

May 13 and beyond (Pt 2)
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It is clear that the 1969 election results and victory parade were the two main precipitating factors leading to the race riots. It must be recognised at the outset that these were distinctly separate events and it is important to distinguish between the two.

In fact because the resulting race riots were the direct outcome of the aftermath of the victory parade itself, they will not be taken up for analysis here except to reiterate that the level of racial insults and threats to continued Malay government seen during the election campaign had in fact become too extreme even to mention.

The years of being in the political wilderness, and the expected revolution of rising expectations resulting in the revolution of rising frustrations, had taken their toll.

Once the spark of the fuse had been lit all hell broke loose and the only steps that could be taken were to try to bring the law and order situation back under control. For example at the height of the riots, Ismail Mohd Ali recorded that Abdul Razak Hussein (photo) wanted to drive down to the epicentre in his official car and directly call on the rioters to stop the bloodshed. Ismail's response to Razak was simple and effective: "They will probably tear you to pieces."

(It might not be out of place to seek a word of clarification as to whether the riots could be strictly termed as 'race' riots. Had they really been so, they would have spread to rural areas as well and Chinese shopkeepers and others in small-scale business scattered around the kampongs would have been massacred.)

In retrospect, the 1969 election campaign itself was the writing on the wall that there could be some racial trouble because of the strong 'anti-racial' tone of the entire campaign that according to Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah also extended to the candidates from PAS and Umno itself. And yet there were no attempts either by the Alliance government or the police to take pre-emptive steps to maintain law and order.

Undue delay

Even when the election results showed that the Umno-dominated Alliance had in fact suffered a major setback when it lost the two-thirds parliamentary majority that it had enjoyed since the inception of democracy, there seemed a lack of preparedness for any likely adverse outcomes.

Indeed, even with the opposition's victory celebrations over the gain of Penang and Kelantan and when Perak and Selangor were on the brink of falling into their hands, and with Chinese and Indian demonstrators calling on the Malays to quit Kuala Lumpur, leaving the seat of government to the opposition, there is little evidence of police preparedness to face a deteriorating law and order situation.

The seriousness of the situation might be gauged from the following statement: "For the first 24 hour period, sections of the police force simply became demoralised due to the impact of widespread violence and the regular police forces are a key element in maintaining any long range security in this country." (17th May 1969, Confidential to FCO, cited in Kua Kia Soong,

May 13th p50)

As regards the tragic aftermath of the riots in terms of the deaths, casualties and untold suffering and misery of the victims there is little doubt that it was worse because of the undue delay on the part of the authorities to deal with the situation. The fact was that the political leaders were caught by surprise and hence even after three days of rioting there was still no directive from the government to the army to move in to control the situation. Neither were the army chiefs of staff able to initiate action on their own volition.

Indeed, in an informal discussion with one of the generals summoned by Razak and questioned as to why the army was failing to take prompt action, he was astonished to be told that the army was waiting for instructions!

It would seem very strange that such senior military officers who would have probably have been trained overseas including top British military institutions failed to grasp the seriousness of the law and order situation and to have acted accordingly. When I probed the matter further, the general's response was that the army was waiting for the police to withdraw from the scene so that it could be free to take such action it thought fit. It was only after Razak signed a directive that the army finally moved in.

There is no question therefore that the earlier colonial government, and the entire Alliance government should be held accountable for this tragic situation where ordinary law-abiding men, women and children were hounded like animals and died like dogs in the streets through no fault of their own.

It can be seen from the above analysis that the entire elite ruling class of both races were more concerned about maintaining their cosy neo-colonial status quo after independence while being themselves protected by the Anglo-Malaysian defence treaty against foreign aggression. This is all the more incriminating considering that that in my recent book I argued that neither Umno nor the MCA had a popular mandate to take over the Government from the British at the time of independence. ('The Finest Hour')

MCA pullout

The question of the establishment of the National Operations Council (NOC) must also be recognised. Whatever else may be said about the usurpation of democratic powers by the military it must nonetheless be conceded that the law and order had been brought under control and the political situation was in hand.

Particularly to those with first-hand experience of the lawlessness in parts of KL controlled by gangsters and secret societies prior to the elections, and especially to those who saw their relatives being suddenly massacred and they themselves severely injured or being forced to become refugees, the NOC might be said to be a blessing in disguise.

Within two days the membership of the Council was announced but perhaps one of the greatest political tactical errors was the MCA's decision not to accept any cabinet posts. While it was understandable that the party should abdicate from its traditional partnership with Umno in the Alliance, (because of the massive defeat of its candidates in the general election), withdrawal meant that Umno had a free hand to push ahead the bumiputera position in the New Economic Policy without Chinese opposition.

But the fact remains that while there was no policy to enhance a multiracial society under

colonialism, indeed policies such as divide and rule were designed to ensure that integration did not take place. But even after Independence the continuation of political parties based on race essentially perpetuated the divisiveness of society along racial lines rather than to work towards integration.

It should be clear to readers therefore that our entire society is on a fault line and therefore we have no option but to get off it as soon as possible. With respect, it happens that both my recent books 'The Naked Social Order' and 'The Finest Hour' provide discussion and analysis on these vital questions and it is my considered opinion therefore that we need to reject the post-colonial social structure in its entirety once and for all and to seek an alternative model if we are to avoid racial conflicts in the future.

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