

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introductory Background

The relationship between Malaysia and Singapore presents a rather distinctive inter-state relationship, and yet is difficult to fathom if one has not fully understood the causal factors influencing this relationship. Separated only by a kilometre long Tebrau Straits, the uniqueness of this bilateral relationship is perhaps epitomized by a variety of expressions, such as ‘Siamese twins’, ‘sibling rivalry’ and ‘family quarrel.’ These frequently used expressions imply a rather complex love-hate relationship in Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations that grown out of geographical proximity, a shared common history and cultural background, coloured by political differences, economic competition and interdependency.¹

Since their brief unification under the Federation of Malaysia (hereafter the Federation) from September 1963 to August 1965 and their subsequent separation, Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations have never been free from functional tensions and antagonisms, albeit one may notice that both countries have the inclination to adopt ‘pragmatic’ and ‘business-like’ approach, that is reflected in numerous mutually beneficial collaboration in security, economy and political spheres.²

¹ See, for example, the works by N. Ganesan. (1998). “Malaysia - Singapore Relations: Some Recent Developments.” *Asian Affairs: An American Review*. 25(1), particularly at p. 25, and by the same author in (1991). “Factors Affecting Singapore’s Foreign Policy Towards Malaysia,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. 45(2), p. 187; and Rusdi Omar, Mas Juliana Mukhtarudin & Mohamad Ainuddin Lee Abdullah. (2005). *Hubungan Malaysia-Singapura Era Mahathir*. Sintok: Penerbit Universiti Utara Malaysia, at p. 2.

² For detailed historical analysis, key determinant and political economy of Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations, see K. S. Nathan, (August 2002). Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Retrospect and Prospect. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 24(2): 385-410.

Singapore's unceremonious ejection from the Federation marks, in the opinion of several observers, was the beginning of a new and more prolonged phase of disagreements and confrontations over many issues between the two countries.³ Throughout the long history of their constant bilateral tension in the post-independence period, the scope and volume of animosity between the two countries arguably intensified during the tenure of the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, from 1981-2003, who has been the longest serving Prime Minister to date.⁴ A myriad of tense bilateral issues either resurfaced or fresh ones emerged during his years in office. Some of these issues remain unresolved until today, and, regrettably, worsened by exaggeration and extreme comments made by certain quarters imbued with the motivations of gaining political mileage. These included: disagreements over the low price of untreated water paid by Singapore to Malaysia (3 Malaysian cents [US\$0.008] per 1000 gallons); alleged adverse environmental impact on Malaysia's territorial waters emanating from Singapore's land reclamation work; and the access of Malaysian airspace by the Republic of Singapore Air Force fighter jets for over-flight and training.⁵ Other contentious issues which have now been fully or partially resolved by both countries include the proposed replacement of the Johor Causeway by a suspension bridge across the Tebrau Straits; the sovereignty status of Pedra Branca Island (or in Malay, Pulau Batu Putih); and the sovereignty of Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) railway line crossing Singapore's heartland.⁶ The underlying reason triggering the above-mentioned long-standing issues between Malaysia and Singapore perhaps resided on

³ Chandran Jeshurun, Kamarulzaman Askandar, and Syed Yusof Syed Kechik. (January-March 2003). "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: A Case Study of Conflict-Prone Bilateral Ties." *The Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network Bulletin*. p. 8.

⁴ For details analysis of Dr. Mahathir's leadership styles in influencing Malaysia-Singapore relations, see Chapter 6.

⁵ Rusdi Omar. (2009). "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Issues and Strategies", in David Martin Jones and Lili Yulyadi Arnakim (eds). *Regionalism and Political Development in Southeast Asia*. Kuala Lumpur: UM. p. 93-103.

⁶ Detailed discussion of above-mentioned issues can be found in Chapter 3.

the countries' adoption of non-compromising stand when dealing with the issues concerned, inevitably worsening their already strained bilateral relations.⁷

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Since Singapore's separation from the Federation, tensions and mutual distrusts have occasionally surfaced in the relations between Singapore and its northern neighbour, Malaysia. In many of the disputes, both sides steadfastly refused to make concessions. This position, not only contributed to the failure of both sides to settle their many longstanding disputed issues, but also further intensified the gravity of their rivalry and animosity. Many commentators have observed that Malaysia's foreign policy vis-à-vis Singapore tends to take a distinct set of approaches when handling the disputed issues: the former generally opted to adopt what it perceived to be a diplomatic approach, while the latter is more inclined to pursue legalistic approach in dealing with the bilateral problems.⁸ As can be seen in many cases, Malaysia views its bilateral relations with the island-republic from a subjective, and sometimes emotional, perspective. Nowhere was this argument more evident than in 1986, when Malaysia, a Muslim-majority State, accused Singapore of lacking sensitivity to its neighbouring State when Chaim Herzog, the Israeli President, paid a formal State visit to the island-republic.⁹ Singapore, from its

⁷ K. S. Nathan. (2010). "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: A Bilateral Relationship Defying ASEAN-Style Multilateralist Approaches to Conflict Resolution," in N. Ganesan and Ramses Amer (eds). *International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 263-281.

⁸ K. S. Nathan. (2010). *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁹ See Michael Hass. (1999). "A Political History", in Michael Hass (eds). *The Singapore Puzzle*. United States of America: Greenwood Publishing Group Inc. p. 27; Michael Leifer. (2000). *Singapore's Foreign Policy. Coping with Vulnerability*. London: Routledge. p. 50; Kalminder Singh Dhillon. (2009). *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era, 1981-2003: Dilemmas of Development*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press. p. 244; and Kamarulnizam Abdullah. (2009). "Johor in Malaysia-Singapore

part, firmly believed and has always maintained that it is a sovereign State, and therefore has the right to invite any world leader it chooses to visit the country.¹⁰ From the standpoint of international law, the prerogative of sovereign nation to allow such visits is consistent with the customary State practice.¹¹

An additional source of friction in Malaysia-Singapore bilateral ties stemmed from the pivotal role played by domestic politicians and the media on both sides of the causeway, particularly in terms of exerting a considerable degree of influences on these relations. There is a genuine basis for several bilateral problems to have been blown out of proportion by the media and politicians on both sides of the causeway. It is fair to say that the deep-seated cause of this situation has more to do with a domestic political agenda. Zubaidah (1999) observed that the motivation behind the varying comments stated in the articles in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers by aspiring Malay-based United Malays National Organization (UMNO) leaders - mostly empty and emotional rhetoric - were probably intended to score political mileage that could bolster their political career and image.¹² In retaliation, Singaporean politicians would also engage the media to counter the comments made by their Malaysian counterparts.¹³

Relations”, in Takashi Shiraiishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p.125.

¹⁰ See Michael Leifer. (1988). “Israel’s President in Singapore: Political Catalysis and Transnational Politics”. *The Pacific Review*. 1(4): 341-352.

¹¹ Refer to Roozbeh (Rudy) B. Baker. (2010). “Customary International Law in the 21st Century: Old Challenges and New Debates”. *European Journal of International Law*. 21(1): 173-204.

¹² Lily Zubaidah Rahim. (1999). “Singapore-Malaysia Relations: Deep-Seated Tensions and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 29(1): 38-39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Given the fact that both states have similar colonial history and was in one Federation, these issues should not take long time to resolve. Both countries share and inherit British administration, democracy and political system. They share similar views on stability of state and regions. However, the above background shows that there were many longstanding unresolved issues that create tensions in their relations. Hence, the purpose of this research was to study thoroughly why all the above-mentioned issues were difficult to resolve. Related to this, what the underlying factors were behind the continuation of conflicts and how both countries negotiated their disputes.

1.3. Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research was to analyse the tumultuous state of affairs between Malaysia and Singapore during the period of Mahathir's administration from 1981 to 2003. To this end, the aim of this research was achieved through a threefold approach. First, it provides the background for high profile disputes over numerous issues that have shaped Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations prior to and during Mahathir's administration era. Second, the research examines and analyses the underlying factors that contribute to the difficulties to resolve issues and how these factors affect the government of both countries in handling the relevant bilateral issues. The underlying factors identified focuses on three major factors: (i) the burden of historical baggage following Singapore's separation from Malaysia; (ii) different perceptions and approaches of both sides in handling bilateral relations; and (iii) political cultures and the leadership styles of Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew. Finally, the research identifies the efforts that have been undertaken by both sides to resolve the dispute and to maintain their bilateral relations.

Based on the objectives mentioned earlier, this research is framed around the following three questions:

- (1) What were the contentious issues preventing the establishment of good relations between Malaysia and Singapore during Mahathir's administration?
- (2) What were the driving factors and underlying factors of these issues? To what extent did these factors act as stumbling blocks that adversely affected Malaysia-Singapore relations?
- (3) How were the negotiations conducted to improve the bilateral ties between the two countries?

1.4. Scope and Limitation

The scope of the study was restricted to major issues in Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations that took place during the period of Mahathir's administration from 1981 to 2003 as he has been Malaysia's longest serving Prime Minister to date. Although certain bilateral issues affecting the countries' relations predated prior to the Mahathir's administration, there were number reasons for selecting the period mentioned above. The period covered was seen as significant to academic and policy community, as this was the period when both countries underwent rapid transformation in the economic, social and political fronts. Additionally, Malaysia and Singapore during this period slowly evolved into two separate countries, with distinctively different cultures; a fact which may indirectly lead to the gradual diminishing of the political baggage that had burdened their bilateral relations.

There were some significant limitations to the study, namely that of access to Malaysian Government documents classified as official secrets were restricted and only non-classified material were available. Similarly, access to official secret Singapore Government documents were not available at all.

1.5. Literature Review

Insofar as bilateral ties between Malaysia and Singapore are concerned, scholarly analysis on the topic is substantial in term of volume. The prominent studies were found in seminal works, including article journals, seminar and working papers, academic thesis and chapters in book.¹⁴ Existing works in the literature present general analysis, either as a whole or just one aspect in details, focusing on elements of conflicts, negotiations and collaborations.

¹⁴ See Chin Kin Wah. (1992). "The Management of Interdependence and Change Within a Special Relationship", in Azizah Kassim and Lau Teik Soon (eds.), *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*. Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). pp. 230-248; Lau Teik Soon. (1969). "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Crisis of Adjustment, 1965-1968". *Journal of Southeast Asian History*. 10(1): 155-176; Teofilo C. Daquila. (2009). "Competing or Complementary?", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 200-230; Mahani Zainal Abidin. (2009). "Malaysia-Singapore Economic Relations: Once Partners, Now Rivals. What Next?", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 231-249; Linda Low and Lee Poh Onn. (2009). "Singapore's Perspective on Economic Relations with Malaysia", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 250-264; Ooi Keat Gin. (2009). "Politics Divided: Malaysia-Singapore Relations", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 27-51; Carlyle A. Thayer. (2009). "Political Relations", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 80-91; Albert Lau. (2009). "The Politics of Becoming "Malaysian" and "Singaporean", in in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 92-124; Carlyle A. Thayer. (2009). "Security Relations", in Takashi Shiraishi (eds.). *Across the Causeway: A Multi-dimensional Study of Malaysia-Singapore Relations*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 163-174.

Significant evidence clearly indicates the fact that Malaysia and Singapore share a long-standing dispute over many bilateral issues and problems; a feature typical of relations conducted by many neighbouring countries in the region. A series of contentious bilateral issues, which have been the major source of frictions between two countries predated as early as 1965, with some of them fully or partially resolved by both parties through negotiations or adjudication. These contentious issues are the subject of comprehensive description and analysis characterized the works of Nathan¹⁵, Lin¹⁶ and Ganesan¹⁷.

Much attention has focused on explaining the underlying reasons behind foreign policy action and behaviour of the two countries towards their bilateral relations.¹⁸ Driving factors explaining the animosity between Malaysia-Singapore relations constituted the central theme of analysis in the works by Lin (2003)¹⁹, Nathan (2010)²⁰, Long (2001),²¹ Onn (2005),²² and Ganesan (1998).²³ From the previous literature, four major determinant variables can be identified, these underpinning Malaysia-Singapore bilateral ties, encompassing ethnic-religious variance, political rivalry, economic competition, and geopolitical consideration.

¹⁵ K.S. Nathan. (2002). Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Retrospect and Prospect. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 24(2): 385-410.

¹⁶ Chang, L. L. (2003). Singapore's Troubles Relations with Malaysia: A Singapore Perspective. *Southeast Asian Affairs*. pp. 259-274.

¹⁷ N. Ganesan. (1998). "Malaysia - Singapore Relations: Some Recent Developments." *Asian Affairs: An American Review*. 25(1): 21-36.

¹⁸ The underlying reasons/ factors will be discussed further in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁹ Chang, L. L. (2003). *Op.cit.*, pp. 259-274.

²⁰ K. S. Nathan. (2010). *Op.cit.*, pp. 385-410.

²¹ Joey Long. (December 2001). "Desecuritizing the Water Issue in Singapore-Malaysia Relations". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 23(3): 504-532.

²² Lee Poh Onn. (2005). Paper presented in *A cross-disciplinary workshop on the many aspects of Water in Mainland Southeast Asia* (29 November-2 December 2005) at Siem Reap, Cambodia, organized by the Centre for Khmer Studies (CKS), Siem Reap, Cambodia, and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden/Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

²³ N. Ganesan. (1998). *Op.cit.*, pp. 21-36.

Unique in some ways, these relations have been driven by multiple factors, ranging from geography, history, politics, ideology, economy, culture to ethnicity. Evidently, comprehensive description and analysis of these variables dominated the literature on the Singapore-Malaysia relations.²⁴

Another aspect that has received considerable attention is the mechanisms adopted by both countries to resolve or diffuse arising tension because of their bilateral disputes. Considerable efforts have been made by both sides to overcome these problems through diverse social activities. Clearest examples of these include regular meetings that incorporate informal social activities such as annual golf and sports meetings between cabinet members of both countries, and the holding of joint cultural and religious festivals that involve the leaders from both sides of the causeway (i.e. Hari Raya and Chinese New Year celebrations). All these efforts are designed to enhance people's relations, so they can withstand the possible turbulence created by political and other frictions that might surface from time to time.

In contrast to many states such as Japan and Russia that often solved their disputes, particularly territorial disputes through military provocations and intimidations, Singapore and Malaysia uses dialogues and peaceful matter including the above soft diplomacy to solve their problems. The

²⁴ See for example, Azizah Kassim and Lau Teik Soon (eds) (1992). *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*. Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs. Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *The Malay Dilemma*. Singapore: Times Book International. pp. 179-188. Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965-2000*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holding. pp. 257-291. N. Ganesan. (1998). Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Some Recent Developments. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*. 25(1): 21-36. K.S. Nathan. (2002). Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Retrospect and Prospect. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 24(2): 385-410. Lee Poh Ping. (1992). "Malaysia-Singapore Relations: A Malaysia Perspective", in Azizah Kassim and Lau Teik Soon (eds), *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*, Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs. pp. 219-229. See also, Chin Kin Wah. (1992). "The Management of Interdependence and Change within a Special Relationship", in Azizah Kassim and Lau Teik Soon (eds), *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*, Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs. pp. 230-248. Chang, L. L. (2003). Singapore's Troubles Relations with Malaysia: A Singapore Perspective. *Southeast Asian Affairs*. pp. 259-274.

soft diplomacy was made possible because of historical similarity, geographical proximity and similarity in political system.

As illuminated by several scholars, relations of both states were inseparable from the country's previous colonial experiences. Azizah Kassim and Lau Teik Soon (eds). (1991) asserted that Malaysia and Singapore share a common ground of being subjected to British colonization. Both countries also shared other similarities: they are economically interdependent with multi-racial population. The political system in both countries is predominantly modelled after the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy - a legacy from their British colonial rule. Co-existing with this common bond are the differences, which exist between Malaysia and Singapore in terms of ethnic composition of their population. Ethnic Malays and Chinese have dominated the populations in Malaysia and Singapore respectively.

In the political context, Malaysia has developed a strong coalition government comprising representatives from various multiethnic political-based parties under the Barisan National Front. Across the causeway, Singapore's political system has long been dominated by one single party: People Action Party (PAP). These factors of commonality and difference have created an exceptional relationship under which peaceful and harmonious relations sometimes erupted into periods of stress and tension between these countries. Because of the common history and shared colonial past, the people of both countries tend to be overly sensitive when it comes to dealing with issues pertinent to their relations. Even a trivial issue of say, the persistent violations of Malaysian traffic laws by Singapore cars in Malaysia, have attracted substantial comments in the

letters to the editor in the Malaysian newspaper.²⁵ Ironically, similar violations committed by Thailand registered cars would most likely be ignored and go unnoticed in the local newspaper. Despite the fact that Malaysia and Singapore have gone separate ways for more than 40 years, their print media in both countries still carry special sections focusing on news items from ‘across the causeway’.

As elaborated by Kassim, *et al.* (1991), close geographical proximity of the two countries, along with their common bonds (particularly in terms of interdependency in trade activities, multiracial societies typified by cultural and socio-economic differences, and nearly similar adopted political systems have naturally influenced, to a considerable degree, the psyche and mindset of people at leadership and public levels. Government, political and community leaders, in particular, have been constantly reminded of the symbiotic relationship between both countries: they are twins born in the same family, but are now separated.²⁶ Malaysia and Singapore have placed emphasis from time to time on their economic interdependence and defence indivisibility. Even though they have been characterized by competition in economic and social matters, because of a very high level of economic interdependence as major trading partners, the geographical proximity of the two causeway neighbours have made their economic, security, and prosperity indivisible.²⁷ With respect to security, for example, Malaysia and Singapore are both members of the FPDA (Five Power Defence Arrangement); a defence pact constituted of these and other Commonwealth countries such as Australia, Britain and New

²⁵ K.S. Nathan. (2010). *Op.cit.*, pp. 258-262.

²⁶ Azizah Kassim. *Op.cit.*, (1992). *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*. Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs. pp. vii-viii.

²⁷ K.S. Nathan. (2002). Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Retrospect and Prospect. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 24(2): 388.

Zealand. Bilaterally, both of these ASEAN countries have regularly conducted combined military exercises and their military leaders have been known to have close personal relations.

In the diplomatic sphere, Malaysian foreign missions still maintain the Singapore interest sections on behalf of the latter government in countries where it does not maintain an embassy. Despite of this functional role, certain Malaysian political leaders had questioned the motive behind Singapore's socio-economic policy. Mahathir, in his 1970 book, "*The Malay Dilemma*", has focused on this issues arguing that the Malays were left behind in economy because they do not have opportunities involved in business and not because of hereditary and environmental factors. Mahathir's personal perception of Singapore's attitudes in the *Malay Dilemma* may have been the precursor to, and eventually shaped, his foreign policy orientation towards the republic when he later became Malaysian Prime Minister in 1981.²⁸ Whilst Mahathir's view on the goal of uplifting the participation of the indigenous Malays in the country's overall economy and private sector were generally practical and realistic, he still stressed that they, nonetheless, required some form of government assistance in order to make progress.²⁹ This apparently pragmatic view, nonetheless, was inconsistent with the perspective and strategy adopted by Lee Kuan Yew, who unwaveringly believed in racial equality and argued against the 'Malay Malaysia' concept espoused by Mahathir. These divergent views still constitute the political baggage that eventually burdened the relations between the two countries since their separation. This prompted Mahathir to rule out the possibility of Singapore's re-entry into Malaysia.³⁰ Despite this strong fundamental difference of principle, both Mahathir and Lee were known to be

²⁸ Sivamurugam, Pandian. (2005). *Legasi Mahathir*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd. pp. 1-92.

²⁹ Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *Op.cit.*, pp. 32-153. See also Aziz Zariza Ahmad. (1997). *Mahathir's Paradigm Shift: The Man Behind the Vision*. Selangor: Kumpulan Rusa Sdn Bhd. pp. 2-3.

³⁰ Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *Op.cit.*, pp. 179-180.

pragmatic, realistic and objective when dealing with issues affecting both countries, thereby making it easier for both countries in resolving the issues concerned effectively. The only drawback perhaps is that both Mahathir and Lee also came to be observed as strong and uncompromising characters; a factor that may have contributed to the failure of both countries to compromise on what they believed would adversely affect their interests.

Lee Kuan Yew focuses on the dichotomy of views between both countries' leaders in his book, *"From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965-2000"*. He describes how Singapore managed to survive its early years of economic stagnation after being separated from Malaysia Federation, and now becoming the wealthiest among the Third World countries.³¹ He also touches upon his perceptions of all the four earliest Malaysian Prime Ministers. He accused them of being prejudiced against Singaporean leaders.³² In his observation, the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore had already been strained since Tunku Abdul Rahman was the Prime Minister of Malaysia, but he stopped short of asserting that the possibility for the relationship to have spiralled into a bloody armed conflict having been a genuine possibility. Nevertheless, Lee's book comprehensively shows his distrust and curious perception of Malaysian leaders and ethnic Malays. There are many issues pointed out by Lee in substantiating his argument. In reality, most of these issues had been shelved or resolved for practical reasons, albeit his experience with Malaysian political leaders, particularly when dealing with Mahathir, had been problematic. In his work, Lee discerns Mahathir as a fierce and dogged fighter, possessing

³¹ Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p. 12.

³² Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *Op.cit.*, pp. 257-291.

personal traits difficult to deal with, and having perhaps a strong influence on some uncompromising stands taken by the Malaysian government during that period.³³

The many bilateral tensional issues between Malaysia and Singapore and the relevant factors affecting these issues have been the focus of discussion in the work by N. Ganesan. In his article “*Malaysia-Singapore Relations: Some Recent Development*”, Ganesan (1998) observes some of the critical dimensions in the evolution of the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. He presents, for example, the underlying reasons behind the collapse of the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 by pointing to the tense bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. Based on the sources provided in Mahathir’s book, “*The Malay Dilemma*”, Ganesan believes that the Malays had been economically marginalized and desperately need of special treatment and assistance in order to compete economically with other ethnic groups until such time as they were able to compete on equal terms.

Mahathir’s views on Malays and how to organize state-society relationship are in sharp contrast to Lee Kuan Yew’s view on how to manage Malaysia. Lee believes in racial equality and subscribes to what is termed the ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ concept, which would give equal opportunity to all Malaysia’s citizens without privileging the Malays. The concept of the ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ has always underpinned the development planning of Singapore’s PAP in its strategy of building a united Malaysian nation that comprises all ethnic groups on equality basis. This strategy, however, was not without opposition. The majority of the Malay political leaders in UMNO-led Alliance Party opposed such a strategy, given the huge socio-economic gap between the ethnic Malays and Chinese in Malaya at that time. For these leaders, affirmative

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

action policies were highly preferred to assist the Malay community. The disagreement about this issue was one of the impetuses on why Lee then decided to leave Malaysia and form Singapore as an independent state in 1965.

In addition to the above reasons, Ganesan holds the view that there are several contributing factors behind Singapore's separation from the Malaysian Federation in 1965. The Malaysian government accused Singaporean leaders for the four important basic principles governing Malaysian politics: (i) a common citizenship; (ii) the special position of the Malays; (iii) the monarchical system; and (iv) the use of Malay as a national language. With such animosity and mistrust dominated at the leadership level, Singapore's relationship with Malaysia steadily worsened immediately after the separation of the latter from the Federation.

Nevertheless, the above conflicting strategies to manage state-society relationship have not hindered the two countries from establishing mutually benefited relations. As Ganesan has elaborated, the interdependence of these two countries is too deep to separate them completely. As one country before the separation, Singapore and Malaysia had forged significant economic cooperation and social links. This cooperative arrangement continues, and even extends beyond social-economic sphere to politico-security areas. This is expected, as the origin of security cooperation between the countries can be traced back during the early periods after Singapore's separation from the Federation, at a time when communist expansionistic activities in the region were at its high. The security cooperation had its other utility from the context of military strategy, one of which constituted part of the Western military alliance in countering similar expansion of communist threats in Southeast Asian region. Instead of joining the radical and

revolutionary state such as Indonesia, both countries choose to stick with their traditional Western block. In the post-Cold War development in Southeast Asia, such a geopolitical constellation did not change much and this has great impact on how these two countries see their politico-strategic position in Southeast Asia.

From the analysis made on these literatures it is believed that the contexts, perceptions and conditions that contribute to the conflicts, cooperation and negotiations that often take place between the two countries. A considerable body of published works highlighted the problems confronted by these countries with the possibility of these problems to continue dominating their relations. On the other hand, the literatures also elaborate how these two countries are interdependent on one and other, both in domestic and regional settings. These literatures, therefore, can be a source of starting point and reference to understand the deterioration of relationship between the two countries.

In developing a more thorough analysis, this research goes further by developing a new set of approaches. The above literatures are limited in explaining views of the two main leaders that have impacts on how both countries see one and another. They also do not see the current situation and development of relationship between two countries during Mahathir as proposed by this research. There has not been a detailed study carried out regarding the underlying factors affecting Malaysia-Singapore relations during Mahathir's administration, and certainly not one that has sought to dig deeper into the concrete reasons that contributed to both the pragmatic cordial connections between the two states, as well as the difficulties and tensions in the relationship. Therefore, this research intends to fill that gap, and perhaps indicate useful

directions that may be pursued towards resolving the apparent deadlock imbued in many of Malaysia-Singapore bilateral issues, and thereby enabling both countries to move forward in their relationship, and do so with a more positive and cordial approach.

1.6. Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

Before elaborating theories that will be used in this research, it is important to see the nature of tensions between Malaysia and Singapore. Tensions that often took place between the two countries relate to economic resources and management of borders but do not involve military conflicts and tensions. Both states have tacit commitment and developed a mutual understanding to negotiate the disputes in peaceful ways. Despite this general understanding, however, the solution of the disputes seemed to be complicated since they were not only related to technical issues but also to history, style of leadership and culture in these two states.

Given the above nature of relationship, which on the one hand has elements of conflict but on the other hand contains continuity and mutual interests, liberal perspective in international relations is the most relevant perspective compared to other perspectives such as realist. Disputes between both states have been resolved by negotiations although they may take a long time. In liberal international theory, the negotiations attempt to achieve a win-win situation for both parties. This happened in the case of Malaysia-Singapore relationship.

The negotiations are made possible if there have been mutual understanding between states. In the context of Malaysia-Singapore relations, similarity of domestic political regime types has

contributed to the mutual understanding between two countries. In liberal perspective, similarities in political system and regimes, such as being explained in the ‘democratic peace theory’, can bring peace or at least no war among countries that adopt the system. Similar political regimes also relate to a development of similar political cultures. We need to use also this ‘political culture theory’ to explain the development of mutual understanding between Malaysia and Singapore in solving their disputes. In addition to this, ‘interdependency theory’ can help explain why the conflicts between two countries did not escalate to war.

The first theory utilized in this study is the ‘democratic peace theory’. The aftermath of the Cold War era has given a new lease of life to scholars who have assiduously propagated the peaceful attributes of democracy. A considerable number of scholars have referred to certain States being in different categories, including ‘autocratic’, ‘ripe democracy’ and ‘half-baked democracy.’³⁴ The liberal paradigm is of particular prominence here, invoking the ‘democratic peace theory’. The theory empirically demonstrates a direct correlation between democracies and avoidance of armed conflict: democratic States would normally refrain from resorting to war with other democratic States, as they are accountable to their citizens.

Several scholars have joined in support of this theory by identifying democracies in particular as a prerequisite element in generating peace. The proponents of ‘democratic peace theory’ are closely associated with the works by Michael W. Doyle and Bruce Russett.³⁵ They contend that

³⁴ The proponents of democratic peace theory.

³⁵ See Michael, W. Doyle. (1996). “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs”, in Michael, E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, *“Debating the Democratic Peace”*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Press. pp. 3-57. See also Bruce, Russett. (1996). “The Fact of Democratic Peace” & “Why Democratic Peace”, Michael, E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, *“Debating the Democratic Peace”*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Press. pp. 58-154.

interdependence democratic representation at transnational level - an ideological commitment to uphold human rights - provide the explanation for the 'peace prone' tendencies of democratic States. They argued that the absence of these attributes is the reasoning behind the inclination of non-democratic States to be 'war prone'.

The central notion of such perspectives is that the democracies are more likely to resolve conflicting interests among the involving parties, often stopping short of employing threat, or use, of military force. Obviously, conflicts of interest will, and do, arise between the democratic States, although shared norms and institutional constraints also mean that democracies rarely escalate those disputes to the point where the States concerned threaten to use military force against each other, or actually use the force at all. Most of democratic States, as Doyle and Russett elaborated, normally would settle their disagreement through mediation, negotiation, or other forms of peaceful means, thereby suppressing the varied interests of States from escalating into violent disputes.

When implemented directly in the context of Malaysia-Singapore relations, the core assumption of 'democratic peace theory', in which there is a hypothesized link between democracies and non-violent means is likely to be or, has already been, is widely criticized. This criticism is directed at the incompatibility of the so-called 'guided democracy' adopted by Malaysia and Singapore and the 'true democracies'; a system which normally intertwined with liberal democracies modelled along Western line. Adherents of this critique suggest that it cannot be simply assumed that both States can be labelled under Western-centric type of democracies. Central to their argument is that these two States do not implement a complete aspect of liberal democracy, such as full

freedom of speech and freedom to form organizations. In reality, liberal Western-style democratic governments are generally sensitive to popular public sentiments, including opposition against the government's decision to go to war because to its high financial cost and casualty rate. Ironically, Malaysia and Singapore have never engaged military force as an avenue to settle their bilateral problems. Instead, diplomatic negotiations, dialogues and other peaceful measures have been to seek solution to their bilateral issues. Therefore, despite the many bilateral issues that have surfaced in the course of Malaysia-Singapore relations, armed conflict between the two countries is very unlikely, as both have been practising democratic forms of governance since their independence from the British.

The literature review demonstrates a considerable number of works on issues and their driving factors affecting Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations. At the same time, gaps are evident. The analytical niche filled by this thesis is the gap in our understanding about the relationship among foreign policy decision-making, government behaviour and domestic politics. Even here, the thesis departs from existing work. First, previous intra-state analyses tend to treat the above elements in a peripheral manner rather than as the principal subject of investigation. We need to search for additional factors to explain the no war situation between Malaysia and Singapore. As with many newly independent countries, the role of leadership is one factor that can bring a country to be a war-prone or peace-prone state. The new regimes of leadership of both states will play important roles in fostering the relationship of both countries in relation to democratic peacekeeping. If Malaysia and Singapore do become engaged in a full-scale war, we would have to discount the popular argument that democracies are not likely to go into war against each other, given the fact that both Malaysia and Singapore are governed on democratic principles.

Arguably, the apparent flaws in their brands of democratic system of government would be given as the reasons. However, both governments are led by rational and pragmatic leaders, who understand the extent of the negative consequences of war to both countries, and therefore this worst-case situation is not possible.

This political leadership style, which is linked to the second theory utilized in the study, relates to the argument espoused by the ‘political culture theory’. Under this theory, the key of explaining government’s foreign policy behaviour somewhat lies in its historical and political experiences, which, in turn, intrinsically shaped the political culture of local elites. From the historical context, both Malaysia and Singapore have a common root: both countries were once under the British rule and had been one single entity of State under the Federalist system. To gain insight into the perceptions and attitudes of the local elites towards each other, some scholars contributed to these historical experiences. The period under the British colonial administration and the early years of their independence had played an influential role in shaping the pragmatic and flexible behaviour amongst the majority leaders in both countries.

Political culture has been defined by Almond as the “particular pattern of orientation to political action” in which each political system is embedded.³⁶ *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* goes on to provide an elaborate definition of political culture that is a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process. It is the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics, and, hence, encompassing both the political ideals and the operating norm of a polity.

The difficulty in finding common ground between nation States may arise from their different

³⁶ Gabriel, A. Almond. (August 1956). “Comparative Political Systems.” *The Journal of Politics*. 18(3): 396.

political cultures. Adherents of this view include Cohen, who argues that in the international disputes, the rules cannot simply be taken as common knowledge; significant cultural differences between rivals in international disputes may exacerbate conflict, and complicate amicable resolution of the disputes. This assumption is also shared by numerous diplomats, who have written extensively on the obstacle of conducting successful negotiation between the disputing State parties with diverse political cultures and interests.³⁷ The cultural argument for the democratic peace proposition is that the disputes between democratic political regimes are less likely to escalate into war because each regime is aware of the inclination of other parties to settle their disputes through negotiation and compromise.³⁸

Additional key variables to explain non-war situation and the use of peaceful means for resolving bilateral issues between Malaysia and Singapore is examined here by reference to the third theory adopted in this study: ‘interdependency theory’. As an analytical approach, the assumption of ‘interdependency theory’ is that actors or events in different parts of a system affect each other. Interdependence means mutual dependence, which is neither good nor bad in itself, and there can be more or less of it. In personal relations, interdependence is summed up by the marriage vow in which each partner is interdependent with another ‘for richer, for poorer, for better or for worse’. The arising outcome from interdependence among nations sometimes means richer, sometimes poorer, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.³⁹ In world politics,

³⁷ Cohen, Raymond. (1996). “Cultural Aspect of Mediation”, in Jacob Bercovitch. *Resolving International Conflict: The Theory and Practice of Mediation*. United Kingdom: Lynne Rienner. p. 108.

³⁸ See William, W. Doyle. (December 1986). “Liberalism and World Politics”. *The American Political Science Review*. 80(4): 1151—1169. See also William, J. Dixon. (March 1993). “Democracy and the Management of International Conflict”. *The Journal of Conflict Resolutions*. 37(1): 42-68. Bruce, Russett. (1993). *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. pp. 30-38.

³⁹ Joseph, S. Nye, Jr. (2005). *Understanding International Conflict: An Introduction to Theory and History*. New York: Longman. p. 198.

interdependence refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries.⁴⁰

Several commentators argued that economic issues occupy a central position in world politics in the aftermath of the Cold War. Networks of economic interdependence that span the globe have reached incremental level parallel to increasing role of the market resulting from new information and transportation technologies, as well as changing attitudes on the role of governments and states.⁴¹ In the same vein, Henry Kissinger argues that:

“The traditional agenda of international affairs- the balance among major powers, the security of nations- no longer defines our perils or our possibilities... Now we are entering a new era. Old international patterns are crumbling; old slogans are uninformative; old solutions are unavailing. The world has become interdependent in economics, in communications, in human aspirations.”⁴²

From the context of Malaysia-Singapore relations, economic interdependence underpins the relationship between both countries. Singapore’s importance to the Southeast Asian countries lies in its position as a major regional shipping ports and financial centre, whereby Malaysia has gained significantly from its southern neighbour’s prominent global position in trade and finance area. Similarly, Singapore, because of its own lack of natural resources and land, looks towards Malaysia for its economic needs. These needs include, *inter alia*, a stable destination for investment, and water supply and labour. Such economic interdependence has long been recognized by both countries as paramount in fuelling their rapid economic growth over the last

⁴⁰ Robert, O. Keohane & Joseph, S. Nye. (2001). *Power and Independence*. New York: Longman. p. 7.

⁴¹ Joseph, S. Nye, Jr. *Op.cit.*, p. 191.

⁴² “A New National Partnership,” Speech by Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger at Los Angeles, January 24, 1975. New Release, Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Media Service, p. 1. In Robert, O. Keohane & Joseph, S. Nye. (2001). *Power and Independence*. New York: Longman. p. 3.

two decades, and is arguably the reason why trade and investment between them has remained substantial.

Promoting sustainable economic prosperity in both countries is arguably more important than their outstanding problems. Since Malaya's independence (in 1957) and Singapore's (in 1965), both countries have not looked back in their quest to attain the status of developed country. Ensuring their survival in an increasingly globalized economic environment would require mutual reliance. Giddens contends that nation-States today are confronted with various economic risks and dangers rather than traditional-military threats.⁴³ This means that geo-economics will replace geopolitics in the new international politics; hence, economic instrument is becoming the key instrument of politics.⁴⁴ Consequently, military options would logically be very low on the list of States' priorities such is the case of Malaysia-Singapore relations.

Therefore, in this study, the 'democratic peace' and 'interdependency' theories provide the analytical tools to investigate specific issues affecting Malaysia-Singapore relations by determining the limit of the deterioration of relations between the two countries in a worst case scenario. Whilst the 'political culture theory' offers the theoretical framework for determining the underlying factors that influence the manner and approach taken by the two countries when dealing with each other.

⁴³ Anthony, Giddens. (2002). *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our live*. New York: Routledge. p. 18.

⁴⁴ Joseph, S. Nye, Jr. *Op.cit.*, p. 192.

1.7. Research Methodology

This research is based exclusively on qualitative research methods. In doing so, the deductive approach assumes the dominant analytical approach used by this research. The exposition of the research will proceed from a general position (based on presumed relationship variables) to specific evidentiary details. This research will be based on two major types of data: primary and secondary.

Firstly, the primary sources are largely taken from a wealth of documentary materials sourced from Malaysian Government agencies, notably those collected from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at *Wisma Putra*, public documents such as minutes of meeting, speeches by the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, reports, official statements, and agreements between Malaysian Government and Singaporean Administration. The material used for primary sources also originated from series of interviews that were conducted from 2007 to 2009. Respondents were officials from Malaysia's Foreign Ministry, Malaysian Diplomat to Singapore, Singaporean Diplomat to Malaysia, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR). Interview was also conducted with some of the most prominent figures in Malaysian politics, namely the country's former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, and former Foreign Ministers, Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak.

Aside from depending on primary literature, the references used in the thesis are acquired from various secondary resources. These include books, unpublished manuscripts of dissertations and scholarly journals in both printed and electronic forms. Additional sources of secondary

literature include selected magazines and newspaper articles, as well as unpublished and published proceedings of workshops and seminars. These materials will be subjected to critical analysis by using a *content analysis* approach.

1.8. Significance of Study

The significance of this research lies in fact that there has not been any thorough study of the underlying factors that are believed to have prevented the establishment of good relations between Malaysia and Singapore in the past. Unless these factors are clearly established and measures to overcome them are identified and taken, the status of bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore would continue to be in the state they are now. This research thus makes a much-needed contribution to the study of Malaysian foreign policy, particularly on its relations with Singapore.

It is hoped that the findings of this research can serve as a blueprint that can contribute to the improvement of Malaysia's Government ability in handling and resolving the existing bilateral issues affecting Malaysia-Singapore relations. As far as we know both countries are known for their economic achievements and regarded as South East Asian economic leaders. By working together, rather than competing against each other, these two countries would economically increase their economic potential and develop a synergy, especially in the light of rising economic competition from other South East Asian countries and China. Competition between the two countries is inevitable, but it should be conducted in a healthy manner.

CHAPTER 2

THE BURDEN OF HISTORICAL BAGGAGE FOLLOWING THE SEPARATION

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key underlying factors affecting Malaysia-Singapore relations, many of which are closely intertwined to the burden of historical baggage of both countries. We argue that, to a certain degree, these factors have played a pivotal role in dictating their relationship until to date. The traumatic history of separation between both countries remains influential in shaping the leaders' decisions and choices of foreign policy. There had been also political and economic rivalry between the two countries because of separation. This chapter is divided into five parts. The first part is introduction. The second part discusses the reasons why Singapore wanted to join Malaysia. It also includes an examination of the reasoning behind Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia. The third part looks at the influence of race relations in Malaysia and Singapore. This is to be followed by the fourth part, which examines the political and economic rivalry between Malaysia and Singapore. The final part is conclusion.

2.2. Some Reasons Why Singapore Joined Malaysia and Why Singapore Was Expulsed from Malaysia

The Federation of Malaysia achieved its independence during the period of emergency while Singapore was granted internal autonomy (the Randle Constitution) in 1955. In 1959 Singapore had achieved full internal self-government under the PAP government. Whilst Malaysia and

Singapore generally accepted the concept of a new Federation of Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak had mixed reactions. To determine the acceptability of the concept by the people of Sabah and Sarawak, a commission headed by Lord Cobbold visited the two states in 1962. The findings suggested that the majority in both states favoured the formation of Malaysia. Subsequently on 16 September 1963, the formation of Malaysia was formally promulgated. The motivations, objectives, and expectations tied up in the merger were as diverse as the land and people of the four states involved.

However, when Malaysia came into being, both Tunku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew, who were the Prime Ministers of Malaya, and Singapore respectively, appeared to be deeply committed to the concept of Malaysia, which they had created.⁴⁵ Malaysia and Singapore share a unique and diverse entity, combining different races and types of political and economic organisation. They had extensive political, economic, and social ties. The major reasons for Singapore to merge into Malaysia were, firstly, to solve Singapore's severe economic problems. They saw that Malaya was then, the main producer of rubber and tin but needed to export through Singapore's port. This would keep their entrepôt trade on going to improve their economy. Secondly, it was the security problems due to riots, strikes, and civil disorder, which they faced for several years. Therefore, by joining Malaysia it would become a larger federation and with better political stability. This was seen as a way to attract more foreign entrepreneurs to invest and do business in Singapore. Lastly, was Singapore's concern with its viability as an independent state.

⁴⁵ Nancy, McHenry. Fletcher. (1969). *The Separation of Singapore from Malaysia*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University. p.1.

Unfortunately, the merger did not last long, Singapore was expelled from Malaysia by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj, on 9 August 1965. The most obvious reason for Singapore's expulsion from the Malaysian Federation was its challenge on the four important areas in the ground rules governing Malaysian politics 1963. Malaysian leaders, led by Tunku had identified the four areas identified as common citizenship, as being hailed by Lee Kuan Yew – Malaysian Malaysia, namely: the special position of the Malays, the monarchical system, the use of Malay language as the national language. Singapore also accused the 'Ultra-nationalist' or the extreme right-wing section of UMNO for the failure of the merger with Malaysia.⁴⁶

Coupled to that, Singapore perceived that there was a racial inequality in the Malaysian government with Malay dominance. Their retrospective view has focused on what the troubled two years in Malaysia did for them.⁴⁷ According to Singapore, the anger and humiliation of the experience drove them to the expulsion. The above testimony is believed to be the reasons that had exacerbated the relations between Malaysian and Singapore especially concerning the two leaders. The bitter experience that had led to the separation was seen as an unforgivable and unforgettable act by both leaders. This is more significantly so to Malaysian leaders, who felt undone, but were left unable to act for four decades. The majority of them witnessed the actual incident in hatred, misunderstanding and disgust.

⁴⁶ N. Ganesan. (Nov 1991). Factors Affecting Singapore's Foreign Policy Towards Malaysia. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. 45(2): 182-196.

⁴⁷ Edwin Lee. (1991). "Singapore: Lessons from History in National Development", in Azizah Kassim & Lau, T.S.(eds.). *Malaysia and Singapore: Problems and Prospects*, by. Singapore: Singapore Institute of International Affairs. p. 38.

However, Malaysia and Singapore generally maintained a relationship, even though they were separated. One could say however, that the relationship was not cordial. No matter what it was, despite facing numerous bilateral issues or ‘war of words’, both countries still managed to maintain enough relationship to conduct business and social activities. Reasons underpinning the relationships between these two sovereign states were affected by a variety of factors, such as geographical location, history, ideology, ethnic origin and language.⁴⁸ It could also be seen that this uncordial but vast and unique relationship was not only attributed to the earlier reasons but also to the claims made by Singapore’s first Foreign Minister, Mr S.Rajaratnam in his speech in 1965, indicating the need for collective security which is as follows:

“All these latter factors (history, geography, economics and demography) underline not the separateness or foreigners of the two territories, but the oneness of the people in the two countries. People on both sides of the causeway have not since 9th August even begun to treat one another as foreigners. In addition, I do not think that they ever will. This is a fact...On foreign policy is based on an awareness of not so much the constitutional fact of what is real... the reality of the thing. The survival and well-being of Malaysia is essential to Singapore’s survival. Conversely, the survival of Singapore is essential to Malaysia’s survival”⁴⁹

Thus, Singapore enjoyed rapid economic development and achieved developed status much earlier than anticipated, while Malaysia was still in the developing process. After 48 years of separation, the situation is much different now as compared to the early days. There are vast differences in economic development and defence capabilities between these two countries. Malaysia in the meantime concentrated on nation building through national development and went on a rapid industrialization process with the aim of becoming an industrialized and

⁴⁸ Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *The Malay Dilemma*. Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International. p. 180.

⁴⁹ N. Ganesan. (1991). *Op.cit.* p. 183.

developed nation by the year 2020 while Singapore is already hailed as the NIC (Newly Industrialized Nation/Country).⁵⁰

Despite the existence of interdependent nature in the bilateral relationship between both countries, in searching for their visions, there is still distrust and security suspicion impinging on the relationship. Singapore being the smaller country, maintained an acute sense of vulnerability in its mindset.⁵¹ Hence, it saw Malaysia as its economic rival adversary, especially with the emergence of Seaport at Tanjung Pelepas, International Airport (KLIA) and Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), i.e. Putrajaya and Cyberjaya. Meanwhile, Malaysia saw Singapore as individualistic and far from a curt and suspicious neighbour. There were a few incidents, which involved Singapore that created concern to Malaysia's national security. It is clear that the political baggage of both countries is the important factors in the bilateral relationship. If the current security and economic issues are not properly addressed, it may lead to a possible armed conflict, which might be a great loss for both sides. In terms of bilateral trade, Malaysia and Singapore is each other's largest trading partner. Half of the tourists who visited Malaysia are Singaporeans. Malaysia is also Singapore's top overseas investment destination. These stakes are just too high to be ignored in terms of evaluating the relationship of these countries.

2.3. The Influence of Race Relation

Since separation from the Federation in 1965, Singapore's relationship with Malaysia has been characterised by considerable tension and mutual distrust. The reasons are numerous, focusing

⁵⁰ N. Ganesan. (1998). *Op.cit.*, p. 27.

⁵¹ Alan, Collins. (2000). *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p. 95.

on the ethnic mix in both countries and their irritable experience when Singapore was part of Malaysian Federation between 1963 and 1965⁵². They have since continued to respond aggressively to internal developments in each other's countries.

The political environment during the period Singapore was in the Federation of Malaysia, when PAP wanted to have Malaysian Malaysia policy, UMNO wanted the Malays special privileges to be preserved and protected, thus creating a political conflict that was coloured by racial undertones. Mahathir believed the Malays, due to their colonial experience, were economically under-privileged and in need of special treatment and assistance in order to compete economically with other races until such time as they are able to compete on equal terms. Lee Kuan Yew on the other hand believed in racial equality and subscribed to what is termed the 'Malaysian Malaysia' concept, which would obviously give the Chinese considerable advantage over the Malays. The concept of 'Malaysian Malaysia' has always underpinned the developmental approach of Singapore's PAP in its strategy of building a united Malaysian nation comprising all ethnic groups on the basis of equality. But many of the Malay leaders of the UMNO-led Alliance Party do not agree with this concept because of the visibly huge gap in the socio-economic differences between the ethnic Malays and Chinese in Malaya at that time. The ideological-philosophical-ethnic overtones encompassed by the slogans 'Malaysian Malaysia' and 'Bumiputeraism' appears to have dominated the debate over the ideal paradigm of governance in the two societies.

⁵² Alan Collins. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p. 96.

‘Malaysian Malaysia’ Slogan

The phrase ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ was originally used in the early 1960s as the rallying motto of the Malaysian Solidarity Council, a confederation of political parties formed to oppose Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia. This article specifically provides special quotas for the Malay and other indigenous peoples of Malaysia in admission to the public service, awarding of public scholarships, admission to public education institutions and the awarding of trade licences. It also authorises the government to create Malay monopolies in particular trades. This form of affirmative action for the Malays has been alleged to be racial discrimination on the basis of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy), making the phrase ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ a mere tautology because of the distinction between nationality and race.

The complaint was that Malaysia was not being ‘Malaysian’ by discriminating against non-Malay Malaysians, and was rather being a ‘Malay Malaysia’. The concept of a Malaysian Malaysia has always underpinned the developmental approach of Singapore’s PAP in its strategy of building a united Malaysian nation comprising all ethnic groups on the basis of equality. The phrase ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ is widely associated with Lee Kuan Yew, then leader of the People’s Action Party (PAP), the prime constituent in the Malaysian Solidarity Convention; who was foremost a critic against the racial policy.

In a speech, Lee scoffed at what he viewed as a discriminatory social contract:

"According to history, Malays began to migrate to Malaysia in noticeable numbers only about 700 years ago. Of the 39 percent Malays in Malaysia today,

about one-third are comparatively new immigrants like the secretary-general of UMNO, Dato' Syed Ja'afar Albar, who came to Malaya from Indonesia just before the war at the age of more than thirty. Therefore it is wrong and illogical for a particular racial group to think that they are more justified to be called Malaysians and that the others can become Malaysian only through their favour."⁵³

The campaign for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' was not viewed highly by the government of Malaysia and the parties in the ruling coalition of the Alliance (later the Barisan Nasional). Those against the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia justify their views by citing the fact that Malaya was progressively colonised by the British from the mid 19th century to its height in 1926. During this period, a large number of immigrants not of the Malay stock including the Chinese and the Indian came to Malaysia and Singapore. This is elaborated with idea that the Malays were forced to accommodate other peoples during the colonial era and for them to remain after independence would be a privilege, not a right, with the reason given that the influx of immigrants had negatively affected the rights and resources of the Malays. The argument is given in spite of the existence of Malay-Chinese 'Peranakans' and regular Chinese in Malaya before the British arrival.

Some politicians in the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) thought of the concept as a threat to the Malays' special position in Malaysia, and considered Lee to be a dangerous and seditious trouble-maker; one went as far as to call Lee a traitor to the country. The more moderate Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was perturbed by the campaign for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' and thought it would lead to trouble, in his opinion the Malays were not ready to be cut loose from their special privileges. Eventually, he decided the best option would

⁵³ Ye, Lin-Sheng (2003). *The Chinese Dilemma*. Australia: East West Publishing Pty Ltd. p. 43.

be to oust Singapore from Malaysia; Lee agreed, and Singapore seceded from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965.

Bumiputeraism Slogan

In contrast to the PAP approach to Malaysian unity, the UMNO-led Alliance Party tended to emphasize an approach based on Malay ownership of the country, ethnicity, socio-economic upliftment of the Malays, special preferences for the ‘indigenous’, meaning *bumiputra*, community, that is, the Malays- all of which may be subsumed under the rubric of *ketuanan Melayu*, or Malay supremacy in Malaysia. UMNO’s anxieties vis-à-vis the ethnic Chinese in Malaya and Singapore were heightened by the visibly huge gap in socio-economic status of the Malays which could only be redressed by a policy of positive discrimination, or what may be termed ‘affirmative action’. In short, Malay dominance in the political sphere must now be harnessed to redress the economic imbalance vis-à-vis the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese who are generally perceived by the Malays to be aggressive, acquisitive, and insensitive to the local cultural milieu in which they are a part. The rabid anti-Chinese tone of ultra-Malays such as Syed Jaafar Albar in the 1960s, largely directed at the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew, was indicative of the general Malay political sentiment and insecurity, exacerbated as it was by the expansion of the Chinese population in Malaysia through the merger with Singapore. Malay insecurity and inferiority, compared with Chinese prosperity and superiority- at least in the realm of mutual perceptions of each other, rightly or wrongly- undergirded much of the debate regarding the merits and demerits of a Malaysian Malaysia.

The Malay, for historical, political, and cultural reasons, did not wish to become a second-class citizen in his own country. Hence, UMNO strongly believed (and continues to believe) in shaping a political economy based on discrimination as the basis of stability. Since the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970, the Malay-dominant government has consciously encouraged the growth of a Malay middle class, even at the expense of non-Malays interests. With an economic policy designed to challenge, if not reduce Chinese dominance in certain sectors of the economy, such as trade, finance, and construction, the impact on the non-Malays has generally been negative and disintegrative. Gordon Means aptly notes that the NEP, which was designed to reduce the salience of ethnicity and create a harmonious and integrated society in the future appears to have as its major consequence the perpetuation of ethnic divisions in law, in institutions, and in public policy.⁵⁴

The impact of such policies on ethnic perceptions in neighbouring Singapore could hardly be missed. Singapore's perception of the discrimination by the Malays of the ethnic Chinese minority in Malaysia would only reinforce its determination to pursue offensive as well as defensive policies to mitigate such discrimination. Thus, the avoidance of communal violence in Malaysia becomes an important element of its national interests vis-à-vis Malaysia. The PAP has always maintained that the principles of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity should serve as the governing principles for building a united, prosperous, and peaceful multiracial Malaysia.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Means, Gordon P. (1991). *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*. Singapore: Oxford University Press. p. 313.

⁵⁵ K.S. Nathan. (2002). *Op.cit.* p. 392.

Race Conflicts

Malaysia and Singapore came together as one in 1963 but the troubled union lasted just two years before Singapore's Lee walked out of the Malaysian Federation after squabbling between his Chinese-dominated party and the main Malay party. The island of Singapore is home to mostly ethnic Chinese, while the population of its big neighbour to the north is mainly ethnic Malay. The two races have a long history of tension and sometimes violence. There were serious riots in 1964, with loss of life. These resulted from racial conflict between Malays and Chinese, caused by a rift between the PAP and racially extremist Malays in the Federation, and were not part of a revolutionary process in the sense of trying to seize political power by illegal means. They no doubt contributed to the deteriorating relations between the predominantly Chinese government of Singapore and the predominantly Malay central government in Kuala Lumpur. The break between them, however, resulted more directly from a bid by Lee Kuan Yew to get a wider political foothold for the PAP by putting up PAP candidates in nine of the constituencies on the mainland of Malaya in the 1964 elections. Although the attempt was a failure in that only one PAP candidate was returned, many Malay politicians interpreted it as a bid by Lee Kuan Yew for eventual premiership in Kuala Lumpur. After months of vituperation, Singapore was expelled from the Federation in August 1965, and became a wholly independent state.⁵⁶ In 1969, economic disparities between Malays and Chinese were blamed for race riots that killed hundreds in Malaysia.

⁵⁶ Richard, Clutterbuck. (1985). *Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia 1945-1983*. Singapore: Singapore National Printers (Pte) Ltd. p. 161-162.

Malays still refer to Chinese at times as outsiders and to themselves as 'sons of the soil'. In Malaysia, they remain wary of the Chinese making political advances and have kept a stranglehold on power since independence from Britain in 1957. Malaysia has pursued pro-Malay affirmative action for three decades, but they still lag the Chinese in terms of wealth. Malaysia's political analyst and former lecturer, Chandra Muzaffar said that, in certain areas, the Malay situation needs more attention. For example, in the corporate sector, the Malay and Indian participation are quite small. "Malaysia on the whole had done quite well in managing race relations, though tensions were inevitable. In a multi-racial society, you can't run away from it. It's very, very complex issue if you look at the ethnic mix," he said.

i) *1964's Race Riots*

The 1964 Race Riots were a series of riots that took place in Singapore during two separate periods in July and September between Chinese and Malay groups. The first incident occurred on 21st July 1964 during a Malay procession that marked Prophet Muhammad's birthday. In total, the violence killed 36 people and injured another 556 people. About 3,000 people were arrested. The riots are also known as the Prophet Muhammad Birthday Riots, 1964 Racial Riots, and 1964 Sino-Malay Riots. At that time, Singapore was a state in the Federation of Malaysia.

On 21st July 1964, about 25,000 Malays gathered at Padang, Singapore to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. After the speeches, the procession went on to Geylang. Along the way, a group that was dispersed was asked to rejoin the procession by a policeman. Instead of obeying the orders the group attacked the policeman. This incident led to a race riot after the group of Malays attacked Chinese passers-by and spectators. The riots were reported to have started at

about 5:00 p.m. between Kallang and Geylang Serai. A curfew was declared at 9.30 p.m. to restore order, but in the first day of riot, four people were killed and 178 injured.⁵⁷

After the curfew was lifted at 6 a.m. the next morning, the conflict grew even more tense, and another curfew was imposed - only lifted for short periods for people to buy food. The curfew was completely lifted on 2 August, 11 days after the start of the riots. After the riots goodwill committees were set up made up of community leaders from the various racial groups. The main job of these leaders was to help restore peace and harmony between the Malays and the Chinese by addressing the concerns of the residents. About 23 people were dead and 454 people injured during the July riots. There was significant damage to property and vehicles. About 3,568 people were arrested, including 600 secret society members and 256 people arrested for possession of dangerous weapons. The rest were arrested for violating the curfew.⁵⁸

A second race riot occurred just a month after the first on 3 September. This time, a Malay trishaw-rider was found murdered at Geylang Serai and his attackers were believed to be a group of Chinese. The race riot ensued in the neighbourhoods of Geylang, Joo Chiat and Siglap, and another curfew was imposed. In this incident, 13 people lost their lives and 106 people were injured. Some 1439 people were arrested, of whom 268 were placed under preventive detention orders, and 154 charged in court.⁵⁹ Under the presence of troops and the imposing of curfews, these tensions eventually eased after a few days.

⁵⁷ Lai Ah Eng. (2004). *Beyond Rituals and Riots : Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

⁵⁸ Lau, Albert. (2000). *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, p. 175.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Both Malaysia and Singapore have attributed the September riots to Indonesian provocateurs. It was the Konfrontasi period and 30 Indonesian paratroopers had landed in Labis, Johor on 2 September. Different reasons have been cited for causing the riots. Malaysia Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak blamed Indonesian and Communist provocateurs. On the other hand, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and several other foreign observers attributed the riots to the agitation by Syed Jaafar Albar and other elements of the ultra-nationalist faction in UMNO. According to the Australian Deputy High Commissioner, W.B. Pritchett:

"...there can be no doubt that UMNO was solely responsible for the riots. Its members ran the communal campaign or allowed it to happen."⁶⁰

The riots occurred during the period when the PAP-UMNO relations were severely strained after the People's Action Party challenged the UMNO in Malaysia's federal election in March 1964, with the campaign slogan of 'Malaysian Malaysia'. In addition, the involvement of Chinese secret societies in the riots also increased the level of violence.

Leaders in Malaysia and Singapore were surprised by the rapid escalation of racial violence and both sides made frequent appeals for calm. The riots exposed serious racial tension and the fear of further violence contributed to Singapore's secession from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, when both sides were unable to resolve their disputes.

During the riots a large number of arrests were made under the Internal Security Act (ISA) of those involved in subversion and rioters who were members of secret societies. This helped to contain the violence, especially during the September riots. ISA remains in force in both

⁶⁰ Lau, Albert. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p. 194.

countries and is used to counter potential threats of communalism or racial and religious violence.

ii) *1969's Race Riots*

The May 13 Incident is a term for the Sino-Malay race riots in Kuala Lumpur (then part of the state of Selangor), Malaysia, which began on 13 May 1969. These riots continued for a substantial period of time, leading the government to declare a state of national emergency and suspend Parliament until 1971. Officially, 196 people were killed between 13 May and 31 July 1969 as a result of the riots, although journalists and other observers have stated much higher figures.⁶¹ The government cited the riots as the main cause of its more aggressive affirmative action policies, such as the New Economic Policy (NEP), after 1969.

Amidst tensions among the Malay and Chinese population, the general election was held on 10 May 1969. Election day itself passed without any incident and the result shows the Alliance had gained a majority in Parliament at the national level, albeit a reduced one, and in Selangor it had gained the majority by co-operating with the sole independent candidate. The Opposition had tied with the Alliance for control of the Selangor state legislature, a large setback in the polls for the Alliance.

⁶¹ Comber, Leon. (1983). *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations*. Singapore: Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd. p. 71.

On 12 May, thousands of Chinese marched through Kuala Lumpur and paraded through predominantly Malay areas which hurled insults that led to the incident.⁶² The largely Chinese opposition, Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan gained in the elections, and secured a police permit for a victory parade through a fixed route in Kuala Lumpur. However, the rowdy procession deviated from its route and headed through the Malay district of Kampung Baru, jeering at the inhabitants. Some demonstrators carried brooms, later alleged to symbolise the sweeping out of the Malays from Kuala Lumpur, while others chanted slogans about the 'sinking' of the Alliance boat, the coalition's logo. The Gerakan party issued an apology on 13 May for their rally goers' behaviour.

Malay leaders, who were angry about the election results, used the press to attack their opponents, contributing to raising public anger and tension among the Malay and Chinese communities. On 13 May, members of UMNO Youth gathered in Kuala Lumpur, at the residence of Selangor *Menteri Besar* Dato' Harun Haji Idris in Jalan Raja Muda, and demanded that they too should hold a victory celebration. While, UMNO announced a counter-procession, which would start from the Harun bin Idris' residence. Tunku Abdul Rahman would later call the retaliatory parade "inevitable, as otherwise the party members would be demoralised after the show of strength by the Opposition and the insults that had been thrown at them."⁶³

Shortly before the UMNO procession began, the gathering crowd was reportedly informed that Malays on their way to the procession had been attacked by Chinese in Setapak, several miles to the north. The angry protestors swiftly wreaked revenge by killing two passing Chinese

⁶² Professor Dato' Dr. Zakaria Haji Ahmad. *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia*, "Government and Politics".

⁶³ Hwang, In-Won. (2003). *Personalized Politics: The Malaysian State under Mahathir*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p. 78.

motorcyclists, and the riot began. The riot ignited the capital Kuala Lumpur and the surrounding area of Selangor, according to *Time*, spreading throughout the city in 45 minutes.⁶⁴ Many people in Kuala Lumpur were caught in the racial violence. Dozens were injured and some killed, houses and cars were burnt and wrecked, but except for minor disturbances in Malacca, Perak, Penang and Singapore, where the populations of Chinese people were larger, the rest of the country remained calm. Although violence did not occur in the rural areas, *Time* found that ethnic conflict had manifested itself in subtler forms, with Chinese businessmen refusing to make loans available for Malay farmers, or to transport agricultural produce from Malay farmers and fishermen.⁶⁵

Incidents of violence continued to occur in the weeks after 13 May, with the targets now not only being Malay or Chinese, but also Indian. It is argued that this showed that “the struggle has become more clearly than ever the Malay extremists' fight for total hegemony.”⁶⁶ According to police figures, 196 people died and 149 were wounded. 753 cases of arson were logged and 211 vehicles were destroyed or severely damaged. An estimated 6,000 Kuala Lumpur residents, 90% of them Chinese, were made homeless.⁶⁷ Various other casualty figures have been given, with one thesis from a UC Berkeley academic, as well as *Time*, putting the total dead at ten times the government figure.⁶⁸

The government ordered an immediate curfew throughout the state of Selangor. Security forces comprising some 2000 Royal Malay Regiment soldiers and 3600 police officers were deployed

⁶⁴ "Race War in Malaysia", *Time*. (23 May 1969).

⁶⁵ "Preparing for a Pogrom". *Time*. (18 July 1969). p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Hwang, In-Won. (2003). p. 72.

⁶⁸ *Time*. (18 July 1969). p. 1.

and took control of the situation. Over 300 Chinese families were moved to refugee centres at the Merdeka Stadium and Tiong Nam Settlement.

On 14 May and 16 May, a state of emergency and accompanying curfew was declared throughout the country, but the curfew was relaxed in most parts of the country for two hours on 18 May and not enforced even in Kuala Lumpur within a week. On 16 May, the National Operations Council (NOC) was established by proclamation of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (King of Malaysia) Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah, headed by Tun Abdul Razak. With Parliament suspended, the NOC became the supreme decision-making body for the next 18 months. State and District Operations Councils took over state and local government.

The NOC implemented security measures to restore law and order in the country, including the establishment of an unarmed Vigilante Corps, a territorial army, and police force battalions. The restoration of order in the country was gradually achieved. Curfews continued in most parts of the country, but were gradually scaled back. Peace was restored in the affected areas within two months. In February 1971 parliamentary rule was re-established. In a report from the NOC, the riots were attributed in part to both the Malayan Communist Party and secret societies.

The eruption of violence on May 13 was the result of an interplay of forces. These include a generation gap and differences in interpretation of the constitutional structure by the different races in the country;

“the incitement, intemperate statements and provocative behaviours of certain racialist party members and supporters during the recent General Election; the

part played by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and secret societies in inciting racial feelings and suspicion; and the anxious, and later desperate, mood of the Malays with a background of Sino-Malay distrust, and recently, just after the General Elections, as a result of racial insults and threat to their future survival in their own country”

— Extract from the May 13 Tragedy, a report by the National Operations Council, October 1969.⁶⁹

Immediately following the riot, conspiracy theories about the origin of the riots began circulating. Many Chinese blamed the government, claiming it had intentionally planned the attacks beforehand. To bolster their claims, they cited the fact that the potentially dangerous UMNO rally was allowed to go on, even though the city was on edge after two days of opposition rallies. Although UMNO leaders said none of the armed men in the rally belonged to UMNO, the Chinese countered this by arguing that the violence had not spread from Harun Idris's home, but had risen simultaneously in several different areas. The armed Malays were later taken away in army lorries, but according to witnesses, appeared to be "happily jumping into the lorries as the names of various villages were called out by army personnel".⁷⁰

Despite the imposition of a curfew, the Malay soldiers who were allowed to remain on the streets reportedly burned several more Chinese homes. The government denied it was associated with these soldiers and said their actions were not condoned. However, Western observers such as *Time* suggested that "Whether or not the Malay-controlled police force and emergency

⁶⁹ See National Operations Council. (1969). *The May 13 Tragedy: A Report of the National Operations Council*. Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.

⁷⁰ Emery, Fred. (6 June 1969). "The nightmare that lingers on in Malaysia". *Times*. p. 11.

government have actually stirred up some of the house-burning, spear-carrying mobs, they seem unwilling to clamp down on them."⁷¹

In 2007, a book, *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* by academic, former Democratic Action Party member and former Member of Parliament Kua Kia Soong, was published by Suaram. Based on newly declassified documents at the Public Records Office in London, the book alleged that contrary to the official account which had blamed the violence on opposition parties, the riot had been intentionally started by the "ascendent state capitalist class" in UMNO as a coup d'état to topple the Tunku from power.⁷²

Immediately after the riot, the government assumed emergency powers and suspended Parliament, which would only reconvene again in 1971. It also suspended the press and established a National Operations Council. The NOC's report on the riots stated, "The Malays who already felt excluded in the country's economic life, now began to feel a threat to their place in the public services," and implied this was a cause of the violence.⁷³

Western observers such as *Time* attributed the racial enmities to a political and economic system which primarily benefited the upper classes. The Chinese and Indians resented Malay-backed plans favoring the majority, including one to make Malay the official school and government language. The poorer, more rural Malays became jealous of Chinese and Indian prosperity. Perhaps the Alliance's greatest failing was that it served to benefit primarily those at the top. For

⁷¹ *Time*. (18 July 1969). p. 1.

⁷² See Kua Kia Soong. (2007). *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969*. Petaling Jaya: SUARAM.

⁷³ Hwang, In-Won. (2003). *Personalized Politics: The Malaysian State under Mahathir*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p. 78.

a Chinese or Indian who was not well-off, or for a Malay who was not well-connected, there was little largesse in the system. Even for those who were favored, hard feelings persisted. One towkay recently told a Malay official: "If it weren't for the Chinese, you Malays would be sitting on the floor without tables and chairs." Replied the official: "If I knew I could get every damned Chinaman out of the country, I would willingly go back to sitting on the floor."⁷⁴

The riot led to the expulsion of Malay nationalist Mahathir Mohammad from UMNO and propelled him to write his seminal work *The Malay Dilemma*, in which he posited a solution to Malaysia's racial tensions based on aiding the Malays economically through an affirmative action programme. Tunku Abdul Rahman resigned as Prime Minister in the ensuing UMNO power struggle, the new perceived 'Malay-ultra' dominated government swiftly moved to placate Malays with the Malaysian New Economic Policy (NEP), enshrining affirmative action policies for the *bumiputra* (Malays and other indigenous Malaysians). Many of Malaysia's draconian press laws, originally targeting racial incitement, also date from this period. The Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971 named Articles 152, 153, and 181, and also Part III of the Constitution as specially protected, permitting Parliament to pass legislation that would limit dissent with regard to these provisions pertaining to the social contract. (The social contract is essentially a *quid pro quo* agreement between the Malay and non-Malay citizens of Malaysia; in return for granting the non-Malays citizenship at independence, symbols of Malay authority such as the Malay monarchy became national symbols, and the Malays were granted special economic privileges.) With this new power, Parliament then amended the Sedition Act accordingly. The new restrictions also applied to Members of Parliament, overruling Parliamentary immunity; at the same time, Article 159, which governs Constitutional amendments, was amended to entrench

⁷⁴ "Preparing for a Pogrom", *Time*, (18 July 1969). p. 2.

the 'sensitive' Constitutional provisions; in addition to the consent of Parliament, any changes to the 'sensitive' portions of the Constitution would now have to pass the Conference of Rulers, a body comprising the monarchs of the Malay states. At the same time, the Internal Security Act, which permits detention without trial, was also amended to stress 'intercommunal harmony'.⁷⁵

Despite the opposition of the DAP and PPP, the Alliance government passed the amendments, having maintained the necessary two-thirds Parliamentary majority. In Britain, the laws were condemned, with *The Times* of London stating they would "preserve as immutable the feudal system dominating Malay society" by "giving this archaic body of petty constitutional monarchs incredible blocking power"; the move was cast as hypocritical, given that Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak had spoken of "the full realisation that important matters must no longer be swept under the carpet."⁷⁶ The *Rukunegara*, the de facto Malaysian pledge of allegiance, was another reaction to the riot. The pledge was introduced on August 31, 1970 as a way to foster unity among Malaysians.

2.4. Political Rivalry

The sometimes turbulent relationship between the PAP and UMNO, which were, and still are, the ruling parties respectively of Singapore and Malaysia, has impacted the recent history of both states. Both parties have common roots, being formed during the period of anti-colonialism and widespread resentment which grew after the Japanese occupation. Initially allowing insurgent faction members advocating communism into both their parties as an ally against colonialism,

⁷⁵ Khoo, Boo Teik. (1995). *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*. Singapore: Oxford University Press. pp. 104–106.

⁷⁶ Emery, Fred. (8 November 1969). "Malaysia Unity Call Against a Background of Fear". *Times*. p. 7.

both later developed hostile relations with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), expelling the leftists from their ranks. Thus, the PAP and UMNO had co-operated closely for some time to work towards eliminating the MCP insurgency and achieving independence from colonialism. Such co-operation culminated in 1963 with the entry of Singapore into Malaysia. Official ceremonies celebrated the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963.

There are many factors that led the UMNO and the PAP to agree to a merger. Negotiations for merger began in 1960, and initially, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, refused. However, fears of the MCP-backed insurgency taking over Singapore and using it as a base against Malaya gave reasons for the Malayan government to admit Singapore as a member state. For Singapore, the promise of independence from British colonial rule and economic growth with a guaranteed common market between the two nations gave the city-state reason enough to join the Federation. Singapore became part of Malaysia after a national referendum was held, under the conditions that all Singaporean citizens would automatically become citizens of Malaysia. Singapore would also retain a degree of autonomy and state rights, such as over labour and education. Singapore would also retain the right to keep all four of its official languages, English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. The Federation of Malaysia was established on September 16, 1963 under those conditions.

Initially all appeared well. However, both nations developed different ideological lines on racial issues, especially concerning the Chinese race and the Malay race, mainly marked by UMNO's belief in the bumiputra policy of positive racial discrimination. UMNO saw this as much needed

affirmative action for Malays, who had supposedly been put at a disadvantage due to the heavy presence of immigrants that had entered the Malay Archipelago during colonial rule. The PAP staunchly opposed this as unjustified and racist. The PAP, along with several other Malaysian minority parties, epitomised this view with the cry of a 'Malaysian Malaysia', a policy to serve the entire Malaysian *nationality*, in which Singapore was included, as opposed to just the Malay *race*. This was driven by the fact that Singaporean Chinese were facing increasing political, legal, and economic discrimination. One of the initial solutions proposed was to have the PAP join UMNO and later on participate in the federal government, but the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) feared that the PAP would replace them, and opposed the PAP, seeing it as a radical socialist movement. The MCA urged UMNO to prevent the PAP from being too influential in the federal government. From this point on the relationship between the UMNO and the PAP became increasingly cold, falling little short of hostile.

During this period, racial tensions grew between the Chinese and the Malays, allegedly partially incited earlier by the MCP, such as during the Hock Lee bus riots, with growing blame put on UMNO by the PAP. This was not an unfounded allegation, as many Malay newspapers, such as the partisan newspaper Utusan Melayu continued to allege that the PAP had been mistreating the Malay race, citing the relocation of Malays from the kampungs for redevelopment. An increasingly heated debate on both sides sprung up, inciting racial tensions to such an extent that race riots occurred, culminating with two riots on and after Prophet Muhammad's birthday in 1964. Both parties continued to escalate the tension with scathing verbal attacks on each other, accusing each other of being the cause of the riots. Earlier, in what was seen by the PAP as a violation of previous agreements, UMNO backed and formed the Singapore Alliance Party,

which ran for the 1963 state elections in Singapore on 21 September 1963, but failed to win any seats, even in Malay constituencies. Despite this failure, it was seen as an attack on the PAP's power base.

Eventually, the PAP decided to challenge the policies of the Central Government directly, both as a retaliatory measure and to further its ideological grounds. It ran in the April 1964 Malaysian federal elections in coalition with other parties under the Malaysian Solidarity Convention. The PAP was now a legitimate opposition party in the federal elections, and campaigned on a platform of eliminating racialism and a Malaysian Malaysia. Their rallies attracted large crowds. They decided to contest a minority of the seats to avoid any perception that they were trying to undermine the ruling party or being seen as agents of instability. The PAP only won one seat and 7% of the vote.⁷⁷ UMNO saw this as spite and felt threatened by the fact that the PAP had even contested any seats at all was alarmed by the seat the PAP managed to win. Dr. Tan Siew Sin, the Finance Minister at this time, demeaningly commented, "*How can these kachang puteh parties pose a threat?*".⁷⁸ The sharp highlight of the degenerating situation was a vow by UMNO to oust the PAP from the Singapore government when the next set of state elections occurred, perhaps before the PAP could do likewise at the next federal election.⁷⁹

In addition to racial unrest, thorny issues concerning Singapore's rights as an autonomous state further put a dent in relations, such as the failure of a common market to be set up between the Federation and Singapore, and the heavy tax burden placed on Singapore, which was seen as unfair. Such issues catalysed the impending secession. On August 7, 1965, Tunku Abdul

⁷⁷ *The Strait Times*. (2 June 1965).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁹ Abdullah Ahmad. (1985). *Op.cit.*, pp. 90-92.

Rahman announced to the Malaysian Parliament in Kuala Lumpur that the Parliament should vote yes on the resolution to have Singapore to leave the Federation, choosing to "*sever all ties with a State Government that showed no measure of loyalty to its Central Government*" as opposed to the undesirable method of suppressing the PAP for its actions. Singapore's secession and independence became official on August 9, 1965. *De jure*, Singapore withdrew of its own accord. *De facto*, however, the PAP had no true authority to influence whether Singapore should leave or not, despite having pressured Tunku Abdul Rahman not to take such a course of action. The separation agreement was signed to maintain friendly relations, trade agreements, and mutual defence ties. These were left intact, although federal ties to Singapore as a state were cut off.

The complex relationship continued with the issue of trade and other agreements between the now separate entities of Malaysia and Singapore. At times both parties heavily criticised each other for their policies, to the extent of issuing threats. At present, both have had their countries issue bans on some of the other's media, for example, the New Straits Times, a Malaysian newspaper publication, is banned in Singapore, and the Straits Times, the corresponding newspaper publication for Singapore, is banned in Malaysia (though as recent as June 2005 there have been talks to lift the bans on both sides of the causeway). This heavy exchange of words is epitomised by the past leaders of both countries, Lee Kuan Yew of the PAP, and Dr. Mahathir of the UMNO. Both are no longer the prime ministers of their countries.

PAP-UMNO relations were volatile at several points in history, and there are still long-running disputes. However, Malaysia and Singapore remain relatively close allies. The two countries'

relations with each other are stronger than their (generally warm) relations with countries in the region, for example, the members of Southeast Asian regional-bloc ASEAN. For example, there is strong law enforcement cooperation on both sides of the causeway.

2.5. Economic Rivalry

Malaysia's major goal in the next thirty years is to reduce the heavy dependence on Singapore as a re-export centre for Malaysia goods. This necessarily entails upgrading the country's technological and industrial base, its sea-ports and airports, educational infrastructure, transportation networks, and transforming the commodity composition of bilateral ties and international trade from low to high value-added, especially manufactured goods, electrical and electronic products. After years of being in its neighbor's shadow, Malaysia has signaled that it is determined to cut its dependence on Singapore as a regional shipping, financial and aviation center, and compete for business in these and other areas, such as communications and the media, with the island-state. Malaysia now has a modern national highway network and telecommunications. Its seaports, railways and power supplies are being upgraded. A new international airport near Kuala Lumpur, which was opened in 1998 was designed to match or surpass Singapore's airport.

In the 1980s, Malaysia's economy was gaining momentum with the huge inflow of foreign investments. This provided some form of rivalry to Singapore. When Dr. Mahathir took over the reigns of power, there was a shift in the directions of Malaysia's foreign policy. It was responding more towards international political economy and was friendlier towards developing

nations. This strategy which involved championing third world causes and opening up new markets became the core agenda of Dr. Mahathir's business plans. The economy was given priority in shaping foreign policy. Internally, more modern and sophisticated infrastructure such as the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), the seaport at Tanjung Pelepas and Port Kelang were built and reconstructed to prepare for this economic resurgence. The introduction of Malaysia's Incorporated Policy and the emergence of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) provided impact on investment in Singapore. Some investors were moving their offices to Kuala Lumpur. This allowed a healthy competition between the two countries and will chart a smart partnership in many areas on the future. Too some the competition is viewed as nations in conflict, one trying to outdo the other. But the truth of the matter is; it is done more for economic survival. This was the most trying and challenging period for both nations.

Former Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad of Malaysia blames British colonial rule for concentrating development in Singapore and giving it a head start as a commercial center. Singapore was once part of the Malaysian federation, but was forced to leave in 1965 to become a sovereign state because Kuala Lumpur feared the island-state would become politically dominant. Noting that about one third of Malaysia's trade still passes through Singapore, Dr. Mahathir said that Malaysians must make full use of Port Klang, the country's chief port near Kuala Lumpur. He said that the government would do 'some mild arm twisting' to make sure that exporters and importers sent and received their goods through Port Klang, which has a large and modern container terminal.

Ling Liong Sik, the then Malaysian transport minister, said the government was seriously considering doubling the handling charges at Port Klang for containers destined for ports in neighboring countries that would be later transhipped to other foreign countries. The government had earlier introduced a levy of 100 ringgit on cargo vehicles entering Malaysia from Singapore, and doubled the levy to 200 ringgit on those leaving Malaysia. Such levies "may force many manufacturers in Malaysia who currently export to the world through Singapore to reroute to Malaysian ports," said Graham Hayward, executive director of the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce.

A Malaysian-led consortium announced plans to build an oil pipeline and upgrade road and rail links between the Penang Port, on the Malaysian coast at the northern entrance of the Strait of Malacca, and Songkhla in Southern Thailand. The group said that the 'land bridge' project, which has Malaysian government backing, would enable international shippers to bypass Singapore, which has one of the world's largest ports and a huge oil-refining capacity, and cut the sea voyage between Indian and Pacific oceans by more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles). Malaysia has embarked on an extensive effort to rapidly develop its southern gateway in Johor, including improving connectivity to its ports by rail and air. The competition in the logistic services heated up considerably when the privatized Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) successfully convinced two key Singapore port users to relocate.

Malaysia's confidence was boosted when it convinced two Singapore port users, namely Maersk Sealand (Danish Shipping giant) and Taiwan's Evergreen carrier to shift its transshipment/ hub

operation from Singapore to PTP.⁸⁰ The Maersk's shift was believed to be the biggest single move in the port industry in Southeast Asia and it will guarantee PTP an annual volume of 2 million twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEUs) in 2001. It was served as a catalyst to attract other major carriers.⁸¹

Malaysia is also actively promoting an International Offshore Financial Center (IOFC)⁸² in Labuan island off Borneo to reduce reliance on Singapore-based banks, fund managers and insurance companies. The creation of Labuan as an IOFC in 1990 was designed to increase Malaysia's capacity to provide financial services to a region that is growing in economic dynamism, a measure that could undercut Singapore's regional predominance in this sphere. Analysts said that Malaysia wanted to bring down its current-account deficit, projected to increase to more than 18 billion ringgit in 1995 from 10.9 billion ringgit in 1994, by cutting its dependence on foreign shipping, banking, insurance and other professional services, many of which are based in Singapore.⁸³

2.6. Conclusion

History operates to provide perspective, continuity, and appreciation of past trends that condition current thinking, performance, and future behaviour. Indeed, it is this historical factor that binds these two nations together, and yet injects differential approaches to problem-solving within a national as well as regional context. But, the rows between Malaysia and Singapore have never

⁸⁰ Chang, L. L. (2003). *Op.cit.*, p. 265.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁸² <http://www.bnm.gov.my/index.php?rp=19>. (Accessed on 10 December 2013)

⁸³ Richardson, Michael. (27 January 1996). Economic Scene: Singapore's Competitive Neighbour. *International Herald Tribune*.

been allowed to escalate into violence by both sides. Wide-ranging economic, political and social ties continue to develop between the two countries. Nonetheless, the bilateral relationship continues to be encumbered by the inability of Malaysia and Singapore to set aside mutual mistrust and misgiving, which is largely due to the burden of historical baggage of their separation. This is an important crosscutting factor that acts to frame and intensify ethnic, geopolitical, economic and other sources of conflict between Malaysia and Singapore.

Mutual mistrust derived from the ordeal of separation continues to linger in the consciousness of many Malaysians and Singaporeans. This mistrust continues to linger despite leadership and generational change, and the development of significant bilateral economic and social linkages, because both sides have tended to use the traumatic history of separation for nation-building or regime consolidation. Moreover, the lingering mistrust between Malaysia and Singapore from the merger and separation period was politicised in contemporary times especially during the Mahathir era by politicians, media and community leaders from the both countries. They use these events for tackling present-day problems.

Malaysia-Singapore relations are as equal as Malay-Chinese relations. Thus, the burden of historical baggage after the separation of Singapore from Malaysia is one of the main factors in influencing the state of Malaysia-Singapore relations. The ordeal of disengagement continues to influence the present-day Malaysia-Singapore relationship. As Chan Heng Chee noted, bilateral relations are still very much encumbered “by the bitterness of historical past borne out of merger and separation”.⁸⁴ Lee Kuan Yew continues to remember how he was treated while Singapore

⁸⁴ Chan Heng Chee. (1992). Singapore 1991: Dealing With a Post-Cold War World. *Singapore: The Year in Review 1991*. Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies. p. 9.

was in Malaysia, whilst Mahathir always views Singapore as a troublemaker. On several occasions in the 1990s and 2000s, Lee Kuan Yew would remark that separation was one of the “saddest moments” in his life. Clearly, Lee Kuan Yew cannot forget it and he still feel aggrieved. Hence, the older generations of both countries still remember these events because the former leaders, Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew have put their differences into the public domain. It influenced them in making decisions when they were dealing with the issues between the two countries.

The historical baggage that was seen as the barrier in the relations between the two countries will still linger for as long as the leaders that were in power during and after the period of separation are still alive and politically active. These leaders will still continue to evoke the memories and the bitter after taste of separation to influence the governments of both sides in their dealing with the other party. This phenomenon is however slowly eroding. Mahathir is now retired though still active politically but his obsession is more focused towards domestic politics. Lee Kuan Yew is also retired and in the past has rarely made any controversial political statements that would undermine the relations between the two countries. On the other hand, the younger generations on both sides the causeway has already accepted that Malaysia and Singapore are two separate nations with different political agendas. Due to their geographical proximity and economic interdependency need each other. Some of the earlier political and economic rivalries were rather trivial but could not be resolved due to the pressure of this unnecessary baggage. The way forward for the two nations in order to move ahead is foster stronger bilateral relations that would benefit both countries based on pragmatic consideration taking into account that both countries can mutually benefit from each other’s strength.

CHAPTER 3

HANDLING BILATERAL RELATIONS: DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS AND APPROACHES

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses different perceptions toward each other in these two countries and its impact on handling bilateral relations. We argue that to a certain degree different perceptions influence the way these countries handle their bilateral relations. Ties between the two countries have been described with adverse terms like ‘prickly’, ‘frosty’, ‘wintry’, ‘sticky’ and ‘tempestuous’ ever since Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia on 9 August 1965.⁸⁵ The traumatic history of separation between both countries still influences their leaders in decision making process for their own country. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part is introduction. The second part discusses the perceptions that have been developed by these two states toward one and another. The third part looks at Malaysia and Singapore’s approaches in handling bilateral relations. The final part is the conclusion.

3.2. How Malaysians and Singaporeans Perceive Each Other

Even after nearly four decades since Singapore’s separation from the Federation, many Malaysians still begrudge the former’s ‘exploitative, unfriendly, arrogant and un-neighbourly’ conduct. Singaporeans, on the other hand, shared similar sentiment, resenting Malaysia’s desire to ‘control the destiny of their country’. These sentiments manifested in the mass media of both

⁸⁵ Refer to *CNN.Com*. (14 August 2000). “Singapore’s Lee Visits Malaysia”; *BBC News Online*. (24 January 2001). “Malaysia Protests...”; and *Agence France Presse*. (6 September 2001). “Singapore Strikes...”.

countries. For instance, Singapore's *Strait Times* complained that Kuala Lumpur traditionally perceived the island-republic as 'a thorn in the Malaysian flesh'.⁸⁶ In the same manner across the causeway, Malaysia's *Utusan Malaysia* bemoaned that many problems with Singapore have yet to be resolved and these are a 'thorn in the flesh' in neighbourly relations.⁸⁷

Negative perceptions still linger in the mindset of many citizens of both countries.⁸⁸ Such perceptions existed when politicians, media and community leaders alike frequently politicised the bitterness arising from the separation between Malaysia and Singapore. Malaysians generally tend to perceive Singaporeans as arrogant and *kiasu*.⁸⁹ Whilst they tend to be well disciplined in their own country, Singaporeans are seen as irresponsible and arrogant when they drive across to Malaysia, breaking the speed limits and other traffic rules, and throwing their garbage indiscriminately when in Johor. Singapore is perceived to have regarded Malaysians as backward, both in their thinking and in their way of life. Malaysia is also accused of being fond of playing the role of a big brother, with its constant reminders to Singapore to be more 'aware of its sensitivities' and placing premium importance of this factor as the key to good bilateral relations between the two countries. David Plott, a managing editor at the Far Eastern Economic Review depicted both countries' perception towards each other:

⁸⁶ *Strait Times*. (18 July 1998). "What Ails KL-S'pore Relations Now?";

⁸⁷ *Utusan Malaysia*. (12 August 2000).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁹ *Kiasu* reflects an obsessive concern with getting the most out of every transaction and a desire to get ahead of other. Kiasuism has both positive and negative outcomes. The kiasu person is selfish. He takes more than he need...He is inconsiderate. He is greedy. And he is definitely obnoxious. However, kiasu also has positive benefits. The kiasu person often excels because they want win. They scan the environment for opportunities and take quick advantage of them. Every action is designed to ensure that the person or their beneficiary gains an advantage. This concept is a prominent part of the national culture of Singapore. See Hwang, Ang & Francesco. (2002). The Silent Chinese: The Influence of Face and Kiasuism on Student Feedback-Seeking Behaviours. *Journal of Management Education*. 26(1): 70-98. Also refer to Leo. (1995). *Kiasu, Kiasi: You Think What?* Singapore: Times Books International.

“...Citizens of both countries have accumulated strong prejudices about each other: Singaporeans are greedy, arrogant, godless and boring; Malaysians are lazy, corrupt, insecure and backward. These prejudices have fuelled the acrimony that has marked relations over a range of bilateral issues.”⁹⁰

Malay Malaysians still project ‘Chinese’ Singapore as being “insensitive to the history of the [Malay-Muslim] region”.⁹¹ Too many Singaporean politicians and bureaucrats are a supercilious lot who show little respect for Malaysians, and, at best, condescend to their Malaysian counterparts. Singaporeans, for their part, projected their northern neighbour as a ‘lazy native’ that is “just jealous” of their country’s runaway economic success, low levels of corruption and ‘First World’ status. Malaysians respond that Singaporeans, stuck in their tiny apartments, are envious of Malaysia’s open spaces, less demanding working environment, and lower lifestyle costs.⁹² While Malaysians depict Singapore as hawkish, pro-American regional anomaly, a visual ‘Israel’ of Southeast Asia, which produced nothing but exploits its neighbours’ economic weakness, Singaporeans often depict Malaysia’s Malay-dominated armed forces as a potential threat to the prosperous but vulnerable island, the only place in Southeast Asia where Overseas Chinese can enjoy unqualified equality and security. In addition, the pro-Malay/pro-bumiputera (sons of the soil) affirmative action policies of Malaysia’s Barisan Nasional (National Front) regime, implemented to raise the socio-economic position of indigenous peoples in relation to the relatively well-off ‘immigrant’ Chinese minority, have been routinely portrayed in Singapore as discriminatory or anti-meritocratic.⁹³ For their part, Malaysians have promoted the perception that Singapore’s Malay-Muslim minority were often the victims of political and economic

⁹⁰ David Plott. (14 December 2000). Provocative Political Fantasy. *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

⁹¹ Bilveer Singh. (1999). *The Vulnerability of Small States Revisited*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press (GMUP). p. 193.

⁹² *The Economist*. (10 February 2000). “A Prickly Pair”.

⁹³ See *Agence France Presse*. (25 January 2001). “Mahathir Dismisses Singapore Slight...”; and *South China Morning Post*. (26 January 2001). “Singapore Fires Another Shot in Meritocracy Row”.

discrimination by the Chinese majority, usually known by the term marginalization.⁹⁴ Such stereotypical or unflattering cross-border views, which tend to amplify whenever bilateral differences surface, are inherently symptomatic of the legacy of history in Malaysia-Singapore relationship.

In short, we can say that Malaysians and Singaporeans still have negative perceptions toward each other until the present. They are still prejudice with their actions in handling bilateral relations between the both countries. Mistrust and suspicion still remain rooted in their peoples' mindset. Thus, we argue that if their way of thinking will not change in the near future, it is impossible to resolve the outstanding issues between Malaysia and Singapore. For the sake of their peoples, the leaders from both countries must do away their negative perceptions toward each other. Then, mutual respect and mutual trust must be inculcated in both leaders mindset when dealing with the outstanding issues between both countries. Finally, we believe that the outstanding issues, which have caused some 'political hiccups' between both countries, can be settled.

3.3. Malaysia and Singapore's Approaches in Handling Bilateral Relations

As an extension of domestic policy, foreign policy is designed with the intent to defend and promote national security, economic and other vital interests. Despite the diversity of views regarding the perception and explanation of foreign policy behaviour, no foreign policy can be formulated in a vacuum as it must serve to function in a dynamic environment.

⁹⁴ See Shamsul Akmar. (19 December 2000). "Meritocracy Comes Under Attack". *New Straits Times*; and *Agence France Presse*. (8 April 2001). "Malays Urged Not to Suffer Same Fate as in Singapore".

Malaysia's foreign policy is no exception. Various geographical, historical, social and political determinants contribute to shaping the nature of Malaysia's foreign policy and the conduct of the country's international relations. Added to this is the external environment, or what may be termed as the systemic determinant, which becomes increasingly important with the advent of globalisation and in the wake of the advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). But the basic objective remains the same, i.e. the pursuit of Malaysia's national interest at the international level.

A critical examination of Malaysia's foreign policy since 1957 would show its steady evolution characterised by notable changes in emphasis with changes in Malaysia's political leadership. A markedly anti-Communist and pro-western posture with close links to the Commonwealth under Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister, gave way to one based on non-alignment, neutralization and peaceful co-existence. Under Tun Abdul Razak, as a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Malaysia began to identify itself as a 'Muslim nation'. The search for new friends substantially increased the importance of NAM to Malaysia. Investment from other than British sources began to be also welcomed. A period of consolidation ensued under Tun Hussein Onn, with ASEAN becoming the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy, following the collapse of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in 1975, the withdrawal of the US military presence from Southeast Asia and the invasion of Kampuchea (now Cambodia) by Vietnam.

But a more dramatic shift occurred when Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammad took over as the

fourth Prime Minister in 1981. Malaysia's foreign policy stance began to take a much greater economic orientation than ever before, coupled with a strong and nationalistic defence of the rights, interests and aspirations of developing countries and the advocacy of south-south co-operation. Tun Dr. Mahathir's premiership saw the pursuit of numerous new initiatives such as: Antarctica as the common heritage of mankind; the look east policy (LEP); reverse investment; East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC); Group of 15 (G15) - ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Co-operation; Islamic Unity; and the championing of the cause of developing countries on major issues like environment, human rights, and democracy.⁹⁵

The evolution of the country's foreign policy under successive prime ministers reflects a pragmatic response to the geopolitical and economic changes of their times. To be continually relevant to the country's needs, foreign policy cannot remain static. But whilst change has become a general feature of Malaysian foreign policy, continuity has also been evident. Both the change and continuity mark a higher level of confidence and maturing of the country in the conduct of its international affairs. Indeed, in many ways Malaysia's leadership role has been recognised on several issues of deep interest to the developing world.

Malaysia's initiatives at various regional and international forums have put the country on the world map. Increased economic prosperity and political stability have in fact enabled Malaysia to carve its own niche in the international scene. Making its presence felt has allowed it to exercise some influence in setting the international agenda. Being less dependent on foreign aid and

⁹⁵ <http://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/evolution>. (accessed on 10 December 2013)

assistance, Malaysia has been able to speak up on issues that other developing countries feel constrained to voice for fear of retribution by the major, particularly western powers.

Malaysia's activism at the international front has of course attracted attention and reaction from various quarters. Malaysia in turn becomes the target for being 'too vocal'. But this is something that it needs to take in its own stride if Malaysia is to be proactive at the global level. As a small developing-country player in the international arena, Malaysia needs to firmly uphold the principles of the UN charter as a defence of last resort. Certain fundamental principles governing interstate relations would continue to guide Malaysia's relations with other countries. These refer to sovereign equality and mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes as well as mutual benefit in relations and peaceful co-existence. These principles have stood the test of time. Indeed, Malaysia's steadfast adherence to these principles, supported by a consistent foreign policy, has established for Malaysia certain credibility in the eyes of the international community.

Malaysia has repeatedly stressed the importance of adhering to the especially important principle of non-interference in internal affairs, particularly in the context of regional relations. The so-called 'constructive intervention' policy advocated by some, involving loud criticism, adversarial posturing and grand standing would only bring more harm than good to the promotion of neighbourly relations. Malaysia does make exceptions to the policy of non-interference in certain extreme situations. The bloody cruelty, genocide and atrocities perpetrated by the Serbs against the people of Kosovo struck its conscience, and made Malaysia support NATO's military action.

The peculiar situation in Kosovo calls for pragmatism on Malaysia's part in the interest of humanity whilst recognising the central role of the UN in resolving the problem.

Similarly, the adoption of the 'One China Policy', whilst pursuing close economic relations with Taiwan, bears no paradox but reflects Malaysia's pragmatism in the face of certain realities. And so are its relations with the west. There is no contradiction between Malaysia's justifiable criticisms of the west on certain issues and its continued acceptance of western countries as a market for its products and as a source for investment in Malaysia. Malaysia's clear foreign policy goals in respect of defence and security, development and trade, international co-operation and diplomacy determine the pattern of relations that have been established with its neighbours. As well as with other countries within the framework of ASEAN, ARF, APEC, ASEM, South-South Co-operation, the OIC, the Commonwealth, NAM the UN and other regional and international organisations.

Developing close bilateral relations with her neighbours remains a high priority in Malaysia's foreign policy.⁹⁶ A constructive approach had been taken to resolve outstanding problems including those related to overlapping claims and the determination of land and maritime boundaries. Every diplomatic effort is made to ensure that bilateral relations do not become adversely affected on account of such problems with all its neighbours. Agreeing to refer to the ICJ, the overlapping territorial claims that Malaysia has had with Indonesia and Singapore, indicates the extent to which it is prepared to go in achieving solutions to bilateral problems. The establishment of separate joint commissions between Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, the

⁹⁶ <http://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/bilateral>. (accessed on 10 December 2013)

Philippines, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam has also provided a useful framework to develop wide-ranging bilateral co-operation in all fields of mutual interest.

Special attention is given to Malaysia-Singapore relations. In this case, the potentials for mutually beneficial collaboration are immense. Emotions, anchored in the pages of history, however, have bedevilled relations between the two countries. There is a definite need for restraint from both sides. The conduct of bilateral relations should be rooted on a 'win-win formula' that would receive the support of the peoples of both countries. Indeed, Malaysia-Singapore relations should move out of its old mould and mature into what it ought to be; interdependent, proximate and mutually beneficial. This is absolutely vital as strained relations between Malaysia and Singapore would inevitably hinder the creation of a regional community, whilst avoiding a drain of resources could be put to effective use in their foreign policy agendas.

In resolving bilateral disputes between the two countries, we would argue that Malaysia is more inclined towards a diplomatic approach. This approach allows for peaceful negotiations and discussion among countries. Without giving diplomacy a chance, there will be a tendency for both countries to resort to old arguments over a range of outstanding issues. Through diplomacy, we believe, these countries could discuss matters amicably and to better appreciate one another's points of view.

Despite Dr Mahathir's strong attitude as well as his negative perceptions towards Singapore, his administration was concerned with problems in the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore but he believed in resolving them through negotiations. Therefore, Dr Mahathir's style

was not much different with the diplomatic approaches taken by his predecessors, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn. This action was evidenced in the issue of sea reclamation by Singapore in southeast of Tekong Island (Singapore), which unfortunately had created some negative impacts on Malaysia water. Singapore's action has resulted in the passage of vessels using the waters of Malaysia to the port of Tanjung Pelepas, which has become narrow and shallow to the extent that large ships had to switch to using the port of Singapore. Moreover, this sea reclamation also had an affected environmental impact on the Malaysia maritime border areas, and the destruction of marine life has affected the income of fishermen from Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir's approach to using series of talks to discuss this bilateral issues has become central for Malaysia in resolving disputes and problems that exist with neighbouring countries. On the other hand, in an unlikely event of a failure at resolving the disputes at bilateral level, Malaysia has the option of taking up the matter to international tribunal, such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, Germany.⁹⁷ In addition, Malaysia has also set up a monitoring body or group of independent experts mandated to carry out studies on the effects of the reclamation project towards Malaysia.⁹⁸

Like the Prime Ministers before him, Dr Mahathir also emphasized the need for compromise and understanding with Singapore based on the concept of 'prosper thy neighbour'⁹⁹. The priority of his administration was to resolve problems through negotiation instead of using violent methods, or other mean that could further heighten tensions and cause unnecessary misunderstandings between the two countries. This attitude was very different from when he was a member of

⁹⁷ Rusdi Omar, Mas Juliana Mukhtarudin & Mohamad Ainuddin Lee Abdullah. (2005). *Op.cit.*, p. 41.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁹⁹ Rusdi Omar. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p. 155.

UMNO under the administration of Tunku Abdul Rahman, in which he was so critical with Tunku's style in managing Singapore. Dr Mahathir was considered as a Malay ultra nationalist whose views were seen as trying to protect the interests of the Malays more than those of other races, especially the Malaysian Chinese.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia is not a country inclined towards using the traditional approach for resolving crisis and war between neighbours, but emphasizing a proper use of international law and negotiation mechanism instead, such as through the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Dr Mahathir realizes that violence method do not resolve problem, but instead creates more problems, and which, in turn, brings losses to both sides. Thus, in resolving some issues Dr Mahathir decided to make decision based on 'win-win' situation. As an example, there are still issues such as Pulau Batu Putih, an island off the coast of the State of Johor claimed by both Malaysia and Singapore, in which Dr Mahathir could not help resolve during his premiership. But this did not mean that the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore had deteriorated over this claim, rather it afforded both countries to refer this matter to the ICJ for its opinion. Pending the ICJ decision, Dr Mahathir also encouraged investors from Singapore to continue to invest in Malaysia, together cooperate in security matters whilst at the same time to respect the sovereignty of both countries.

This approach helps explain Mahathir's position that he did not want Malaysia and Singapore to remain hostile to each other. In an attempt to maintain good relations with Singapore, Dr Mahathir had proposed a review of the Water Agreement, in which he said:

“According to the water agreements, Malaysia has the right to review the price of water after 25 years. It not stated that Malaysia has lost the right to review if it failed to do in 1986 and 1987 respectively, exactly after 25 years. Twenty-five years after 1961 and 1962 respectively means any time after 1986 and 1987. This mean, that although the revisions need to be done after 25 years, this does not mean the review must take place immediately on these periods because it is not stated in the agreement... They (Singaporean) are good tourists and have contributed to the economy. Please tell your friends in Singapore that we do not have any problems with them.”¹⁰⁰

Besides the water agreement, there were other issues to be resolved and these included the land at Tanjung Pagar on which the Malaysia Railway and the Custom, Immigration and Quarantine Centre (CIQ) were located; the Central Provident Fund (CPF) for the Malaysian workers; and use of Malaysia airspace by Singapore Air Force (SAF). Malaysian foreign minister, Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar on May 5th 2003 in explaining Malaysia's commitment to finding a solution that brings benefits to both sides said:

“This problem should not be prolonged. We should resolve it for establishing a long-time relationship. We cannot be plagued with the outstanding problems. Malaysia is ready to resolve the problems concerned, but require compromise from the Singapore. Malaysia strives to reduce the differences with Singapore so that the principle of win-win situation between the two parties can be established”¹⁰¹

However, the understanding that had been fostered by the two leaders for taking into accounts the common perception of these two countries being interdependent. However, the result of

¹⁰⁰ *Utusan Malaysia*. (21 July 2003).

¹⁰¹ *Utusan Malaysia*. (6 May 2003).

relationships formed it cannot escape the problems that will affect the bilateral relationship in some extent. Hence, efficiency in the leadership process is necessary to resolve issues and problems that arise between the relationships so that situation can be controlled.

In the CIQ problem, discussion after discussions had been held between Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁰² The relocation of the CIQ centre from Malaysia to Singapore was actually delayed until a dispute between the two countries was resolved on a number of provisions that contained in the agreed matters document (POA) Malaysia- Singapore.¹⁰³ In the previous discussion, POA is an agreement regarding the terms of the development of railway land by Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) in the republic. When the controversy about the POA peaked in June 1997, the then Deputy General Secretary of Malaysian Foreign Ministry, Datuk Ghazali Sheikh Abdul Khalid wrote a letter to his Singapore counterpart, saying that “Malaysia has decided to maintain the CIQ in Tanjung Pagar railway station and not to move it to the Woodlands.”¹⁰⁴

Both countries engaged in negotiation in an attempt to resolve the problem. These were held in Manila on 28 July 1998, however this issue failed to be resolved.¹⁰⁵ The strong stand taken by Malaysia, led by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad, involved the Custom Centre, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) of Malaysia has fixed to maintain its CIQ in Tanjung Pagar, and indicated that it would never allow its move to Woodlands, in Singapore.¹⁰⁶ Even though Singapore shifted its CIQ to Woodlands from 1st August 1998, on 16th October 2003

¹⁰² N. Ganesan. (1998). *Op.cit.*, pp. 21-36.

¹⁰³ K.S. Nathan. (2010). *Op.cit.*, pp. 267-269.

¹⁰⁴ Asiaweek. (14 August 1998). pp. 28-30.

¹⁰⁵ *Utusan Malaysia*. (14 September 1998).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,

Singapore suggested that Malaysia bring this issue to international level adjudication for a solution. Foreign Minister of Singapore stated that:

“Singapore government took the view that this issue can be resolved in effectively ways through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or Permanent Court of Arbitration.”¹⁰⁷

However, the flaw in Malaysia's preference in adopting the diplomatic approach in this was that, in the basis of negotiations - as opposed to the legal approach, is too broad and not clearly defined. This in itself makes discussions difficult. For example, Malaysia could have viewed the decision by Singapore to invite the Israeli president to Singapore in 1986, as being ‘insensitive’ towards its neighbours.¹⁰⁸ To the Singaporean, however, this was a non-issue, as the whole event took place in Singapore, and did not impinge on the sovereignty of its neighbours. So what constitute acts that are deemed to be ‘insensitive’ to the neighbours? The two countries appear to have no common understanding on the issue. This example clearly illustrates the differences in political and cultural values and perceptions that make discussions or negotiations based on ‘diplomatic approach’ alone between the two countries difficult.

But recently, Malaysia also adopted the legalistic approach in resolving some other outstanding issues with Singapore. For example, Malaysia and Singapore allowed ICJ to resolve their claim over Pulau Batu Putih (Pedra Branca). This would thereby avoid conflict, leading to peace and prosperity for both countries.

¹⁰⁷ *Utusan Malaysia*. (17 October 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Michael Leifer. (1998). *The Pacific Review*. pp. 341-352.

Although many issues were discussed and solved by negotiation, there are certain issues that were delayed for so long and could not resolve during Dr Mahathir administration period. Besides that, there are several issues that are not settled through direct negotiations result both parties finally agreed to use arbitrator in resolving the problem. Among the outstanding issues was that of the Malaysian workers' provident fund (CPF) in Singapore. In this, Singapore imposed different conditions of workers from the peninsula, preventing the latter from withdrawing their contributions until they became fifty-five years old. Obviously, they have been discriminated against, while the people of Sabah and Sarawak Malaysia were allowed to continue to withdraw their money from the funds. Contributions Malaysians in this scheme were estimated to bring S\$ 1billion economic benefit to Singapore.¹⁰⁹ This was because Singapore government are worried if the amount been discharged to Malaysia, then Singapore will be lack of working capital which they depends on the outcome of the employee's contribution.¹¹⁰ The Malaysian government wanted its Singapore government to be fair and equitable, and to adopt similar regulation made by Employees Provident Fund (EPF) in Malaysia.

The regulation enforced by Singapore is forced to be restudying so that it ensures the concept of 'prosper thy neighbour' could be applied to ensure the prosperity of both neighbouring country. In any case, recommendations made by the Malaysia government still were not recognized by Singapore that still stand firm on their standpoint by not losing that condition. If seen in this case there is interest on the part of their importance of Singapore denying that although many appeal made by the government of Malaysia for the peoples of Malaysia.¹¹¹ The regulation made by Malaysia were to no avail, as the people from Singapore working in Malaysia did not have

¹⁰⁹ Lee Boon Hiok. (June 1982). "Constraints on Singapore's Foreign Policy". *Asian Survey*. 22(6): 524-535.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹¹ *Utusan Malaysia*. (6 May 2003).

savings in Malaysia, nor did they contribute to the Malaysia EPF. However, this issue being delayed in the relationship of Malaysia-Singapore during Dr Mahathir administration period since it involves the financial affairs issue of both countries. Hence both countries are trying to resolve this problem.¹¹²

The second issue of note was the use of Malaysia air space for the training of RSAF pilots and crews. After various events occurred that threaten the safety of many people of Malaysia, this country has taken action to close the military airspace to the RSAF which Malaysia has issued a notice to Singapore that began 18 September 1998 all RSAF aircraft must obtain prior permission before entering the air space, besides that Malaysia had a rights to withdraw facilities given flight, and after that Singapore is no longer allowed to use Malaysian airspace.¹¹³

Singapore intrusion action was considered as a violation of the agreement and were not respect to the national boundaries and Malaysia sovereignty. However, as all know that Malaysia was known as a country that had always yielded to the neighbouring countries. Malaysia had offered a transit route for the RSAF to via and use of Johor airspace to the South China Sea Area. This issue was still in efforts of settlement between the two countries.¹¹⁴

Problems that arise are hovering in terms of needs and demands for the internal respective of both countries. Singapore has asked Malaysia to allow the utilization of these facilities but the Malaysian government would only offer two from the five facilities, such as the Search and

¹¹² *Utusan Malaysia*. (15 August 2005).

¹¹³ *Utusan Malaysia*. (4 July 2007).

¹¹⁴ *Utusan Malaysia*. (15 August 2005).

Rescue and Northern Transit Corridors. However these two offers should be agreed by Malaysia and Singapore government.

Malaysian Search and Rescue facilities offered to Singapore were based on a reciprocity principle, which consistent to international practice. Both countries decided to resolve their problems through diplomatic channels.¹¹⁵ Both countries had declared their commitment to resolve bilateral discussions in a number of issues plaguing the two countries establish diplomatic relations. On 15th August, 2005 the Senior Minister Singapore, Goh Chok Tong stated that:

“Our relationship with our neighbours is good. Prime Minister (Hsien Loong) is very close with Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi. Both neighbouring country are now have cooperation in several aspects...Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) and I are quietly trying to resolve the two-way outstanding issues between both countries.”¹¹⁶

Besides that, the facility of Northern Transit Corridors is just a transit to South Sea Area. However, Singapore air force aircraft are not allowed to roam at all in the Malaysia air space. Problems of these demands have caused this issue cannot be resolved quickly. This is because of this issue raises in Malaysia, caused the public enforce pressure to cancel the proposed construction is seen as Singapore claims not to reflect a win-win situation.¹¹⁷ As a result, this issue still not resolved yet.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁶ *Utusan Malaysia*. (15 August 2005).

¹¹⁷ *Utusan Malaysia*. (28 January 2006).

Another issue to emerge was that regarding a Crooked Bridge (*Jambatan Indah atau Bengkok*). Singapore took a stand to keep the Tambak Johor, even though Malaysia decided to build *Jambatan Indah* in Malaysia area. However, this project was stopped during Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration, which drew Dr Mahathir Mohamad's anger. Nevertheless, recently, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, suggested that a third bridge be built that would connect the Eastern part of Johor and Changi area in Singapore to resolve crowd problem in Tambak Johor.¹¹⁸

Despite the ability of both parties to resolve outstanding issues directly, there were some issues involving sovereignty and territorial administration that failed to be resolved during Dr Mahathir's period in office. The two difficult issues that could not be resolved by both parties were the issue of Singapore's Reclamation Land that threatened Johor fishermen's income and overlapping claims to Pedra Branca Island.

The reclamation issue was another issue which had a great negative impact on the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. This was issue began when Singapore initiated reclamation work at the south-east of *Pulau Tekong*, Singapore. This activity apparently will bring a few negative impacts towards Malaysia. Due to these activities, the maritime routes became shallower and narrower, which caused merchant ships which use Malaysian water to *Tanjung Pelepas* Port might shift to the republic. Besides that, it also had a negative impact on fishermen in Johor, ruining their otherwise good catches. Strong waves generated by the development caused the sea banks to become narrow, and movement of sand in the sea occurred.

¹¹⁸ *Utusan Malaysia*. (9 Jun 2009).

Obviously, the sea reclamation issue had a number of negative impacts on Malaysia, beside affecting the income of fishermen who lived in, and worked from, Johor. Illegal dumping practiced by Singaporeans polluted the surrounding of the Johor water. Even more serious, however, was the discharge of toxic waste by Singaporean factories near the areas reclamation. This pollution threatened to cause the extinction of fish species off that island, and left long-term effects on the socio-economy sphere for the people working as fishermen.

The results of the reclamation work conducted were shown through the research carried out by Marine Police Malaysia between *Pulau Tekong and Pulau Ubin*. This showed that a negative impact was to be seen not only on the Malaysian government, but it was also bad to the lives of local people, who had relied on *Sungai Johor* and *Sungai Lebam* as sources of income. Besides fishing activities, the river was also used for water transportation. This also gives a great impact towards the economy of Malaysia where the fishing activities were stopped and merchant ships were no longer using the sea route.

Whatever decision made by Singapore is their right and sovereign to develop their sea area, they were accused of not thinking about the implication that going to cause by the implementation of their project towards neighbouring countries. Hence, Singapore government was forced to set up a space where they need to told Malaysia what was their finding according to their environment assessment if they did not have anything to hide behind.

Even though Malaysian government sent objection letter officially to Singapore to stop all activities that brought the negative impact, Singapore emphasized that the activity was their

country right and it did not affect the border of the two countries, moreover this activities was meant to widen their country, so that they will be able to compete with Malaysia. Malaysia did try in various ways to stop Singapore from their activities by sending few official letters instantly.¹¹⁹

Malaysia also conducted a series of discussions with Singapore regarding the reclamation problem. However, these discussions did not succeed, and this caused both parties to recognise that the best solutions was to bring this matter to the higher level, referring to a third party , the international arbitrator in the form of the United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Following this action, taken in 1982, Malaysia brought this issue to International Tribunal for the Law of The Sea (ITCLOS) in Hamburg, Germany. Besides that, Malaysia also set up a body of surveyors to conduct research into the effects from the reclamation project.

The most interesting part is where ITLOS decided that both countries continue to discuss the matter of the impact on the environment that resulted from the reclamation work undertaken by Singapore. Through their discussions, two parties finally agreed to conduct research more deeply regarding the impact to the environment, whilst Singapore agreed to pay a compensation to fishermen from Johor which affected by the reclamation project.

The impasse in the broader discussions had brought the two countries to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve the problem of requisition of *Pulau Batu Putih*. Singapore and Malaysia decided to take their case to international law to resolve.¹²⁰ The court was located in

¹¹⁹ *Utusan Malaysia*. (2 February 2007).

¹²⁰ *Utusan Malaysia*. (24 May 2008).

The Hague, Netherland. If the court verdict was that it belonged to the Singapore, the republic could continue to develop the island. Alternatively, if the ruling went against Singapore, the latter would have had to retreat from the island. Malaysia and Singapore signed an agreement that brought this issue to ICJ on 6th and 9th February 2003 in Putrajaya (Malaysia) and adhere to decision of the ICJ. With that agreement, decision regarding sovereignty of *Pulau Batu Putih* and two more islands nearby, Middle Rock and South Ledge will be decided by ICJ too.

Pulau Batu Putih issue finally resolved through verdict by ICJ which hand over the island to Singapore on 23th May 2008. Judiciary method of ICJ was the best way to resolve conflicts between Singapore and Malaysia, to avoid violence conflicts between Malaysia and Singapore.¹²¹ Even though the final decision favoured on Singapore side, but Malaysia got a so call consolation, whereby ICJ pronounced that Malaysia had the sovereignty over South Ledge next to *Pulau Batu Putih*.

Undeniably that the nature, style and manner of Dr Mahathir's leadership has impressed the way Malaysia deal with Singapore in resolving the outstanding issues since the two countries separated in 1965. But in order to be competing politically and economically with Singapore, Malaysia's foreign policy approach under Dr Mahathir is not much different compared with the past. His administration emphasises on negotiation process and meeting in order to create a harmonious atmosphere between Malaysia and Singapore. However, under Dr Mahathir's administration, a new approach by using arbitration has been used in resolving difficult issues which consists of national sovereignty and territory. Based on this trend, both countries might use the same type of approach if the two way communication or meeting fails in the future.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

On Singapore's side, it would prefer to adopt the legalistic approach when dealing with Malaysia. It wanted to discuss and settle the outstanding issues with Malaysia through methods based on international law, where the governing principles are more clearly defined and the issues can be dealt with devoid of emotional influence. Singapore's legalistic approach, however, is more practical, as the rules of international law are generally well defined and interpreted. The conclusion of the Pedra Branca case, in which the judgement handed down by the ICJ, ended up in Singapore's favour. This is a good example of how this approach benefited Singapore.

In an attempt to resolve this territorial dispute, Singapore stressed that the legalistic approach based on international law is the best approach to conclude the lingering issue. On the other hand, Malaysia also committed to resolve this issue through this approach, after the non-legalistic approach failed to resolve the issue. Apart from not wanting to spark off of a possible confrontation, Mahathir's stern warning was also an explicit manifestation of Malaysia's commitment to bind itself to adhering to international law in resolving the sovereignty dispute.¹²²

After several years of intermittent negotiations, a major breakthrough was achieved in early 2003 when Singapore and Malaysia successfully worked out the legal details that enabled this dispute to be referred to the ICJ. Both states signed the Special Agreement in Putrajaya to formalize the referral of the issue to the ICJ on 6 February 2003. More significantly, as part of the agreement, both states committed in advance to accept judgment of the court as final and binding upon them. The special agreement was necessary because neither Malaysia nor Singapore accepts the

¹²² Gosh, N. (18 July 1992). "Mahathir-Leave Emotion out of Malay-Singapore Issue". *Straits Times*.

jurisdiction of the ICJ as compulsory.¹²³ During the ICJ submissions in November 2007, Singapore accused Malaysia of making baseless claims arising from incomplete records, whereas Malaysia has expressed concern over the negative impact on the stability of Malaysia-Indonesia relations, as well as on environmental and navigational security in the event the island republic gains legal sovereignty.¹²⁴

After receiving final submissions by both sides, the ICJ delivered its judgement without appeal on 23 May 2008. Singapore was pleased with the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which awarded Singapore sovereignty over Pedra Branca, which was the key territory in the dispute. The judgment was not totally in Singapore's favour, as the Court awarded Middle Rocks to Malaysia. The Court also decided that South Ledge belongs to the country in whose territorial waters it was located.

This judgment brought to a closure a long-standing territorial dispute between Malaysia and Singapore. Both countries had undertaken to respect and abide by the findings regardless of which way the ICJ decided. By resolving this dispute through third party adjudication, both countries have demonstrated their respect for international law and their commitment to settling disputes in an amicable manner. This case exemplifies the usefulness of a third party dispute settlement mechanism, and can be a model for resolving other bilateral disputes.¹²⁵

¹²³ Hong, C. (6 February 2003). "Pulau Batu Puteh Dispute for ICJ Reference Soon". *New Straits Times*.

¹²⁴ *New Straits Times*. (20 November 2007). "Malaysia's Claim Baseless, Singapore DPM Tells Court".

¹²⁵ *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore*. (23 May 2008). MFA Press Statement: International Court of Justice Awards Sovereignty of Pedra Branca to Singapore. <http://www.mfa.gov.sg/> (Accessed on 15 December 2011).

3.4. Conclusion

In discussions on matters relating to resolving bilateral disputes between the two countries, there exists a marked difference in the manner both sides see how the problems ought to be resolved. Malaysia appears to be seeing the issues from the diplomatic perspective whilst Singapore, perhaps influenced by their pragmatic outlook is more inclined to be more legalistic in dealing with similar issues.

Despite the rather strained relations, both Malaysia and Singapore were acutely aware of the mutual importance of each other and continually look for ways and means to improve relations between the two countries. The differences of opinions are likely to continue for as long as both countries continue to adopt differing approaches in dealing with bilateral issues. In this respect, it might be a good idea for Malaysia to adopt the legalistic approach taken by Singapore, where the governing principles were more clearly defined and the issues can be dealt with devoid of emotional influence.

It also could be argued that Malaysia should be more willing to compromise in its dealing with Singapore regarding the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues. It should however be implemented based on the principles that would lead to a 'win-win situation' and adhering to the rules of international law. Singapore's well-being was important to Malaysia, as Singapore was one of its largest trading partners. The establishment of good relations with Singapore was therefore economically vital to Malaysia. The 'win-win situation' could only be achieved if both parties were willing to accept the fact that the key to solving the outstanding bilateral issues was

their willingness to compromise. Malaysia would argue that this was something that has been commonly practiced by Malaysia and therefore an act that was not difficult to get into. Singapore, on the other hand, was begun to realize its economic and social vulnerability. It was aware of the importance of regional goodwill and cooperation in combating issues such as the recent outbreak of SARS. The realisation by both nations that compromise was the key to better relations could eventually lead to its adoption and therefore better relations.

To date, numerous bilateral issues have not been resolved by the two countries. If this was to be seen as an indicator of the state of relations between the two countries, then much was to be desired. However, seen from the broader overall perspective of the bilateral relations, one would agree that the states of relations were still good, though there was plenty of room for improvement. Unlike the period immediately after the separation, the leaders of both countries no longer carry the political baggage that makes it difficult for outstanding bilateral issues to be dealt with in an unemotional manner. The leaders of both countries were known to have good personal relations between them. This was a very positive factor and should be further strengthened to facilitate a better state of official relations. Similar efforts must also be made to ensure that the same state of relations exists between the civil servants of both countries. Both countries were acutely aware of this and realise that economically, socially and politically both countries were mutually dependant of each other.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE LEADERSHIP STYLES OF MAHATHIR AND LEE KUAN YEW

4.1. Introduction

Two important factors need to be discussed in this chapter. The first is the issue of political cultures, and the other is leadership, or more to the point: the idiosyncratic styles exhibited by Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew. Political cultures cannot be underestimated in explaining the relations of Malaysia and Singapore. It gives the context for decision made by leaders of these two countries. The political cultures make it possible for the dominant roles of leaders in making foreign policy. In Malaysia and Singapore, the political cultures make it possible for ruling elites to make decision. It is quite clear, therefore, that Malaysia's foreign policy as well as that of Singapore can best be understood in terms of decisions made by the ruling elite, and nowhere could the impact be seen more visibly than in the context of Malaysia-Singapore relations. This chapter is divided into four parts. After this introduction, in the second part, it discusses on the factors that influence the formation of Malaysia and Singapore's political cultures which is divided into periods before separation, after separation and current situation. The third part looks at the roles of Mahathir and Lee in the relations of both countries and the final part is the conclusion.

4.2. The formation of Malaysia and Singapore's Political Cultures

The colonial legacy, the 'founding' of the tiny entrepôt port of Singapore by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and its settlement by industrious Chinese immigrants, ensured that Singapore

and Malaysia would have an inherently symbiotic relationship, and, instead, that they would be antagonistic on account of the ethnic discrepancy.¹²⁶ Aside from ‘locational segregation’ of rival ethnic groups (Chinese-dominated Singapore and Malay-majority of the Malay Peninsula), the legacy of British colonization also contributed to the evolution of distinctive political identities in the two contiguous regions- a conservative communal based political milieu in the Malay Peninsula and a progressive multiethnic political culture in Singapore. In addition, the colonization of the Malay mainland by British Singapore engendered longstanding antipathy between the former (the ‘exploited’ agrarian hinterland) and the latter (the rapacious mercantile island-state).¹²⁷ For instance, the variance of points of view between *Bumiputra* Malaysia and ‘immigrant’ Singapore were clearly illustrated by the fact that after the attainment of independence, the statue of Thomas Stamford Raffles in Singapore was not destroyed; indeed a replica was made and erected on the place where he landed.¹²⁸ The simmering tensions between two principle ethnic communities in British Malaya erupted into open conflict during the Japanese Occupation and the ensuing Malayan Communist Party insurgency. Even so, the British sponsored the creation of the Malaysian Federation on 16 September 1963 to pre-empt a possible communist takeover of the self-governing colony of Singapore.

¹²⁶ Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *Op.cit.*, pp. 288-291.

¹²⁷ Philippe Regnier. (1991). *Singapore: A City-State in South-East Asia*. London: Hurst and Company. p. 39 & pp. 191-200; See also C.M. Turnbull. (1999). ‘Regionalism and Nationalism’, in Nicholas Tarling (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume Two, Part Two: From World War II to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 286.

¹²⁸ Alex Josey. (1980). *Singapore: Its Past, Present and Future*. Singapore: Eastern University Press. p. 27.

4.2.1. Political Cultures during the Malaysian Federation

The political culture during the period Singapore was in Malaysia revolved around the issue of the Malay-Chinese political rivalry and the differences of view with the concepts of Malaysian Malaysia/Bumiputraisim. Between 1963 and 1965, Singapore joined Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak as part of the Federation of Malaysia, with Lee Kuan Yew of the People's Action Party (PAP) at the Head of the Singaporean government. During the years of merger, racial tensions had grown within Singapore, culminating in numerous riots and curfews, notably the notorious clash that took place on Prophet Mohammed's birthday (*Maulidur Rasul*), between the Malay and Chinese races. The federal government of Malaysia, dominated by the United Malays National Organization, feared that as long as Singapore remained in the Federation, the bumiputra policy of positive racial discrimination to the Malays would be undermined, and therefore not in the interest of their pro-Malay agenda. One of the major causes of this fear was the fact that the PAP continued to repeatedly call for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' which means the fair and equal treatment of all races in Malaysia, by serving Malaysian *citizens*, rather than the Malay *race*. Another contributing factor was the fear that the economic dominance of Singapore's port would inevitably shift political power away from Kuala Lumpur should Singapore remain in the federation.

The trouble had begun within a few weeks of the merger, when Tunku Abdul Rahman's ruling Alliance Party (UMNO, MCA and MIC) joined forces with a number of small parties in Singapore to form a new grouping, the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA), to oppose the PAP in the Singapore elections in September 1963. The Tunku's reason, presumably, was a very real

fear that a PAP landslide might later encourage Malayan Chinese voters on the mainland to jump onto the bandwagon, enabling PAP to supplant the MCA as the Chinese party in the Alliance of the Federation.

The SPA failed to win a single seat in the 1963 elections, but its intervention had precisely the effect it aimed to avert. Six months later Lee Kuan Yew decided, contrary to his earlier intentions, to field PAP candidates in constituencies in the mainland states in their elections on 25 April 1964. He did indeed claim to be the best representative for Chinese voters in the Alliance; he may also have feared that disillusioned MCA voters might defect to the left wing Socialist Front, which was widely regarded as a Communist front, so he hoped that they might instead defect to the PAP. In the event only one constituency fell to a PAP candidate, Devan Nair, an Indian trade union leader who took the seat from a Chinese independent, not from the MCA. Nevertheless, the Alliance was alarmed at the PAP's intervention, interpreting it as a clear indication that Lee Kuan Yew saw the supplanting of the MCA in the Alliance as a route to the Premiership of Malaysia (the whole of Malaysia).¹²⁹

A few weeks later, in July 1964, serious communal rioting broke out in Singapore, largely arising from Lee Kuan Yew's refusal to grant Malays in Singapore the same privileged status as they enjoyed in the mainland states. These riots were the only serious communal riots to have occurred in Singapore since the Hertogh riots in 1950 and caused Lee Kuan Yew and the Tunku to consult to find ways of reducing racial tensions.

¹²⁹ See Willian, Shaw. (1976). *Tun Razak: His Life and Times*. Kuala Lumpur: Longman. pp. 164-9; and C.M. Turnbull. (1977). *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. p. 288.

Chinese resentment of discrimination in favour of Malays, however, remained and in May 1965 Lee Kuan Yew gathered four opposition parties in Malaya and Sarawak to join the PAP in the Malayan Solidarity Convention standing for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' instead of a 'Malay Malaysia'. Again this alarmed the Alliance, and especially the more militant Malays in UMNO (the 'ultra') who saw this as another manifestation of Lee's ambition to become Premier, this time by attracting not only the Chinese communities but the poor and discontented of every race to follow his leadership. Their anxiety was increased by the growing international prestige which Lee Kuan Yew was acquiring as a statesman on the international scene.¹³⁰

The state and federal governments also had disagreement on the economic front. Despite earlier agreement to establish a common market, Singapore continued to face restrictions when trading with the rest of Malaysia. In retaliation, Singapore did not extend to Sabah and Sarawak the full extent of the loans agreed to for economic development of the two eastern states. The situation escalated to such an intensity that talks soon broke down and abusive speeches and writings became rife on both sides. UMNO extremists called for the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew.

On 7 August 1965, Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman, seeing no alternative in his attempts to avoid further bloodshed, advised the Parliament of Malaysia that it should vote to expel Singapore from Malaysia. Despite last ditch attempts by PAP leaders, including Lee Kuan Yew, to keep Singapore as a state in the union, the Parliament on August 9, 1965 voted 126-0 in favour of the expulsion of Singapore, with members of Parliament from Singapore not being

¹³⁰ Shaw. *Op.cit.*, p. 176; and Turnbull. *Op.cit.*, p. 292.

present. On that day, a tearful Lee Kuan Yew announced that Singapore was a sovereign, independent nation and assumed the role of prime minister of the new nation. His speech included this quote: "For me, it is a moment of anguish. All my life, my whole adult life, I have believed in merger and unity of the two territories." Hence, Singapore became the only country in the history of the modern world to gain independence against its own will.¹³¹

4.2.2. Political Cultures after Separation

The relations between Malaysia and Singapore during the period after the separation continued to be influenced by this political culture, with Singapore seen as a Chinese dominated nation and Malaysia as a Malay dominated nation. The contention between the two countries continued to be along ethnic lines. Malay-Chinese hostility still existed in the mindset of both Malaysian and Singaporean peoples, especially the old generation leaders. Most of them still remembered the 'love-hate' relations while they were together as one state. It meant that the legacy of the past, such as the traumatic experience of merger and separation, still continued to affect bilateral relations during the period after separation. It also helps us to understand why their post-separation relations are constantly in a state of flux and bilateral differences tend to become highly emotive.¹³²

Nonetheless, both states compete intensely in the realms of economics, defence, foreign relations, sovereignty and territoriality. The competition is rooted in historical realities of ethnicity and religious composition of their societies, which have become the basis of antithetical

¹³¹ "Road to Independence", *AsiaOne*. (Accessed on 28 June 2006).

¹³² K. S. Nathan. (2010). *Op.cit.*, p. 257.

national ideologies. Malaysia has a Malay-Muslim majority, which functions within a communal political culture whose policies openly and ascriptively favour the Malays over the Chinese in the name of social justice. On the other hand, the Chinese-majority Singapore, having being expelled from Malaysia for failing to reconcile with a model of nation building which relied on ‘special positions and rights’ for the Malays, choose the antithesis of the Malaysian model, multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, as its prescription of nation building. Although Chinese dominance was a way of life, there was no official policy equivalent of the Malaysian NEP.

Other foundational contradictions exist, whereas Malaysia’s political parties were communal or religious, Singapore’s were multiracial, even though 75 per cent of the population was Chinese. While Malaysia’s state ideology is based upon ascriptive, redistributive and preferential policies, Singapore projects itself as practising the exact reverse and based on its ideology on meritocracy and universalism. Whereas Islam was the official religion and of particular relevance and salience in Malaysian political culture, Singapore had arduously strived for secularism and even prosecuted extreme religious groups.¹³³ So contrasting and deeply rooted in historical antagonism were the national ideologies of both nations that they alone were regarded as sources of conflict, as articulated candidly by Singapore’s foreign minister in 1990:

“The prime reason for conflict in Southeast Asia was never superpower intervention but local rivalries that had their root causes in historical animosities, racial and religious divisions or competition for influence and resources.”¹³⁴

¹³³ See N. Ganesan in “Boundary Markers in Malaysia-Singapore Relations”, Paper presented at the 6th *Malaysia-Singapore Forum* at Kuala Lumpur in December 1996. p. 9.

¹³⁴ Michael, Richardson. (September 1990). “Breaking Down the Asian Barriers”. *Asia Pacific Defense Reporter*. p. 24.

4.2.3. Current Political Cultures

The current situation is still influenced by this political culture with the ethnic issues always raised by their leaders. For instance, Singaporean displeasure over the political marginalisation of Malaysia's Chinese minority, and resentment in Malaysia over the economic marginalisation of Singapore's Malay minority. The politicisation of 'historical legacy' of both countries by politicians, journalists and others has worsened the rift between Malaysia and Singapore in the most recent times. For instance, Lee Kuan Yew's remarks on Chinese marginalisation in Malaysia, re-merger with Malaysia and the state of the city of Johor Bahru as 'notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jacking' could cause the Malaysian people to be dissatisfied with their government. Many Malaysian politicians criticised and demanded Lee Kuan Yew retract, apologise and explain his 'baseless statement'. They also asked Lee Kuan Yew not to get involved in Malaysia's internal affairs. Finally, Lee Kuan Yew apologized to the Malaysian Prime Minister for upsetting relations between the two countries with these remarks.

On the contrary, on numerous occasions Malaysian leaders, including Mahathir and many others, have publicly warned Malaysian Malays that if they ever lose power they risk the same fate as Malays in Singapore, who they allege are marginalised and discriminated against. For example, Mahathir's comment that Malays in Singapore are not given the opportunity to hold high posts in government bodies like the armed forces and the wide per capita income disparity between the Chinese and Malays. These comments had caused displeasure among the Singaporean people.

The remarks by both leaders regarding these sensitive issues would happen every few years in the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore, as long as some basic contradictions in the relationship are not resolved. They tried to portray each other with a negative light, whether it referred to the leaders or to the political system of both countries. I argue that both leaders must realise they are now two separate and sovereign countries and implement two distinct political cultures so that they must not to interfere in each other internal affairs. If not, they will create an uncomfortable situation amongst their people.

4.3. Political Cultures and Leadership Style of Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew

The above political cultures have become sources and context for political behaviour of elites in these two states. In the following part, the thesis explains more specifically the role and influence of Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew in relations of both countries. Their roles, values and personality traits were dominant and very significant. Elite values and personality traits are believed to play an important role because these categories help to explain the leader's behaviour, and hence they are able to make predictions. Predictions are possible although it might not be one hundred per cent accurate because the traits possessed by the leaders normally will influence his or her response to international events. It has also proven that these personality traits could operate as a main determinant of foreign policy decision-making. Therefore, in the context of Malaysia-Singapore relations, the leadership styles of Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew have played an important part when dealing with the bilateral issues between both countries.

4.3.1. Mahathir's Idiosyncratic Influence in Dealing with Singapore

A Malaysian scholar, Johan Saravanamuttu said in his book, *The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Foreign Policy, 1957-1977*, when he listing some factors influencing Malaysia's formulation of foreign policy, he uses "idiosyncratic" to refer to the influence of individual actors.¹³⁵ Milne & Mauzy in their book, *Malaysian Politics under Mahathir*, discussed on Mahathir's personal characteristics, and they quoted that:

"His beliefs and actions are unusual, constituting a pattern that has been fascinating ever since. He has a sharp mind rather than an intellectual or academic mind. He is happiest when dealing with the world of objects, constructions, and gadgets. He is captivated by the way things work. His interest is greater if they are huge or fast, or both. He is the best in the Malaysian history of leadership."¹³⁶

The role of the idiosyncrasies of the primary personality of Mahathir Mohamad is played an important feature in the making and shaping of Malaysian foreign policy (MFP) toward Singapore. The principal proposition is that Mahathir's personality, political ideology (in his brand of nationalism) and leadership style had a profound impact on the shape, direction and rhetoric of the nation's foreign policy during his two decades rule. Mahathir's idiosyncrasies are constructed through the weaving together of three major aspects of his individual traits, political ideology and political leadership style.

¹³⁵ Saravanamuttu, J. (1983). *The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Foreign Policy, 1957-1977*. Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia. p. 10.

¹³⁶ Milne, R.S. & Mauzy, D.K. (1999). *Malaysian Politics under Mahathir*. London: Routledge. p. 159-163.

i) Individual Traits

Individual traits that most distinguish Mahathir from predecessors are his plebeian background, non-political upbringing and local education as opposed to his predecessors who were linked, directly or through marriage to the royal family, had political role models to emulate within their families and were educated in foreign schools and universities. Other traits which further distinguish him from the other premiers are his mixed ethnic roots, traditional family life, and medical training as opposed to the legal background of all three former premiers.¹³⁷

Mahathir, born on 20 December 1925 in one of Malaysia's poorer states, Kedah, was the youngest of nine children in the family of Mohamed Iskandar, a self-made disciplinarian school headmaster. His father was the first teacher and then the first headmaster of Sultan Abdul Samad (now renamed Sultan Abdul Hamid) a school in Alor Setar, Kedah. Forty years old when Mahathir was born, Iskandar was said to have maintained within his home disciplined and order fit for the supervision of school pupils.¹³⁸ Mahathir attended this school on his secondary level of education. Mohamed Iskandar maintained with his home discipline. His children including Mahathir were required to attend a secular English medium school which where the students could be fined, caned or placed into detention class if they spoke any language other than English. Besides English, his father was very particular with Islamic education. It required Mahathir to take religious lessons from a professional home instructor hired for his strict spiritual reputation attend homework circles and take additional lessons outside of school curriculum

¹³⁷ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era 1981-2003: Dilemmas of Development*. Singapore: National University of Singapore (NUS) Press. p. 20.

¹³⁸ Victor, Morais. (1982). *Mahathir: A Profile in Courage*. Petaling Jaya: Eastern Universities Press. p. 1.

under Iskandar's supervision.¹³⁹ As in Victor Morais' book, Mahathir's quoted "I grew up in a very disciplined home. My father ran it like a classroom. The sound of his cough as he approached the house was enough to send us boys flying back to our books".¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, Mahathir has no political mentorship at home and only has local education background. It is contrast with the former leaders before him. Tunku was a member of the Kedah royal household and graduate from Cambridge University in England. Hussein Onn was the son of Onn Jaafar who was the founder of UMNO, and Razak's father was an UMNO activist. He joined Medical College in Singapore with seven other Malay students. From the seven students, only four of them graduated, and among four of them are his wife and himself. And his wife, Siti Hasmah admitted that she could not have done so without Mahathir's Iskandar-style which is tough yet extensive tutoring.¹⁴¹

During his premiership, Mahathir was a controversial figure. It started with his first major foreign policy crisis which connected to the United Kingdom, '*Buy British Last*', '*Look East*' and '*Commonwealth Policy*'. His outspoken characteristic has brought Malaysia into the global world with proud and honour, with his idea in saving Malaysia from the Asian Economic Crisis 1997. Since then, the world pay more attention to this small and so called as the third world country.

Besides his plebian background and his non-political upbringing in the family, his mixed ethnic roots also give impacts in defining his individual traits. In a political system rooted in

¹³⁹ Dhillon, K. S. (2009). *Op.cit.* p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Victor, Morais. (1982). *Op.cit.* p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.* p. 25.

communalism, an individual's racial origin carries just as much meaning, connotations and consequences as does one's lack of pure ethnic roots, hence, as Dhillon said, this was bound to affect Mahathir. His paternal grandfather of Kerala Indian decent lived in the northern island of Penang, home to many early Indian immigrants, where he married Siti Hawa who was a local Malay lady. However, the fact that his father was half Indian is passing by some and ignored by others. Mahathir's museum only displays a genealogical chart of his lineage through his mother Wan Tempawan but has nothing on his father's side. Dhillon suggests that Mahathir's mixed ethnic roots are a reflection of racial stereotypes and religious prejudices present in the ethnic based communal politics of Malaysian society. Looking at Mahathir's ethnic background, the ethnic of Indian Muslim in Malaysia always gives negative stereotyping by the Malay Muslim and Indian Hindu. They are called *Mamak*, viewed by both segments as shrewd traders whose main motivation for adopting the religion of the majority is to derive economic, social, and political benefits, while most of the converts are fail to surrender certain cultural traits such as language. Thus, it fuels the prejudicial belief that their religious conversion is not genuine. Because of this, Mahathir always got insinuations especially from the opposite party and called him as *Mamak*.¹⁴²

ii) Political Ideology

Mahathir climbed up step by step in political arena. He first joined the party (UMNO), since the party was established in year 1946. During his third year in college, he started to write articles in Straits Times using pseudonym 'C.H.E. Det'. His articles were about his observations of Malay

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.22-24.

customs, his opinions on Malay issues and problems and views on political issues such as nationality and royalty.¹⁴³

In his articles, he was not only tried to give idea about changing the traditional Malay weddings into modern, but he also called on Malay parents to send their children especially girls into English medium schools to avoid being left behind the Chinese and Indians in education.¹⁴⁴ Besides, he wrote a controversial book entitled “*The Malay Dilemma*” which has been banned by the Prime Minister at that time, Tunku Abdul Rahman because he seems to bitterly attack the government with his thought.

The emerging political world of Mahathir was very narrow. He was called as the ‘Malay Ultra’ because he was very much a Malay world. Nevertheless, it was uniquely diverse environment in which he was developing. It was because, even though he had lived in devastating World War, experienced terrifying Japanese occupation, witnessed pervasive British colonialism, in fact, studied in Singapore which a country that has Chinese as the majority population, none these seemed to have broaden his focus beyond his Malay world.¹⁴⁵

He reached a conclusion that there were two factors that affect the Malay in Malaysia, which were broadly speaking internal factors and the external factors. For the internal factors, it was because of the tradition of Malay customs itself, such as the low rate of mixed marriage, early marriage, and the poor upbringing. And from his point of view, these create weakness in Malay development. While, for the external factors, he argued that it was because of the two actors in

¹⁴³ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 27.

the country which were the Chinese and the government. He said, the Chinese had monopolized and dominated the economy, while the government did not act to fix it.¹⁴⁶

Tun Hussein Onn, Malaysian third prime minister, made a wise decision by choosing Mahathir as his deputy. He then occupied the two most important political posts in the country, which were the UMNO president and later the prime ministership. During his appointment to these positions, he lifted the ban on his book, “*The Malay Dilemma*” as he wanted the citizens know more about him and his idea.¹⁴⁷

Mahathir followed an evolution in his political ideology. It was complex yet obvious. One of it, he has given the Islamic part more attention in his premiership. He has set the institutions with Islamic aspects. Under his leadership, Malaysia has *Pusat Dakwah*, Islamic Research Centre, International Islamic University which co-sponsored by the Organization of Islamic Conference, Islamic Economic Foundation such as *Tabung Haji*, Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), and there was also an Islamic Training and *Dakwah* Institute in Prime Minister’s Office.

Moreover, in his political ideology, he also introduced the West and its negative influence. From Dhillon’s point of view, by targeting the West, it “allowed Mahathir’s nationalism to be elevated from ethnic to national and from national to global; from Malay to Malaysian and from Malaysian to the developing world.”¹⁴⁸ Hence, the policy such as ‘Look East’ policy and ‘Buy British Last’ policy have been created.

¹⁴⁶ Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *The Malay Dilemma*. Singapore: Donald Moore for Asia Pacific Press. pp. 56-61.

¹⁴⁷ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Besides, Dhillon said, Mahathir had succeeded in being widely acknowledged as a spokesman of the developing world and the championing of the causes of the Third World and Islamic solidarity became a major part of his foreign policy rhetoric.¹⁴⁹

iii) Leadership Style and Traits

In talking about his leadership style, Mahathir was often described as autocratic and dictatorial. It was more a one-man show. For example, during the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis, he has made his own decision without even listen to the other ministers' opinion. As Dhillon concluded, Malaysia's decision to withdraw abruptly from the foreign exchange market in the economic crisis in 1998 is the illustrative of Mahathir's style of decision making.¹⁵⁰ Even though most of the members were against it, he still stuck with his decision and said the decision should be viewed as a collective decision. He was not trying to convince foreigner to invest in the country, but he attributed his problems to the rough speculative activities of George Soros. He believed that speculation should be banned by the international agreement. He did not believe in the 'invisible hand' of Capitalism. He thought that a visible hand was there, and that it was part of a conspiracy and he also saw that globalization as infringing on his control of Malaysia, yet the foreign investment, which he saw as essential for Malaysia's development, was a manifestation of that same globalization.¹⁵¹ Besides, he once said that there was no way Malaysia would

¹⁴⁹ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵¹ Milne, R.S. & Mauzy, D.K. (1999). *Malaysian Politics under Mahathir*. London: Routledge. p. 150.

surrender its economy to the IMF even if that was the only way for the country to recover.¹⁵² He declared that Malaysia is recovering by follow his way. And it shows that his nationalism had come a long way but remained very much intact at the core.¹⁵³

In describing Mahathir's leadership style, Dhillon has stated that, in the political realm, prominent traits of the Mahathir leadership include stability, centralization of power within the executive and serious conflicts with other branches which resulting in the declining independence and influence of the bureaucracy, legislature, judiciary and monarchy. Hence, the outcome was an increasingly authoritarian regime, mindful of the need for populism, yet manifesting an ever-increasing disregard for democratic procedures and institutions that stood in its way. Thus, by this regard, Dhillon took from the sense that used by Jackson and Rosberg, Mahathir's political rule as a sophisticated 'personal rule', but yet in a much looser form. It is personal in the sense that 'institutional rule' progressively weakened as political power was increasingly centralized in Mahathir's hand. It is sophisticated in the sense that the centralization of power was not arbitrary, never beyond certain boundaries – no matter how artificial, and very often justified in detail and in public by Mahathir himself.¹⁵⁴

Mahathir has faced many challenges in serving as Malaysian Prime Minister. One of them is money politics. Money politics has been storm in Mahathir's reign strongly. Dhillon has quoted from Gomez and Jomo, "*Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*" in which they argued that Mahathir's privatization policy was essentially a government patronage

¹⁵² Edmund Terrence Gomez and Jomo, K. S. (1999). *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 20.

¹⁵³ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

policy that helped take the phenomenon of money politics to unprecedented heights.¹⁵⁵ The virtual monopoly of privatization had benefited Malay entrepreneurs loyal to Mahathir and alienated sections of the ruling party who rallied around various party leaders which mounted challenges to oust Mahathir. However, this was observed by Mahathir, and he also acknowledged the phenomenon of money politics. He said in an interview that the money politics happened because of the business people are getting into politics, while before, it was only school teachers involved in politics which had not much money to be scattered around. And, he also admonished party delegates in the October 1996 UMNO Assembly more directly by noting that “some delegates vying for higher positions had been offering bribes and gifts exchange for votes.”¹⁵⁶

Besides that, he also faced the economic crisis during the mid-1980s, which was his first major political crisis. The extensive links between business and politics, developed as a result of Mahathir’s privatization and heavy industrialization policies ensured that the crisis was a political as it was economic. The recession severely curtailed the benefits which could be disbursed by the regime, leaving UMNO ranks deeply dissatisfied. The finance minister that time, Tengku Razaleigh, a prince with an extensive business empire of his own who enjoyed close ties with the Chinese business elite, teamed up with deputy premier, Musa Hitam, to lead a major challenge to oust Mahathir from power. Razaleigh alleged that Mahathir had formed a kitchen cabinet which had centralized decision-making powers and most government contracts and business

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Terrence Gomez and Jomo, K. S. (1999). *Op.cit.*, pp. 91-98.

¹⁵⁶ Mahathir Mohamad, Speech to UMNO General Assembly, October 1996, in Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era 1981-2003: Dilemmas of Development*. Singapore: NUS Press. p. 40.

opportunities were distributed to members of this inner circle.¹⁵⁷ This happened against the backdrop of a court decision temporarily stopping the privatization of the multi-billion Ringgit North-South Highway project. The court had ruled that since UEM, the company which was awarded the project had close links to UMNO; there was a conflict of interest. Musa, who had earlier resigned as the deputy premier due to Mahathir's authoritarian ways, Razaleigh and about one half of Mahathir's cabinet which included Defence Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and Foreign Minister, Rais Yatim, formed what was to be known as the Team B of UMNO as opposed to Mahathir's Team A. and this is the first time in the history of the nation, a prime minister and UMNO president was being challenged openly and decisively from within his party. Up until this time, the informal UMNO game rules, collectively known as the 'Malay Way', discouraged direct confrontation and contest for the president's post. It had always been the party president's prerogative as to when he wanted to step down and the naming of his successor.¹⁵⁸

During his leadership, since he has the economic leadership style, Malaysia's economic progress was very impressive. The citizen's average yearly income had built up from RM300 a person to RM5000. Hence, the Chinese who initially hated him for being 'ultra-Malay' liked him even more because of his contribution to economy development. His objective was to turn his country into fully developed one by 2020. He necessitated adopting an economic leadership style in focusing on winning over the nation psychologically to get their full support. This is because of the long gestation and rather uncertain nature of such a goal. Therefore, there were some changes happened, such as, it constantly sought to narrow the space of dissent, concentrated decision making within his offices, showed impatience with established economic institutions and relied

¹⁵⁷ *New Straits Times*. (23 April 1987).

¹⁵⁸ Dhillon, K.S. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 37.

substantially on foreign capital and expertise. He made himself personal marks by mega projects and gained Malay entrepreneurs loyal to the premier's party and ideology in the name of privatization, on the other hand, inevitably feeding into the phenomenon of rent-seeking and carried out outside of established normal routines and procedures such as open bidding became the trade mark of the regime's style.¹⁵⁹

The macroeconomic policy of heavy industrialization and grand projects such as North-South Highway, UMNO headquarters, Steel Manufacturing, KL Towers, KLIA, *Dayabumi* Complex, National Car Project, New Government Project (*Putrajaya*), Bakun Hydroelectric Dam, Penang Bridge, Silicon Valley, Second Causeway to Singapore and Formula One Race Track were very much in line with the economic and development paradigm of Mahathir. The high visibility and grandiose nature of these projects instilled a psychological sense of rapid technological and economic progress. Moreover, they pretended to put Malaysia on par with the developed world which helped to silence domestic critics, and, those who criticized these project as wasteful, non-profitable, turn-key, having negative environmental impact or questioned the manner in which they were planned and implemented, mostly were identified as envious foreigner who did not want Malaysia to become fully developed.¹⁶⁰

Besides that, the contracts were awarded mostly to handpicked Malay entrepreneurs loyal to the regime. And through the MFP-facilitated efforts, these entrepreneurs were able to form joint-ventures with foreign companies in order to obtain projects that by passed exercises of open tender. However, Mahathir answered such criticisms by stating that the government did not

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

choose the contracts by bias, and, by labeling anyone who won as a crony of the government placed the government in a no-win situation.¹⁶¹

According to Milne and Mauzy, there are several other characteristics that Mahathir possessed as Prime Minister. He had a control and determination demeanour, he kept checks and balances within the executive, he dislikes competition, moreover, he had both far and near vision in terms of politics:

“Mahathir is a believer in strong government, especially if exercised by himself. He enjoys power, and he fights to win.”¹⁶²

By his control and determination personality, he seemed very careful in believing people and his decision-making was mostly shaped by his own ideas. He believed that he had never been wrong. Even though he kept the checks and balances within the executive, it was actually as a weapon to ensure the supremacy of the executive as the dominant power. This is different from the United States, which uses the checks and balances by separating the powers between the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. Besides that, Milne and Mauzy also stated that Mahathir dislike competition. Although once in a contest, he was set on winning, he nonetheless preferred that no contest should occur. Politically, the best example of his successful avoidance of competition was when the 1995 UMNO General Assembly, without any signs of dissent, he asserted that he would not be challenged for the top UMNO post until 1999. Moreover, in talking

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁶² Milne, R.S. & Mauzy, D.K. (1999). *Malaysian Politics under Mahathir*. London: Routledge. p. 159.

about vision, the word vision itself will always been associated with him. This is because of his famous vision 2020.¹⁶³

Yet, Saravanamuttu describes Mahathir as an 'iconoclast'.¹⁶⁴ Milne and Mauzy argued that the premier was best categorized as an idiosyncratic person within an idiosyncratic category.¹⁶⁵ His beliefs and actions are unusual, constituting a pattern that has been fascinating to previous, as well as the present, writers. He has a sharp mind rather than an intellectual or academic mind. Given the nature, style and substance of his rule, it is argued that Mahathir, the individual, had a domineering effect on every major aspect of Malaysian political life, including foreign policy.

Mahathir combined the conviction that he was always right and the best leader for the country with a skilful, and when necessary, ruthless determination to eliminate competition, adversaries and obstacles (individuals or institutions) in order to stay in power on his own terms. His deputy, Musa Hitam has described him as 'ambitious, ruthless and autocratic'.¹⁶⁶

During Mahathir's tenure, foreign policy making moved from the combined realm of select government institutions to the prime minister himself. The fairly substantial role in policy making, which the bureaucracy (in particular, those branches entrusted with foreign service and trade) enjoyed under previous regimes, evaporated under Mahathir, who presumed the role of determining foreign policy decisions, without consultation with the bureaucracy and overriding

¹⁶³ Milne, R.S. & Mauzy, D.K. (1999). *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

¹⁶⁴ Johan Saravanamuttu. (Jun 1996). "Malaysia's Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Period, 1981-1995: An Iconoclast Come to Rule". *Asian Journal of Political Science*. 4(1): 1-16.

¹⁶⁵ R.S. Milne and D.K. Mauzy. (1999). *Op.cit.*, p. 183: "his beliefs and actions are unusual, constituting a pattern that has been fascinating."

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Mohamad Yusof Ahmad, *Continuity and Change in Malaysia's Foreign Policy, 1981-1986*, p. 348.

objections at times.¹⁶⁷ Malaysian diplomat Mohamad Yusof, in discussing MFP in the first five years of the Mahathir regime, quotes MFA head Zainal Abidin Sulong as concurring with the view that “MFA role in policy formulation was either minimal or virtually nil”.¹⁶⁸ Non-governmental institutions, the legislature, press and think tanks either did not feature or saw their role reduced to negligible. Foreign ministers and secretaries during the Mahathir era did not enjoy the sort of independence and clout enjoyed by many of their predecessors.

Mahathir’s control of foreign policy was so visible that one could not be faulted for mistaking him as simultaneously holding the foreign ministerial portfolio. After all, it was Mahathir who announced foreign policy decisions, justified them in terms of national needs and defended them against critics. Mahathir’s control of the decision-making process happened when Malaysia made a deal with Singapore in resolving the contentious issues during his era.

During his time in office, Dr Mahathir was concerned with economic development as an important aspect in ensuring the development of the country in stable condition and balanced with other countries especially Singapore. Through his miracle ideas, Malaysia has successfully overcome the economic recession that hit the country in 1997-1998 when he rejected the proposal to get funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Dr Mahathir had introduced some measures to revive the domestic economy to ensure economic generation and increase economic growth without relying on the other party. Action and this ideas has been shown that Dr.Mahathir was a very smart man and have good ideas for the country in various aspects including political, economic, social and international relations.

¹⁶⁷ Muhammad Muda. (1991). “Malaysia’s Foreign Policy and the Commonwealth, 1960-1995”. *The Round Table* 320. p. 458.

¹⁶⁸ Mohamad Yusof Ahmad, *Continuity and Change*. pp. 351-352.

Besides bilateral approaches, Malaysia also improves the system of national defence in the face of threats or armed crisis with neighbouring countries. This process also involves his efforts to improve and modernize the Malaysian armed forces on a large scale since 1990. Moreover, Malaysia also strengthening international ties through regional organizations. The concept zone of peace, freedom and neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia has become the core of Mahathir to develop policies and strategies in its external relations with foreign countries, especially Singapore.

In order to ensure the foreign countries respect Malaysia, Dr.Mahathir also paid attention to the involvement of Malaysia in the international arena. Dr.Mahathir urged other countries to establish a relationship oriented economy that will promote the process of neighbourhood consultation and closer friendship and focus on the best interests of the country in Southeast Asia and East Asia. This is because he believed that economic cooperation can reduce the concentration of the country in political affairs and issues that arise between nations. Mahathir was also active in the activities conducted at the international level, while also involved in the expression of opinion on issues and problems of poor countries by the developed countries. This approach has increased the confidence of foreign countries on the image and status of Malaysia that emphasized on common welfare.

Through the above statement could be clearly concluded that Dr. Mahathir was a courageous leader in voicing out his view on the issues that arise in the international level and indirectly made himself as an important person internationally. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, in his book *“The*

Malay Dilemmas”¹⁶⁹ stated that the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore was relying on the leaders from both countries. It referred to the fact that the statement issued by Dr. Mahathir in his own book could be seen as representing that he was not interested with the participation of Singapore in the building of Malaysia.

What was quite interesting about Dr Mahathir administration in the context of Singapore-Malaysia relationship was that the republic was no longer considered as a second feeder to the prosperity of Malaysia. Previously Malaysia export goods and natural resources went through Singapore, but during his time, Dr Mahathir changed the policy by making the country’s main ports, especially Port Klang as a place to export his country’s goods. Therefore, during his administration, a number of mega infrastructure projects were launched, and these were considered to be in a position to compete with Singapore’s position as a regional economic centre. Port Klang had been modernized and enlarged. In addition, Dr Mahathir administration has also built a mega-airport in Sepang, intended to be a rivalry of Changi International Airport in Singapore. Despite the criticism of various parties as to the costs required to develop Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), the main objective of Dr Mahathir is to make KLIA as a premier aeronautics and aviation in South East Asia.

In finance sector, the administration of Dr Mahathir had introduced Islamic banking system to compete with Singapore’s conventional banking system. As a result of the introduction of Islamic banking system by Kuala Lumpur, Singapore also finally introduced the same banking system.

¹⁶⁹ Mahathir Mohamad. (1970). *Op.cit.*, pp. 6-18.

Based on the strategies used by Dr Mahathir, it can be concluded that he had brought a new dimension to the Singapore-Malaysia relationship by creating a new confidence to compete with economic development and air transport sectors of Singapore. This is very different from the previous administrations, which emphasized instead the complimentary economy, where both parties are focused on the interdependence of the two countries in developing their respective economies. But what would have happened if Singapore was going to advance, while Malaysia still depended on its natural resources to develop its economy? Dr Mahathir changed the complimentary relationship to one economic competition and a healthy political climate to ensure the country equally benefit from its economic resources in the centre of world economic growth at the time.

In order to solve the problems in bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore, this study has found that Dr Mahathir uses his own ideas through Malaysia-Singapore bilateral approach. With a strict principle in the exercise, or deciding upon, a policy and it has been a strength that can produce the best solution to resolve issues arising between Malaysia-Singapore. For example, in the 2003 water issue between Malaysia-Singapore, Dr Mahathir continued to maintain his position to defend the rights of Malaysia for review of water price charged by Singapore, even though there were objection from Singapore. Mahathir believed that with the rights and agreements that enabled Malaysia to revise the price after 25 years, meaning that to his mind his decision was on the right track. Therefore, Malaysia continues to review the price of water.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ *Utusan Malaysia*. (1 January 2003).

Based on the actions of Dr Mahathir, he showed that his efforts in trying to ensure the security of Malaysia was not threatened by the actions of other countries, especially Singapore. Dr Mahathir effort was one of the decisive actions taken by Malaysia under Dr Mahathir administration to ensure that was nothing problems and issues worsen happened or to be faced by Malaysian citizen. For example, with the issue of the Scenic Bridge (*Jambatan Indah*), he looked disappointed with the decision to cancel the scenic bridge. Ideas and suggestions regarding the bridge were, after all, the products of his own inspiration in 1996, when he was still the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir had a very strong stance and was firm in carrying out an action. Disappointment expressed by Dr Mahathir has its own significance, for the cancellation of the bridge construction led to many negative implications, especially when it came to the national interest. The Malaysian government even had to pay damages amounting to RM 257.4 million to the Southern Integrated Gateway Premier, the company that was responsible for ensuring construction of the bridge.¹⁷¹ It was seen here that the government was losing a very high implications of the government's decision to cancel Malaysia construction of the bridge.

In resolving the issues and problems arising from bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Singapore, Dr Mahathir played many roles and contributed his ideas to make sure the solutions were the best and effective that could be produced. As is well known to all, Dr Mahathir was very forceful in implementing its foreign policy, and especially so in making any decision related to the development and growth of the country. For example, his firmness in the water questions with Singapore that had persisted for a very long time. However, he did not hesitate in defending

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

the rights of Malaysia to revise the price of water, and that this should be carried out in 1986 and 1987.¹⁷²

This revision is a matter that should be done because the law requiring the review be made after 25 years does not mean it has to be made during the particular year. For Singapore is to ensure long-term supply of water, Singapore government choose a policy of ‘outsourcing’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ country to solve its water problem.¹⁷³ Through the concept of ‘outsourcing’, Singapore in an effort to further strengthen its water resources had made several surveys and Singapore had seen the country Indonesia was very suitable to become a supplier of raw water supply to his country. The initial idea for the capture of raw water supply from Indonesia was started from 1987 when it was proposed by the then Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew at that time. Since 1963, the tense relations Singapore and Indonesia ended when Singapore took over the initiative to foster regional cooperation between the two countries.¹⁷⁴

Assertiveness of Dr Mahathir had resulted in Singapore to find other alternatives for water resources. In 1989, Singapore announced its intention to buy water from Indonesia and on August 28, 1990, a consent agreement was signed between the Singapore and Indonesia government to coordinate their cooperation in the supply of raw water from Indonesia to Singapore. In connection with this, in July 1991, then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Lee

¹⁷² *Utusan Malaysia*. (1 January 2003).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Utusan Malaysia*. (14 September 1998).

Hsien Long had signed an agreement ‘water-pact’ with the assent Indonesia water supply from the Singapore, Island of Riau.¹⁷⁵

Besides that, Singapore has also conducted research to identify the best way to get water and a breakthrough had been achieved, so that Singapore could embark on the long-term plan to desalination. This programme was seen as being successful in several other countries, and this became a suitable solution for Singapore. This was because through this process, Singapore would be able to save money from buying water from neighbouring countries. In addition, solar energy would also be used as substitute fuel consumption for the machinery, and would therefore reduce the cost of the process. Desalination is actually not a process to replace the water supply from Johor, but is in addition to it. Until 2003, Singapore, through the Minister of Information, Communications and Arts stated that: “Singapore is still willing to resolve the matter in accordance with the terms of the Water Agreement”.¹⁷⁶

Dr. Mahathir’s leadership style was quite different from his predecessors in handling the main issues pertaining to Malaysia-Singapore relations during his era. The importance and significance of his role as the most effective Malaysian leader in deciding the pattern and direction of Malaysia-Singapore relations can be seen from the views of Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf:

¹⁷⁵ Shee Poon Kim. (1992). “Singapore in 1991: Endorsement of the New Administration”. *Asian Survey*. 32(2): 119-125.

¹⁷⁶ *Utusan Malaysia*. (26 July 2003).

“Leaders- and the kind of leadership they exert- shape the way foreign policies are made and the consequent behaviour of nation states in world politics”¹⁷⁷

Dr. Mahathir had been leading Malaysia since the early eighties with an open and soft [non-confrontational] approach during the early stage of his tenure as Prime Minister, but then adopted a more aggressive [confrontational] approach during the later period of his administration. He had been able to handle the two countries relationship until it entered a new era. It had entered a so-called ‘win-win’ situation compared to the previous era where it seemed to be benefiting Singapore alone. On this matter, Lee Kuan Yew had said:

“Despite my difference with him, I made more progress in solving bilateral problems with Mahathir in 9 years he was prime minister, from 1981 to 1990, when I stepped down, than in the previous 12 years with Tun Razak and Hussein Onn as prime minister”¹⁷⁸

Generally, Dr. Mahathir’s personality impacted bilateral relations. His inclinations towards Singapore may have been part of the problem. His experience in Singapore during his student days was not a pleasant one. He recounted that experience in his book, *“Malay Dilemma”*. So, one can say that there is historical baggage at the top of the leaderships. In the past five or six years, Mahathir has gained increasing confidence in what he has done for Malaysia, especially after the financial crisis of 1997. He looked at Singapore not only as a friend, but as a competitor. He wanted to improve relations, but at the same time, he has bad memories of Singapore and he did not look at Singapore's policies or its efforts towards Malaysia as being friendly. As a result, he decided that he would do it his way and the results have shown that his way has not been very amiable, especially towards Singaporeans.

¹⁷⁷ Charles W. Kegley, Jr. & Eugene R. Wittkopf. (1993). *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*. London: St. Martin’s Press Ltd. p. 56.

¹⁷⁸ Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p. 289.

From above discussion, we can conclude that, in handling Malaysia-Singapore relations, Mahathir's idiosyncratic factors played as the major caused. Thus, in short, this is why under his 22 years of leadership, the issues between both countries did not resolve amicably. And until now, he is still giving comments on how Malaysia and Singapore react to each other.

4.3.2. Lee Kuan Yew's Idiosyncratic Influence in Dealing with Malaysia

Lee Kuan Yew has been an important actor in deciding the pattern and direction of Singapore's foreign policy in Malaysia-Singapore relations. An understanding of the pattern and direction of Singapore's domestic and foreign policy would be incomplete without placing it within the worldview of the nation's long-serving Prime Minister and current Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew. The ideological underpinning of Singapore's foreign policy remains firmly rooted in the beliefs of Lee Kuan Yew.

Lee Kuan Yew was the youngest Prime Minister in the world.¹⁷⁹ At the time of his appointment in 1959, he was not even 36 years old of age. Being one of the longest party leaders in modern history, holding 38 years of leadership since he established the PAP in 1954, he has solidly put his personal beat on many aspects of Singapore right from the recent history, ideology, language and up to the social norms. He had long pondered the nature of leadership and how this related to the need, desires and aspirations of a people. He concludes that Singapore and other Asian nations required firm leadership to produce essential social and political stability.¹⁸⁰

In describing Lee's political beliefs, leadership style and public persona, his biographers

¹⁷⁹ Alex, Josey. (1995). *Lee Kuan Yew. The Crucial Years*. Singapore: Time Book International. pp. 57-64.

¹⁸⁰ Lee Kuan Yew. (2000). *Op.cit.*, pp. 735-746.

emphasize that “as the island republic’s elected head of government, he was decidedly in charge. Critics and those who opposed him knew they would be countered without compunction. He once remarked that if he found an obstacle in the way of the policy or goal he thought needed to be achieved, he would not hesitate to run a bulldozer to clear the way”.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, Lee’s style is very much alike his Malaysia’s counterpart, Mahathir.

Furthermore, a Professor of Harvard University, Ezra Vogel in his books “*The Four Little Dragons*”¹⁸², delineates a rather wide range of institutional and traditional factors that underlie the successful industrialization of Singapore. He points out that the most special factor in Singapore’s success story is its genuinely charismatic leader, Lee Kuan Yew.

Perhaps, by Southeast Asian standards Lee is unique. He is a ruler to the fingertips, yet he was not born to rule. He is the patron of Singaporean politics; spotting, hiring and firing top talent; commanding the apparatus of power and various alternative sources of information; able to choose freely when to let alone or when to intervene.

Some commentators exaggerate his capacity to be a one-man band, a saviour figure. According to Richard Nixon, “the fact that a leader of Lee’s breadth of vision was not able to act on a broader stage represents an incalculable loss to the world.”¹⁸³ Yet it is inconceivable that Lee could be Prime Minister, or President, of any country but Singapore. However much he admires crave his styles of leadership for their own country. His star, and that of the island Republic has merged almost beyond distinction.

¹⁸¹ Minchin, James. (1990). *No Man is an Island. A Portrait of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew*. Australia: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd. pp. 321-342

¹⁸² Vogel, F. Ezra. (1991). *The Four Little Dragons. A Spread of Industrialization in East Asia*. United States of America: Harvard University Press. p. 82.

¹⁸³ R. M. Nixon. (1982). *Leaders*. New York: Warner. p. 336.

According to many Lee's biographers, he towers over other Asian leaders on the international stage, yet he comes from one of Asia's smallest countries. Despite a champion of Asian values, he is most un-Asian in his frank and confrontational style. He is a man of great intelligence with no patience for weaknesses; a man of integrity, with a relentless urge to slash opponents; a man who devours foreign news but has little tolerance for a disrespectful press at home.¹⁸⁴

It is difficult to view Lee on his own. Despite the power and strength that he portrays, according to James Minchin in many ways "Lee is the island, embodying in his character all the insecurity, vulnerability, emotional detachment, arrogance and restless energy that also characterize Singapore."¹⁸⁵ His life has shaped and been shaped by the small territory at the tip of the Malaysian peninsula that he made first into a country and then a rich country.

In addition, according to Professor George P. Landow, a visiting professor at the National University of Singapore, Lee lives by the conflict theory of management, "you either dominate or be dominated". He knows all about being dominated, both under British colonial rule and more brutally, during the Japanese occupation. In his memoirs he relates how he was slapped and forced to kneel in front of a Japanese soldier for having failed to bow to the man while crossing a bridge. Thus, when it became Lee's turn to dominate, he used the full force of his personality and the law to fight his opponents.

Lee's barely-concealed cultural and intellectual arrogance, at times manifested in derogatory statements about neighbouring countries, has long been a source of diplomatic tension. Lee's belief in the intellectual gulf between himself and other Southeast Asian leaders goes some way

¹⁸⁴ Alex Josey. (1995). *Lee Kuan Yew. The Crucial Years*. Singapore: Times Book International. pp. 34-38.

¹⁸⁵ James Minchin. (1990). *No Man is an Island. A Portrait of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew*. Australia: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd. pp. 291-317.

towards explaining his satisfaction in highlighting the shortcomings of neighbouring political leaders. Until relatively recently, the considerable economic gap between Singapore and most Southeast Asian countries, coupled with the latter reputation for bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption has only served to reinforce Lee's belief in the cultural malaise of indigenous Southeast Asians. These condescending attitudes serve to explain the acutely defensive attitude of Malaysia towards perceived signs of condescension across the causeway.

Lee's combative political style and brash '*kurang ajar*'¹⁸⁶ demeanour, which has become almost legendary and supposedly out of sync with Asian political culture, where restrained outward manners greatly served to inflame the already tense relations arising from the ideological differences between Malaysia and Singapore during the merger years of 1963-1965. Relations had soured early on in the merger period when it became increasingly apparent to the Alliance leadership under Tunku Abdul Rahman that Lee and his colleagues were not content with their status as just another state government in the Malaysian federation. Indeed, Lee expected the island state to be treated as an equal partner in the federation.¹⁸⁷ Symbolic of this, Lee never assumed the title of Chief Minister as adopted by other heads of government in other states, but insisted on being referred to as Prime Minister.

The trauma and crisis of separation from Malaysia arguably constituted a politically defining moment in Singapore's modern history and has served to promote the PAP as guardians of the island's economic survival and political integrity. As is characteristic of politically defining moments, separation has unwittingly bestowed an enormous level of moral authority on Lee as

¹⁸⁶ The Malay term '*kurang ajar*' means to behave in a rude manner.

¹⁸⁷ Fletcher, M. (1969). *The Separation of Singapore From Malaysia*. Data Paper No. 73. Ithaca: Cornell University. p. 47.

the father of independent Singapore. Under the stewardship of the PAP, the fledgling republic successfully steered through and triumphed over the enormous economic challenges of high unemployment, exacerbated by the closure of British military bases in the late 1960s, and the shift from import-substitution to export-oriented industrialisation strategy. The continued political hegemony of the PAP government therefore cannot be fully understood without taking into account the psychological legacy of merger and separation particularly on Chinese Singaporeans.

4.4. Conclusion

Political culture and idiosyncratic factors of ruling elites have a strong influence in determining the foreign policy direction of a country and how foreign policy issues are approached by those particular nations. We believe that the emergence of two separate political cultures in Malaysia and Singapore have strengthened dominant and significant roles of elites in the bilateral relations between the two countries. The political culture during the period Singapore was in Malaysia revolved around the issue of the Malay-Chinese political rivalry and the quest by Lee Kuan Yew's party to seek equal rights for ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. The relations between Malaysia and Singapore during the period after the separation continued to be influenced by this culture with Singapore seen as a Chinese dominated nation and Malaysia as Malay dominated nation. The rivalry between the two countries continued to be along ethnic lines. Over the decades, Malaysia and Singapore have grown into two separate nations with two distinct political cultures. With the fading of the older generation leaders and the emergence of new generation leaders the political baggage that bogged down the relations between the two countries began to diminish. The trend is going to continue and this augurs well for both countries.

The above issues have come up and become contexts of many statements made by leaders of both states. Leaders, as social actors, also play an important part in determining the direction of conflict. Singaporean leaders, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong are widely perceived as merely continuing Lee Kuan Yew's policies, and as such there will not be major changes in the direction of Singapore's foreign policy towards Malaysia. Meanwhile Malaysia's foreign policy has been redirected to suit the priorities of the current leaders. Tunku Abdul Rahman was understanding and sympathetic towards Singapore. Tun Abdul Razak was more aggressive, while Tun Hussein Onn was just continuing the prevailing policies of the time. The biggest paradigm shift in Malaysia-Singapore relations could be seen during the tenure of Dr. Mahathir. His vision 2020 policy was more challenging to Singapore than other neighbouring countries.

In the case of Malaysia and Singapore, the leadership styles of Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew have been a strong influence in the bilateral issues between the two countries. Both leaders were aggressive in dealing with the issues. Both were also influenced by their past experience and the pre and post separation political baggage. Mahathir's view towards Singapore may have been coloured by his experience as a medical student in Singapore whilst Lee Kuan Yew's views towards Malaysia were mainly coloured by his involvement in Malaysian politics during the short period Singapore was in the Malaysian Federation and relations with Malaysia during the period immediately after the separation.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia and Singapore have a complex and uneasy relationship. Common sources of tension between proximate countries, such as economic rivalry and military insecurity, are not sufficient to explain the 'love-hate' relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. This research examined the deep-seated underlying factors that significantly have contributed to the current state of relations between these two countries. In our view, understanding the underlying factors that formed the state of bilateral relations, between Malaysia and Singapore, during Mahathir's era, is the key to seeing how the apparent deadlock in the many bilateral issues can be resolved. It is hoped that by analysing these factors, it may show ways to improve bilateral relations between the two countries.

In this research, we have shown some underlying factors that influence Malaysia and Singapore relationships. The first factor is the burden of historical baggage following the separation. Relations between Malaysia and Singapore are very fragile and are very much influenced by their historical backgrounds. Old problems continue to exist, often appearing in a more delicate manner and later compounded by a host of new issues and associated problems which compete for the attention of both countries leaders and the public. Moreover, the politicization of history, the rekindling of the past for contemporary political goals, has had the effect of reopening old wounds and imbuing a younger generation of Malaysians and Singaporeans with the prejudices and resentments of their ancestors. After 48 years of separate and independent existence, and regardless of the growth of extensive political and economic linkages, there is still a great deal of

mistrust and resentment in both countries arising from the experience of separation. Many of the grievances accruing from the disengagement of August 1965 continue to ruin bilateral relations.

Related to the first factor, the second factor is the countries' perceptions of each other. All along, the bilateral relations have always been based on suspicion and distrust. This was clearly seen when Singapore in searching for her own identity had to rely greatly on the West for security purposes, allowing its military bases to be used by the British and US. Malaysia viewed this as an unfriendly act towards a friendly nation. Although the relationship between the two nations is special, conflicts arise from how the two states, through their political leaders, interpret the action of the other party. To what extent this mutual suspicion and mutual distrust between the two sides will be sustained in the future is uncertain.

The third factor that often disturb the relations of these two countries is the tendency for the countries, when dealing with issues affecting each other, to approach the problems at two distinctively negotiation approaches. From Singapore's standpoint, the relationship should be based on mutual respect, mutual benefit, and adherence to international law and agreements. Singapore will continue to seek new areas of cooperation to strengthen bilateral relations with Malaysia even further. From Malaysia's side, the relationship must be based on a 'win-win' situation approach, which means both countries will benefit from that relationship. In other words, Malaysia is more inclined to take the view that Singapore opts for a rather over-legalistic approach that conveys the impression that the city state is insensitive to the cultural milieu in which it finds itself. Malaysia tends to view such an approach as antagonistic and confrontational, and not in keeping with the general consensual approach based on musyawarah

(deliberation) and muafakat (consensus). Singapore, on the other hand, prefers to hold steadfastly to formal commitments that have issued from negotiations as its own survival and prosperity are firmly based on strategic planning to fulfil the aspirations of its citizenry and to remain competitive internationally.

The fourth and last factor that we saw as influential in influencing relations of both states is political cultures and the style of leadership of political leaders particularly with respect to Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew. It is during Mahathir as Malaysian Prime Minister the unsettled issues between both states became significant. During previous Prime Ministers, the longstanding issues such as water disputes and Malaysian railways had been there but were rarely seriously debated. Only after Mahathir took over the power, he started to renegotiate the issues. His style of leadership which was more direct and outspoken than previous Prime Ministers and his nationalistic character contribute to his efforts to resolve the longstanding issues between the two states. These attitudes had made public aware of the unresolved issues and pushed negotiations to take place. Statements made by Mahathir regarding Singapore's attitudes to the issues had often created uneasiness of relations with Singapore.

Despite the above problems, however, both countries have attempted to solve their conflict by peaceful measures such as negotiation. It is the trust of the study to also examine why this is so. This is, in particular, due to the closeness of both countries historically, politically and economically. History may cause problem but history also ties Malaysia and Singapore. On the one hand, it is clear that the history has been mentioned as barrier to develop relations because this may create suspicion and anger. However, on the other hand, they have to deal with the

reality that they are two neighbours and need to overcome the politicization of history that may trap them in situation where they cannot cooperate. They learn from bad experiences in the past to mend the relationship.

Both countries also have rather similar approaches in political system and economic development which bring the countries to the same perceptions on how to deal with political and economic issues. These same perceptions make the leaders of both countries easier to deal one another. Both Malaysia and Singapore know the importance of political stability and their relationship towards the development and progress of their respective countries. Both countries realised that they are interdependent in terms of economic, security and social aspects. For example, in terms of the economic aspect, most Malaysians know Singapore is one of the biggest investors in Malaysia and vice versa. Furthermore, more than half of all visitor arrivals in Malaysia originate from Singapore. Singaporeans find Malaysia an attractive place to visit because of their shopping facilities, attractive holiday destinations and good food. It appears that the leaderships in Malaysia and Singapore have seen the benefit of cooperation and mutual understanding between them in economic, security and social aspects in order to realize their potential.

The tensions may continue to take place in relations between the two countries since there are still many unresolved issues between the two countries. There has been feeling in Malaysia that they always get disadvantaged when dealing with Singapore. This feeling casts a shadow over every administration in Malaysia when handling negotiations with Singapore. As far as this research is concerned, Mahathir had attempted to overcome this feeling by outspokenly stating

Malaysia's position. His position and policy became the trigger to keep renegotiating the longstanding issues and he successfully represented the people's concerns. Malaysian leaders after him also have to face similar issues of how to deal with Singapore in a way that can overcome this disadvantaged feeling so that Malaysia can at least get equal benefit like Singapore.

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