



## “Political Volcano” in 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election: *Makkal Sakhti* (People Power) Against Communal Politics, “3Cs” and Marginalization of Malaysian Indian

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### Abstract

Malaysian politics has been overwhelmingly dominated by the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition since 1969. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election, the ruling coalition suffered a shocking moral defeat. This paper argues that the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election is metaphorically a political volcano eruption, witnessing the rise of People Power against suppression of dissatisfactions over communal politics, deteriorating social-economic conditions (dubbed the “3Cs” factors) and continues marginalization of Indian community in Malaysia. Aspects of communal politics include (1) the issues of NEP, Ketuanan Melayu, racism and “second-class citizen” treatment to the Malaysian non-bumiputera, and (2) the issues of UMNO-putra politicizing the NEP and Malay poverty. The “3Cs” refers to dissatisfaction over increasing (1) cost of living, (2) crime and (3) corruption, taking the first letter of each to form the acronym. Meanwhile, the revolution by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) highlighted the marginalization of Indian. Indeed, the Hindraf revolution popularized the *Makkal Sakhti* that means “People Power” in Tamil.

**Keywords:** Political volcano, People Power, *Makkal Sakhti*, Malaysian General Election, Malaysian politics, Communal politics, Marginalization, Malaysia

### 1. Introduction

In the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008, the ruling coalition of Barisan Nasional (National Front) suffered moral defeat. Since independent in 1957, the only other general election the ruling coalition, then called *Perikatan* (Alliance, which later changed its name to Barisan Nasional) failed to win handsomely is in the 1969 election that resulted in racial riot. Consequently, economic inequality between ethnic groups is blamed as the root cause of the riot and thus, the New Economic Policy (NEP), which gives various economic priorities to the *Bumiputera* (literally means “son of the soil”) group, was introduced in 1971 as the remedy. The NEP is supposed to have a 20 years lifespan that end in 1990 but its legacies, the “30% quota system” and priorities to the *Bumiputera* group are continued in the subsequent policies of National Development Policy (NDP) (1991–2000) and National Vision Policy (NVP) (2001 – 2010). In practical, one may argue that the NEP has not expired yet, hence Malaysian laymen know of only NEP but not the other two policies. The NEP managed to strengthen the ruling coalition by winning the support and votes of Malays while the antagonism from non-Malay groups are either softened by their respective ethnic-based political parties within the ruling coalition or suppressed by various laws, particularly the Internal Security Act (ISA). Consolidation of the Barisan Nasional’s (BN) power over Malaysian politics since 1969 is obviously at its peak in the 11<sup>th</sup> General Election in March 2004 where the BN won 90.87% of Parliament seats and 89.70% of State seats, enabling them to form the ruling government at national level and for all states except Kelantan state where *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (Malaysia Islamic Party, PAS) won marginally. Communal politics is played to the best effect by BN using the issue of PAS

intention to set up Islamic State that cause fear to the Chinese while reminding the Malay to defend their *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay Supremacy or Malay Dominance) [Note 1] and hence, the NEP and United Malay National Organization (UMNO) that championed their supremacy. UMNO is a Malay ethnic based political party and also the leader component party in the BN coalition. All the while, Indian ethnic seems to be a voiceless and “obedience” group, unbelievably content while marginalization of this group seems obvious. With support from the *Bumiputera* (mostly are Malays but also included natives in Peninsular Malaysia, the Sabah state and the Sarawak state), Indian and the “opportunist” within Chinese group, BN has little resistant to retain two-third majorities in Parliament. Government’s control over media make it a mammoth task for any opposition alliance to break the BN’s political dominance until in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election where the opposition coalition of *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People Justice Party, PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP) and PAS won a total of 82 (36.94%) Parliament seats and 196 (38.81%) State seats. The PKR-DAP-PAS coalition also gained majority State seats to form State government in five states, namely Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor and Kelantan.

The 12<sup>th</sup> General Election result is the most shocking and best ever result for opposition coalition in Malaysian history, thus prompting media, politician, academician and even laymen tagged this phenomenon as “political tsunami”. However, the factors contributing to moral defeat to the BN are continuous suppression of dissatisfactions under communal politics and the marginalization of Indian ethnic. Hence, the “shocking” loss of BN in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election is the results of eruption of a volcano of accumulated dissatisfactions from various ethnic groups. Therefore, the phenomenon of the mentioned election result should be better reflected as a “political volcano” rather than “political tsunami”. According to Wikipedia (2008e), “political tsunami” is a term used to describe an overwhelming victory by one political party over another. The origin of this term is unknown but among the first use of “political tsunami” was by some political analysts in describing the most probable outcome of the general midterm election of November 7, 2006, when the Democratic Party swept the Republican Party out of power in both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election, the opposition did not manage to sweep Barisan Nasional out of power in federal level and eight other states, therefore the term “political tsunami” seems not appropriate. In contrast, “political volcano” generally reflects people power against political repression of continuous suppression of dissatisfactions. When these dissatisfactions no longer under-controlled, lavas of anger and disappointment erupted, usually precede by demonstrations as signal of dissatisfaction like ash smoke as signal of coming volcanic eruption. As examples, reviewed literatures found that the struggle against Felipe Calderon’s repressive program, religious obscurantism and torture in Mexico that peak in September 2006 is termed as “political volcano” (RCP Publication 2006). Schweimler (2007) portrayed “Ecuador’s political volcano” as continuous 10 years of struggle against the political turmoil, corruption and economic hardship. Subhash Kapila (2004) warned that Bangladesh is sitting on a political volcano that could explode anytime. He believed that the masses in Bangladesh could not be expected to be in state of “frozen paralysis” due to the terrorization by Islamic fundamentalists, thus not ruling out sharp reactions from the “silent majority” in terms of counter-violence. Nevertheless, the People Power Revolution of 1986 against Ferdinand Marcos in Philippine seems most suitable being tagged as “people powered political volcano”, a reflective of Malaysian people-powered 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. In the Philippine scenario, its citizens raised against years of authoritarian regime of Marcos that suppressed their dissatisfactions through repressive laws and political assassinations. The assassination of opposition leader Ninoy Aquino on 21 August 1983 sparked off the eruption of Philippine political volcano. In Malaysia, the dissatisfactions are squashed through restriction of freedom of speech that in turn camouflaged as “noble sacrifice for economic growth and social stability”. Freedom of speech in Malaysia is often mocked as “having freedom to speak, but no freedom after speech”. Three major public rallies are signs of eruption, metaphorically to smokes coming out of an active volcano. For 50 years, the Barisan Nasional thought Malaysian political volcano is inactive as the repression actions have overwhelmingly success. Suppression of speech, which included detention without trial under Internal Security Act (ISA) and biasness of mainstream media as government’s propaganda vehicles seem very effective. Nevertheless, in the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election, the volcano finally erupted, witnessing the rise of People Power against suppression of dissatisfactions over communal politics, deteriorating social-economic conditions (dubbed the “3Cs” factors) and continues marginalization of Indian community in Malaysia. There are two aspects of communal politics, namely (1) the issues of NEP, *Ketuanan Melayu*, racism and “second-class citizen” treatment to the Malaysian non-*bumiputera*, and (2) the issues of UMNO-putra politicizing the NEP and Malay poverty. The “3Cs” refers to dissatisfaction over increasing (1) cost of living, (2) crime and (3) corruption, taking the first letter of each to form the acronym. Meanwhile, the revolution by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) highlighted the marginalization of Indian. Indeed, the rally by Hindraf popularized the *Makkal Sakhti* (literally in Tamil means “People Power”).

## 2. People Power Revolution against Communal Politics

History of communal politics in Malaysia can be traced back even before the country’s independent. British colonial used the “separate-and-rule” policy that resulted in identification of ethnic groups. Generally, the Malays are identified as public administrators that hold most of the government positions allocated by the British to the locals. Chinese

generally are identified as tin-miners and entrepreneur while the Indians are mainly perceived as estate and railway workers. When the British introduced Malayan Union after World War II in 1946 to merge all Malay states, Melaka state and Penang state that were under British colony at that time into centralized governance under a British Governor, the Malays forcefully objected, fearing their status as *bumiputera* being threatened. The Malays objected two aspects of the Malayan Union. The first is the abolishment of the supremacy of the King (known as *Sultan* in Islam-Malay world) to just empowered in matter relating to Islam and Malay's customs. The second is the award of equal citizenship to the non-Malay based on *jus soli* principle. As a result, the British replaced the Malayan Union with Federation of Malaya on 1 February 1948. The Malay has managed to reinstate the power of *Sultan*, tightened the requirements for citizenship and the Malay is to be given special rights as *bumiputera*.

Antagonism against Malayan Union and efforts to protect Malay's privileges resulted in the establishment of United Malays National Organization (UMNO) by Onn Jaafar in 11 May 1946, which has the motto of "Hidup Melayu" (literally means "Long Live the Malays"). From its background, UMNO is a Malay ethnic based political party. UMNO and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) [Note 2] formed the *Perikatan* (Alliance) for the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council's election in 1952 and won convincingly (Barisan Nasional, 2004). Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) [Note 2] joined the Alliance in 1954 (Malaysian Indian Congress, 2004). The Alliance won 51 out of 52 seats in the first General Election in July 1955 and further strengthened when more political parties joined the coalition. This coalition of various parties was later institutionalized as Barisan Nasional (BN). Nevertheless, Mauzy (1983: 78) questioned that the formation of BN could be an *ad hoc* happening following the racial May 13 riot rather than a planned effort to form a truly multiracial coalition. MCA was formed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1949 out of the need to save the Chinese in Malaya from being repatriated to China (MCA 2007). Meanwhile, MIC was established in August 1946 to fight along for Indian independence from British colonial, and then turned to struggle for Malaysian independence after India obtained its independence (Wikipedia 2008a). All three main parties of then, the Alliance and now BN are ethnic based political parties. UMNO is confined to ethnic Malays, MCA to ethnic Chinese and MIC to ethnic Indians. Furthermore, the fact that these three core political parties of the BN coalition, namely UMNO, MCA and MIC still remained as individual ethnically based party further proves racial politics exist in Malaysia. Some other BN component parties are state-based. For example, the Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) is mainly a Sarawak state-based political party that is mostly dominated by Chinese in that state while Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) (Sabah United Party) is mainly a Kadazan-Dusun ethnic cum Sabah state-based political party. Besides the ruling coalition of *Barisan Nasional*, the opposition coalition of *Barisan Alternatif* (Alternative Front) also partly ethnic-religious based, especially in the prior general elections in 1999 and 2004. The clearest example is PAS. Many (but not all) in the PAS maintained a literalist-fundamentalist notion of Islam, rejected democracy as a Western legacy and as an extension of secularism, furthering Islamic laws and ultimately establishing an Islamic state (Loh 2003: 95). Taking advantage of PAS's Islamic ideology and against events such as aggression on ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, the Malaysia 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969 racial riots (dubbed as "May 13") and the looming terrorist activities that were linked to Islamic fanatic groups, issues of setting up Islamic state were played up to the benefit of the *Barisan Nasional* by striking fear into the Chinese group. In the previous 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election in 2004, issues that are either directly or indirectly linked to the concept of Islamic state were presented to the Malaysian Chinese voters through various categories of fear instilling rhetoric also known as *ad baculum* (Lim & Har 2008: 29). Nevertheless, those PAS leaders who believe Islam is not incompatible with democracy championed Anwar Ibrahim's plight for *reformasi* (reformation) and the formation of Alternative Front (Loh 2003: 95). Anwar Ibrahim is the ousted former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia cum Minister of Finance and current *de facto* leader of PKR and opposition coalition.

In fact, before Independent until contemporary, there were efforts to transform communal politics to multi racial politics in Malaysia. The first effort was the unsuccessfully attempted by Onn Jaafar, the founder and first President of UMNO. In his speech in the UMNO's half-year General Meeting on March 1951, Onn Jaafar proposed to open membership of UMNO to the non-Malay and renaming UMNO to "United Malaya National Organization" [Note 3]. He reminded the Malays about some plans like establishment of Labour Party or Progressive Party that did not limited their membership to one ethnic but open their doors to anyone that are willing to abide by the party's rules. Hence, he urged UMNO members to "open its door before its door is being closed by other peoples" (Mohamed Abid 2003: 180 – 181). However, his proposal went unheeded resulting Onn Jaafar left the party on August 1951 to form the multiracial party, Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). IMP failed subsequently, implying that communal politic triumph over multiracial. Onn Jaafar was succeeded by Tunku Abdul Rahman as President. In his last speech in UMNO General Meeting on 26 August 1951, Onn Jaafar claimed that UMNO is a national association of the Malays, thus questioning UMNO as a truly national organization of the people in Malaya. He further reminded the Malays that democratic rule should not protect the rights of only one group of its citizens (Mohamed Abid 2003: 191). The second effort was the success of Tunku Abdul Rahman uniting UMNO, MCA and MIC under the Alliance. That might be the best possible effort to start off multiracial politic in early days of Malaya but as those racial-based parties have been cooperating and in coalition for so long (since more than 50 years ago), should they not merge themselves into one single multiracial

party with its own political ideology rather than a group of individual racially identified parties in a coalition? Hence, a successful start by Tunku Abdul Rahman seems failed to further complete the transformation of Malaysian politics towards multiracial based. The third effort towards multiracial politics is trumpeted by the DAP's concept of "Malaysian Malaysia". This concept is made as one of their objectives and supported by their policies to abolish the division of "bumiputra" and "non-bumiputra" as paramount principle towards nation-building (DAP 2005). However, despite its strong social democrat approach, DAP is perceived by the society as a "Chinese party with few other professional Indians" due to its leadership and members structure which is dominated by ethnic Chinese. Similarly, in spite of its multi-racial political philosophy, *Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* or PGRM (another main component party in the *Barisan Nasional*) is also perceived as a "Chinese party" even though there were previously and currently few outstanding non-Chinese members in the party while People's Progressive party (PPP) has lost its strength and prominence. PGRM was formed on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1968 and when the party was approved by the Registrar of Societies on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1968, the first Central Committee comprised six Malays, including two ladies, six Chinese and three Indians. Among its non-Chinese founder included the renowned Professor Syed Hussain Alatas and V. Veerapan (PGRM 2008). PPP was formed in 1953 in the Perak state (at then, by the name "Perak Progressive Party" before changing it to the current name in 1956) by the Seenivasagam brothers mainly as an opposition party to the Alliance. In 1969, PPP was nearly able to form the Perak state Government, but fell short of just two seats in the state assembly. PPP is one of the founding members of *Barisan Nasional* in 1973 but joining the coalition would prove its undoing as it lost nearly all its seats when it contested under the *Barisan Nasional* ticket in the 1974 Malaysian General Elections (Wikipedia 2008B). Lastly and most contemporary effort towards multiracial politics, Anwar Ibrahim seems has successfully initiated another starting step towards multiracial politics by uniting PKR, DAP and PAS in the alliance of *Barisan Rakyat* (People Front) in the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election, which was renamed as *Pakatan Rakyat* (People Coalition) after the election. Previously in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election in 1999 and 2004 respectively, the opposition coalition is known as *Barisan Alternatif* (Alternative Front).

Besides racially identified political parties, NEP seems to be the most controversial representation of communal politics in Malaysia as it is linked with the issue of *Ketuanan Melayu* and the event of "May 13" racial riots. Some researchers, like Dr. Kua Kia Soong, director of the human rights organization SUARAM believed that the riot is not racial in nature, but politicized using communal platform. In his book entitled *May 13: Declassified documents on the Malaysian riots of 1969*, he wrote that "official history" infers that such racial riots will occur "spontaneously" if, or when the status quo (refers to Malay Supremacy) is shaken. However, in his view, the riots were by no means a spontaneous outburst of violence between Malays and Chinese but rather a planned coup d'état by the ascendant state capitalist class against the Tunku (Abdul Rahman)-led aristocracy while Farish A. Noor (2008c) claimed that the elevation of May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969 as a turning point in Malaysia's history was and remains a deliberate act.

### 2.1 NEP, *Ketuanan Melayu*, racism and "second-class citizen"

The New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented throughout the *Second Malaysia Plan 1971 – 1975* to *Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986 – 1990* has two objectives of eradicating poverty and restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance between races, both based on the belief that Malays are generally much poorer than the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese. This imbalance is also partly blamed as the cause for the "May 13" riots. According to the *Second Malaysia Plan 1971 – 1975* (as cited in Milne 1976: 240), "the government has set a target that within twenty years (1971 to 1990), Malays and other indigenous people will manage and own at least 30% of the total commercial and industrial activities in all categories and scales of operation". Kua (2007: 118) criticized that the main premise of the NEP that couched in terms of restoring the "racial imbalance" can be seen as an expression of the ruling class's communalist strategy. Kua Kia Soong also claimed that at Independence in 1957, Article 153 (of the Malaysian Federal Constitution) on the "special position of the Malays" was mainly concerned with their access to land, admission to public services, issuing of permits or licenses for operation in certain businesses, scholarships, bursaries or other forms of aid for education purposes. On the other hand, the status quo since the imposition of the National Operation Council in 1969 (as a results of the "May 13" riots) has been one of *Ketuanan Melayu*, a racist concept that is alien to the spirit of the Federal Constitution and that tries to justify all kinds of racial discrimination (Kua 2007: 1). Therefore, one of the (not surprising) Chinese complaints about the NEP is that the objective of restructuring the economy to help the Malays is being given too much attention compared with its another objective of eradication of poverty regardless of race (Milne 1976: 251). They also question why the principle of proportionate or near proportionate, representation of ethnic groups not applied across the board? This was particularly referred to under-representation of Chinese in the civil service, land settlement, the armed forces, university admissions, police, nurses training, taxi and lorry licenses, and the composition of the National Youth Council. As for the Indian, they called attention to their relatively high rate of unemployment and the principle of proportionate allocations for the Indians in spheres such as land settlement schemes and admissions to university (Milne 1976: 252 – 253). Those issues are still relevant contemporary, most notably are the relative poor economic welfare of the Malaysian Indian community and under-representation of Chinese and Indian in the government Cabinet, be it in quantity of Ministers or "importance" of the ministerial portfolio. Since the resignation

of Tan Siew Sin as Finance Minister in 1974, what is the most important ministerial portfolio ever held by a Chinese or Indian? In the implementation of the policy, “the government will ensure that no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation” (*Second Malaysia Plan 1971 – 1975*, cited in Milne 1976: 240). The captivating point is when the targets are measured in term of percentage (30%), how can improvement of percentage share of one group not causing any loss or deprivation to other groups, and hence causing grievance?

R. S. Milne, then editor of *Pacific Affairs* and one of the active academic critics of Malaysia’s NEP has identified two main types of possible tensions resulting from the NEP, regardless of its success or failure. Those are tensions between different racial groups and those within a racial group, particularly the Malays. The second aspect shall be discussed in the later part of this article. He noted that non-Malay might be antagonized by the fact that NEP is doing more for Malays than for them, particularly in areas where there may be inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources like small manufacturing business and entry into university (Milne 1976: 257). Fundamentally, the NEP identified Malaysian into two main groups, which are the *bumiputera* and the non-*bumiputera*. The former group enjoys “special privilege” in many aspects include economic rights, university enrolment and public sector employment, hence giving impression that the non-*bumiputera* group is treated as “second-class citizen” or worst, as “foreigner”. It is a norm that application forms in Malaysia need applicants to identify themselves as either *bumiputera* or not or even more specifically stating their respective ethnic origin and religion. Ethnic and religion are also clearly stated in the National Identity card. To some extent that involved the issue of marginalization of Indian community in Malaysia, the *DNA* newspaper of India carried a front-page article claiming Malaysia practicing apartheid against Hindus (*The Star* 2007: N12). In Malaysia, as Malays are the main ethnic component in the *bumiputera* group and Malays are also Muslim, religion seems to be another channel to segregate Malaysian into two classes of “Islam” and “non-Islam”. In a BBC write-up, their Islamic affairs analyst, Roger Hardy (2005) questioned the fairness of the twin guiding principles (goals) of Malaysia’s modernization. The first is giving Islam a new pre-eminence in public life, which meant stressing Muslim values and identity, building up Islamic institutions and forging new links with the wider Muslim world. Secondly, Malaysia continuing the “affirmative action” policies, begun in the 1970s, which gave the ethnic Malays – who form some 60% of the population – a privileged position in government, education and bureaucracy. Hence, Hardy added, “Where do these twin goals leave the Chinese, Indians and others who form the non-Muslim minority? Can a society based on these two principles also be genuinely democratic?” Even in the 1970s, Milne (1976: 244) has written that the degree of administrative discretion exercised by the Ministry of Trade and Industry has caused concern among non-Malays as various Ministry approvals are dependent on their satisfying various requirements about the proportion of Malays employed and the achievement of the Malay ownership target of 30%. When administrative controls are put in the hands of the government officials, uncertainty is created and the criteria on which decision are made are obscured (Milne 1976: 251).

On the issue of fair opportunity in education and brain drain, prominent opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang has been condemning the inequality as a result of NEP since the 1970s, but remained unheeded by the ruling government. In his speech on the Royal Address on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1978, he warned that the complete abolition of the English-medium MCE examination and switch over to the Malay-medium SPM examination after 180 might cause difficulties for Malaysian students to join Commonwealth universities and colleges simply because their command of the English language would not be sufficient to entitle them to automatic admission. Thus, when the NEP expended higher education opportunities for the Malay students at the expense of non-Malay students, the door of higher education seems close to the non-Malay students both from inside (because of deliberate government policy) and abroad (because of inadequate command of English language) (Lim 1978: 10). In the same speech, Lim Kit Siang condemned the government ignorance towards the proposal of establishment up Merdeka University that use merit system as enrolment criteria. He claimed that if the Barisan Nasional government continues to be blind to the injustice and inequalities created by the NEP as the root causes of popular frustration, discontent and alienation, students aboard might refuse to return or professionals emigrate en masse (Lim 1978: 12 – 14). Azmi Sharom (2008) claimed that 30% of the staff in the National University of Singapore Law school are Malaysians, hence questioning “How come these clever fellows (Malaysian) who are good enough to teach in a university that is among the top 20 in the world are not here in the land of their birth?” and “Is it because that talent is all non-Malay and they feel they have better opportunities there than here?” Albright the reasons, statistics from the Home Ministry of Malaysia show that Malaysian Chinese renouncing citizenship from year 2000 to 2006 is 87% of the total follows by Malays (6.6%), Indians (5.0%) and others (1.4%) (Yoges Palaniappan 2007b). Yet, the brain drain is hard to quantify, claimed Montlake (2008) in referring to many white-collar Malaysian migrate to Singapore and elsewhere without giving up their (Malaysian) passport.

The NEP and racist mindset of the ruling Barisan Nasional leaders, to some extent implied that non-Bumiputera is “foreigner”, prompting racial discrimination. This issue gained an unexpected revelation in an exclusive post 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election interview by *Malaysiakini* with Samy Vellu, a long-serving Minister cum MIC party President on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2008. While stressing that the government is not discriminatory, he claimed that those in the civil service are. “Anything for other races, they don’t like to see it ... some of them don’t consider us (non-Malays) as

Malaysian. They are the ones who brought the Barisan (Nasional) down in this election”, he was quoted saying (Anand 2008a). He also admitted they (the MIC) were not treated as equals in the coalition. Below are some extracts of Samy Vellu’s answers in report of the interview (Anand 2008b).

(1) The present total employment in government, Indians have (is) not more than four percent... And the (job promotions are completely very bad. We (referring to the Malaysian Indian) don’t get promotions, however you work, however smart you are, you will never get promotion. If you get a promotion, you won’t last long. These are the things that made people get fed up.

(2) In the local authorities, you never get jobs, you never get any contracts, nothing. There may be councilors, one or two. These councilors will not be in the important committees.

(3) Why (did) we build the Tafe college? Because we never get places in any of the government technical college. So, I said let’s build, let’s have our own.

The issue discrimination and taking non-Malays as “second class citizen” or “foreigner” has roots to the social contract for Independent where the Malays granting non-Malays citizenship for the later to agree to four Malays’ special rights that are embedded in the Federal Constitution. There are special privilege to the Malays (later manifested in the NEP and the concept of *Ketuanan Melayu*), Islam as official religion, the power of the Malay rulers and the Malay language as official language. The non-Malays are reminded not to question the social contract while being reminded that they are not indigenous settlers and the consequences of risking other racial riots of the “May 13” tragedy if the Malays are provoked. Below are several examples of racist remarks.

(1) In his *The Malay Dilemma* book, Mahathir (1970: 116) wrote “the non-Malay is always a guest to the Malay, a guest in his country”. He also claimed that the Chinese and Indian found in fact that in the land of the Malays they are privileged (ibid: 117). Mahathir persisted that Malays bestow “inalienable rights” due to that they are “the original or indigenous people of Malaya and the only people who can claim Malaya as their one and only country” (ibid: 133).

(2) Senator Dr. Mohd Puad Zarkashi of Johor state UNMO quoted stressing that the “Hidup Melayu” slogan is the UNMO struggle to enable the return of Malays’ right that were denied by history. The right is deemed “the nation debt to the Malays due to the denial of the colonial on the *Bumiputera*’s (son-of-the-soil) right in his own soil” (Utusan Online 2007).

(3) Utusan newspaper (Utusan Online 2000) wrote in its article column: “Remember, Malaysia is originally named *Tanah Melayu* (literally “Malay Land”). Still not compromise enough of the Malays to change the name to Malaysia?”.

(4) Mohamed Rahmat, former Secretary General of UMNO and Barisan Nasional claimed that as long as Malays position is not consolidate, imbalance might occur that may cause security problem. He further threaten, “Do not conjecture the Malays, they only know one word, amok!” (Utusan Online 2006).

(5) Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia claimed that Malaysian Chinese would ‘return’ to China if the local economy is bad while the China economy is robust. “In the past, they came to Malaysia because there were no opportunities (in mainland China). If there are little or no opportunities here, some would return to China,” he said (Hong 2007).

(6) In August 2006, Khairy Jamaluddin, UMNO Youth Deputy Chief cum Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi’s son-in-law told an UMNO Youth meeting that the Chinese Malaysian community would take advantage of any UMNO infighting to make demands to advance their interests. Besides at that meeting, he also make other racial remarks including complaints that the *Bumiputera* have not reached the 30% equity ownership and the communities is still lagging behind in many economic opportunities (Beh 2006a).

(7) In an interview with Agence France-Presse (AFP 2008) (quoted by *Malaysiakini* on 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2008), Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak was quoted rising the spectre of the country’s worst race riots of the “May 13” to defend the government crackdown on ethnic Indian street protest. He said, “If the Malays of Kampung Baru (a Malay enclave that was one of the flashpoints of the “May 13” riots) come out then we have the spectre of a serious possibility of a racial clash in this country.” “There were signs that they (the Malays) were preparing to come out so we had to tell them (the Indian protesters), ‘look, don’t make the situation any worst’,” Najib further added.

(8) Umno Youth chief cum Education Minister Hishammuddin Hussein has been repeatedly waving and kissing the *keris* (a Malay dagger) in various UMNO meetings for years. In 2005, he had brandished the *keris* during the Umno general assembly in rallying members behind his call for *Ketuanan Melayu* (Yoges Palaniappan 2007a). Hishammuddin waved and kissed a *keris* again at the Umno Youth annual meeting in 2006, when calling for the revival of the New Economic Policy (ibid) while warning religious freedom groups not to raise issues related to Article 11 and Article 121 (1A) in the Federal Constitution (Beh 2006b). Despite some flippant protests from MCA and PGRM, no other concrete action taken even by Abdullah Badawi.

(9) An exact quote from Wikipedia (2008c) is as follow: In 1987, as UMNO Youth Chief, Najib defended special Malay privileges in a speech where he vowed to bathe the keris (Malay dagger) with Chinese blood. Shortly afterwards, the government launched a crackdown on extremist elements, termed Operation Lalang, although Najib was not detained. At the same rally, banners were hoisted carrying phrases such as "revoke the citizenship of those who opposed the Malay rulers", "May 13 has begun" (referring to the May 13 racial riots in 1969), and "soak it (the *keris*) with Malaysian Chinese blood" (also, see Farish A. Noor 2008a).

(10) In the 57<sup>th</sup> UMNO general assembly in 2006, an UMNO Malacca state delegate, Hasnoor Sidang Hussein was quoted saying: "Why should Malays and Umno be passive and defensive? It's time to raise our voices and defend the Malays and Islam. Umno is willing to risk lives and bathe in blood in defense of race and religion. Don't play with fire. If they mess with our rights, we will mess with theirs" (Soon & Kuek Ser 2006).

## 2.2 UMNO-putra politicizing the NEP and Malays poverty

In 1970, Mahathir Mohamad wrote *The Malay Dilemma* book, arguing that the Malays were being held back partly by their physical environment and partly by hereditary factors. Due to that, the Malays possessed a worldview that retarded them in the contest between races in Malaysia, making them little match for the "industrious and determined immigrants" and thus lost out in the competition over business, skilled jobs and urban employment (Milner 2003: 134). Mahathir called for an "affirmative action" program in aid of the Malays (Khoo 1995: 25) and that "harsh punitive measures should be meted out to those who impede the elevation of the Malays to equality with other races" (*The Malay Dilemma*, p.60). Today's "Malays' dilemma" has taken another twist because the Malay poverty and backwardness have been an institutional problem that saps the Malay laymen's share of the country prosperity to politic business cloaking under NEP and *Ketuanan Melayu*. Therefore, shrill warning cry that Malays are "under treat" after the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election is rebutted by Azmi Sharom (2008), claiming that it is UMNO hegemony under threat, not the Malays. During the recent (and many others past) election campaign, UMNO volubly criticisms about the poverty and lack of development in the PAS lead state of Kelantan backfired by empirical and statistical data that shows clearly that after 18 years of PAS rule, Kelantan was no longer the second poorest state in Malaysia while neighboring state of Terengganu (under the Barisan Nasional ruling, population in both Kelantan and Terengganu are mostly Malays) was suffering under much higher levels of absolute poverty with more people there living below poverty line (Farish A. Noor 2008b). According to Gomez (2002: 82), practice of political business has been facilitated by the extent of authoritarianism in Malaysia, characterized by the centralization of power in the executive arm of government, particularly in the hands of UMNO. This has lead to beliefs that Malays poverty is not because they are being denied their rights to the fruits of economics success by the non-Malays. In contrast, they are poor because their shares of the economic prosperity are being snatched away by "UMNO-putra", a term literally means "son-of-UMNO" but used in mockery of capitalists and opportunists that are linked to UMNO either by party memberships or other networks. Gomez has provided a list of 37 major corporate figures together with their companies in which they own an interest or hold a directorship and their affiliations with UMNO or key UMNO leaders (see Gomez 2002: 87 – 90, Table 3.2). The example of corporate figures comprises of 32 Malays (include three of Mahathir's son but not inclusive of other politically connected prominent business figures like Daim Zainuddin), four Chinese and an Indian.

There are twin perils of UMNO-putra politicizing the NEP using Malays poverty as backdrop. Firstly, this scenario naturally create money politic in UMNO, where members trying to buy votes for position in the party or promoting respective crony protégé capitalists. In a wider context, Gomez (2002: 83) describes Malaysian "money politic" as among other things included favoritism, conflicts of interest and nepotism in the award of state-created rents, securing votes during federal and party elections by disbursing current and future material benefits, and the direct and indirect interference of political parties or influential politicians in the corporate sector. According to Milne (1986: 1371 – 1372), the total money spent on votes at the 1984 UMNO elections was allegedly well in excess of RM 20 million, the highest ever and was said that for the first time more "Malay money" was spent than "Chinese money". As a result, influence over UMNO elections is shifting from rural areas, where Malay school teachers were often leaders, to urban areas, the base of Malay capitalists. A decade later in UMNO's 1993 party election (highlighted by the contest for Deputy President post between Anwar Ibrahim and UMNO veteran incumbent, Ghafar Baba), estimated sum spent has increased to approximately RM3 billion. By 1995, almost 20 percent of UMNO's 165 division chairmen were millionaire businessmen-cum-politicians (Gomez 2002: 98). Mahathir dubbed the money politic in UMNO elections as "culture of greed" (Gomez 2005: 38). Nevertheless, he seems "easily forget" that he is part of many criticisms regarding money politic and cronyism although none of those criticisms could be proven legally. Daim Zainuddin is among well-known Mahathir's protégé that worth mentioned. Mahathir appointed Daim as chairman of Peremba Bhd, a state-owned property development firm in 1979 and chairman of Fleet Holding Sdn Bhd, UMNO's private investment arm in 1981. Hence, acting in his triple capacity as private businessman, government appointee and UMNO trustee, Daim involved these companies under his control in a myriad of interlocking business transactions (Gomez 2002: 91 – 92). Daim ventured into business in the late 1960s, producing table salts and plastics. Both of those ventures failed, yet in 1992, the total value of Daim's assets was reportedly RM1 billion, which included assets in Australia, Britain,

Mauritius and the United States (Gomez 2002: 93, quoting *The Star* 19/5/92). The puzzling question is that should the emergence of “new rich” Malays by like Daim indicates the government success in developing entrepreneurship Malays? The answer is “no” as money politic and politic patronage cause polarization within the Malays. The poverty to the “laymen” Malays group is constantly being used as excuses to support continuous “constructive protection” (a term used by Mahathir in his *The Malay Dilemma* book) that protect the “new rich” Malays. In 1974, there already have some protests of dissatisfaction from the Malays like the unrest in Baling (Kedah state) in November and student demonstrations throughout the second half of that year (Milne 1976: 260). Professor Syed Hussein Alatas branded the transfer of thriving business from government agencies to Malay capitalists as “the height of absurdity which has never entered the imagination of even the most fanatical capitalists in the entire history of mankind”. His question speaks out the peril and dissatisfaction of NEP-politicking clearly: “Why should a small handful of greedy and un-enterprising Malays get the benefit of the transfer as opposed to the Malay community represented by the workers of the enterprise and the Government’s interest in it?” (Milne 1976: 249). However, the most comical criticism was in 2005 towards Minister of International Trade & Industry, Rafidah Aziz over the dispensing of Approved Permits (APs) to import vehicles without tax to selected few companies. The UMNO members lamented not the practice of targeting individuals as beneficiaries of the APs, but that they were not the people who were targeted (Gomez 2005: 39).

Secondly, this NEP-politicking leads to “dependency syndrome”, also known as “subsidy mentality” to both UMNO-putra and the Malay laymen, which has weakened the Malays in term of physical environment and mentality. Isn’t that similar with Mahathir’s version of “Malays dilemma”? Malays are preferred in the awarding of public work contracts (Bakri Musa 1999: 178) but the benefits of those contracts are shared by not all Malays. Logical deduction tells that all contracts especially the mega projects need a measurable amount of capital layout, which is not affordable to poor Malays. Hence, this gives rise to so-called “Ali Babaism” where the Malays get the contract or license, then “sells” or “outsource” it to the non-Malay, particularly the Chinese for instant monetary gain. This on one hand angered the Chinese, as they have to subscribe to rent seeking to survive or to get the fruits of the nation economic growth. On the other hand, the poor Malays that typically without political connection or big capital layout gain nothing, no contract awarded, no rent received, remained in poverty and worst still, their poverty condition being used (or rather “misused”) as reasons to justify the continuous practice of awarding of public work contracts and licenses to UMNO-putra Malays. Same argument applied to privatization of large corporations where corporate Malay businessmen owned equities but doubting that the same privilege is enjoyed by the laymen Malays as well. As a result, an intra-class cleavage is created within the Malays. Even in 1976, Milne (1976: 259) has cautioned that the benefit of NEP might have been restricted to a small “special class”, “coterie” or “elite” and if it is so, the political consequences is hard to guess. Then till contemporary context, critics of the NEP or the Bumiputera privileges are usually aggressively dealt with. As examples, in 2006, Lim Teck Ghee was forced to resign as the director of the Center for Public Policy Studies after it release a report that claimed the NEP has already achieved its goal of 30% Bumiputera corporate ownership while then European Commission ambassador, Thierry Rommel was heavily vilified for labeling the government’s racial quota policy as protectionism in 2007. Therefore, no surprise that a national youth survey (conducted before the Hindraf rally) revealed that 37% of ethnic Malay as contrast to 59% of Chinese and 58% of Indian disagreed that Malaysia’s government treated everyone equally. The survey also revealed that 67% Malay agreed that “Malaysian free to speak what they think without fear”, but only 44% of Chinese and 56% of Indian concurred (Montlake 2008).

### 3. People Power Revolution against “3Cs”

As mentioned, the “3C” are cost of living, crime and corruption. An opinion pool commissioned by *The Star* newspaper in December 2007 reported that the three most concerned issues to Malaysian are cost of living (as claimed by 96% of the respondents), followed crime rate (88%) and illegal immigrants (40%) (Zulkifli Abd Rahman & Florence A. Samy 2008). Firstly, Malaysian did not content with inflation that continuously raises the cost of living. Dissatisfaction may have mounted year by year as the government keeps on insisting that the Consumer Price Index is low, which is not reflective on the actual prices the consumers need to pay in their everyday living. Continuously increase in crude oil price has put pressure on the government to reduce petrol subsidies, increase toll rate and electricity rate, which could accelerate inflation in the country. The anger of the voters is further played up by the opposition in various campaigns like mocking “BN” acronym as “Barang Naik” (literally means “price of goods increase”) while Anwar promised to reduce petrol price if the people power backs the opposition to win the election and form the ruling government.

On crime, Malaysians generally have not satisfied with the crime rate or the police forces for a long time. The police force failed to portray a good image of integrity and efficient to the public. Statistics from the Royal Malaysia Police are summarized in Table 1. As per Table 1, total crimes, rape and property crime accelerate in year 2006 and 2007. If year 2004, the year of the prior 11<sup>th</sup> general election is used as yardstick, total crimes have increased 33.94%. Increase in rape cases is even more alarming at 84.92%. Perhaps, a laymen voters might not understand or have exact access of these statistics, but their fear of crime and their family members (especially the daughter) safety have been part and parcel of their life, hence further boiling their dissatisfaction towards the government.

Nevertheless, the eruption of dissatisfaction on crime concerns in Malaysia could be due to few high profile crime cases involving brutality against women and children. Example of those cases include the murder of Mongolian Altantuya Shaariibu (body was allegedly blown up by military-grade explosives, case still pending hearing), Canny Ong (raped, stabbed and then dumped into a manhole to be burned to dead on 14 Jun 2003), Nurin Jazlin Jazimin (8-year old, reported missing since 20 August 2007), Nurul Huda Abdul Ghani (10-year old, brutally raped and murdered, Jan 2004 case) and Sharlinie Mohd Nashar (five-year-old, reported missing on 9 Jan 2008). Besides, gang-rape cases also widely reported in Johor Baru, the capital city of Johor state. A series of rape cases in June 2007 particularly terrified the residents of Johor Baru. On 12 June 2007, three men raped a 19-year-old girl and forced her 22-year-old boyfriend to watch helplessly, after he had been slashed twice. The following day, a group of armed men took a couple on a terror ride before raping the 35-year-old woman in the presence of her friend, who was slashed. On 20 June 2007, a schoolgirl was raped by four men and another by a bogus policeman in two separate incidents within a six-hour period (The Star Online 2007 & Farik Zolkepli 2007).

Issues of corruption encompass mismanagement of public funds and juridical problems. Based on Transparency International (TI) Corruption Index (score of "10" being the least corrupt while score of zero being most corrupt), Malaysia's yearly score from 1995 to 2007 range between 4.8 (achieved in year 2000) to 5.32 (achieved in year 1996). These index scores seem "not good enough" after Abdullah Badawi greatly being portrayed as the Chinese legendary graft-buster Justice Pao and his continuous promise of "no-nonsense" anti-corruption stand since the last general election in 2004. Worsen the corruption dissatisfaction was the Auditor General's Report 2006, detailing mismanagement of public funds. Glaring examples include excessive expenditures by the Youth and Sport Ministry that reported to have paid RM8.4 million more than market price for 13 items. Two examples are technical books were bought at RM10 700 per set while corresponding market price is RM417 per set (25.66 times higher) and two-tonne car jack purchased price at RM5 471 per unit is 109.42 times higher than its corresponding market price of RM50 per unit. The ministry's secretary-general was also reported to have signed 11 contracts worth RM8 million to RM74 million pertaining to the National Youth Skills (Training) Institute on behalf of the government. The defense minister (who is also the Deputy Prime Minister) was also asked to explained the RM6.75 billion scandal of six navy patrol boats that are either not been delivered or not operational (Malaysiakini 2007a). Another questionable case is the award of the RM1 billion-bridge replacement project in 2000 to Titanium Management Sdn Bhd, a company owned by a son of Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud (Thein 2007). The mentioned company only registered in 1998 with a paid-up capital of RM2.4 million, thus the RM1 billion project is about 417 times its paid-up capital. Besides the 2006 report, the Auditor General's Report 2005 highlighted the misuse of the national disaster relief fund for tsunami victims and uncollected taxes (Beh & Yap 2006) while then Deputy Finance Minister Tengku Putera Tengku Awang was quoted saying the Finance Ministry has categorized seven states as "almost bankrupt" since they were in financial deficit and needed aid from the federal government (Beh 2004).

Corruption issues were no longer be able to suppressed but exploded through the "Lingam video-clip" case, all at once brought back the memories of the historical *Operasi Lalang* (literally "Weed Operation") and the "1998 constitutional crisis", both started in 1987 and peaked in 1998. *Operasi Lalang* refers to events from October 1987 to April 1989 that resulted in 106 person detained under the ISA, which 38 were formally served with 2-year detention orders at the end of December 1987. Of the thirty eight detainees, seven were DAP's Member of Parliament, ten from PAS, two from PSRM, ten Christians associated with church work, two Chinese educationists while the rest are academicians, environmentalists and individuals (Lee 1989: 14). Lee Lam Thye (ibid: 9 & 14) claimed that never in the history of Malaysia has such a wide spectrum of people ever been arrested under ISA and believed that the *Operasi Lalang* was an orchestrated intimidation of the people to repress the growing demands for government accountability and democracy. In addition, the country judiciary system was also in turmoil in 1987 when Salleh Abas, then Lord President was suspended two months after he convened a meeting of all 20 federal judges in Kuala Lumpur that decided to send a letter to the King stating that they were disappointed with comments made by the Prime Minister about the judiciary. The issue is complicated as it inter-related with the internal battle within UMNO, UMNO deregistration and later re-registered as "New UMNO" (see Harding 1998 for further reference). Salleh was then brought before a tribunal for "misconduct" but five judges of the Supreme Court convened and granted Salleh an interlocutory (interim) order against the tribunal. Nevertheless, the order was later set aside in August 1988, which Salleh was sacked (thus, making this happening known as "1998 constitutional crisis"). Meanwhile, the five judges that grant the interlocutory order were suspended, in which two of them eventually being sacked in October 1988 but the remaining three were reinstated (Ng 2008: N12). On 19 April 1989, all political detainees under the *Operasi Lalang* were released. Nevertheless, "the damage done to the Malaysian body politic, democracy and human rights have yet to be undone" (quoting Lee 1989: 6) while Malaysia's TI Corruption Index plunged from 6.29 for the period of 1980 – 1985 to 5.10 for the period of 1988 – 1992. After about two decade, in September 2007, Malaysian judiciary system integrity is in jeopardy again after Anwar Ibrahim made public a video clip showing lawyer V.K. Lingam on the phone brokering judicial appointments with a senior judge. It is believed that the video-clip was recorded in Lingam's house in December 2001. A Royal Commission

was established to investigate the case. In mid May 2008, the commission found that “the video clip is authentic, the person speaking on the phone is V.K. Lingam, the person whom V.K. Lingam was speaking to was Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim (former Chief Justice) and there is sufficient evidence of misbehavior on the part of certain individuals or personalities identified or mentioned in the video clip”. Among other top personalities implicated in the case include former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, tycoon Vincent Tan, UMNO secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and former Chief Justices Eusoff Chin (Shaila Koshy & Sujata 2008: N4). Despite the final findings came after the election, the effects of this case to the election need not wait with the opposition capitalizing on it to rallies for people power against corruption.

Another “high impact” case is the “Zakaria’s scandals” issue that emotionally spices up the corruption and misused of power issues. Zakaria Md Deros was an influential UMNO politician in Klang, state of Selangor, holding position as UMNO division chief, Klang Municipal Council councilor, state assemblyperson and land committee chief in the Selangor Economic Development Corporation (PKNS). Among related controversial issues are building his infamous palatial mansion (dubbed “Zakaria’s Palace”) in a low-cost housing area without local authority approval, having his son and daughter-in-law in the Klang Municipal Council, operating a *satay* shop on state land without license, facing various charges under the Companies’ Act for several offences as a director of Titi Steel Sdn Bhd., granting seven acres of land to the Selangor Badminton Association (an organisation he himself heads) at RM20 million below the market value and approving 11 acres of state government land to be developed by a company owned by two of his sons (*Malaysiakini* 2006a, 2006b, 2006c & 2007b). The DAP successfully further fanned up this issue by nicknaming Zakaria as “Chiak ka liau”, which literally in a Chinese Hokkien dialect is “eat (taking) up everything”.

#### 4. Makkal Sakhti against Marginalization of Indian Community

As Malay is also Muslim in Malaysia, the issue of “Supremacy” is extended to *Ketuanan Melayu-Islam*. On one hand, Malays view pluralism as “*muhibah*” (literally means goodwill or friendly feeling), which promotes unity and harmony. On the other hand, agenda of *Ketuanan Melayu-Islam* (Malay-Islam Supremacy) did not allow pluralism parity or to some extent even the existence of it but solitary cultural power. Whenever the later dominated the former, battle for cultural superiority emerged, so do some controversial issues of marginalization like the “copyright Allah”, body snatching, restricts religion conversion and Hindu temples demolition. To some extent, marginalization covers not only Indian, but also other non-Malay (non-Muslim) communities. Collectively, these issues deposit dissatisfaction-lavas into Malaysian political volcano. On the “copyright Allah” issue, the government banned the usage of certain Arabic words like “Allah”, “Baitullah” (House of God), “Solat” (prayer and “Kaabah” (Sacred House) in the literature, gospel and speeches of non-Muslims faiths in December 2007 (Baradan Kuppumasmy 2008). *Herald*, a Christian weekly newspaper was told to drop the use of the word “Allah” in their publication or risk their near-expiring permit not renewed. This exclusive use of the word “Allah” for Muslims only has since been termed as “copyright Allah” issue and helped won the votes of Christian communities during election. *Herald* claimed that in Malay language, the term “Allah” is a correct translation of the Bible for “God” as well as “Tuhan” for “Lord”. Regarding this matter, the Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur filed suit against the government, arguing that for fifteen centuries, Christians and Muslims in Arabic-speaking countries have been using the word “Allah” in reference to the One God while complaining of constant harassment and numerous threats by the minister and government has infringed legal right to freedom of speech and has caused him much apprehension, anxiety and uneasiness (MySinchew 2008). Meanwhile, the Sikhs communities also claimed that for centuries, they have used the word “Allah” to refer to God as well as Arabic terms “*iman*” and “*ibadat*” for faith and worship (Fauwaz Abdul Aziz 2008). According to Farish A. Noor (2007), ‘Allah’ is an Arabic word and that the use of the word ‘Allah’ predated the coming of Islam. “Copyright Allah” issue is also criticized as Malays’ *Ketuanan Melayu* mentality problem of “I-am-right-therefore-you-are-wrong” syndrome (Sulaiman 2008), bizarre, lapse of wisdom and sense of justice, and immaturity in tackling a world of differences (Oh 2008), and a nonsensical debate that is more to do with communal and divisive politics of Malaysia (Farish A. Noor 2007). Anthony (2008) sarcastically claimed that if using the word “Allah” by Christians can confuse the Muslims, the repeated use of the word “Allah” in state anthems such as those of Perak, Pahang and Kedah might confuse non-Muslims.

The Hindu American Foundation’s (HAF) press release on its “Hindus in South Asia and the diaspora: A survey of human rights 2006 Executive summary” claimed that minorities in Malaysia struggle to maintain and practice their religions. The right to religious freedom has been eroding. Ethnic Malays are required to be Muslims, as they are born into Islam and do not have the freedom to convert. The Hindu population faces increased discrimination and intimidation, including the destruction of their temples and places of worship. The government continues to treat pre-independence era Hindu temples differently than mosques from the same era, and gives preference to mosques in the allocation of public funds and lands. These findings have lead to the HAF (2006) recommended that the United States, United Nations, the international community, and human rights groups should pressure the Malaysian government to protect Hindu temples from desecration and destruction. HAF further urged that Hindu places of worship that existed prior to independence should be designated as temple property and title to the land should be handed to the

respective temple trustees/committees as has been done for pre-independence era mosques. Farish A. Noor (2006) highlighted the case of attempt to level the Sri Mariamman Muniswaran temple, located near Seremban town (in the state of Negeri Sembilan) for road expansion development reasons. Historical records indicate that the temple was between 110 to 130 years old. The Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) commissioner claimed that in between 2003 and 2006, Suhakam received 11 complaints pertaining to the demolition of places of worship – Hindu temples (6), Mosques (3), Church (1) and a Buddhist temple (Malaysiakini 2007c). Hindraf chairperson P. Waytha Moorthy in a media statement however challenged the figures that only six Hindu temples and three mosques have been demolished by the authorities. According to him, it should be eighty-six temples as of January 2006 and not only six as mentioned. With the mosques, he said, they “have been demolished but even so those mosques were relocated to suitable land with government funds” (Palaniappan 2007).

Regarding body snatching and restricts religion conversion, Dhume (2007) cited three “high profile” cases that were capitalized by the opposition to erupt the suppressed inner dissatisfaction of non-Muslim Malaysian voters. The first case involves Revathi Masoosai, a 29-year-old ethnic Indian woman born to Muslim parents but raised by a Hindu grandmother. In April 2007, Malaysian religious authorities forcibly separated Revathi from her Hindu husband and handed their 15-month-old daughter to Revathi’s mother. The second case happened in 2005 where Islamic authorities claimed that M. Moorthy, a celebrated Hindu mountaineer had converted to Islam and snatched his body from his family to be given a Muslim burial. The third case is about Lina Joy/Azlina Jailani, a computer saleswoman in her 40s, who has spent nearly 10 years unsuccessfully seeking official recognition of her conversion from Islam to Christianity. In 2007 alone, the “Lina Joy” case has gathered numerous concerns and bombardments such as from Lim Kit Siang (June 2), Christian Federation of Malaysia (May 30), the Council of Churches of Malaysia (May 31), Hindu Sangam (May 30), AWAM, SIS, WAO & WDC (May 31) [Note 4], Aliran paper (May 30), Center for Public Policy Studies (May 31), Kim Quek (June 13), Haris Ibrahim (June 2) and Elizabeth Wong (May 31) [Refer the collection of materials from Malaysiakini and various blogsphere as cited in the book entitle *Religion Under Siege?*, edited by Nathaniel Tan & John Lee (2008)]. Besides, cases of body snatching, especially related to Indian communities are also heavily condemned by HAF (2006), the *DNA* newspaper (*The Star* 2007: N12) and various international press. On 25 January 2008, the Associated Press (2008) reported an ethnic Chinese man was buried as a Muslim following ruling of the Islamic Shariah High Court in the Negeri Sembilan state, triggering angry protests from his family. This has prompted comment that in interfaith disputes involving Muslims, the Shariah court usually gets the last word, making a favorable decision for professed non-Muslims less likely and causing non-Muslims to feel their religious rights are under threat. Lim Teck Ghee in his paper for the Regional Outlook Forum 2008, organized by Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) on 8 January 2008 claimed that the handling of both Moorthy and Lina Joy cases by the authorities served to aggravate already mistrustful relations between Muslim and non-Muslim, marked a decisive encroachment by Muslim zealots on the secular character of the country’s constitution and signaled the increasing willingness of UMNO to use the religious card to ensure continuing political support from the Malay/Muslim population (Lim 2008). Hence, the reason non-Malays are willing to vote an Islamic based party like PAS rather than secular coalition of BN in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election could be that in recent years, UMNO, the leading party in BN is more Islamic than PAS, a view shared by Amir Taheri (2008), who claimed that playing Islamic card would not help in winning election.

According to Uthayakumar, Hindraf legal advisor, marginalization of Indian communities in Malaysia might have started to get international attention at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala, Uganda in November 2007 after it caught the attention of the British Prime Minister and the press in Kampala. In an interview with *Malaysiakini* on 3 December 2007, Uthayakumar told that he has wrote to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown with a reference to Kampung Medan incident [Note 5] in May 2001 where (he claimed) six people were killed, more than a hundred were injured. He claimed that over 1,000 letters have been written for the past 10 years to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, chief ministers, mayors, Attorney-General, Inspector General of Police about the atrocities done to Indians. Uthayakumar also testified that during the Padang Jawa temple demolition, Samy Vellu went to the ground and told the enforcement chief, ‘please don’t break the temple’ but the enforcement chief told him ‘go away, I’m breaking the temple’. As Samy Vellu was then the most senior minister in the cabinet, that incident seems undermining his power and ability to speak up for the Indian communities. Uthayakumar argued that only the Umno-lead government breaks temples as the PAS-led government in Kelantan has not broken a single Hindu or Buddhist temple. In addition, the largest sleeping Buddha in Southeast Asia is in Kelantan in Kampung Neting, Tumpat. He further explained that “ethnic cleansing” a la Malaysia is not killing people like in Bosnia, but could be worst as it involve “living and suffering on a day to day basis” (Soon 2007). Given robust economic growth, there is not much trickling down effect to the Indian communities. The results of a survey conducted by the Socio-Economic and Environment Research Institute (Seri) between November 1997 and February 1999, pooling 3,100 Indian households in Penang state might prove that. The reported findings are listed in Appendix 1. These imply that instead of enjoying economic prosperity, the Indian communities are made victims through overall national development. For example, Lim (2008) claimed that over 300,000 Indian poor had been displaced after the plantations that traditionally provided them modest livelihoods were acquired for property and township development in the last two decades. He also mentioned that

FELDA, the country most successful poverty alleviation program failed to take in large numbers of rural Indians displaced from plantations, consequently the Indians lost their jobs, housing, crèches, basic amenities, socio-cultural facilities and community support. Facing difficulties and hardship in negotiation transition from the plantations to urban living, suicide rates are highest amongst Indian while many Indian youth turned to anti-social activities like gangsterism but the government provides little concrete assistance in the same way that the Malay poor has been targeted. Therefore, Lim believed that the combination of socio-economic exclusion and deprivation together with repeated disrespect of Hindu religious rights by state authorities in demolishing Hindu temples and shrines has become a powerful rallying point for Indian activists, particularly the Hindraf.

### 5. The Roles of Anwar Ibrahim

A comment from Firas Ahmad in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* is all it takes to summarize Anwar Ibrahim's importance in the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election. Ahmad (2008) claimed that despite BN still holding simple majority, the tectonic shift in Malaysian politics in many ways is engineered by Anwar. However, this article systematized the roles of Anwar into two categories, namely as mediator and reflector of BN's arrogant. In previous elections, the DAP and PAS are either non-cooperative or their cooperation backfire, both are due to the issues of Islamic states. DAP's political philosophy is social democrat thus opposing strongly PAS intention to set up Islamic states. Nevertheless, both parties cooperated in the previous 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> general elections. In the former election, the opposition's marginal success was not because of the cooperation, but because of the emotion from the sacking of Anwar, more popularly known as the "wave of *reformasi*". In the 11<sup>th</sup> general elections, their cooperation had become ammunition to the BN to successfully scare off Chinese voters. Another direct cooperation between DAP and PAS in the 12<sup>th</sup> general election could spell disaster to both parties while confrontation between the two might split votes to BN's favor. Through PKR, Anwar engineered an "indirect" partnership of DAP-PKR-PAS for a one-to-one challenge against BN in the 12<sup>th</sup> general election (except for contest in Sabah and Sarawak). The opposition coalition called "Barisan Rakyat" (literally, "People Front") was mediated through two partnerships of DAP-PKR and PKR-PAS. Initially, the negotiations of election seats allocation have threatened to burst away any possible cooperation, but Anwar was rushed in to broker compromise. The same compromise never happened in Sabah and Sarawak, in which it is believed that bad blood between DAP and PKR there could not be solved without Anwar's presence. Perhaps, Anwar's experience in the highest level of politics (as Deputy Prime Minister) makes the difference. Ahmad believed that Anwar paved a path for peaceful transition by bringing his credibility as a Malay politician to the table while simultaneously assuring Chinese and Indians that their rights would be respected. Besides, Anwar is believed to be the mastermind that "fine-tuned" PAS's strong Islamic stand to a moderate "welfare state" political philosophy and softened DAP (especially its leader, Lim Kit Siang) aggressiveness against Islamic state, both efforts greatly help in fostering the opposition coalition and dispersing fear of the Chinese to support them. Furthermore, for the first time, PAS fielded a non-Muslim candidate (Kumutha Raman from their PAS Supporters' Club), but technically contesting for a state seat under the PKR. Besides Anwar, Lim Guan Eng (DAP Secretary General) and Husam Musa (PAS Deputy President) are believed to have played important mediating roles in their respective parties. Lim Guan Eng has been well received by the Malays and known for helping to fight and speak up for the Malays, especially in the case against then Melaka Chief Minister that resulted in him being sentenced to two concurrent 18-month jail terms from 25 August 1998. Meanwhile, Husam Musa has been known for his moderate stand and humble attitude that would not worry the Chinese.

Besides being a mediator, Anwar gained many pity-votes as a result of continuous stinging attacks from the BN and government-linked media. These "Anwar bashing" not only backfired but also reflected BN's arrogance that helped agitate the voters (particularly the Malays) in favor of the opposition. Welsh (2008) believed that personal attacks on Anwar are seen as unfair to Anwar and a serious miscalculation by the BN. Welsh also claimed that the attacks re-ignited the 1999 *reformasi* spirit and served to alienate many Malays. Among the themes of personal attacks by UMNO are branding Anwar as unpatriotic, traitor to the country, hypocrite, chameleon and opportunist. Abdullah Badawi claimed that Anwar joined the opposition after he failed to rejoin UMNO. Attackers also alleged Anwar of making empty or unrealistic promises. The MCA and PGRM keep on reminding the Chinese of Anwar's previous record in the government, which is hostile to the Chinese. Two most controversial attacks involved Khairy Jamaluddin (UMNO Youth deputy president and Abdullah Badawi's son-in-law) and Chandra Muzaffar (former PKR deputy president) that resulted in Anwar initiating defamation proceedings against them (Kabilan 2008). In his speeches, Abdullah Badawi claimed "Anwar is irrelevant, therefore need not be mentioned" but continued dedicating lengthy time to criticize Anwar. This gives a contradicting impression that makes Anwar bashing backfire. In contrast, political observers believed the government was rattled by Anwar, who has drawn crowds of thousands with his fiery speeches and charisma (Malaysiakini 2008). By having the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election before April 2008 so that Anwar is not eligible to contest also reflects the important role of Anwar as a credible threat to the BN.

### 6. Three People Power Rallies and Election Volcano Eruption

After years of suppressed dissatisfactions, the warning of eruption was in the 10<sup>th</sup> General Election in 1999 powered by the spirit of *reformasi* that also resulted in the formation of PKR (then called "Parti Keadilan" or "Justice Party").

Therefore, the first post-Independent “People Power” in Malaysian politic could accredited to the *Reformasi* rally in Kuala Lumpur that protested the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim from his Deputy Prime Minister position in 1998. The sacking is seen as a political assassination of the most likely challenger to the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad. Anwar was also charged in court with corruption and sodomy. “Reformasi” in Malay language literally means “reformation”, infamous as Anwar’s supporters’ demand to the ruling government to reform to curb corruption and injustice to Anwar Ibrahim. The protesters held belief that Anwar is innocent, being framed for political gain of his accusers. The *Reformasi* rally played important influence in helping the oppositions, especially the PKR. Nevertheless, the BN still achieved more than two-third majority due to low participation of Chinese and Indian. *Reformasi* was seen as “Anwar’s personal issue” that related to his Malay supporters. Thus, this first People Power failed to ignite a national eruption of dissatisfactions.

The second event of Malaysian “People Power” is the *Bersih* rally also at Kuala Lumpur on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007, believed to be masterminded by Anwar. It is one of the biggest anti-government rallies in Malaysia in nearly a decade. The word “Bersih” in Malay language means “clean”, a name given to reflect the aim of the rally to demand electoral reform. The election process in Malaysia is deemed corrupted and controlled by the ruling government, hence the rally demands a clean up to enable free and fair election in the future. Opposition political parties and civil society groups are among the demonstrators whom aimed to march to the national palace to submit a memorandum detailing their concern on unjust election process to the King. The organizer of the rally claimed that at least 40,000 people [Note 6] have turned up for the rally despite prior stern warning by the Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi and his vow to suppress the demonstration, heavy police presence and roadblocks on the day of the demonstration (Malaysiakini 2007c). While marching to the national palace in heavy rain, banners and chanting of “election reform”, “justice”, “Allahu akbar” (God is greatest), “reformasi”, “Save Malaysia” and “Election Commission, stop your tricks” are reported (Malaysiakini 2007c and Jalil Hamid 2007). The third event of Malaysian “People Power” is the “Hindraf rally”, the name taken to reflect its organizer, the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf). On 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007, about 30,000 protesters (believed to be mostly Malaysian Indian) are reported demonstrating at various locations in Kuala Lumpur city after their effort to gather outside the British High Commission to submit a petition was thwarted by riot police. The protest rally is also to support a US\$4 trillion lawsuit by Hindraf against the British (Malaysia’s former colonial) for bringing Indians to Malaysia as indentured labours and exploiting them for 150 years, plus to sought a declaration that the Reid Commission Report 1957 failed to incorporate the rights of the Indian community when independence was granted, resulting in discrimination and marginalisation of the Indian community (Malaysiakini 2007d). Despite the lawsuit and giving reason of wishing to petition Queen Elizabeth II to appoint a Queen’s Counsel to argue the case on their behalf, the Hindraf rally seems as a manifest of last resort to highlight the continuous discrimination and marginalisation against the Indians, which included the rampant state-sanctioned demolition of Hindu temples. In this Hindraf case, the Tamil word for “People Power”, *Makkal Sakhti* emerged and subsequently becoming an influencing slogan in the opposition alliance’s election campaign. Anwar Ibrahim seems taking a step further to blend some Malay-Islamic features into this Tamil-Hindu slogan by mix-using the phrase *Makkal Sakhti* with his slogan of “*kuasa rakyat, kuasa keramat*” (people power, blessed power). These two rallies together with DAP consistent criticism of inequality of NEP to the Chinese perfectly set up condition for a full-scale political volcano eruption. In this case, Anwar played the role of catalyst and conductor that led this eruption orchestral in 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008 of the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election.

## 7. Conclusion

When the Barisan Nasional (BN) seems to be invincible in Malaysian politic, the opposition inflicted a moral defeat to them in the 12th Malaysian General Election, an event many claimed unpredictable and shocking. However, the BN moral defeat is alike to the eruption of a political volcano of accumulated dissatisfactions from various ethnic groups that the BN could no longer keep under control. The Malaysian voters were orchestrated under the People Power revolution against communal politic, the “3Cs” of cost of living, crime and corruption, and marginalization of Malaysian Indian. In this election, Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister and current PKR de facto leader has successfully unite various opposition parties to form a multiracial coalition against the communal coalition of the BN. Nevertheless, question still remains whether the People Power could continue striving Malaysian politic towards greater democracy and multiracial. Could the new People Power coalition gradually turn into another BN-like communal-based political coalition in future?

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### Notes

Note 1. Quoting Wikipedia (2007d) in length, *Ketuanan Melayu* is the racist belief that the Malay people are the "Tuan" (masters) of Malaysia. The Malaysian Chinese and Malaysians Indian, who form a significant minority in Malaysia, are considered beholden to the Malays for granting them citizenship in return for special privileges as set out in Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia. This *quid pro quo* arrangement is usually referred to as the Malaysian social contract.

Note 2. Currently, Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) are respectively known as Malaysian Chinese Association and Malaysian Indian Congress.

Note 3. UMNO official website stated that Onn Jaafar proposed to open up UMNO and renamed it to "United Malayan National Organization". In his speech as cited in Mohamed Abid (2003: 180 – 181), Onn Jaafar repeatedly stress that he intended to renamed UMNO to "United Malaya National Organization" and asked the audiences not to mistaken it as "United Malayan National Organization".

Note 4. Those acronyms respectively are All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Sisters in Islam (SIS), Women's Aid Organization (WAO) and Women's Development Collective (WDC).

Note 5. The incident happened in a suburban squatter in March 2001 where bloody racial violence between Malays and Indians broke out. The cause is believed to be a misunderstanding.

Note 6. Estimation from the police was 10,000 to 30,000 people but was disputed by the organizer. An Internet media, Malaysiakini (2007A) published pictures of big crowd and quoted the *Agence France Presse* (AFP) estimate of close to 30,000 protestors.

### Appendix

Findings of the Socio-Economic and Environment Research Institute (Seri) survey.

- a) 60 percent were wage earners in the lower income brackets.
- b) Average monthly income was between RM500 and RM1, 000 per household.
- c) Seven percent were living in hardcore poverty.
- d) About 80 percent in the manufacturing industry, Penang's biggest revenue earning sector, were low-level workers.
- e) Involvement in the tourism sector, the state's second highest revenue earner, was virtually non-existent.
- f) About 50 percent of private companies did not have a single Indian employee.
- g) The share in paid-up capital investments in the state were a mere 0.2 percent.
- h) The majority were indulged in traditional businesses due to lack of funds, bureaucratic red tape, racial discrimination and difficulty in securing loan.
- i) Nearly 30 percent were squatters or living on temporary occupation license land.
- j) About 75 percent of pupils in 28 Tamil primary schools had failed to achieve the minimum pass-mark of 'C' in all six subjects in the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah public examination.
- k) At secondary level, 80 percent of pupils had stopped schooling after Form Five.
- l) Many Indians were involved in alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence and child abuse.
- m) Nearly 40 percent of the state's suicide cases involved Indians.

(Source: Athi Veerangan 2007)

Table 1. Crime Rate in Malaysia (2000 to 2007)

Year	Total crimes		Rape		Property crimes	
	Cases	% change	Cases	% change	Cases	% change
2000	167 173	–	1 210	–	145 569	–
2001	156 469	(6.40)	1 354	11.90	136 079	(6.52)
2002	149 042	(4.75)	1 418	4.73	128 199	(5.79)
2003	156 315	4.88	1 471	3.74	133 525	4.15
2004	156 455	0.09	1 718	16.79	134 596	0.80
2005	157 459	0.64	1 887	9.84	135 326	0.54
2006	198 622	26.14	2 435	29.04	156 279	15.48
2007	209 559	5.51	3 177	30.47	174 440	11.62
Different*	53 104	33.94	1 459	84.92	39 844	29.60

Source: Malaysia Royal Police (2008a & 2008b)

\* Different between year 2007 (latest data) and year 2004 (the previous 11<sup>th</sup> general election year)