Ethnic Relations and the Media - A Study of the Malaysian Situation

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Abstract

This paper examines ethnic relations in multi racial Malaysia. Since independence from Great Britain in 1957, it is a well acknowledged fact that Malaysia has maintained a relatively long record of political stability and minimum experiences of ethnic unrest. However, it is hypothesized that beneath the surface of stability and a model multi racial *bonhomie*, tensions have existed because in October and November 2007, organized street demonstrations erupted in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia.

Malaysians have been subject to a number of laws since independence that restrict freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom to gather freely. This study further hypothesizes that the outcome of the 12th Malaysian elections held on 8 March 2008 shows that the Malaysian citizenry is now ready for a government that respects them and nurtures them rather than one that imposes fear through a set of draconian laws that have the power to jail without trial.

This study analyses relevant media articles (from December 2007 to April 2008) that touched on ethnic relations in order to examine the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia. For this paper a semantic analysis of the content of media articles was carried out to

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examine the rhetoric of politicians when handling ethnic relations. The study also looks at how the media itself handles issues relating to the various races living in Malaysia.

Findings from the analysis of newspaper articles show that there are underlying tensions among the various ethnic groups. The reasons for such tensions are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: discourse analysis, ethnic relations, content analysis

1.0 Introduction

This paper examines ethnic relations in multi racial Malaysia. Since independence from Great Britain in 1957, it is a well acknowledged fact that 'Malaysia has maintained a relatively long record of political stability and minimum experiences of ethnic unrest' (Mohammed, 2005:2). Brown (2004) further goes on to say that Malaysia is widely accepted as a country which has been uniquely successful in managing and containing ethnic conflict in a post-colonial context against expectations. In comparing the records of Malaysia and Ceylon/Sri Lanka, for instance, Horowitz (1989), further claims that in the post-colonial era, expectations were that countries such as Sri Lanka would remain peaceful, whilst Malaysia will not be so. History has proven that the reverse is true.

However, it is hypothesized that beneath the surface of stability and a model multi racial *bonhomie*, tensions have existed because in October and November 2007, organized street demonstrations erupted in Kuala Lumpur. These demonstrations called the BERSIH (meaning clean in Malay) and HINDRAF (Hindu Rights Action Force) rallies demolished the frequently touted happy multi-racial Malaysian Dream State. This study further hypothesizes that the outcome of the 12th Malaysian elections held on 8 March 2008 shows that the Malaysian citizenry is now ready for a government that respects them and nurtures them rather than one that imposes fear through a set of draconian laws that have the power to jail without trial.

The type of democracy adopted in Malaysia since independence, while modeled along western liberal ideas which enshrine basic freedoms of speech, religion, assembly etc., also engages a range of repressive machinery that is at odds with democratic ideals so much so that few if any observers would describe the country as a fully functioning democracy (Brown, Siti and Wan Muda, 2004). Several problematic areas exist which hinder the democratic process. These include, other than the repressive legislation mentioned above, the control of the Judiciary by the Executive, amendments to the constitution by a government that has consistently held a two thirds majority in parliament as and when it sees fit, status of Islam as official religion, special rights and privileges of Malays and citizenship rights of the non-Malays.

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This paper attempts to analyze ethnic relations in Malaysia through the examination of media reports from a daily mainstream newspaper called, *The Star*. One of the uphill battles faced by newspapers in Malaysia is the Printing Presses and Publications Act which gives the government the right to close down a paper in the interests of national security. Newspapers are obliged to renew their license to publish annually. This successfully implements self censorship on the part of newspapers which, understandably desire to keep their license to publish and therefore try not to get on the wrong side of the government.

2.0 Background to the Study

In the following sections, the political scene in Malaysia is examined and studied. Then the issue of the analysis of political rhetoric is discussed and finally related studies are examined to provide a background to this study.

2.1 The Political Scene in Malaysia

Since independence in 1957, Malaysia's ruling government comprised of a triumvirate of parties drawn along ethnic lines following a notorious 'bargain' (Brown, Siti and Wan Muda, 2004:3) made with the British so that the Malays retained political dominance in return for basic guarantees for Chinese business activities. This effectively left out the small but significant Indians and the non-Malay *Bumiputras* from the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak without political or economic powers (Mohamad, 2005).

While the country has mostly been perceived as a poster child for multi racial harmony (this was based on a pact made among political elites along ethnic lines), underlying tensions have existed over the preferential New Economic Policy which was implemented in 1971 to give preferential treatment to *Bumiputras* thus creating inequality and the lack of a level playing field for non- *Bumiputras.*

The General Election in 1969 is a very significant event that has had repercussions for decades to follow. The coalition of parties drawn along ethnic lines, the Alliance Party, made up of: the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) performed very badly (gaining less than 50% of the vote) losing key states due to the lack of support from urban Chinese. This resulted in racial riots for three days beginning 13 May 1969. A state of emergency was declared suspending parliament and the country was run through a National Operations Council till February 1971 (Brown, Siti and Wan Muda, 2004).

The country has been, since then, been ruled with an iron hand inhibiting dissent through legislation that prevents public gatherings, debates, the formation of societies and organisations seen as non-compliant and free speech. This has been made possible not only through the use of draconian laws (see 1.0) but also through a very compliant

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Judiciary and Press who are controlled by the government. Following the May 1969 riots, the Federal Constitution was amended to designate certain issues considered 'sensitive' to the security of the nation thus effectively prohibiting criticism of the government and punishing perpetrators of 'sensitive' issues to be dealt with machinery such as the Sedition Act.

In October and November of 2007, two groups rallied for a range of causes. The first called themselves 'BERSIH' was a group of concerned Malaysians who marched for a clean and free elections and the eradication of corruption. The second organised by an Indian movement called 'HINDRAF' protested the poor and unequal treatment of Indians and the demolition of Hindu temples. Both rallies were dealt with strongly by the Police who used water cannons and tear gas to break up the rallies. Several HINDRAF leaders have been jailed under the ISA Act, which allows detention without trial.

3.0 Methodology

The research for this study involved relevant media articles that touched on ethnic relations in order to examine the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia. In the light of research by Mohammad (2005) and Brown (2004) both of which state that management of ethnic conflict in Malaysia has been touted as successful, certain events say that the case is otherwise.

Recent public rallies staged by HINDRAF and BERSIH suggest that perhaps ethnic relations in Malaysia has been artificially managed through laws such as the Internal Security Act, The Police Act, The Printing Presses and Publications Act which prohibit talk that could give rise to ethnic tension. The question that begs an answer is: Is there ethnic tension in Malaysia? If so what are the reasons for such tension?

This study will use critical discourse analysis, which explains links between language use and power. Language of the media and the consumption of the meaning in language in a society are inter-related (Richardson, 2007). Discourse analysis explains how explicitly language users relate context and text (Van Dijk, 1993). The press more often than not has categories that place current events in their political, social or historical context. In addition to this, in many cases, through its language and other capacities (for example, page make-up), the media plays an instrumental role in countering an opposition ideology, as a potent strategy (Van Dijk, 1993). Therefore, language and symbols play a very important role in both media as well as the society that read and forms meanings from it and language is central to the process by which meaning is produced (Hall, 2001).

Cap (2004) says that more than any other kind of discourse analysis, it is the study of political discourse that seems to invite necessarily cross-disciplinary considerations, involving contributions from such disciplines as political science, sociology, (social) psychology and anthropology. The study of language used by the media by politicians

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especially can give an insight into the speaker's use of language and it can count as a potent determinant of what the addressee thinks and, subsequently, does. And vice versa: it could possibly constitute an effective constraint on what the addressee should not think and do as well.

Content analysis is a technique of gathering and analyzing the content of text. (Neuman, 2003). The content can be words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any messages that can be communicated. A number of analyses attempt to relate certain characteristics of the message of a given body of content. These forms have been used in some studies that test hypotheses of form (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). Fundamentally the technique involves analyzing the content and hence evaluating the content of communication. (Jackson-Beeck, 2003).

For this paper, a semantic analysis of content of media articles was carried out (Babbie, 2004). Here the underlying implicit meaning in the content was analyzed. The coding system is based on several issues that involved ethnic unrest. This method is best used for tapping underlying meaning of communication, because people communicate meaning in many implicit ways that depend on content, and not just on specific words. (Neuman, 2003).

4.0 Findings

In order to find answers to the question of whether ethnic relations in multi-racial Malaysia need to be addressed, the mainstream newspaper, *The Star*, was referred to and several articles were identified from December 2007 to May 2008. These articles were chosen on the basis that they discussed or reported on issues that touched on ethnic problems or relations in the country.

The articles were analyzed for terms or words that showed a problematic area that needed to be addressed. This is exemplified in Tables 1 and 2. The analysis was carried out in two ways. Firstly, as shown in Table 1, statements or phrases, uttered by people in power, signifying an ethnic problem, were identified based on meanings derived from these phrases and the problems that they implied. Secondly, headlines of articles that were solely connected to the wooing of the public for the 7th General Elections that were held on 8 March, 2008, were examined to analyze them in connection with racially motivated politics.

On examination of both Tables 1 and 2, four problems related to ethnic relations were identified. They are:

1. Religion
2. Malay special rights
3. Politics and the race card

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4. Equal opportunities

4.1 Religion and Ethnic Conflict

Religion plays an important part in ethnic conflict in Malaysia, mainly because Islam is the religion of the majority race, i.e., the Malays. The system governing religious issues such as marriages and divorces are two-fold. The Muslims are governed by the Syariah Courts while non-Muslims adhere to Civil Law. Problems inevitable arise when cross religious unions occur.

In Malaysia, a non-Muslim who wishes to marry a Muslim is expected to compulsorily convert to Islam. Further issues arise when a non-Muslim who already has a non-Muslim spouse and perhaps even children through a civil law union decides to marry a Muslim spouse. A lack of bridging laws between the Syariah and Civil courts has resulted in much conflict between Muslim and non-Muslims.

Examples can be seen from Table 1 (No.7) where a non-Muslim spouse of a man who had married a second wife according to Muslim rites was told that her civil marriage was automatically 'nullified' as soon as her husband had embraced Islam. This brings about tensions between people of different religious backgrounds as non-Muslims feel that they have no security in Civil law marriages if the Syariah can automatically nullify their marriages and bastardize their children.

Another instance (No.4) of religious tension was when a Catholic weekly newsletter was served with injunction papers 'prohibiting' the use of the word 'Allah' to describe God as it was felt that the word 'Allah' can only be applied to the Muslim God.

Further examples of religious tensions have been the questionable conversion to Islam of people who were in hospital. Deceased bodies of non-Muslims were taken away by the Islamic Affairs Department claiming that they had converted to Islam and therefore the burial would be according to Islamic rites. An example is No.6, where the Chinese non-Muslim widow of an allegedly converted Muslim man alleged 'discrepancies in the conversion papers' that would not be investigated by the Muslim authorities.

Another example is No.5 where a top Islamic official felt that the license given to a Chinese woman who wanted to reconvert back to Buddhism from Islam was short sighted and that 'the religious council should have been more responsible in giving guidance and counseling to Muslim converts to ensure such incidents do not occur'.

Perhaps the incident that most questioned ethnic harmony in Malaysia is the HINDRAF rally that took place in September 2007. A group of disgruntled Hindus held a peaceful rally to protest unfair treatment to the Indians and Hindus in particular. They were dispersed with water cannons and tear gas and later labeled as extremists. Rhetoric by

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people in power in government has been harsh. Leaders proclaim that claims by HINDRAF leaders 'deceive the Indians that they are an exploited race' (No.1) and that their actions have 'tarnished the image of the country' (No.2) and claims that 'a temple had been destroyed' (No. 3) are all 'lies (No.1).

The Home Minister explains harsh actions taken against HINDRAF leaders (who were jailed under the Internal Security Act) by claiming 'we cannot wait for people to *incite racial and religious feelings* that can lead to problems' (No. 13).

It was obvious that, during the election campaigns by the ruling parties, religious issues (considered very sensitive) were addressed to pacify the Indian public. They were informed that the ruling government was aware of these issues and that they are still the best people to handle these issues (No. 27 and 49 in Table 2). The Prime Minister is quoted as saying, "We will solve woes faced by Indians" (No.27), while another says that 'Barisan Nasional is making inroads into Indian-populated areas in the Merbok constituency to explain the country's current affairs'. Here, *current affairs* refers to the state of unhappiness that had erupted among Indians especially with regard to religious issues. These news stories and headlines are testament to the fact that religion plays an important part in ethnic conflict.

4.2   Malay Rights and Ethnic Conflict

Another potential source of conflict among the races in Malaysia is the issue of the special rights of Malays which were enforced through a set of pro-Malay policies through state interventionism that the New Economic Policy made possible (Brown, Siti and Wan Muda, 2004). These have caused much debate in Malaysia in recent times with statements made by royalty such as the Kelantan Crown Prince who advised Malaysians that 'It is *not appropriate* for the other races to demand equal rights and privileges' (No.12, Table 1) and that 'the special rights of Malays *should not be questioned'* (No.10).

Even the Federation of Malaysian Writers Associations (Gapena) President issued a statement to the effect that 'our stand is that Malaysia's existence is founded on the principle of *Kedaulatan Melayu (Malay sovereignty)*. Such statement made by important personalities such as the Malay royalty has eroded ethnic relations to the extent that even the leader of a component party (No.11) of the ruling coalition the Barisan National said 'that *no one race should feel superior or inferior* in this country'. It is important to note that while he did not openly state that the Malays should not be considered superior, he said that *no one race* should be *inferior or superior.*

It is also common to find leaders threatening to sue one another for making derogatory statements against one race or the other as exemplified in No.8 'Khairy Jamaluddin will sue Gobind Singh Deo (opposition party member – an Indian) after the general election

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because … he alleged that the Umno Youth deputy chief had *insulted the Indian community.*

4.3   Politics and the Race Card

Since the premiership of Abdullah Badawi, there has been less stringent regulations for the mainstream media compared to the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad. This has resulted in greater outcry against the lack of equal opportunity. In previous times, draconian laws such as the Internal Security Act were used ruthlessly against any public display of raising race issues or questioning of Malay rights. The fact that race is used as a political ploy confirms that racial insecurities exist in Malaysia and that they need to be attended to diligently and sensitively in order to preserve racial harmony.

This has resulted in leaders openly expressing these issues especially in news reports coming up to the general elections that were held on 8 March 2008. Electioneering tactics often included statements by component parties (based along racial lines). The ruling Barisan Nasional often made statements to show that they were better than the multi-racial parties that were growing in importance such as the Democractic Action Party (DAP) and the Pakatan Rakyat (PKR).

An East Malaysian party (SUPP) leader warned the ethnic Chinese community (No.23, Table 1) 'The Chinese in Sarawak are at *risk of losing* their only representative in the Federal Cabinet if the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) suffers *devastating defeats* in key urban parliamentary constituencies like Miri' while another Chinese party leader (no. 28, Table 1) asked the voting public, '*Who will be the loser?* This is certainly *undesirabl*e as *less Chinese representation* in the Government will only result in a *weaker voice* for the Chinese in the Government and the Cabinet'.

Further compelling arguments posed included a Chinese based party leader (of the ruling coalition) telling off a multi-racial party leader (No.23, Table 1) that 'It's action that counts, *effective* action to bring development for the people is what counts, and not mere words'.

Further pre-election rhetoric includes that by the ruling coalition parties trying to drum up support for racial harmony which they claim to have had through their rule. These include statements by the Indian component party of the ruling coalition the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) making press statements (No.1, Table 2) such as 'MIC to woo 250,000 non-members (*from PKR)*, (No.11, Table 2), 'Samy: Indians can count on MIC' (No.10, Table 1), 'Don't vote with emotions, Indians urged' (No.13, Table 2). Even Prime Minister Abdullah Abdullah (No.27, Table 2) promised, 'We will solve woes faced by Indians' and pledged   'Help for Indians in Bukit Bintang' (No.33, Table 2).

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Even non-Indian Barisan member parties, the Chinese especially, went all out to capture Indian voters as seen in (No.36, Table 2) 'Dr Teng woos Batu Kawan voters in Tamil' while (No.49, Table 1) we see the Barisan 'Making inroads in 'Indian' areas- Barisan Nasional is making inroads into Indian-populated areas in the Merbok constituency to explain the country's current affairs' ostensibly to explain the recent problems with HINDRAF.

In No.47 (Table 2) Chinese leaders are shown to be paying attention to Indian needs as in 'Ulu Temiang temple in need of funds'. It touches on how non-Hindu devotees Barisan Nasional candidates for the Lobak and Temiang state assembly seats, Siow Koi Voon and Jason Lee Kee Chong 'visited the temple recently and took part in special prayers conducted to wish them well for the elections'.

Other election promises included (No.18, Table 1) 'support signed by the three community leaders' meaning that even if minority communities had little power, they were 'fortunate to have a government that *promised to take care of all citizens irrespective of race or religion'*

The Chinese community was also assured of equal opportunities through the Malay and Chinese parties to show that the Barisan National government is capable of ensuring the welfare of all Malaysians. An example is (No.14, Table 2) 'Army to have recruitment ads in Chinese media' to allay popular beliefs that the country is not recruiting non-Malays into security positions that require the carrying of arms.

'Battle for Chinese heartland - an exciting one with Barisan unveiling a "*comprehensive conservation plan"* for a more 'liveable' Tanjung' (No.19, Table 23) shows that the BN has the Chinese community at heart while in No.29 (Table 2) Foochow clansmen were 'urged to back BN' and that they must 'rally behind the Barisan Nasional as they owe their success in commerce and trade to the ruling government'. No.40 (Table 2) is an example of how the Chinese are told that 'MCA is the future of Kinta Valley' by MCA man Ong Ka Chuan. He further says in No.54 (Table 2) 'Don't split your votes-we are working hard to make sure *the community is looked after within the concept of power-sharing* with the other races'. The message is that it is the MCA which sticks with the community and delivers results.

Other communities are not left out of electioneering tactics which play the race card, especially the East Malaysian bumiputras of Kadazan, Iban and other ethnic groups. This can be seen in No. 53 (Table 2) where 'Barisan Nasional looks set for a runaway victory in the Dayak and Malay-Melanau-predominant constituencies'. This ostensibly is because they are the ones who can stand up deliver compared to any new or multi racial party.

4.4 Equal Opportunities and Ethnic Conflict

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After the election, though, there was still talk of inequalities in the power sharing concept that was promised during the elections. An ethnic Indian leader is quoted as saying that all Malaysians should be provided with equal opportunities 'in securing government contracts, business licenses, and seats in higher education institutions' (No.17, Table 1) while the Chinese Penang Chief Minister says that 'The people want *open tender system. Even the Class F contractors are all Malays*' (No. 21, Table 1). The Malay Home Minister (No.19, Table 1) agrees that 'the Chinese community *is not happy*' but what can he do about it, because (No.20, Table 1) '*Unfortunately,* when you start to talk of the NEP, *it's about the Malays'.*

Even a brief glance at the rhetoric that is seen daily in the newspapers is enough to show that while Malaysia is not in the midst of open physical racial conflict, the undertones are there to show that ethnic relations between the various races could really be better than what it is now.

Table 1

Area of unrest	No.	Date	Person making statement	Community referred to	Statement/phrase signifying ethnic problem
Religion	1	2/12/2007	Prime Minister	Hindu Indians	The allegations are all lies to *deceive* the Indians that they are an *exploited race*.
Religion	2	2/12/2007	Deputy Prime Minister	Hindu Indians	The move by Hindu Rights Action Force leaders to take their issues overseas will only *tarnish the image* of the country internationally
Religion	3	2.12.2007	Prime Minister	Hindu Indians	no truth to the claims in the Hindraf memorandum that a Government-backed *extremist group had*

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					destroyed a temple in Kampung Jawa
Religion	4	7/5/2008	Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur	Christians of all races	applying for leave for a judicial review against the *Government's decision prohibiting* a Catholic weekly to use the word "Allah".
Conversion back to Buddhism	5	10/5/2008	State Religious Affairs Committee Chairman	Non-Muslims	The religious *council should have been more responsible in giving guidance* and counselling to Muslim converts to *ensure such incidents do not occur,"*
Contest of religious conversion to Islam	6	29/1/2008	Widow of alleged Chinese Muslim convert	Non-Muslim	application claiming there were *discrepancies in the deceased's conversion papers.*
Issues relating to conversion to Islam	7	20/9/2007	Syariah Court Counsel	Non-Muslim wives	The civil marriage between a woman and her husband *becomes nullified* under *Hukum Syarak* upon the latter's conversion to Islam
Race relations	8	3/3/2008	UMNO Youth leader	Indians	Khairy Jamaluddin will sue Gobind Singh Deo after the

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					general election because ..he alleged that the Umno Youth deputy chief had *insulted the Indian community.*
Malay rights	9	11/5/2008	Federation of Malaysian Writers Associations (Gapena) president	Non-Malays	our stand is that Malaysia's existence is founded on the principle of *Kedaulatan Melayu (Malay sovereignty),*
Malay rights	10	11/5/2008	Crown Prince of Kelantan	Non-Malays	*the special rights of Malays should* not be questioned
Malay rights	11	11/5/2008	MCA President	All	"It follows that *no one race should feel superior or inferior* in this country
Malay rights	12	11/5/2008	Tengku Mahkota of Kelantan	Non-Malays	"It is *not appropriate* for the other races to demand equal *rights and privileges*
Race and Religion	13	4/4/2008	Home Minister	All	"We cannot wait for people to *incite racial and religious feelings* that can lead to problems
Citizenship obligations	14	11/5/2008	Muar MP Razali Ibrahim.	Non-Malays	This includes a *willingness* to wear the *songkok, not fighting for mother-tongue classes,*
Politics and race	15	11/3/2008	Star Editor	Chinese/Indian/ Malay	For sure, there should be *no fanning of*

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					communal sentiments.
Closure of Tamil Paper	16	18/4/2008	Star Deputy Editor	Indians	The paper's closure is being seen as yet another *regrettable episode of gross insensitivity to the grouses* of the Indian community,
Equal Opportunities	17	11/3/2008	Indian Social Welfare Secretary of Seberang Prai	Indian/Chinese	Chinese, Malays and Indians, should be given *equal opportunities*, especially in securing government contracts, business licences, and seats in higher education institutions.
Equal Opportunities	18	21/5/2008	ISA detainee/ Assemblyman for Selangor	Indian/Chinese	pledged to continue to raise matters of public interest and fight *for justice for all, irrespective of race and religion* without fear or favour
Equal Opportunities	19	8/4/2008	Home Minister	Chinese	The Chinese community *is not happy* with the police
Equal Opportunities	20	8/4/2008	Home Minister	Malays	*Unfortunately,* when you start to talk of the NEP,

					it's about the Malays
Equal Opportunities	21	2/4/2008	Penang Chief Minister	Non-Malays	The people want *open tender system. E*ven the Class F contractors who *are all Malays…*
Race and politics	22	29/2/2008	MCA Youth vice-chairman Chew Kok Woh	Chinese	"You can shout and bang tables but the fact is that the *voices of the community can only be heard inside the Cabinet*. The community *must understand the realities.*"
Race and politics	23	29/2/2008	Buntong Tiger Datuk Yik Phooi Hong (MCA) to his opponent M. Kulasegaran (DAP)	Chinese	It's action that counts, EFFECTIVE action to bring development for the people is what counts, and not mere words -
Race and politics	24	2/3/2008	Sharizat –MP for Bangsar	Malays	New Dimension to urban voting – urban Malays in Pantai Dalam. I *asked my conscience* if I have *served my community* well. The answer is yes
Race and politics	25	2/3/2008	Hisham, resident in Pantai Dalam	All races	Personally, I think Barisan will win because Bangsar, *Malays are conservative*. When it comes to the crunch, so are

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Category	No.	Date	Speaker	Who/Group	Quote
					the *Chinese and Indians,''*
Race and politics	26	2/3/2008	Rashidah Abdul Rahman,	All races	They will vote for Barisan, as it has given them *stability*
Race and politics	27	3/3/2008	Party president Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam	Chinese	The Chinese in Sarawak are at *risk of losing* their only representative in the Federal Cabinet if the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) suffers *devastating defeats* in key urban parliamentary constituencies like Miri, warned.
Race and politics	28	6/3/2008	MCA President Ong Ka Ting	Chinese	*Who will be the loser?* This is certainly *undesirabl*e as *less Chinese representation* in the Government will only result in a *weaker voice* for the Chinese in the Government and the Cabinet.

Table 2 (Headlines)

Category	No.	Headlines	Date
Race	1	MIC to woo 250,000 non-members (*from PKR*)	25/2/2008
Racial harmony	2	Gentleman's fight in the offing (*between parties*)	25/2/2008
Racial harmony	3	Zam striving for BN clean sweep in Sg Petani (*from multi-racial party*)	25/2/2008

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Equal opportunity	4	Bayan poised for more action *(between single race and multi racial party)*	26/2/2008
Race	5	Applause for newcomer who speaks in Mandarin *(non Chinese)*	26/2/2008
Race	6	Voters' requests concern local issues *(along racial lines)*	26/2/2008
Racial harmony	7	Three dialysis machines for centre courtesy of members of the Perak MCA *(to show that MCA caters to all)*	26/2/2008
Racial harmony	8	Grants for NGOs, schools and temples, said Barisan Nasional had so far kept its promises to the people.(1 mil)	26/2/2008
Gender	9	Being chosen a bonus for Gemas' first woman candidate	26/2/2008
Race	10	Samy: Indians can count on MIC *(MIC for Indians)*	27/2/2008
Multi racial harmony	11	Minority groups back Wong -support signed by the three community leaders, stated that the minorities had no political strength but felt fortunate to have a government that promised to take care of all citizens irrespective of race or religion	28/2/2008
Race	12	The Indians are behind us, says Ch'ng- S'gor MCA	29/2/2008
R ace	13	Don't vote with emotions, Indians urged	29/2/2008
Race	14	Army to have recruitment ads in Chinese media	1/3/2008
Multi racial politics	15	Barisan going all out to retain all four Raub seats	1/3/2008
Gender	16	Azalina: BN knows women are capable *(unlike Muslim PAS)*	1/3/2008
Race	17	Boost for Tamil schools Puchong	1/3/2008
Race	18	Farmers to receive RM800m incentives annually	1/3/2008
Race	19	Battle for Chinese heartland - an exciting one with Barisan unveiling a "comprehensive conservation plan" for a more 'liveable' Tanjung.	1/3/2008
Gender and morality	20	Good government like a good wife	1/3/2008
Gender	21	BN women who make history	1/3/2008
Race	22	Lee's catchy slogan for the polls SAMSENG po pi - that is the catchy Hokkien slogan Pengkalan Kota incumbent assemblyman Lee Hack Teik is changing these days.	1/3/2008
Race	23	Sikhs pledge support for BN	2/3/2008

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Race	24	RM400,000 for associations, NGOs(Chinese)	2/3/2008
Race	25	MCA's 12 candidates to help Negri become developed	3/3/2008
Multi racial promises	26	BN can retain Skudai and Bantayan	3/3/2008
Race	27	Abdullah: We will solve woes faced by Indians	3/3/2008
Race	28	Saying it out loud and clear for BN candidate (23 Chinese temples)	3/3/2008
Race	29	.Foochow clansmen urged to back BN- must rally behind the Barisan Nasional as they owe their success in commerce and trade to the ruling government	3/3/2008
Race	30	A virtual unknown at Felda scheme –Ong Ka Chuan – good voting for Ah Chuan "could not go wrong" because he was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's choice for the Tanjung Malim parliamentary seat. "The Government has done a lot for us Felda folks. Life is very much easier compared to the pioneering days," she added.	3/3/2008
Race	31	Orang asli performance captures heart of incumbent(Ease Malaysia issues)	3/3/2008
Race	32	Preserve your voice in Cabinet, says Chan (East Malaysia)	3/3/2008
Race	33	Help for Indians in Bukit Bintang	4/3/2008
Race	34	Putting the shine back in Kinta Valley – if MCA is voted to power.	4/3/2008
Race	35	MCA man is no pushover, newcomer at Sitiawan has great potential, I am not scared of losing. We will try to strike back. This is probably the edge I have over my opponent Ngeh. I live here. I am always available," he said.	4/3/2008
Race	36	Dr Teng woos Batu Kawan voters in Tamil	4/3/2008
Race	37	Exciting battle to watch out for "I will not make promises I cannot deliver(Lumut)Picture pro – BN with Malay leader	4/3/2008
Race	38	Negri Sembilan MCA unfazed by opposition's tactics	/2008
Race	39	Chinese and Indian communities rally behind FT Barisan chairman.FT BN chairman Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique's speeches are short and sweet. His words are politically correct and his press conferences to the point.	/2008 5/3/2008
Race	40	MCA is the future of Kinta Valley, says Ka Chuan	5/3/2008
Race	41	Sungai Puyu Malays support BN candidates	6/3/2008

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Race	42	Vote MIC, Indians told	6/3/2008
Race	43	Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was joined at the Rifle Range flats in Penang on Wednesday night by top guns from the MCA and Gerakan to win over Chinese voters.	6/3/2008
Race	44	MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting has proven that he is capable of speaking up for the Chinese community in the Government,	6/3/2008
Race	45	Duo just like hand and glove FOR the fourth consecutive general election, Alor Star voters are being given a 'two for the price of one' offer by the MCA	6/3/2008
Race	46	MCA's pledge for Serdang	6/3/2008
Race- Chinese helping out Hindus	47	Ulu Temiang temple in need of funds touches even non-Hindu devotees as witnessed when Barisan Nasional candidates for the Lobak and Temiang state assembly seats, Siow Koi Voon and Jason Lee Kee Chong visited the temple recently and took part in special prayers conducted to wish them well for the elections.	7/3/2008
Race	48	A burning desire to serve society -I am a beneficiary of the MIC's educational assistance to pursue higher education and I believe I can repay the party by serving the community	7/3/2008
Race	49	Making inroads in 'Indian' areas BARISAN Nasional is making inroads into Indian-populated areas in the Merbok constituency to explain the country's current affairs	7/3/2008
Race	50	Vote for own interest, Chinese told - Don't harm your community's interest by voting for the Opposition, the Chinese voters have been told.	7/3/2008
Race	51	Vote for a voice in the Government, says Abdullah Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reminded the Chinese community that if they gave the DAP their votes, they will end up not having any representation in the Government.	7/3/2008
Race	52	Ong: We need a strong voice The MCA must win "30-something" of the 40 parliamentary seats it is contesting for the party to have a strong voice for the community in Government, party president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said	7/3/2008
Race	53	SUPP faces tough fights. Barisan Nasional looks set for a runaway victory in the Dayak and Malay-Melanau-	8/3/2008

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		predominant constituencies.	
Race	54	Ka Chuan: Don't split your votes-we were working hard to make sure the community was looked after within the concept of power-sharing with the other races. But it is MCA who sticks with the community and delivers results.	8/3/2008

5.0 Discussion

One of the greatest fears that most Malaysians have is that ethnic relations could disintegrate to conflict that would mirror the 1969 riots. In fact for much of Malaysia's political history since that time, government leaders have rationalized the use of many of our draconian laws to prevent such a thing from happening. Crocker (1999) says that ethnic conflict cannot be generalized as different types of conflict in different parts of the world are unique in their own way. However he emphasizes a lesson can be learnt from the Irish as they seem to be making more progress than other countries where there is ethnic conflict. Managing conflict is a long learning process, and it is important to first of all empower civil society as a first step towards solving ethnic conflict.

If Malaysia were to take a page out of that advice, then it would seem that our first task is the empowerment of civil society. That will be an uphill task unless we are prepared to take down those laws which curtail the freedoms that a civil society needs in order to act in a mature fashion.

Grofman and Stockwell (2001) cite an important reason for ethnic conflict: competition for jobs and conflicts over resources. In Malaysia, the existence of machinery that promotes the rights of one community over others (pro-Malay policies) enhances ethnic conflict. The problem is enhanced further through the existence of laws such as the Sedition Act which prohibits debate on such issues, effectively muzzling sections of its citizenry that is unhappy over perceived injustices.

Stockwell (2001) emphasizes, that democracy has been successful in some plural societies such as Mauritius and Trinidad and India. A democracy that cuts across class cleavages that mitigate conflict and the political elite who pursue inclusive multiethnic coalitions and policies that promote equality in representation, appointments and equality result in successful democracy in plural societies.

6.0 Conclusion

The sources of ethnic unhappiness in Malaysia can be seen from the analysis above as Religion (the fact that Islam is seen as more important than other religions), Malay special rights, the fact that politicians use and emphasize race issues for political

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purposes and the lack of equal opportunities for all in the country. Ooi (2006) from the Institute of South East Asian Studies believes that it is imperative for Malaysia to loosen its consociational (Power sharing among different races) straightjacket in stages. This is because the emphasis is not on who can do a job well but what race he belongs to. Democratization in Malaysia will have to move towards a civil society that is allowed basic freedoms and opportunities for all Malaysians in order to overcome ethnic conflict.

The Malaysian media can help overcome ethnic problems in Malaysia through more sensitive reporting. While it is true that governance in Malaysia is hampered through various laws such as the PPPA and Sedition Act, newspapers need to join the bandwagon of citizens who cry out for freedom of speech, judiciary and press. This will go a long way towards the true democratization of the country and the improvement of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

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