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Unity in Malaysian Political Diversity

Lukman Thaib^{1*} and Mohamad Zaidi Abd Rahman¹

¹Department of Siyasaah Sharr'iyyah, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Malaya.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author LT designed the study; wrote the content of the article and revised the work. Author MZAR carried all the data collections required for writing of this article and conducted the analyzed outcome of the writing.

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ABSTRACT

This article will address the factors that contributed toward Malaysian political stability in the light of broader shifts toward democratization by focusing on the origin of Malaysian plural society, and what type of regime maintenance has been used by Malaysian political leaders which contributed toward peace and harmonious relation among different ethnics of the Malaysian society. In the concluding part of the writing the writer also provides with an overview on existence of the most important political mechanism in the Malaysian political system which provided opportunity for all political leaders in the country to discuss matters related to their ethnics interests in the country. It is believed that among the most important reasons which contributed toward Malaysian political stability are: the existence of peaceful mechanism of conflict resolution, the continuity in the leadership thinking and due to prudent socio-economic policies and programs.

Keywords: Malaysian political system; Malaysian plural society; regime maintenance; continuity in leadership and prudent economic policy.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: cottring@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the few plural societies in the Southeast Asian region that has achieved success in managing ethnic relations. The main measure of such success is the relative absence of violent racial conflicts. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has enjoyed political stability and relative racial harmony. Apart from an almost two-year period following racial riots after the 1969 general election, the parliamentary system of Malaysia has functioned continuously and general elections have been held regularly. Though not as a result of elections, there have been five consecutive changes of heads of government without violence and there have been twelve uninterrupted general elections. In this sense, the political process of Malaysia has been regular and predictable for the last few decades. Its military, moreover, is clearly subordinate to the civil power and there has never been any threat of military intervention in the political process. This experience of political stability makes Malaysia a distinctive case among the developing countries in the region.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article employed desk research work. The data of this work mostly derived from written documents from library research. Based on the data itself, this is basically considered utilizing the qualitative type of research. By employing this method, rational arguments were applied and the issues on development of Malaysian politics and its democratization process, as well as the factors that has contributed to Malaysian political stability were investigated using frequent questions of 'what', 'how' and 'why' in relation to effort of all political forces in the country. However, simple analytical techniques had been of some minimal use when counting ratio and percentages of voting result among different political parties in the general election, but that would not change its basis firmly in qualitative analysis.

With regard to resource materials, there were two categories of data that were utilized as a resource in preparing this article; primary and secondary sources. Both had been collected and considered more extensively in half of this article. For the other part of this writing some historical documents were selected from University of Malaya Library. Secondary sources, mainly book and articles were also important, because of this topic had been widely published in the Malaysian

media. These selected sources were used in order to understand the Malaysian political historical background the current government transformational programme under the sixth Malaysian Premiership, Dato' Sri Muhammad Najib Tun Abdul Razak.

3. THE ORIGIN OF A MALAYSIA'S PLURAL SOCIETY

The country is a multicultural society, with Malays, Chinese and Indians living side by side in peace. The Malays are the largest community, comprising about 60 percent of the population. By constitutional definition, all Malays are Muslim and they are of the Shafi'ites school. They, along with the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and aboriginal tribes in Peninsular Malaysia, are officially classified as Bumiputra (sons of the soil, or indigenous people) and are accorded a variety of constitutionally enshrined special rights or privileges [1]. The non-Bumiputra consists mainly of two groups, the Chinese and Indians brought in as workers in the 19th century largely as a response to economic incentive. The Chinese comprise about a quarter of the population and have historically played an important role in trade and business. Malaysians of Indian descent comprise about seven per cent of the population. They are mainly Hindu Tamils from southern India, speaking Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, and some Hindi, and live mainly in the larger towns on the west coast of the peninsula. Eurasians and others make up the remaining population. Malay Language (*Bahasa Melayu*) is the official language of the country but English is widely spoken.

The Constitution of Malaysia reflects this pluralism. The Constitutional Provision (Art.95B) for what may be called "legal pluralism" (the provision to establish native court systems in addition to the existing common law and *Shari'ah* law aims at protecting the heritage of distinct cultures throughout Malaysia [2]. Ethnic identification is also perpetuated by most political parties. The governing National Front Coalition (*Barisan Nasional*), however, is a multi-racial coalition. Looking at the impressive record of governmental stability, it can be argued that the British colonial policy failed to divide Malaysia's local elites cover ethnic differences and functional roles. Rather, it helped to link them in a "tradition of accommodation" and to ground them in principles of consultation and representativeness.

Today, Malaysia has emerged as a confident and vibrant entity largely secure, stable and increasingly prosperous at home and at peace with its neighbors and full of initiative abroad. Though the country identification with race and even the component states remains strong, a powerful sense of being Malaysian prevails among the population. No longer are loyalties being questioned. A common indigenous language binds the Malaysian people together. The identity between race on the one hand and geographical location, occupation, and relative wealth on the other is much less evident today.

Though differences remain, the quality of life of all Malaysians have improved by quantum and leaps, taking the income measure alone, Malaysians today enjoy a level of income in purchasing parity terms that is ten times higher than what they possessed just 30 years ago. Most important of all, a common vision of a shared future grounded firmly in the constitution and guided by the Rukunegara and Vision 2020 inspires the people. We seem to be firmly on the road towards becoming a united Malaysian nation-a united Bangsa Malaysia.

4. MALAYSIA'S MODEL OF REGIME MAINTENANCE

Many scholars of conflict resolution argue that intense ethnic conflicts in deeply fragmented society are rarely resolved by orthodox democratic means such as "pure majoritarianism", ordinary parliamentary opposition, political campaigning, and winning elections. Therefore, scholars have proposed the alternative "consociational" model, probably best defined by Lijphart in terms of "grand coalition", "mutual veto", "proportionality" and "autonomy" [3]. He argues that through government by an "elite cartel", a democracy with a fragmented political culture is stabilized. This model is used to deal with intense conflicts, both in the smaller developed European countries and in the post-colonial plural societies of the Third or Developing Worlds.

The intense ethnic and societal cleavages in Malaysia have inclined many scholars to view consociational elite bargaining as the most useful theoretical approach in analyzing regime maintenance in the Malaysian political system. Much of the consociational writing regarding Malaysia, therefore, has been oriented towards exploring how the elites of the various ethnic groups are able to reach some measure of

consensus to achieve and preserve socio-political stability, within a democratic political system.

Studies have shown that some of the features of consociationalism are exhibited by the Malaysian political system, especially in the years shortly before and immediately after the independence. Moreover, most of these works conclude that the Malaysian government's efforts at achieving conflict resolution were praiseworthy [4]. As the original proponent of consociationalism, Lijphart also claims that the case of Malaysia especially in the 1957-1969 periods provides a reasonably successful example of consociational democracy in the plural societies of the Third World.

Historically, since its independence in 1957, ethnicity has been regarded as one of the prime sources of conflicts and its resolution has been a primary challenge for the leaders in Malaysia.. The strategy for achieving national integration and political stability was through the formation of ethnically based political parties in the modern political system in the form of a 'grand coalition of leaders' of all significant ethnic groups to govern the country, where UMNO forged coalition with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and later the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) to create the political Alliance [5].

This is the first established permanent political pattern of a 'ruling coalition' in Malaysian politics known first as the Alliance Party and later as the National Front (*Barisan Nasional-BN*) that united ethnically based parties with the UMNO as the major force. This alliance has been widely held as an example of "consociational democracy" in a multiethnic society.

It is believed that the formation of ethnically based parties does not necessarily mean a further exacerbation of ethnic conflicts since those parties can act as agents of inter-communal co-operation. As Huntington asserts, the presence of institutionalized political parties is a crucial condition for bringing a stable political order to newly independent countries in the bringing a stable political order to newly independent countries in the post-colonial world [6]. Nevertheless, there might be some doubt about how far an ethnically based political party system can sustain favorable conditions for successful management of communal conflicts. It must be noted that mono-ethnic parties tend to mobilize ethnically oriented mass discontent to derive their support from their ethnic communities.

Furthermore, the formation of ethnically based political parties in Malaysia, especially the politically dominant UMNO, was a byproduct of increasing pressure to redress immediate grievances over nationalistic as well as communal identities. Therefore, the creation of exclusive political organizations in Malaysia along ethnic lines can be perceived as a modern attempt to consolidate a segmental plurality of ethnic configuration in Malaysia. We have to recognize that ethnically based political parties, indeed, played a substantial role as institutional mechanism for political manifestations of the communal rivalries in Malaysia's post-colonial era.

It was the overwhelming victory of the Alliance in the elections of July 1955 enabled its leadership to negotiate with Britain for independence. A Constitutional Conference was held in London in 1956 which decided that Malaya should become a self-governing and virtually independent state within the Commonwealth by August 1957 [7] and that an independent Constitutional Commission be appointed to frame a draft of Constitution for Malaya.

What is important for us to know is that the leader of different ethnic groups in Malaysia had already established a pattern of grand-coalition co-operation in the sense of 'consociational democracy' prior to independence [8]. The Alliance of the three main communal parties won a remarkable victory in the first federal election in 1955 by taking all but one of the elected seats. It then formed a cabinet in which all three communal political parties participated. After establishing a stable governing coalition, the Alliance contested two more federal elections in 1959 and 1964. For three consecutive federal elections, the Alliance showed the strength and efficiency of the inter-communal grand coalition in ethnically divided society by winning convincingly. Although the 1957-69 Malaysian political system did not fully conform to all of these consociational elements, the political leaders of the different groups accepted the model in the light of specific Malaysian conditions and formed a coalition called the Alliance.

One event which is constantly remembered by Malaysians is the riots which took place on May 13, 1969 resulting from "victory" procession following the election of May 1969. These noisy and racially provocative demonstrations led to riots which left 196 dead and 409 injured [9]. The total authority was offered to a new body, The

National Operations Council (NOC), which worked to restore order and the eventual return of Malaysia to a stable democratic system.

It should be perhaps be noted that the May 1969 riots represented the only serious instance of racial unrest in the history of independent Malaysia. A Department of National Unity was established and it produced a national ideology, the *Rukunegara*, which is based on five principles: a) Belief in God; b) Loyalty to King and Country; c) Upholding the Constitution; d) Rule of Law; e) Good Behaviour and Morality [10]. Subsequently, Tun Abdul Razak devised a policy to co-opt other parties into an enlarged Alliance. The idea was to eliminate or at least minimize the source of opposition and maximize national unity. Malaysia witnessed a political realignment between 1970 and 1972. The opposition parties were allowed to join the political Alliance and bargain for their demands through the Alliance but in return they had to accept restriction on their public pronouncements and mobilization activities. Thus, in Sabah all active parties joined the Alliance. In Sarawak, the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), [11] which represented Chinese interests, negotiated a coalition agreement with the Alliance. Three of the five parties in Sarawak had already joined the coalition.

In peninsular Malaysia, most of the opposition parties entered into negotiations to join the Alliance. These included Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, which was controlling the state of Penang. It agreed to enter into a coalition with the Alliance at the state level and, in return, gained admission to the Alliance at the national level [12]. The case was similar with the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP, now better known by its Malay acronym PAS), which was strong in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu and was the main rival to the UMNO for the Malay votes. Its leader, Dato' Haji Mohammad Asri, was even given a cabinet position.

The only major opposition party that was not allowed to join the National Front (BN) was the Democratic Action Party (DAP) because of its close alliance with Singapore's People's Action Party. Eventually in August 1972 Tun Abdul Razak, the country's second Prime Minister, presented his concept National Front (BN), an enlarged coalition to replace the Alliance. By 1972 Means says: "Political stability was restored through the tactic of absorption of nearly all opposition parties and the transfer of potentially

divided political issues from public arenas to the secret and informal processes on inter-communal bargaining between leaders of communally based political organizations” [13]. Parliamentary democracy had return by then, albeit within the constraints of the Sedition Acts and the reworking of the Alliance party into the National Front (Barisan Nasional). Tun Abdul Razak’s efforts paid off when the National Front (BN) won 90 per cent of the parliamentary seats in the 1974 election. After his death in 1976, he was succeeded by Tun Hussein Onn, followed by Tun Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Badawi in 2003 and Dato’ Sri Muhammad Najib in April 2009.

5. FACTORS TOWARD PEACE AND POLITICAL STABILITY

As we look at the impressive Malaysian record of achievements in the past 54 years of the nation’s history, it is natural to ask the fundamental question: what are the major factors behind Malaysia’s political stability and the economic development?

5.1 The Existence of Peaceful Mechanism of Conflict Resolution (Pmcr)

One of Malaysia’s main problems after independence was to devise an integrative institution that could unite the diverse parties that had been constructed along ethnic lines. In the light of Malaysia’s political stability, and sustained development, anyone who is not aware of this country’s history may be tempted to believe that despite being a multi-ethnic society, it has not experienced serious conflicts. This, of course, is not true. However, Malaysia has been able to resolve conflict amicably and immediately without the involvement of any foreign power or agency.

Prior to Malaysia’s independence, the British were also interested in handing over power to a party whose legitimacy would be recognized by all major ethnic groups. It was felt this goal could be realized only with the formation of a kind of “grand coalition” at the elite level of the major ethnic-based parties. According to this model, the benefits received by the groups or parties in question would be roughly proportional to their members. Although Malaysia did not follow the ideal type of consociationalism, the political leaders of the different ethnic groups accepted the model in the light of specific Malaysian conditions and formed a coalition called the Alliance.

Initially, three parties composed the Alliance accepted a formula to legitimize the interests of their respective ethnic groups. This established a permanent political pattern of a ruling coalition-known first as the Alliance Party and later as the Barisan Nasional (National Front-BN) that united ethnically based parties with the UMNO as the major force. This alliance has been widely held as an example of “consociational democracy” in a multiethnic society.

Hence, the genuine power sharing between the Malays and the minorities (through the collective governance mechanism under the National Front-BN) and the representation of ethnic minorities in the Malaysian parliament and federal cabinet right from independence has been much higher than the historical record of the representation minorities in many Western liberal democracies including the U.S. Thus, the racially based allegation that Malays are not capable of governing has been proven wrong.

The freedom, prosperity, and representation enjoyed by different ethnic communities in Malaysia today are a result of the Malays attachment to the traditional value of the “governing by *Muafakat* (consensus)”. Thus, the government used the traditional Malay practice of governing by *muafakat* as a part of the Peaceful Mechanism of Conflict Resolution to resolve a highly explosive issue at a very critical moment in the nation’s history. This practice continues under the mechanism of government of the National Front (BN).

5.2 Continuity in the Leadership’s Thinking

Another factor which contributed to Malaysia’s political stability is the existence of good leaders who are committed to national unity by caring for all communities and races; and a vision for a self-sufficient, sovereign and independent nation whose strength lies in a sound and growing modern economy. In Malaysia, good leaders have not emerged by accident. Rather, the nation has developed a political culture and process of scrutiny that motivates those aspiring to lead the nation.

In many Muslim countries, we found that political parties are either controlled by dynastic leaderships or are in the firm grip of autocratic leaders. Whether the party rises to power or falls from grace, these leaders always remain at the top of the party as they are immune from any

accountability. This is not the case in Malaysia. If it is in the interest of the nation, the party quietly pressures the leader(s) to call it quits. However, in line with the Malay culture of respect for human dignity, there is a tradition not to openly push leaders out abruptly but rather to allow them time to leave with grace at the earliest possible of mutual convenience.

One of the most important political fact that one needs to be aware of is, the political party that rules Malaysia has been the same for over 54 years. There is continuity in the basic philosophy of governing and vast experiences have been accumulated that are of help in facing new challenges. Differences in approach by Malaysian leaders can be explained in their choice of priorities, their capacities and their perception of issues [14]. However, as the country's civil service is non-political, despite the changing priorities, capacities and perceptions of Malaysian leaders, there is continuity in the management and implementation of government policies.

Continuity in the leadership's thinking is of utmost importance for the political stability and prosperity of a country. That is the reason why Malaysian leaders are always friends of earlier leaders. Aspiring leaders need, therefore, to study Malaysia's political history and the biographies of its leaders to understand the decisions and policies that have formed the foundation for peace and political stability.

Normally, the style and policies of earlier leaders were shaped by the circumstances of their time and hence they are known for different achievements. Dato' Onn Jaafar is called the Father of Malay Nationalism, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra the father of Malaysia Independence, Tun Abdul Razak the father of Rural Development, Tun Husein On is appreciated for his commitment as the Father to national Unity, Tun Mahathir Mohamad is given the title of the visionary Father of Modern Malaysia, and Dato' Sri Muhammad Najib Tun Abdul Razak as the transformational leader for Malaysia with his 'Government Transformation Programme (GTP)', Economic Transformational Program (ETP), New Economic Mode (NEM) and ONE Malaysia concept.

5.3 Prudent Socio-Economic Policies and Programs

Malaysia's government in effort to achieve peace and political stability has adopted various policies

related to economic development that were also aimed at ensuring peace and political stability, apart from their obvious economic objectives. The National Operational Council (NOC) with its members representing every ethnic group in the country was established to be the caretaker government which took over the role of the parliament after the 13th May 1969 tragedy. It was this council which deliberated on all issues and prepared the New Economic Policy (NEP). This policy, which came after the tragedy, is an excellent example of such a double-edged policy. Its twin objectives were the eradication of poverty and the restructuring of society through the 'equitable wealth distribution' among ethnic groups in the country. The NEP policy was very popular. It provides a great hope to the Malays, thereby restoring their confidence in the country and its leadership. It was a policy which restored Malay unity as even PAS at those times was prepared to be a member of National Front (*Barisan Nasional*), the coalition that replaced the Alliance.

Although redistribution is an economic goal however it has political dimensions. Since restructuring a society through redistribution changes the status quo, it has the potential to lead to inter-ethnic conflict and even violence. Then, the main challenge that confronted the leaders after independence was not simply to develop economy but also to narrow the differential development gap and to eradicate poverty as well equitable distribution of wealth among the ethnic group in the society. To achieve this objective the government consequently, came up with the national development policies that are outlined in the Five Year National Development Plans (NDPs). By 2005, Malaysia had gone through ten NDPs. Although the main themes of national development have changed with the passage of time to suit the contemporary domestic and global challenges by taking into account the achievements and shortcomings of earlier policies but the ultimate objective of creating national unity through socio-economic development, still remains the same.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) which fall in the second phase of NDPs, from 1971-2000, covered four five-year plans was regarded as a major redistributive policy aimed at social engineering and restructuring Malaysian society so as to eliminate identification of communities by economic function. This necessitated the mobilization of Malays to the urban sector,

building a business society among the Bumiputra and enhancing education opportunities. One of the NEP's objectives was to increase Bumiputra ownership of the total equity in private business sector to at least 30 per cent, but it also stipulated that non-Bumiputra involvement could reach a level of 40 per cent. The rationale for this affirmative action's was that the Bumiputra community had been lagging behind in economic ownership ever since the country achieved independence, and this was considered to be the major cause of the 1969 riots. Generally, the NEP succeeded in curbing racial violence in the country. The term of the NEP ended in 1990, and it was succeeded by the National Development Policy in 1991. It is important to note here that the NEP was a very popular policy. It was a policy which restored Malay unity as even PAS (Malaysia's Islamic Party) at that time was prepared to be a member of the National Front (BN). It gives great hope to the Malays, therefore restoring their confidence in the country and its leadership.

Malaysia's target through NEP was to achieve the 'equitable wealth distribution' among ethnic group in such a way as not to disrupt growth. In other words, "the NEP targets were to be achieved not through any disrupting redistribution but through active Bumiputra participation and contribution to the country's economic growth." (Ariff [2]) [15] Thus if the NEP was to succeed, it had to be implemented under long-term high growth strategies. This goal was to be realized through two important channels. First, it was to enhance the education and skill levels of Bumiputra to raise their productivity as members of the labour force. This would contribute to an increase in aggregate supply, leading to high growth. Second, improvement in Bumiputra productivity would increase their incomes, enabling them to consume more. As the majority of the Bumiputra generally belonged to fixed income groups at low income scale, they were much less able to save than those communities which were more affluent. However, their consumption contributes to a sustainable increase in aggregate demand, motivating the private business sector to produce more, resulting in higher aggregate supply, more employment and higher growth. A combination of prudent economic policies, a rise in exports, and this continuous increase in domestic demand has enabled the Malaysian economy to sustain an annual average growth rate of 6.5 per cent over the 48-year period 1957-2005, which indeed is an impressive record [16]. It was achieved under

a grand design which many developing countries have aspired to but few have realized in a nutshell, as opposed to a welfare state policy that is a constant burden on the economy. The NEP created both a demand side pull and a supply side push to propel the economy to generate and sustain high growth rates that benefited Malaysia's private business sector and society at large.

The sensitive political economy question that arose was: Would the other ethnic groups be willing to accept this preferential treatment of Bumiputra? Working within the framework of the National Front (BN) and inspired by its mechanism of collective governance, which is rooted in power sharing and democratic consensus, the other communities accepted the NEP as an important building block towards achieving the common destiny of a united nation. Yet, by 1990, the NEP's target of giving Bumiputra a 30 per cent share in the nation's equity capital had not been achieved. According to the 9th Malaysia Plan (MP) 2006-2010 the Bumiputra share had reached only 18.9 per cent by 2004, and according to the chief executive of TERAJU, now that Bumiputra equity has reached 21.9 per cent [17] whereas the non-Bumiputra communities owned 40.6 per cent. Thus in the post-NEP period the development plans continue to emphasize distribution.

The 9th MP also aims at increasing the "Bumiputra ownership of share capital to between 20 and 25 per cent by 2010, in order to reach the target of at least 30 per cent by 2020." [18]. Although the full NEP target is yet to be achieved, many impressive landmarks have been reached along the way. In 2004 only 5.7 per cent of households earned less than the poverty line income as compared to 8.5 per cent in 1999, while the incidence of absolute poverty had been reduced to 1.2 per cent in 2004 from 1.9 per cent in 1999 (Ibid). Despite this, the overall incidence of poverty by ethnic group among the Bumiputra, Chinese and Indians in 2004 was 8.3 per cent, 0.6 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively [19]. The 9th MP aims at improving the conditions of those below the poverty line by targeting to completely eradicate hardcore poverty and reduce the overall poverty to 2.8 per cent by 2010 [20].

At this point it is suitable to focus on another political –economy related issue by raising the following question: Other than helping the Bumiputra, how did the NEP benefit Malaysian

society? The answer is indeed eye opening. First, as mentioned above, the *NEP* has reduced poverty sharply. Second, the government's commitment to maintaining high growth despite the *NEP* put it under constant pressure to consistently adopt high growth plans and strategies that transformed the economy from one based on the production and export of primary commodities to one characterized by the export of manufactured goods with a constant expansion of the services sector. Consequently, the economy delivered a spectacular growth rate 6.7 per cent per annum during the First Perspective Plan(Perspective Plan 1971-1990) and 7.0 per cent per annum during the Second Perspective Plan(1991-2000), 5.4 per cent (2001-2005), and 6.7 per cent (2006-2010) (Bank Negara 2010).

To ensure that Bumiputra equity is 30 per cent of equities in all economic sectors by 2020 Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Muhammad Najib has announced the formation of '*Unit Peneraju Agenda Bumiputra (TERAJU)*' on February 8, 2011 which will function as the secretariat for *Bumiputra Agenda Action Council (MTAB)*. Its main objective is to lead, coordinate and drive Bumiputra transformation and participation in the economy to reduce the economic gap that exists between Bumiputras and other races in the Malaysian society. He also added that "It is true that the non-Malays became rich because of hard work but it is no less important to note that they became rich also because of our country's stability and sound administration" [21].

The *TERAJU* program represents a new approach based on meritocracy among Bumiputras with no question of cronyism but only to help those who can truly succeed. According to Prime Minister Dato' Najib, the switch in the approach towards assisting Bumiputra entrepreneurs based on meritocracy was seen as being better as previous methods, such as giving initial public offerings(IPOs) through the Bumiputera quota, did not last long as the shares were often resold on the market. In line with changes in global economic environment which produce new economic factors such as China and India its seems that the impact of globalization trends is difficult to be avoided. For that reason to avoid Malaysia becomes a 'Mediocrity', the meritocracy system within the Bumiputras companies need to applied.

To achieve this objective, *TERAJU* will also work with the Performance Management and Delivery Unit(*PEMANDU*) to discuss Bumiputra agenda issues. In this regard *TERAJU* will function as an agency that will propose the transformation agenda in all programs which is undertaken by all government institutions and agencies to enhance institutional effectiveness and programmes which have been implemented related to Bumiputra interest. In this case, the *TERAJU* will function as "Game Changer" for promoting the Bumiputra development agenda to ensure that the Bumiputra community will be able to obtain the benefits from the country's economic progress in the near future.

6. CONCLUSION

Malaysia's experience demonstrates that its success is the logical outcome of a developed political culture that included different ethnic groups to lead the nation. It is a fortunate country within the Muslim World to have visionary leaders who pursued policies to promote peace, political stability and prosperity for all races in the country. The adoption of prudent and effective policies for socio-economic developments alone is not sufficient, but due to the implementation of its economic policies at the right times, with a full sense of responsibility, and taking into account the interest of the largest of both the majority and minority communities in forming a united nation is also playing an important role which contributes to Malaysian political stability.

It is believed that the ability of the Malaysian leaders to create a constructive vision for the nation is a product of the entire socio-cultural and civilization package that is part and parcel of the Malay identity, personality and culture. Hence, good economic policies always need a socio-political process rooted in a peaceful, healthy, constructive and conducive environment. This environment has to be consciously constructed and continuously nurtured by the government through the use of a fine combination of strategic ingredients e.g. an inter-ethnic commitment to protect and promote each community's interests, a Peaceful Mechanism of Conflict Resolution(*PMCR*) through a durable and respectable power-sharing formula. It is clear that the presence of *PMCR* in the Malaysian socio political set up is rooted in the institutionalization of a mechanism of collective governance by democratic consensus.

To sum up, it is not exaggerated to say that Malaysia's experience can serve as a blueprint for Muslim countries. Despite Muslim countries' enormous resources, the progress of both rich and poor people in Muslim countries is being inhibited by internal conflict. These conflicts arise because either the powerful minority ruling elite ignores the majority; or majority ethnic community/tribes abuses its numerical strength to promote its interests at the cost of the others; or there are feudal, dynastic rulers/tribal chiefs pursuing their interests while the people are hunger for democracy.

There have been instances where the persistence of such conflicts in the developing countries has led to civil wars, and even the break-up of countries. Malaysia has played a very constructive role though the monarchy system within the framework of democracy, turning the institution into an asset in nation building. The ruling elites in particular and the political leaders in the Muslim countries can look into the various institutions of Malaysia and learn from its experience and adapt them to their needs within the framework of their socio-political and cultural environment.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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