’ when ‘the people’ means only the Malays, hints at a tone of discrimination found apparently even in the highest levels.”⁽⁷⁾

Singapore’s View of the Regime Change

The Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s views on events developing after the May riots can be glimpsed in this FCO telegram of 28 May 1969. In it, he still believed the Tunku was not a spent force and perhaps underestimated Razak, who was said to be assuming the powers of General Templar, the Head of British Forces during the Emergency in the fifties:

“Laking said that Mr Holyoake had discussed the Malaysian situation with Mr Lee at Singapore Airport on return from the SEATO meeting. Mr Lee had taken a rather more relaxed view than might have been expected. He said that the Malaysians had over-reacted to a security situation which they should have been able to keep within reasonable bounds. Mr Lee added that he did not regard the Tunku as a spent force. Tunku had the best political instinct in Kuala Lumpur, one example of which was that Razak had allowed himself to be photographed visiting only damaged Malay areas whereas the Tunku had been photographed in the Chinese areas. Razak had assumed the powers of General Templar but was not General Templar. Nor did he have the latter’s staff. If he made a mess of things, the Tunku might reassert his authority.”⁽⁸⁾

The British diplomat in Singapore, Sir A. de la Mare put this in plainer words. His close encounters with Premier Lee produced this assessment of the Tunku (“still a silly old man but ... a father figure”) but his view that Razak (“an evil genius”) would be edged aside by the military in time was, perhaps a little presumptuous:

“Lee seems to be revising his views both on Razak and on the Tunku. When Razak appeared to be the heir apparent under the Alliance system, Lee seemed to look forward to his assumption of power and to think that there would then be some prospect of an improvement in Malaysia/ Singapore relations. Hitherto he had consistently dismissed the Tunku as a silly old man, but just before the election he somewhat amended this line: The Tunku was still a silly old man but he was a father figure and, in that capacity, might be able to stave off disaster for a few more years. These few more years were of the greatest importance to Singapore, for the longer Singapore had to develop her economy and her political structure the more able she would be to withstand the impact of any Malaysian debacle.

“Razak, on the contrary, has gone down very much in Lee’s esteem. He told me that we were witnessing the ultimate in absurdity when Razak went about publicly comparing himself to General Templar. What Razak seemed to be after was to establish a virtual dictatorship with military backing. He did not seem to realize that if he played that game the military would soon push him aside and grab total power for themselves. That could only lead to open rebellion by the minorities..In this process, Razak is taking shape more and more in his mind as an evil genius, and the Tunku, broken reed that he is, as the last gamble, probably hopeless but still worth trying.”⁽⁹⁾

Lee’s view of the attempts by the new Razak regime to raise a

few more battalions to handle the civil disturbances is bluntly expressed in another of Sir A. de la Mare's telegrams. He had obviously not anticipated the possibility that the new military government in Malaysia would then embark on its "Barisan Nasional" operation to co-opt the non-Malay elite into a new post-1969 political arrangement:

"Lee said that whether the Malaysian regime raised another three battalions or another 30 would make no difference. The Japanese Kempetai, more vicious and bestial than the Gestapo, had been unable to cow the Chinese. Did anyone think that Razak could do so? The situation had all the elements of a Greek tragedy, moving inevitably to its inevitable climax.

"There was only one course that had any chance of stopping this tragedy. That was to get the Malays to agree to, and to implement, a policy of genuine racial harmony in a democratic system. The minorities had now seen through the Malay device of paying lip-service to multiracialism while practicing discrimination."⁽¹⁰⁾

Sir Arthur de la Mare envisaged two stark alternatives, a middle course, and one which the British ("Malaysia's friends") would like to see. Time has shown that a combination of (a), (A) and (B) below has since come to pass:

"a. Government based on Malay supremacy and prevents the Chinese from gaining the position in the peninsula which they consider they should have.

b. A constitutional government on the basis of real equality which would lead to Islamic areas defecting and Chinese areas aligning themselves with Singapore...

"But we think there are possible developments other than a & b and there's a chance that a middle course if skillfully steered

may bring the country through...

- A. *Continue former Alliance policies with or without new Chinese partner: Malay support would continue to fall away. The consequent likelihood of the Chinese obtaining power by democratic means so alarms the Malay extremists that there would be serious risk of a coup by Malay extremists and/or a military takeover.*
- B. *The government would adopt policies designed to win back Malay support. Examples are probably to be found in bringing the remaining Chinese schools into the national system and certain economic controls designed to benefit Malays...The government also seek a Chinese partner capable of inspiring Chinese trust and confidence.*
- C. *Government implements major pro-Malay policies and make little attempt to nurture the Chinese. The result would be swift descent to major Communist-directed emergency.*

"The points which Malaysia's friends would like to bring to the Malaysian government's attention include:

- A. *Need to implement only the minimum pro-Malay policies which will satisfy Malay opinion while alienating the Chinese as little as possible.*
- B. *Need to bring the moderate Chinese opposition into play as soon as possible...it would probably be unrealistic to expect the government even to tell the full truth about the night of 13th May, but much would be done to restore Chinese confidence if some positive action were seen to be taken against Malays as well as Chinese.*
- C. *Need to think seriously about the future constitutional set up and to be seen to be discussing it with the moderate opposition."* ⁽¹¹⁾

British Expatriates Appalled by Racial Discrimination

British volunteers in the VSO (Voluntary Service) at the time were appalled at the racial discrimination in the schools they taught and they made known their unhappiness when the May 1969 civil disturbances happened.

“I must disabuse you of the idea that VSO are making any political judgement at all in asking whether they ought to continue to send volunteers to West Malaysia. They are being practical. Volunteers are idealists and whatever the official policy may be they are working at levels where they may see and experience racial discrimination. They are likely to tell others at home about their experiences and it may be that recruitment for VSO will fall because young people judge that VSO ought not to be helping a country where for all the policy there is discriminatory. And this attitude may in turn affect recruitment generally.

“One volunteer has just resigned in fact because of favouritism shown to Malays at his school. He was able to find a professional reason for his resignation, however.”⁽¹²⁾

This summary of views by the British community in Malaysia gives a range of opinions from the “older hands” in the commercial sector to the newer intellectuals in the universities who were appalled by the preponderant Chinese casualties in the hospitals. It is worth noting that the former “have seen this sort of thing before” but the fresh young professional expatriates were absolutely appalled by what they saw and were shocked that Her Majesty’s Government should contemplate supplying arms to a racially biased government:

“Sir Malcolm Stoddart-Scott has received a letter from a friend who lives in Ampang, just outside KL, the centre of the

rioting after the elections. The writer is bitterly critical of the emergency government in Malaysia which she considers to be a "brutal dictatorship". She mentions incidents where Chinese were attacked and sees in them a deliberate policy on the part of the authorities. She considers arms should not be supplied by HMG to arm a further 3 Malay battalions.

"On the whole the older hands, particularly those in the commercial world have tended to take a fairly calm view of things. They are influenced by their past experiences here and their realization that to some extent Malaysia has been through this sort of thing before.

"Another group, probably smaller but certainly more vocal, is formed among intellectuals, particularly in the universities. Most of these people have been in Malaysia for a much shorter time. They are much more inclined to be emotionally affected by the wrongs done to the Chinese and to see the Malays as generally blacker villains.

"In many cases such people are influenced by close contact with doctors, for instance at the University Hospital, who have treated victims of the riots and have seen the great preponderance of Chinese casualties and feel very bitterly about it. We have had one or two approaches from people at the university expressing their concern at the idea of HMG supplying arms to a government which they see as racially biased and which many of them suspect deliberately took advantage of the disturbances to suppress the Chinese. We have had one semi-formal expression of concern of this sort from a doctor at the UH who said he spoke "on behalf of a number of colleagues." ⁽¹³⁾

Despite all these recriminations by their own subjects in Malaysia, the British High Commission decided to err on the side of pragmatism. In this dispatch responding to letters protesting against the supply of arms to new Malaysian battalions, we see that the British were fully aware of contributing to a strictly Malay military:

"We cannot be at all sure that the recruiting for the new units will produce a convincing multi-racial makeup. It is true that in addition to 12 Royal Malay Regiment battalions which will be exclusively Malay, there will be five Ranger battalions which are officially multi-racial. In practice however, the likelihood of Chinese coming forward in any numbers to volunteer for the new infantry forces is pretty small. In the infantry arms, there is a vicious circle in that since the existing infantry (in the broadest terms) is Malay, the other races see no point in trying to contribute their drop to the ocean.

"I am first to admit that during the disturbances, the Malay troops demonstrated indiscipline and partiality all too frequently against the Chinese. Moreover, as the existing cadre of officers and NCOs must be stretched to cope with the newly raised forces, maintenance of discipline will continue to pose problems especially perhaps in the new units. This, I fear, is a problem which we can do little to solve." (14)

As it turned out, the British High Commission decided against ostracizing the Malaysian Government while chastising the VSO for their ignorance of the discriminatory clauses in the Malaysian Constitution. He tries to justify "racial favouritism" by comparing Malaysia with Nigeria although he does not say if it is also justifiable in Britain:

"I must admit to being somewhat surprised at the apparent naivete of political thinking at VSO HQ which was revealed by your letter of 30 May...

"Local racial favouritism does, of course, occur but so it does in any racially mixed community (You will recall the situation in Northern Nigeria). It is unlikely to change for the better in the foreseeable future whatever happens and we all have to live with it. It is also correct that the government

has discriminated in favour of the Malays but so it is allowed to do so by the Constitution which entrenches rights for the Malays (or more strictly, the indigenous people).

“HMG’s official policy has certainly not been to react to events here by ostracizing the Malaysian Government.” (15)

The Indonesians Exhilarated over Turn of Events

Among the British High Commission documents, we find these racist views by the Counsellor of the Indonesian Embassy imparted to the New Zealand High Commissioner, reveling in the imposition of “Malay domination” and the fact that the Chinese “would be held firmly down”. He hoped the new “Malay Malaysia” would draw closer to Indonesia. His reading of the reaction of the Chinese in Malaysia after the “slaughter on May 13” bears resemblance to that of the British during the Emergency. (16) In it we also discover that the only foreign leader to have sent a congratulatory note to the new Malaysian regime over the May 1969 turn of events was General Suharto, who had carried out the military putsch against the Sukarno Government in 1965:

“Moerdani (Counsellor, Indonesian Embassy) was plainly exhilarated by the turn of events in Malaysia...What was going to happen was that Malay domination of Malaysia would become a reality, not an illusion. The years of Alliance government had blurred the concept of predominance of the Malay...The NOC would pursue a strong pro-Malay policy and the Chinese would be held firmly down.

“Moerdani said a ‘high up Malay extremist’ – he did not say who – had said to him the new Malay Malaysia would now draw closer to Indonesia. He had developed the theme that it was with Indonesia that Malaysia’s true destiny lay...Was it not significant that the only foreign leader to have sent a message of congratulations and encouragement after the

disturbances had been Suharto?

“Moerdani’s views on the Chinese were, as one might expect, pretty basic. The Chinese were Chinese whether they were in China, Taiwan, and Singapore or wherever. They respected and obeyed power and at present China was the mainland power in Asia. Therefore all Chinese were at heart communist sympathizers. He then trotted out the domino theory. It was essential Malaysia should put the Chinese in their place – a communist Malaysia, which is the way things had been shaping up, was not in anyone’s interest – Indonesia’s, Australia’s or New Zealand’s. But it would not be easy. Indonesia had been able to deal with its Chinese fairly easily because they were so much in the minority. This was not the case in Malaysia. He said he did not think there would be a Chinese backlash as a result of the slaughter on 13 May – they were practical people and they knew who had the guns. Nor did he think Chinese political pressures would build up in the face of a new Malay Malaysia – once they realized who was master they would turn docilely to their primary interest in making money.”⁽¹⁶⁾

The Chinese Government’s Cautious Response

From this dispatch by the British Charge d’Affairs in Peking, we find that the Chinese Government was very circumspect in their comments about the riots but they seemed unaware that the “Rahman clique” had been eclipsed by a new regime and were still emphasising the class struggle:

“While the first report (NCNC 20 May) did say that the “Rahman clique”...directed its spearhead mainly at the Malaysian citizens of Chinese descent, the reports referred repeatedly to persecution of people of various nationalities, specifying Malay, Chinese and Indians in that order. The report of 20 May specifically refuted the ‘Rahman clique’s’ attempt to char-

acterize 'this serious class struggle' as a national conflict. The Chinese seem to have reacted late and very cautiously. This may be partly because they are doubtful whether the disturbances can be very effectively exploited, and partly because they do not wish to risk inflaming anti-Chinese feeling with the precedent of Indonesia in mind." (17)

Summary

In the diplomatic circles, the suspension of the Sarawak elections was seen as a transparent attempt by the new regime in Kuala Lumpur to have total control over the whole country. The CIA was already clued up on Razak's plans to change the Constitution to formalize Malay dominance and sideline the Tunku.

When it came to the new regime's request for military equipment, the Australians and New Zealanders were vehemently against the idea, but the British officials were quick to justify a turn around.

In the region, the Thais and Singaporeans were scathing about the racial discrimination displayed by the Malaysian authorities. Premier Lee of Singapore was cynical about Razak's attempt to be a latter-day General Templar but had misjudged the staying power of the Tunku. The Suharto regime in Indonesian was the only foreign government to congratulate the Malaysian regime for imposing "Malay dominance" and for "keeping the Chinese down". The Chinese government was more cautious, preferring not to instigate further anti-Chinese feelings in the region.

The views of British expatriates contrast strongly with those of the BHC and British commercial interests. Thus, while the former expressed revulsion at the blatant racial discrimination, the latter reproached them for their naiveté and lack of pragmatism.

Chapter 5

The New Malay Ruling Class

“There is no doubt now that democracy is dead in this country; it died at the hands of the opposition which triggered off this violence leading to chaos. Democracy cannot work amidst chaos. It is therefore the first duty of the government of this country to restore law and order.” ⁽¹⁾

Such was the epitaph delivered on 16 May 1969 by Tun Dr Ismail, Malaysia’s then new Minister for Home Affairs. As events unfolded following the outbreak of the racial violence, it was clear that the ascendant Malay state capitalist class within UMNO and the state apparatuses they controlled had a plan laid out to suspend democracy, revamp the Tunku’s “Alliance Formula” and install their new state capitalist system using “Malay-centrism” as their ideology. This FCO telegram of 16 May shows this direction of the new regime:

“The view which (Ambassador) Bell has conveyed and which caused some considerable alarm in the State dept is that:

- A. the Tunku has shown himself very unsure personally over the last three days and taken no grip of the situation;*
- B. the Tunku and his government seem to have embarked on a line of policy which throws overboard multiracialism and*

is flagrantly directed toward Malay supremacy with no effort being made to reassure the Chinese or to work with them.

“Godfrey Counsellor certainly felt that multiracial policies must be pursued if possible and that he hoped that those with influence in Kuala Lumpur would do their best to put this across. He thought that we and the Australians were the people best qualified to do so. Lee Kuan Yew had also said this to Marshall Green on 13 May and had at the same time warned the Americans not to intervene themselves. Counsellor said that he thought this was exactly the advise our High Commission would give.” (2)

National Operations Council

After two days delay, the membership of the National Operations Council (NOC) was announced late 17 May. It included Tun Razak, Tun Ismail, Tan Siew Sin, Tun Sambanthan, the Inspector General of Police, Tunku Osman (Chief of Armed Forces Staff), Abdul Kadir Shamsuddin, Ghazali and Hamzah.

The executive arm of the NOC headed by Gen. Ibrahim Hamzah told the press on 16 May that a Cabinet would be purely advisory since the NOC was clearly the top policy making and administrative body. Foreign observers could see the autocratic regime coming into existence:

“To sum up – An effective government is now in the making, but it is probably the intention to maintain an extra-parliamentary autocratic regime for some time to come. The present attempt to impart some multi-racial flavour may not last.” (3)

The NOC represented not only Razak’s control of the whole state administration but also the military directing the civil administration

for the first time since Independence. This is another FCO telegram of 24 May showing that the new administrative changes were intended to last for some time; that censorship of the media would follow this change, and that the Tunku had lost effective power. It also reveals that the new regime was viewing Gerakan as a possible partner in the new scheme of things.

“The NOC is now meeting daily...The last few days have given further evidence that Tun Razak and his immediate colleagues intend to retain the administration of the whole country firmly in their own hands. Even the Tunku told the press on 21 May: ‘The Cabinet exists in name only. It is subordinate to the NOC’.

“On 20 May, Razak as Director of Operations authorized the NOC Chief Executive (Gen. Ibrahim) to issue orders for directing the public services. Although this follows logically from Ismail’s appointment, it is the first clear case we have of the military directing the civil administration.

“All the State Operations Councils (SOCs) except for East Malaysia were officially gazetted on 21 May. Each consists of four members: the Chief Minister in charge, a senior civil servant, and the senior public and army representatives... seven of the eight SOC’s whose composition has been given in the press are all Malay. The exception is Penang where the Chief Minister and Chief Police Officer are Chinese.

“The impression hardens that the Emergency administration is designed to be in force for some time. In addition to the obvious durable nature of the structure now being erected, we now have a comprehensive censorship organization and a committee set up to strengthen the mass media. All party publications were banned on 22 May. When I questioned Tun Ismail on the time scale, he suggested that after three months it might be possible to begin to return to more normal conditions.

“The cabinet (announced on 20 May) includes 15 Malays and 2 Indians. The MCA have stood firm in their refusal to accept Cabinet posts, but their four main leaders eventually agreed to be named ministers without portfolio to serve in the government on special functions under the emergency.

“All State Executive Councils (i.e. State cabinets) have been appointed. The Alliance has again formed governments in Perak and Selangor, despite opposition challenges.

“The Tunku’s position and his relationship with Tun Razak remains unclear, but it seems certain that his position is being gradually eroded..It is also the case that the Tunku can be useful to the government in a father-figure supporting role because of his acceptability to non-Malays (He no longer counts for anything with Malays)..But as of now it seems unlikely that the Tunku will be able to bring effective control of government into his own hands again.” (4)

In this secret British Cabinet paper, it is clear that Razak’s complete control of the government was by then (i.e. 19 May) an open secret:

“There are reported to be some 10,000 refugees. Local newspapers had been suspended but have now been allowed to resume publication under censorship. Foreign correspondents have had their curfew passes withdrawn for alleged partiality of reporting. There is some evidence that the military but not the police discriminated in favour of Malays in enforcing the curfew. Some opposition political leaders are said to be among those arrested.

“The exact relationship between Tun Razak and the Tunku is not clear. In public Tun Razak says he is directly responsible to the Tunku but he has made it clear privately that he is completely in charge of the country. This could mean the beginning of a process of withdrawal by the Tunku as an effective PM.” (5)

Were there plans by Razak and his UMNO cohorts to send troops to Singapore in the event of racial riots there? This confidential dispatch speculates on this possibility:

“We have learnt from secret sources (British HC, Singapore, Telegram No.455, para 3) of an alleged decision by Tun Razak and senior UMNO members to send troops into Singapore should anti-Malay violence occur there. We have asked the Acting High Commissioner in KL to do what he can to prevent alarmist reports about anti-Malay violence in Singapore circulating and being accepted in KL. (FCO Telegram No.342)” ⁽⁶⁾

Enforcing a Malay-centric Policy

The new state capitalist class counted on an ideology based on Malay-centrism to gain the support of the Malay masses. It is instructive that so soon after the May 13 riots, Ghazali Shafie was already airing his views regarding the need for a “National Cultural Policy” ⁽⁷⁾, which was to be based on Malay language and culture. This is evident from this New Zealand High Commission document:

“We understand from Zainal Sulong that the Government is currently engaged in a soul-searching examination of the aims and objects of the political system and the best methods of attaining this. Zainal echoed Ghazali’s assertion that Malaysian society must be ‘native-based’. Socially, this means a greater acceptance and use of the Malay language and the development of a unifying Malaysian culture which is inward looking (that is, does not draw its inspiration from China, India or Indonesia) and which, although a synthesis of all the separate cultures of Malaysia’s different racial groups, is basically Malay in character.” ⁽⁸⁾

Razak soon added the financial portfolio to his other powers with remarkable speed and ease. It was the end of the Alliance arrangement in which the Minister of Finance was held by a Chinese from the MCA:

“Tun Razak has assumed the financial portfolios in addition to his other responsibilities. Since he is notoriously uninterested with economic and financial problems I assume that he has done so simply in order to have unquestioned authority to authorize expenditure on (a) immediate emergency and relief measures, (b) programme of expansion of the armed forces.” ⁽⁹⁾

From this dispatch detailing a conversation between the US ambassador and Tun Ismail, the latter made it clear there would be no return to the “western model” of constitutional government and that the Chinese in Malaysia must accept the special Malay rights:

“Talking to the US ambassador, Tun Ismail envisaged that, once the immediate security problem had been overcome, there would be a longish period during which the government would retain a firm grip (and tight control of the opposition) while endeavouring to widen support amongst the Chinese. Finally, there would be a return to constitutional government, which, however, would be different from the western model, or at least a modification of it...”

“Tun Ismail thought a normal voting pattern was not necessarily the best way to form a parliament in this country. He certainly envisaged that the Chinese must continue to accept the protection of Malay rights...”

“If the government thinking is as we believe it to be, they are likely to have a very serious situation to contend with...” ⁽¹⁰⁾

Foreign observers at the time could see that three men were in control of the reins of power:

“I should perhaps say that all indications confirm our belief that power is at present effectively in the hands of these three – Razak, Ismail and Ghazali. Of these, Ismail is the one with most time and has been specifically charged to think about the future.” ⁽¹¹⁾

Ismail had begun thinking about how he might fashion the Constitution and parliament, the education system, and a totally new Malaysia:

“Ismail told the Acting HC on 29 May that he was coming round to thinking that the existing Constitution and parliament might be inadequate for the future too. The education system would however have to become a unified one with Malay as its main language – though here again government reports of 1956 and 1959 already spelt out these objectives. We know that UMNO are doing some serious thinking about the future.

“The Australians sent an officer to Kelantan over the weekend, 24-25 May. He found the PMIP leaders supremely confident. In particular they thought they had the measure of the Tunku and Tun Razak though they were concerned about Tun Ismail.

“In general, the PMIP’s aim seems to be to go out of its way to co-operate with the Alliance, ie. to identify themselves in Malay minds with UMNO, thereby inhibiting UMNO’s freedom of action. Their lone Perak State Assemblyman has however been told to remain neutral and join neither the government or opposition coalitions.” ⁽¹²⁾

The new “Malay agenda” of “entrenched special rights” was clearly being circulated by the new Malay ruling class, although their latter day espousal of “Malay dominance” had not yet emerged:

“A. Razak put much stress on the need to reaffirm the indefinite application of the entrenched special rights for Malays in the Constitution.

“Ghazali put stress on the need for general recognition by all communities of the permanence of the principle of Malay rights in the Constitution although he admitted that there was scope for discussion about their implementation.

“I asked him about the nature of the pressures by the extreme wing of UMNO. He maintained that they were not for action to suppress the Chinese but for major practical assistance to the Malay community.

“Ghazali said the new units of troops were necessary to keep order in Malay kampungs. He said they might take only four months. It was clear he did not envisage a return to democracy before these units were trained.

“Mr Duff made the point that there were probably particular political problems facing young educated Chinese.

“Ghazali acknowledged that this might be so but still maintained that in general the Chinese had not got much to complain about.

“(The Malaysian government) intention of trying to reassure the Malay community as a priority while working towards cooperation with the Chinese will be difficult to achieve. I am not convinced that they yet admit even to themselves the need to satisfy the Chinese wish for effective political participation. The ‘Malay’ policy will in any case need particularly careful public presentation, especially to world opinion.”⁽¹³⁾

In the same dispatch, despite their reservations about the new regime’s “Malay agenda”, the British decided to err on the side of commercial pragmatism:

“We must support and show our sympathy in the present position. To seek to preach would be counter productive. We must make the most of our opportunities at Canberra (the Five Power Conference, 19/20 June 1969) where, free from immediate pressures, Razak may be more receptive to advice.”⁽¹⁴⁾

By July 1969, from this dispatch we can see the intention of the new ruling class in UMNO to implement some firm new educational, economic and political policies:

“Meanwhile (the government) is increasingly letting it be known that they intend to govern with a ‘firm’ hand. They continue to believe that education (and the implementation of the national language policy) will be very important to their attempt to regain Malay support and for the purpose of integrating the different communities over the period of a generation or two. There is no doubt that the intention is to work more rapidly than the previous government towards the final objective of a single education stream using Malay as its prime language.

“Minor changes are beginning to emerge, but no announcement of policy has been made and it is in fact difficult for the government to reconcile the wide range of views within the government itself on the handling and timing of this sensitive issue. This is reflected in the rather surprisingly muted tone of publicity for the new National (i.e. Malay stream) University which is to take its first students in May 1970.

“It remains to be seen how effective the new Department of National Unity, announced by Razak on 1 July will be. Ghazali, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is pushing the idea hard. He envisages a series of panels to act as a watch-dog on all government and private activities in order to maintain certain standards of inter-racial behaviour. It is doubtful how far the public can be legislated into goodwill.

They will judge the measure by the extent to which a check is kept on government actions and the military. Some measure of public confidence could be obtained if the appointments to the various panels were made imaginatively.

“Faced by the need to go slowly on education, the government has turned to economic policy for more rapid action. Tun Razak’s economic blueprint for the future is aimed above all at reducing unemployment; especially amongst school leavers and graduates...The emphasis on industrialization along the East Coast and on agriculture is aimed politically at the Malays. But Razak stresses that the industrialization measures are designed to benefit all races and projects in the urban areas should indeed achieve this.

“The recent implementation of an Act requiring non-citizens to apply for work permits could be directed towards protecting at least certain categories of employment for Malaysian citizens. But it is also clear that the government intend to keep this weapon up their sleeves for possible retaliatory use against Singapore citizens.”⁽¹⁵⁾

From the same dispatch, we observe the reluctance by UMNO to make the Alliance a multi-racial party instead of a being a coalition of mono-ethnic parties, each pandering to sectarian interests. They were clearly concerned mainly to mobilize Malay support for their chauvinistic ideology:

“UMNO reject ideas which were floated in some circles of turning the Alliance into a multi-racial party (as opposed to a confederation of communal parties). Some members of the MCA naturally favour such a scheme. There is no evidence of any serious discussions by UMNO with either Gerakan or PMIP, though Gerakan’s leader, Dr Lim Chong Eu, Chief Minister of Penang, continues to get good press coverage. In early June, Gerakan were prepared to take part in government with UMNO if asked.

“An American Embassy officer in Kelantan last week reports the PMIP as waiting confidently for UMNO to come to them. They have already achieved a considerable identity of Malay interest in Kelantan. There is a risk that the government may find themselves isolated by beginning to lose Malay support.” (16)

The Tunku by this time had been reduced to making pathetic gestures to placate the press:

“Tunku in a press interview while still convalescing, 3 July said, Emergency would have to go on for some time, that it was wrong to suggest the NOC was stronger than the cabinet and that there were no differences between him and Razak.

“We are the best of friends and I am certainly not staying on to wear out my welcome if people do not want me.” (17)

Co-opting the Opposition

With the emergency in force, the new regime lost no time in co-opting erstwhile opposition parties into a broader coalition. The first operation was to co-opt Gerakan into a junior supporting partnership. The latter had thus far been supportive of the Alliance’s assumption of power in the states of Perak and Selangor:

“The government continues to refuse to have anything to do with opposition parties and to deny them publicity. The indications are that, once the situation has stabilized, the government intends to take severely restrictive measures against the mainly Chinese DAP. They might also take action against the extremist PMIP. But Umno leaders seem to believe at present that when the time comes they could work with the largely Chinese, but professedly multi-racial Gerakan party, with the latter either as a junior supporting partner or as some

form of loyal opposition. Hitherto the Gerakan have taken the studiously moderate line of seeking to help and of not contesting the Alliance assumption of office in Perak and Selangor.

“The short term proposal is therefore for an indefinite continuation of a firmly authoritarian regime intent on securing the support of the Malays and able to maintain law and order for the time being.

“It seems likely that the leaders of this government believe that once they have secured adequate Malay support, it will not then be too late to take steps to enlist enough moderate Chinese support to enable them to rule the country indefinitely.” (18)

Soon after the riots, Razak was in close contact with Lim Chong Eu of Gerakan and trying to fashion the new ruling coalition while making sure that the opposition could not yet carry out their political activities:

“US ambassador saw Tun Razak at his own request on 22 May. Razak showed concern to prevent fresh racial clashes... Razak said he was in nearly daily telephone conversation with Dr Lim Chong Eu, Gerakan’s Chief Minister in Penang... It was clear that there would be no chance to permit current opposition leaders full freedom for political activity.” (19)

Razak’s entrenched position in the top position and UMNO’s disposition toward Gerakan is seen in another dispatch:

“The impression hardens that the Emergency Administration under Tun Razak is designed to be in force for some time. The Tunku’s position has undoubtedly weakened. Press and publicity media are being controlled and largely denied to opposition political leaders with whom the Administration still have no dealings. However, there are indications that Umno leaders believe that when the time comes they could work with the largely Chinese but professedly multi-racial Gerakan Party.” (20)

Gerakan's horse trading with the new regime is clear in a further document:

"Gerakan continues its conciliatory moves. On 28 May, Lim Chong Eu, a Vice President and Tan Chee Khoon, Secretary general, apparently agreed that if UMNO would summon opposition parties for talks about the future in say a week's time, they would accept a Government announcement underlining the Malay nature of the Government. Tan Chee Khoon, reporting this to the Australians, added the gloss that the MCA would have to leave the Alliance if Gerakan came in and that Gerakan would require three Cabinet seats." ⁽²¹⁾

Razak's Connections with the Army and Police

The new state capitalists could not have carried out the coup without the co-operation of the army and police. Foreign journalists at the time were not convinced by Razak's swift assumption of authoritarian rule and cast suspicions about his dealings with the chiefs of the Army and Police:

"Did Tun Razak Crackdown Too Hard?"

"Many are deeply dismayed at the government's too prompt resort to the dark panoply of emergency authoritarian rule. This was judged imperative to meet a shoddily invoked communist takeover attempt in which few could believe..."

"Tun Razak has virtually suspended the federal system, replacing the intricacies which irritated him with direct control reaching from his NOC right down to district level."

"A glaring, and so far unexplained lapse is what happened in those first three days of paralysis and near collapse. The day violence erupted the Tun had repeated meetings with Chiefs of the Army and Police, yet the security forces' response to violence triggered in the early evening by Malays around a government party meeting was culpably slow." ⁽²²⁾

Who Decides on the National Ideology?

The so-called “National Ideology” or “*Rukunegara*”, as we know it, came about during the state of emergency which was declared after the riots. It was not tabled and extensively debated in the parliament nor was public consultation sought after.

In July 1969, a Department of National Unity was set up and Ghazali Shafie announced the formulation of a “national ideology”, laying down the ground rules for what could be raised and what could not be raised in the new post-1969 Malaysia. It was to be headed by NOC civil affairs chief Tan Sri Kadir. The Department was to be organised into two sections: research, headed by Dr Agoes Salim (formerly attached to the Ministry of National and Rural Development); and an executive section headed by Haji Sujak bin Rahiman (former chairman of the Tariff Advisory Board). Politicians (including Opposition members) and other professionals were to be asked to submit their ideas and opinions to the Department while a trained research staff would carry out long-term investigations. It drew this commentary from Bob Reece of the FEER:

“All this was unobjectionable, although it was not clear from Ghazali’s long speech just exactly what the problem is to be investigated. The research section can no doubt do some valuable work in race relations if it can find trained workers but the formulation of a national ideology seems a much more formidable task.

“An ideology implies a system based on certain ideals or principles which are forward-looking. But it rapidly became clear that Ghazali was also looking backwards. Malaysia up till now has been remarkably peaceful for a multi-racial developing country, he argued, so what went wrong? Tun Razak himself had admitted a few days earlier that since 1957 too many problems had been swept under the carpet

and forgotten. The truth is that there has never been a golden age of good race relations in the Malayan peninsula although an impressive level of religious tolerance has been reached.

“At earlier press conferences Ghazali had stressed that the major reason for the May 13 riots was the breakdown of the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ made in 1957 whereby the Chinese were given citizenship and the Malays were granted a ‘special position’. During the election campaign, he claimed, the Chinese-based opposition parties had challenged the ‘special position’ and by doing so infuriated the Malays who still regarded the Chinese as their guests. Apart from the two-thirds parliamentary majority which the Malay-dominated Alliance Party had enjoyed since 1957, there were the nine rulers to guarantee that Malay rights would never be touched. Therefore, to challenge these rights, or even to suggest that they were not eternal, was to make revolution.

“Perhaps ‘ideology’ as it is usually understood is the wrong word. Tun Razak and Ghazali are more concerned to educate people in the spirit in which the constitution was written – to remind the new generation of non-Malays of the 1957 agreement and all its ramifications. By ‘rukunegara’, Ghazali appears to mean a set of rules – a list of do’s and don’ts which will prevent another outbreak of racial strife. For him it is like a game of golf where all the players must accept the rules. But the question remains: who should make the rules for Malaysia? The Government has established its new Department of Psychological Warfare at Jalan Bluff. Correspondents are anxious to discover whether the National Unity Department will be located at an equally appropriate address.”⁽²³⁾

The Post-1969 Malaysian Political System

Three years after the riots of May 1969, this assessment of the new UMNO ruling class by Derek Davies of the FEER shows how the coup d'état of 1969 had become routinized – with Razak in firm control, Tun Ismail and Ghazali Shafie making up the triumvirate and executing the new “Malay agenda”:

“Naturally, tensions still exist below the surface and it is difficult for a resident, let alone an irregular visitor, to gauge the strength of the fears and resentments which may remain. But in three short years Malaysia has so defused its explosive internal divisions that the capital’s atmosphere today is relaxed: Over a friendly lunch, Musa Hitam (the radical UMNO politician who quarrelled with his leaders after the 1969 riots and left for London, and who is now back efficiently performing the delicate job of running the Federal Land Development Agency) is not only able to discuss “sensitive issues” openly but laces his conversation with deprecating remarks and jokes which would have been unimaginable three years ago...

“Razak built up his political support and gained his political acumen in the days when, as the Tunku’s right-hand man, he tirelessly crisscrossed the country, visiting villages and projects. One of the weaknesses of the United Malays National Organisation is that, as a mass party still largely organised on traditional, class-conscious lines, it throws up too many men who are more remarkable for the political influence they wield in their home states than for their administrative abilities. But this is also a source of UMNO’s greatest strength: it is a mass, grassroots organisation, continuously in touch with the voters who form its power base – the Malay farmer and his family in the Kampong...

“Malaysia’s leadership traditionally is something of a slow ballet composed of carefully-balanced public poses. While the Prime Minister projects a balanced multiracial image, the No. 2 leans slightly towards pro-Malay attitudes. Thus, since succeeding to the leadership, Razak has set himself the task of winning the confidence of all sections of the community and he has largely succeeded.

“Deputy Premier Tun Ismail, who has a reputation for liberalism, has taken over the task of reassuring the Bumiputras. Tun Ismail is proving as solid a support for Razak as the Tun was for the Tunku. Anxiety over his health has receded, and Tun Ismail, to a large extent, symbolises the country’s new relaxed confidence – even to the extent of revealing an unexpected penchant for “pop” shirts and ties, perhaps an oblique signal of sympathy for the aspirations of the country’s youth...

“If Tun Razak should weary of his prime responsibilities in the not-too-distant future – and Tun Ismail, despite his improved health, should decide that he does not want the top job – Ghazali would now appear to be in line for the succession. But the very qualities that appeal to Westerners – his extrovert readiness to expound a policy line, in particular – may harm his chances. If Razak remains at the helm long enough, other potential candidates such as Musa Hitam and Selangor’s Dato Harun will have an opportunity to acquire the experience, maturity and political seniority to contest Ghazali’s claims.”⁽²⁴⁾

We started the analysis of the May 13 riots by looking at the inherently contradictory Alliance racial formula at Independence. Three years after the riots, the basis of this unholy alliance was again being questioned and it continues to be questioned up to the present day:

“Some of the younger intellectuals in political circles are beginning to re-examine the whole communal base on which the ruling Alliance is organised. The three parties must go to the electorate each claiming that it can best represent its community’s interests. This stand implies that a Chinese in a constituency which elects an UMNO candidate cannot – in theory at least – expect to have his interests represented by his MP.

“A growing number of intellectuals are concluding that the present party system is obstructing a healthy growth of interracial identification and a smudging of the lines which still divide the communities. Barely formulated ideas of the possibility that Malaysia might take yet another leaf out of Indonesia’s book by organising its parliamentary representation along non-communal political lines, with the ruling Alliance united into a sort of ‘super-Golkar’, are circulating. However, the day when this can be openly discussed on a national level is still, evidently, far away.”⁽²⁵⁾

Summary

It is clear that the riots of May 1969 had led to the ascendance of the state capitalist class which controlled the National Operations Council. It was also evident that the old aristocratic class under the Tunku had been eclipsed by the new Malay elite under the leadership of Razak.

This new Malay ruling class largely maintained the Alliance Formula but enlarged it to incorporate more opposition parties. However, the predominance of UMNO within this larger coalition was unmistakable. The racial bloodbath and the state of emergency under military rule was intended to serve as a deterrent to any challenge to UMNO's dominance of the post-1969 Malaysian political landscape.

This climate of terror and repression allowed the new regime to introduce and implement discriminatory Malay-centric economic, educational and cultural policies. These policies have been crucial in winning over the Malay masses to support the new Malay ruling class. At the same time, these discriminatory policies have been instrumental in facilitating the accumulation of capital by the new Malay capitalist class.

Conclusion:

Toward National Reconciliation

Nearly forty years after this regrettable May 13 incident in Malaysia, little effort has been made by the authorities to unveil the truth and to work toward national reconciliation. The NOC (National Operations Council) did not hold any open inquiry into the incident and the causes of the post-election disturbances.

The Alliance government rejected as unfounded and malicious the accounts of foreign correspondents as to the nature of the bloodbath which occurred even though its own statistics by race on deaths and arrests support those accounts generally.

Since then, the UMNO leaders have periodically used the May 13 Incident as a threat to would-be dissidents who try to argue for civil rights and even to deter any attempts by voters to vote for the Opposition. We have also witnessed several episodes since 1969 when mobs orchestrated by UMNO have defied the law to harass and threaten Malaysians who question the denial of their civil rights. The connivance of the police and security forces was particularly suspect in the APCET II episode in 1996 and the Kampung Medan Incident in 2001 mentioned in the Introduction.

UMNO leaders have since insisted that Malaysians must agree not to discuss publicly “subjects already enshrined in the Constitution”, and indicated that these forbidden subjects include race, religion, language and the status of the sultans and their families.

The latest UMNO general assembly in November 2006 has been no exception to a practice in these assemblies where veiled threats are issued and *kris*es (Malay daggers) are unsheathed. In the latest assembly, a delegate even egged on the UMNO Youth leader (who happened to be also a government minister!) by asking when he was going to use the unsheathed *kris*, a clear incitement to violence and murder.

May 13 should have alerted Malaysia's political leaders, even if earlier racial disturbances did not, that the communal formula adopted at the time of independence to maintain Malaysia's precarious racial balance was not properly serving that function.

Barisan Nasional: A Larger Communal Formula

The National Operations Council (NOC) that ruled the country by decree, in addition to Tun Razak as Chairman, included eight other members, all senior Malay Alliance leaders, Malay bureaucrats, police and military officers. The MCA and MIC leaders were given only representation on the NOC. This highlighted the new preeminence of the Malay state capitalist class in the ruling coalition, and the NOC period was intended to demonstrate to the Malay community that political power lay firmly in the hands of 'the Malays', in a leadership avowedly determined to 'improve the economic status of the Malays'. ⁽¹⁾

The state, however, also had to present itself as the cohesive factor of the nation, to return the country to normality. 'Goodwill Committees' were set up throughout the country, including a 'Department of National Unity'. The new 'State Ideology', known as Rukunegara ('articles of faith of the state') published in mid-1970, called for "*a united nation, a democratic, just, liberal, and progressive society... belief in God, loyalty to the supreme ruler and to the country, support of the Constitution, good behaviour,*

and morality".⁽²⁾ A National Consultative Council, formed in January 1970, also managed to co-opt some professionals and opposition parties, for example, the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) and Gerakan.

With the suspension of Parliament, the ruling party began to take steps to consolidate its power after the 1969 election debacle. It threatened not to reconvene Parliament as long as the Alliance could not obtain the two-thirds majority needed to allow the Government to amend the Constitution. This blackmail had its desired effect for some of the opposition parties easily capitulated and crossed the floor to join the Alliance, including five SUPP members from Sarawak (elected during the 1970 elections).

The suspended elections in East Malaysia (as a result of the 'May 13' riots) were held in June and July 1970. Out of the 40 parliamentary seats at stake, the Alliance needed at least 30 to be certain of its two-thirds majority. The Sabah Alliance, under Tun Mustapha, won all 16 seats in that state. In Sarawak, however, the Alliance won only nine seats (including two PESAKA (Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak) seats out of a total of 24. It was only after the subsequent decision by the five SUPP members to join the Alliance coalition that the ruling party managed to obtain the two-thirds majority.

With the reconvening of Parliament on 20 February 1971, the Constitutional (Amendment) Act was passed. Under this legislation, certain issues – "which might arouse racial emotions in respect of the National Language, i.e. Malay, the special position of the Malays and other natives the bumiputra, citizenship rights and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers" – were declared to be 'sensitive' and it became an offence to raise these questions in public. The amendments also stipulated quotas reserved for bumiputras in institutions of higher learning.

From that time, the Alliance began to co-opt more opposition parties into the broader framework. In January 1972, Gerakan agreed to the Alliance becoming a partner in a joint Penang state government. The PPP did likewise and entered into a ruling coalition with the Alliance in Perak, while retaining its independence in the federal parliament. Then, in January 1973, Tun Razak succeeded in co-opting Parti Islam (the former PMIP) into the coalition. Dato Asri, Parti Islam's head and Chief Minister of Kelantan, was enticed with a federal Cabinet post as Minister of Land Development and Special Functions.

Thus, by January 1973, the old Alliance (UMNO, MCA, MIC) had enlarged to become the Barisan Nasional (BN), including SUPP, Gerakan, PI, PPP. Together the coalition commanded 122 out of the 144-seat Parliament.

When the first General Elections after the 13 May riots was announced for August 1974, the DAP (Democratic Action Party) – outside the BN – was the main opposition party. It led a frail opposition coalition bloc with SNAP and Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Singapura – Malay National Union of Singapore (PEKEMAS). In the meantime, the Government had redrawn the electoral boundaries to the undoubted advantage of the BN, and added ten more seats to the pre-existing 104 seats in West Malaysia. Within the BN, the undisputed dominance by UMNO was again demonstrated in the way they controlled the electoral bargaining amongst the coalition member parties and ensured that 'government' candidates, and not potential opposition members, were selected. Even the discontent within Parti Islam (PI) – easily the more volatile member of the coalition – was contained by the Malay leaders.

It was the dismal showing by MCA at the 1969 General Elections that had prompted UMNO to bring in the other Chinese-dominated communal parties such as Gerakan and SUPP. There had also been mass defections of MCA members and branches to

Gerakan in the early 1970s. In the aftermath of May 13, Tan Siew Sin – the erstwhile leader of the MCA and, since colonial times a member of one of the main comprador families – suffered the same fate as the Tunku. He was unable to inspire the confidence of the MCA social base, but in the power struggle that followed, the MCA leadership was assumed by one of his supporters, Lee San Choon. The internal squabbles and factional jostling within the top echelon of the party have continued to the present day.

The results of the 1974 elections were a foregone conclusion. But in the event, DAP still managed to secure around 20 per cent of all the votes cast, while independent Malay candidates in Kelantan (mostly Parti Islam dissidents) and Parti Rakyat (renamed Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaya) in Trengganu captured around 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the vote respectively. ⁽³⁾ MCA's success was once again attributed to UMNO's ability to turn out Malay votes for the former's candidates. The urban constituencies in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Seremban, Malacca, Alor Star, all fell to DAP. The PPP's association with the BN cost it much of its non-Malay urban votes. The results in West Malaysia were as follows: The BN won a total of 104 seats (UMNO 62, PAS 13, MCA 19, Gerakan 5, MIC 4, PPP 1); DAP won 9; PEKEMAS won 1 seat. ⁽⁴⁾

In Sabah, as expected, the Sabah Alliance won all 16 seats. Fifteen of these were uncontested because of Tun Mustapha's maverick style of preventing (through arrest or other means of persuasion) the submission of nomination papers by opposition candidates. ⁽⁵⁾ Until 1975, Tun Mustapha's corrupt and dictatorial rule was carried out through his United Sabah National Organization (USNO) party and a political apparatus that dominated every department of Sabah.

In the 1974 elections in Sarawak, SNAP in the opposition retained its 9 seats in the federal parliament and increased the number of SNAP representatives in the state legislature from 12 to

18. ⁽⁶⁾ This was in spite of the defeat of its leader, Stephen Kalong Ningkan, and the state government's arrest and detention of its deputy president, Datuk James Wong. But the Sarawak branch of the BN, composed of SUPP, SCA, and PBB (Partai Pesaka Bumi-putra Bersatu, formed in 1973 through the merger of Partai Bumi-putra and PESAKA), easily absorbed the remaining seats.

The 1974 General Elections thus represented the enlarged BN formula in action. The co-option of the various opposition parties has ensured the Government an overwhelming majority in parliament, which, if the 1969 elections had been left to run its constitutional course, it would have lost. This electoral majority has enabled the Government to carry through its New Economic Policy as well as a gamut of repressive legislation over the ensuing years.

The New Economic Policy

The Government's New Economic Policy (NEP), announced in 1970, was embodied in the Second Malaysia Plan (SMP) (1971-75) and elaborated in the Outline Perspective Plan for the period 1971 to 1990 in the Mid-Term Review of the SMP. The avowed aims of the NEP were: ⁽⁷⁾

- (i) The restructuring of Malaysian society to correct the economic imbalance between the races.
- (ii) The eradication of poverty.

The method by which the government proposed to 'correct the economic imbalance' was to increase Malay ownership of the share capital of limited companies from about 1.5 per cent in 1970 to 30 per cent by 1990. In this, a large role had been designated for the state – about three-quarters of the target of 30 per cent

share ownership was to be held 'in trust' by public bumiputra enterprises, and about a quarter for Malay individuals. ⁽⁸⁾

From the main premise of the NEP – couched in terms of restoring the 'racial imbalance' – this can be seen as an expression of the ruling class's communalist strategy. With the direct participation by the state in capital accumulation, however, vast resources have been diverted through fiscal and monetarist tools and the channeling of domestic as well as international financing. This has included the direct ownership of private capital. ⁽⁹⁾

Consequently, public development expenditure during the Second Malaysia Plan was \$9,820 million, while public financing of private investments was \$3,380 million. There was a sharp increase in state expenditure since the SMP, especially in commerce and industry. ⁽¹⁰⁾ A Ministry of Land Development was set up in 1973 to co-ordinate the activities of the various land development agencies. ⁽¹¹⁾ Even in terms of 'economic costs', these rather expensive FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) schemes had been criticized by such economists as Fisk during the 1960s. ⁽¹²⁾ Between 1956-76, FELDA managed to settle only 40,000 families when, as its Director-General admitted in 1974, 10,000 families were being made landless annually. ⁽¹³⁾

Under the Third Malaysia Plan, public development expenditure in the rural sector increased yet again. More government agencies were set up to give Malays preference and financial assistance in government contracts, licences, grants, land, and other provisions. In all three Malaysia Plans up to 1980, about a quarter of the total development expenditure by the public sector was in the rural sector alone, not counting infrastructural expenditure.

The Malay state capitalists were thoroughly committed to a policy of co-existence with private capitalism. They were also usually the first to take advantage of the new business opportunities that they themselves had created. In the state propaganda, 'Malays'

– from the aristocratic tycoon to the poor peasant in the kampong – were encouraged to venture into business in order to ‘catch up with the Chinese’. Various incentives were proffered by the state, such as land, licence and financial grants, besides the stipulation of 30 per cent Malay participation in new enterprises. ⁽¹⁴⁾ A sizeable section of the Malay middle class no doubt also benefited from these government hand-outs. Besides their corporate interests, the Malay state capitalists also profited from the large salaries and other ‘perks’ that went with being in command of the state apparatus. The opportunities for gain from bribery and corruption in the hugely enlarged bureaucracy were notoriously widespread. ⁽¹⁵⁾

The increasingly large role played by the state in the peasant sector represented, above all, an attempt by the Malay state capitalists to have an economic base also in the rural sector. In this effort, they tried to cut into the economic activities of the lower strata of the non-Malay commercial class, who, in official propaganda were usually portrayed as the main exploiters of the Malay farmers. This was especially evident in the co-operative movement as well as in the other activities of the government agencies such as Perbadanan Nasional (National Corporation) (PERNAS) involving credit, marketing, transport, consumer products, the like. The latter even intruded on the China trade, the traditional preserve of the Chinese commercial capitalists. ⁽¹⁶⁾ But the increased government expenditure and activities in the agricultural sector have largely benefited the rich farmers, the main base of the Malay state capitalists. Nevertheless, the survival of the rich commercial non-Malay capitalists shows that they have managed to undercut the government agencies (which suffer gross bureaucratic inefficiencies), or else have come to an accommodation with the state capitalists.

The other state agencies included Amanah Rakyat – Council of the People’s Trust (MARA); Urban Development Authority (UDA); Lembaga Padi Negara (National Padi Authority) (LPN);

and the State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs). PERNAS was by far the most dynamic, with investments in almost every aspect of the industrial and commercial sectors, both in the urban and rural sectors. The Fourth Malaysia Plan was aimed at a massive acquisition of shares by the state-funded trust agencies for bumiputras. No less than 35 per cent of new capital was to be acquired by the state agencies between 1981 and 1985. ⁽¹⁷⁾

End Racial Discrimination Now

The latest controversy over the share of equity capital by the different ethnic groups culminating in the resignation of yet another Non-Malay academic from a Malaysian policy group is but the latest example of UMNO's vain attempts to justify in perpetuity their ill-gotten economic and political power.

In recent years it has become increasingly clear that the basic premises of racial balance or their application in specific cases are in urgent need of change. But this seems to be precisely what the present ruling class in UMNO refuses to accept. To date, at least two important former UMNO stalwarts – Anwar Ibrahim (former deputy prime minister) and Khalid Ibrahim (former head of PNB) – have come out openly against the continuance of the racially discriminating New Economic Policy that had been implemented after May 13, 1969. They say that the NEP has been the instrument for the ruling class in UMNO to amass wealth and rent collection. ⁽¹⁸⁾

It has never been made clear the basis upon which Malay special privileges were originally placed in the Constitution. At Independence, the special status of Malays was created to allow economically backward sectors in the society to catch up and to compete with the more advanced sectors. Since May 13, 1969, UMNO leaders talk as though the intention was to create a special class of citizens, viz. *bumiputras* who have certain rights not possessed by non-Malays. Now they even toss around a new

concept of “*ketuanan Melayu*” (Malay dominance or “overlordship”) which had provoked heckles from Malaysian society when it was first used by an UMNO leader Abdullah Ahmad in 1986. ⁽¹⁹⁾

The argument for “special rights” for a “race” using the comparison of the American Indians and blacks breaks down at one point: the Malays hold political power in the state and control the state apparatuses in Malaysia. Furthermore, they are numerically superior in the society. Precisely because they do control the instruments of government and the commanding heights of the Malaysian economy, there is a critical need to sort out Malaysia’s priorities today.

As long as the government refuses to recognise the legitimate aspirations and democratic rights of all Malaysian citizens, we will not be able to progress as a nation. To do that, we must first outlaw the fascist tendencies of racist carpet baggers and exorcise the ghosts of May 13 once and for all. Only then will we attain the truth and national reconciliation.

Postscript:

For The Record

In order for us to have a fuller and truer picture of what happened in the 1969 riots, we need to record not only all those who lost their lives or who were injured but also the witnesses to the events. Friends and relatives of the victims, servicemen in the army and police, public servants in the hospitals, Red Cross personnel, reporters and others may have a story to tell.

If you have any information at all on this episode in our history, please send your information including relevant documents to the following centre. Please also leave your contact number since the information will need to be corroborated:

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New Era College
Lot 5, Seksyen 10, Jalan Bukit
43000 Kajang, Selangor D.E.
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Fax: 603-87336799
Email: nec@newera.edu.my

Notes

Introduction

1. *Racism and Racial Discrimination in Malaysia* by Kua Kia Soong, submitted to the World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination at Durban, 3 September 2001, published in Kua Kia Soong, "Malaysian Critical Issues", SIRD Petaling Jaya 2002:13-24.
2. NST 15.10.2006
3. See Hua Wu Yin aka Kua Kia Soong, 1983. (Forthcoming updated edition of this title is expected in 2008)
4. *Tunku, AR: The May 13 Tragedy*, NOC 1969
5. NST, 16.11.2006. The Malacca delegate Hasnoor Sidang Hussein said, "Umno is willing to risk lives and bathe in blood in defence of race and religion"; Perlis delegate Hashim Suboh said, "Hishammudin Hussein unsheathed his keris, waved his keris, kissed his keris. We want to ask when he is going to use it"; Terengganu Umno Youth information chief Razak Idris warned, "Malay rights cannot be challenged, otherwise the Malays will run amok and May 13 will happen all over again in Kuala Lumpur." (*Malaysiakini* 22.11.2006)
6. The author critiques pluralist analyses in his 1983 publication. See Hua Wu Yin 1983

7. “*K.Das & The Tunku Tapes*”, edited by Kua Kia Soong, SIRD 2002: 112)
8. Subky Latiff, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore 1977, quoted in K.Das & SUARAM, “*The White Paper on the October 1987 Affair and the Why? Papers*”, SUARAM 1989:6
9. Government White Paper, ‘*Towards Preserving National Unity*’ 1988
10. Kamaruddin, Raja Petra, “*UMNO’s relevance lies in Ketuanan Melayu*”, *Malaysia Today* 1 Aug 2005
11. See Kua Kia Soong, edited, ‘*Mob Rule: The East Timor Conference in Malaysia*’ 1996, Suaram , PJ 1998)
12. See Kua Kia Soong, “*The Malaysian Civil Rights Movement*”, SIRD Petaling Jaya 2005: 108
13. See Kua Kia Soong (ed), “*Policing the Malaysian Police*”, SUARAM Petaling Jaya, 2005: 13
14. Arumugam, K, “*March 8*”, Petaling Jaya 2007
15. See SUARAM, “*Human Rights Report 2006*”, Petaling Jaya 2007
16. NST, 23 July 2006
17. Tunku, opcit
18. *Straits Times*, 19 May 1969

Chapter 1

1. 1. From Sir H. Gurney to Secretary of State for Colonies, 19 December 1948, FO 371/1583, quoted in Hua Wu Yin, 1984: 98.
2. Malayan Monitor, 12 June 1952, *ibid*, p.99.
3. 'Rules of the MCA' (mimeo), Rules 4-7; p.42, *ibid*, p.99.
4. G. Means, 1970:124.
5. M.Osborne, *Region of Revolt: Focus on SE Asia*, Pelican, 1970:97.
6. Straits Times, 12 June 1950.
7. *ibid*, 9 October 1950.
8. Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report 1950*, p.24.
9. M.V. de Tufo, 'A Report of the 1947 Census of Population'.
10. Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance, 1952.
11. V. Purcell, 1954:196.
12. K.J. Ratnam, 1963:92.
13. Federal Legislative Council debates, November 1952; cited in K.H. Khong, *op.cit*.
14. Straits Times, 11 February 1952.
15. Singapore Standard, 23 January 1955, cited in G. Means, 1970:161.
16. J.M. Gullick, 1969:135.
17. Malayan Monitor, 1 January, 1956, quoted in K.H. Khong, *op.cit*. p. 186
18. Federation of Malaya Information Services, Bulletin No.6072/56, p.1
19. Report of the Federation of Malaya, Constitutional Commission, KL, 1957, p.183.
20. *Ibid*.
21. G. Means, *op cit*, p. 174.

22. Singapore Times, 18 August 1965, p.7
23. Muda I Scheme cost M\$228m (US\$105m). The Muda region produced about one-half of all the local-grown rice.
24. See K.P. Ho, FEER, 13 June 1980, p.104
25. See Hua Wu Yin, 1984: 146, Table 6.1
26. Newsweek, 5 September 1966, p.43.
27. R.K. Vasil, 1971, p. 134

Chapter 2

1. The Treasury Economic Report, 1974
2. See Anne Munro-Kua, 1996: 53
3. Parti Rakyat Manifesto, R.K. Vasil, op. cit. p.179.
4. Malay Mail, Kuala Lumpur, 13 April 1969.
5. I. Kassim, 1979:9
6. Far Eastern Economic Review, 4/10 May 1969: *The Tunku's Last Election* by Bob Reece, Kuala Lumpur)
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. See also, "Constituency delineation and democracy" in Kua Kia Soong, "*Reforming Malaysia*", Oriengroup Kuala Lumpur 1993:41
11. T. G. McGee, "Down – but not Out", FEER Vol. 64, No. 23, 1/7 Jun 1969, 566)

Chapter 3

1. *MALAYSIA: Requiem for Democracy?* by BOB REECE, Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 64, No. 21, 18/24 May 1969, 437)
2. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 491 of 15 May 1969
3. Despatch by Shortliffe, REF OURTEL 681, May 14
4. FCO Telegram No. 483 of 14 May
5. S.A. Budd, British High Commission, 17 June 1969
6. *MALAYSIA: Requiem for Democracy?* by BOB REECE, Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 64, No. 21, 18/24 May 1969, 437
7. D.F.B. Le Breton, 22 June 1969, British High Commission, KL to Mr. W.A. Ward, SW Pacific Dept 22 June 1969
8. J.G. McMinnies, Information Research Dept, FCO, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Dept: South-West Pacific, File No: FWM1/9 (Part C, "Malaysia – Civil Disturbances following General Election) FCO 24/486/1"
9. Mr Kennedy, FCO Telegram No. 74, 24 June 1969, From Kuching to FCO
10. *MALAYSIA: Requiem for Democracy?* by BOB REECE, Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 64, No. 21, 18/24 May 1969, 437
11. Mrs. D.K.K.Lee, Setia Usaha Kebangsaan, MRC Society, Press Release 15 May 1969
12. FCO Telegram No.436 of 16 May
13. Mr. Freeman, FCO Telegram No. 498 of 16 May
14. FCO Telegram No.501 of 16 May
15. *MALAYSIA: Requiem for Democracy?* by BOB REECE, Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 64, No. 21, 18/24 May 1969, 437
16. FCO Telegram No.504 of 17 May 1969

17. Sir A. de la Mare, FCO Telegram No. 442 of 17 May 1969
18. 17 May 1969, Confidential to FCO
19. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No 511 of 17 May
20. K.Das was coming round to asking the Tunku about May 13 during his interviews for the Tunku's biography, but unfortunately he did not get the opportunity because of his untimely departure. See Kua Kia Soong, "*K.Das and the Tunku Tapes*", SIRD 2002.
21. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No.513, 18 May 1969
22. Sunday Times editorial, 18 May 1969
23. Despatch by D.P. Aiers, SW Pacific Dept, 19 May
24. Mr. Duff, Confidential FWM 1/9, 22 May 1969
25. Tunku Tan Sri Mohd bin Tunku Besar Burhanuddin, Vice Chairman, Malaysian Red Cross Society, Press Release, 20 May 1969
26. Confidential TLM/SEASEC14 Malaysian Disturbances, 21 May 1969)
27. Straits Times, 22 May 1969
28. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 549 of 22 May
29. Mrs D.K.K. Lee, MRC Press Release, 22 May 1969
30. Daily Telegraph, "*Malaysia's Veils Fall Away*", By Ian Ward, 23 May 1969
31. ibid
32. Financial Times, 23 May 1969
33. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 574 of 24 May)
34. Mrs. D.K.K. Lee, MRC Press release, 27 May 1969
35. Nik Hassan bin Abdul Rahman, Principal Private Secretary to the PM
36. A.A.Duff, FCO 24/485/1
37. Memo by R.D. Clift, 27 May 1969, "*Malaysia: Internal Situation – Civil Disturbances following General Elections*", FCO 24/485/1

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39. *ibid*
40. Far Eastern Economic Review EDITORIAL Vol. 64, No. 22, 25/31 May 1969, 479
41. Anthony Polsky, "*Singapore-Malaysia: Hot Cross Lines*" Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 64, No. 24, 8/14 Jun 1969, 597
42. *ibid*
43. A.L. Southorn, SW Pacific Dept, Interview by Tun Razak, British High Commission, 11 June 1969
44. SIARAN AKHBAR, Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia 29.6.69, PEN 6/69/400
45. W/210, Restricted, Note on the Background Situation in Malaysia)
46. Telegram No. 14, 4 July 1969
47. Financial Times, 6 July 1969
48. See Arumugam, K, "March 8", Petaling Jaya 2007
49. Financial Times, 6 July 1969
50. CONFIDENTIAL, 14 July 1969 Memo
49. Mr. Duff, FCO 24/487 SECRET File No. FWM 1/9 (Part D) Telegram No.766, 18 July 1969

Chapter 4

1. F. Kennedy, the British High Commission, Kuching, 19 May
2. Secret: Crisis in Malaysia, B.T.W. Stewart, Cabinet Office, 21 May 1969
3. FCO Telegram 502 of 21 May)
4. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 8 of 21 May
5. Sir Ian MacLennan, FCO Telegram No.3 of 21 May
6. Secret and personal for the Secretary of State from Lord Shepherd, Sir N. Pritchard, Telegram No 288, 25 May 1969
7. Bangkok World editorial, 26 May 1969
8. FCO Telegram No.241, 28 May 1969
9. Sir A. de la Mare, FCO Telegram No. 512 of 2 June 1969
10. Sir A. de la Mare, FCO Telegram No. 511 of 2 June 1969
11. KL Telegram No.577 to FCO, 25 May 1969
12. Letter by C.N.F. Odgers of the Ministry of Overseas Development to W. Turner, BHC, KL, 30 May 1969 (RC 354/106/05 OD 18/1)
13. British community views on West Malaysian disturbances, 6 June 1969, Signed: R.D. Clift, British HC, Kuala Lumpur.
14. Confidential memo from G.C. Duncan of British HC, KL to A.L. Southorn of FCO, 27 June 1969
15. Reply by W. Turner of BHC, KL, 11 July 1969
16. The British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney had said this during the Emergency: "The Chinese are, as you know, notoriously inclined to lean toward whichever side frightens them more and at the moment this seems to be the government." (FO 371/1583, 19-12-48, quoted in Hua Wu Yin, 1983:99)
17. G.C. Duncan, British High Com, 30 May 1969, Copy of a note by NZ High Com of a conversation with the Counsellor at the Indonesian Embassy, R.D.Clift, 4 June 1969
18. Signed: J.D. Laughton, Office of the British Charge D'Affairs, Peking 11 June 1969)

Chapter 5

1. Speech by Tun Dr Ismail, 7.15 pm, 16 May 1969 (Radio Malaysia)
2. FCO Telegram No. 1506 of 16 May
3. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No.484
4. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 574 of 24 May; FCO 24/484: Malaysia – Civil Disturbance following the General Election
5. Despatch by D.P. Aiers, SW Pacific Dept, 19 May
6. SECRET, CABINET, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State J.O.Moreton, 21 May 1969
7. See Kua Kia Soong, '*Malaysian Cultural Policy & Democracy*', Huazi 1990
8. Mr Farrell, NZ High Commission, 23 May 1969
9. FCO Telegram No 563, 23 May 1969
10. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 575 of 24 May
11. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 607 of 30 May 1969
12. G.C. Duncan, British High Com, 30 May 1969
13. Mr. Hainworth, Telegram No 282, 9 June 1969
14. *ibid*
15. Mr. Duff Telegram No. 14, 4 July 1969
16. *ibid*
17. Mr. Duff, Telegram No.728, 4 July 1969
18. Mr. Duff, FCO Telegram No. 574 of 24 May; FCO 24/484: Malaysia – Civil Disturbance following the General Election
19. Mr Duff, Telegram No. 576 of 24 May 1969)
20. FCO Telegram No. 378, 28 May 1969
21. G.C. Duncan, British High Com, 30 May 1969
22. Fred Emery, Sunday Times, London, 25 May 1969
23. Bob Reece, "*Malaysia: The Name of the Game*", Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 65, No. 31, 27 Jul/2 Aug 1969, 278
24. "*MALAYSIA: The Three-Year Recovery*" by Derek Davies, FEER Cover Story, Vol. 76, No. 19, 6 May 1972, 12
25. *ibid*

Conclusion

1. Avowed aim of the NEP, SMP, pp.42-5
2. '*Rukunegara*', Federal Department of Information, Ministry of Information and Culture, Malaysia.
3. J. Funston, 1980:234. Parti Rakyat further improved its showing at a by-election for the Kedah state assembly in April 1975 when its candidate lost by only 136 votes.
4. See I. Kassim, 1979:91.
5. See FEER, 15 October 1973.
6. SNAP failed to form a united opposition bloc in 1970 with SUPP and PESAKA. The Malaysian PM had threatened SUPP leaders that unless the proposed coalition gained power, the Emergency would not be lifted in Sarawak and there would be no return to Parliamentary democracy there. The BN also bought over a SUPP leader with a Cabinet post in Kuala Lumpur. FEER, 16 July 1970.
7. SMP, pp.42-5.
8. From 1980, the government began to spread the ownership of corporate wealth to private Malay individuals. All the shares in the profitable corporations – PERNAS, Bank Bumiputra, Malaysia Mining Corporation, etc. – were then channeled into a national unit trust for bumiputras. This 'Permodalan Nasional Berhad' (PNB) was responsible for managing the national unit trust, Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN). (FEER, 22 August 1980)
9. Second Malaysia Plan, p.7.
10. Table 7.1 in Hua Wu Yin, 1984
11. Besides FELDA, there were Youth Land Schemes; Fringe Alienation and Rehabilitation Schemes; Group Replanting Schemes; Public, Joint Venture and Private Estates.
12. See Fisk, in E.K. Fisk and T.H. Silcock, 1963:178.

13. New Straits Times, 22 June 1974, quoted in Hua Wu Yin, 1984:.
14. This was often interpreted to cover all existing enterprises by over-zealous employers; for example, when there were allegations that Chinese workers had been sacked from the 'Anchor' brewery in 1978.
15. Even while the Bank Rakyat scandal was still fresh in the news, a bigger scandal was uncovered in 1979, involving RISDA (FEER, 24 August 1979). In 1981, Malaysia was discovered to rank high on an international 'corruption scale' as devised by Time magazine (FEER, 10 April 1981, p.71). Corruption in high places was common knowledge in Malaysia even though only one or two 'big fish' such as Datuk Harun, the then Mentri Besar of Selangor was brought to light as part of a factional struggle within UMNO. In 1981, there were allegations of corruption in the lands and mines department in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Johore and Sabah involving senior civil servants and top politicians (FEER, 26 June 1981).
16. The Malaysian government came to an agreement with the Peoples' Republic of China in 1979, whereby the imports of Chinese produce would be directly handled by PERNAS.
17. FEER, 10 April 1981.
18. See Malaysiakini, 20 Nov 2006
19. See K. Das, "*Malay Dominance? The Abdullah Rubric*" (K.Das Ink, Kuala Lumpur 1987)

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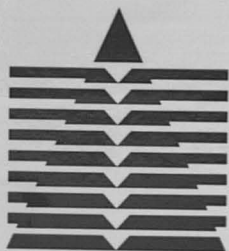
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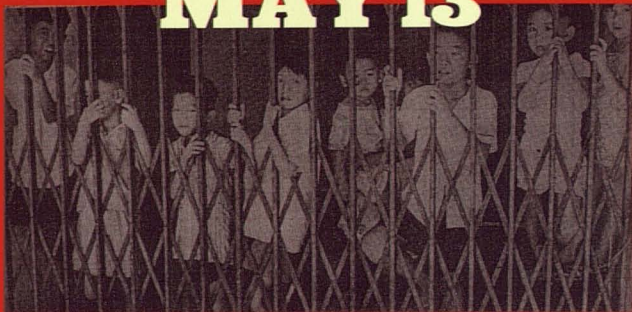


**PERPUSTAKAAN
NEGARA MALAYSIA**



2000310161

MAY 13



This is the first credible account of the May 13, 1969 racial riots in Malaysia using documents recently declassified at the Public Records Office, London after the lapse of the 30-year secrecy rule. These documents provide the only available confidential observations and memoranda by British and other foreign embassy operatives based on their intelligence and contacts with local officials and politicians. They include dispatches by correspondents which were then banned in Malaysia. The local media were suspended at the time and local documents remain classified under the Official Secrets Act.

A social scientist, Kua Kia Soong provides a fresh political analysis of this "May 13 Incident". In his view, the riots were by no means a spontaneous outburst of violence between Malays and Chinese but rather a planned coup d'etat by the ascendant state capitalist class against the Tunku-led aristocracy. He discusses the contradictions of the post-Independence Alliance racial formula and traces the rise of this new Malay capitalist class which has ruled Malaysia since 1969.

These documents clearly show who were responsible for the violence and pose the question, why the security forces allowed the violence to go on. With this publication, it is hoped that the frequently raised "spectre of May 13" by the Barisan Nasional government will be forever put to rest.



Dr Kua Kia Soong is a director of the human rights organization SUARAM and principal of the community-funded New Era College. He was Opposition Member of Parliament for Petaling Jaya (1990-95), director of Huazi Research Centre (1985-90), political detainee under the ISA (1987-89), and lecturer at the National University of Singapore (1978-79). He studied his BA Econ (1975), MA Econ (1976) and PhD in Sociology (1981) in Manchester University, UK.

SUARAM

SUARAM is a non-profit non-governmental organisation committed to defending and promoting human rights and environmental protection in Malaysia and the World.



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