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The 1974 General Elections in Malaysia

Chandrasekaran Pillay

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The 1974 General Elections in Malaysia

A Post-Mortem

by

Chandrasekaran Pillay

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FOREWORD

It is seldom that one gets a chance to read a contemporary account of a general election in Southeast Asia from the pen of a local, home-grown political scientist. From this standpoint, Mr. Chandrasekaran Pillay's *The 1974 General Election in Malaysia: A Post-Mortem* is all the more welcome, even though it makes no pretence to being a detailed analysis of voting patterns, party performances, and so on.

In wishing Mr. Chandrasekaran Pillay and his paper all the best, it is clearly understood that responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in the work that follows rests exclusively with Mr. Chandrasekaran Pillay, and his interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the Institute itself or its supporters.

7 November 1974

Kernal Singh Sandhu
Director

This post-mortem of the 1974 General Elections in Malaysia does not pretend to be a detailed study of voting patterns and party performances. Rather, the focus is on general electoral trends and their relationship to the political development of the country.

Description of the Results

The elections of 24th August 1974 turned out to be a massive victory for the Barisan Nasional (BN) (see Table 1). A coalition of nine political parties from both Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak,¹ it managed to capture 135 out of the 154 seats in the Malaysian Parliament.² This means that the BN is much stronger today at Federal level than the Alliance was in 1959, at the beginning of the First Malayan Parliament, or in 1964, at the beginning of the First Malaysian Parliament, or in 1969, at the beginning of the Second Malaysian Parliament.³

1 The parties are the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) - all part of the Alliance, Peninsular Malaysia - together with the Partai Islam (PAS), the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan), the People's Progressive Party (PPP), the Sabah Alliance, the Sarawak Alliance and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP).

2 The actual breakdown of BN seats in Parliament is as follows:

UMNO	61
MCA	20
MIC	4
PAS	14
Gerakan	4
PPP	1
Sabah Alliance	16
Sarawak Alliance-SUPP	15
	<hr/>
Total	135

3 For details on the 1959 elections see K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1965; for the 1964 elections see K.J. Ratnam and R.S. Milne, *The Malayan Parliamentary Election of 1964*, University of Malaya Press, Singapore, 1967; for the 1969 elections see R.K. Vasil, *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1972.

Table 1: The Party Situation in Parliament and State Assemblies after the 1974 General Elections

	BN	DAP	Pekemas	SNAP	Independents	Total
Parliament	135	9	1	9	-	154
State Assemblies						
Johore	31	1	-	-	-	32
Kedah	24	1	-	-	1	26
Kelantan	36	-	-	-	-	36
Malacca	16	4	-	-	-	20
N. Sembilan	21	3	-	-	-	24
Pahang	32	-	-	-	-	32
Penang	23	2	1	-	1	27
Perak	31	11	-	-	-	42
Perlis	12	-	-	-	-	12
Selangor	30	1	-	-	2	33
Trengganu	27	-	-	-	1	28
Sabah*	32	-	-	-	-	32
Sarawak	30	-	-	18	-	48
Total	345	23	1	18	5	392

* Elections held previously.

The stupendous triumph of the BN becomes even more significant if one looks at the election results in the various states. For the first time since 1959, the coalition in control of the Federal Government is also in charge of each and every state in the Federation. In 1959 as a case in point, the Partai Islam (PAS), then known as the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), controlled Kelantan and Trengganu; in 1964, Singapore was under the People's Action Party (PAP), while Kelantan continued to be ruled by PAS; in 1969 apart from PAS's continued dominance in Kelantan, Penang also fell to the Opposition - the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan).

More important, the Barisan Nasional took three State Assemblies - Kelantan, Pahang and Perlis - without conceding a single seat to the Opposition. In most of the other states, the Opposition can hardly be expected to play a significant role. The exceptions would be Sarawak, where the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) holds 18 out of the 48 seats and Perak where the Democratic Action Party (DAP) has 11

out of the 42 seats. Indeed, putting aside SNAP and the DAP, there is only one other political party in the whole country with any seat at all in the State Assemblies. The Partai Keadilan Masyarakat (Pekemas) holds a solitary seat in the Penang State Assembly. The other Opposition Assemblymen are 5 Independents scattered throughout the country - 1 in Trengganu, 1 in Kedah, 1 in Penang and 2 in Selangor.

Finally, as Table 1 shows, the Opposition should be equally despondent with its performance in the fight for Parliament. There are 19 Opposition MPs today in a 154-member Dewan Rakyat compared with 45 in a 144-member Chamber immediately after the 1969 General Elections.⁴ The DAP and SNAP have nine MPs each while Pekemas has one seat. It might be added at this point that neither the Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaya (PSRM) nor the Kaum Insaf Tanah Ayer (KITA) nor the Independent People's Progressive Party (IPPP) managed to win a single seat either in the state or Federal elections.

I shall now try to analyse and explain the results of the 1974 General Elections. The focus will be on Peninsular Malaysia with a brief evaluation of the electoral situation in Sabah and Sarawak. Then, I shall attempt to find out what implications the elections have for the political development of Malaysian society.

PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

First, what possible factors explain the BN's sweep? In order to answer the question there is a need to treat the response of each community to the BN individually and separately. This is largely because sentiments and issues which determine responses tend to vary from community to community.

4 The breakdown of Opposition seats in the 1969 Parliamentary elections is as follows:

DAP	13
PAS	12
Gerakan	8
PPP	4
SNAP	8
	—
Total	45

Malay Response to the BN

As far as the Malay community was concerned it gave almost 100% support to the BN. Everyone of its Malay candidates for Parliament - 61 from UMNO and 14 from PAS - was returned. In the state elections only 4 of its Malay candidates lost - all to Independents.

There are, it seems to me, a variety of reasons which could explain the Malay response to the BN. First, there is Tun Razak's image. As leader of the BN, and even more crucial, as Prime Minister he is perceived as the harbinger of a new order for the Malays. His association with the New Economic Policy with its unequivocal emphasis upon Malay economic aspirations buttresses this image. In a way, his present popularity with the Malays can be compared to Dato Onn's standing with the community in 1946 or the esteem that Tunku Abdul Rahman enjoyed at the time of Merdeka in 1957. There is little doubt that Tun Razak's popularity was harnessed to the core in order to ensure a number of BN victories in the rural areas.⁵

Perhaps the promise of more jobs and higher incomes through land schemes, irrigation projects, improved fishing facilities and so on - in short, the promise of a 'Golden Era' in the event of a BN victory - also helped to influence the voters. Promises of this sort achieve a certain degree of credibility especially when there has been some preceding development - like Felda (Federal Land Development Authority) schemes in Kelantan and Trengganu, and new townships in Pahang which have brought benefits of a kind to little rural communities. Thus, we have the BN election manifesto recounting some of the achievements of the last five years and pledging to do much more provided it is given a powerful mandate by the people. As the manifesto put it, "450,000 jobs have been created which is 58% of the five year target. Most of the jobs are in the manufacturing sector. Another 140,000 new jobs will be created this year. 670,000 acres of uncultivated land have been developed ... Over 200,000 acres of new land will be developed during the year ... Barisan Nasional will continue to develop new growth centres consistent with the objectives of restructuring society and eradication of poverty. To this end, we shall establish more industrial estates, Free Trade Zones and such other

5 This was especially true of 'new faces' who had been associated with Tun Razak as his Political Secretary or Press Secretary or in some other such capacity. Notable examples would be Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and Encik Abdullah Majid.

projects by providing the necessary incentives to create more employment and provide higher income for our people."⁶ The actual election campaign was along the same lines. Tun Razak, for instance, reminded the Malays, "that a strong government was vital to ensure that the 30% target of Malay participation in commerce and industry would be achieved. At the moment, Malays own only 2% of the total share capital in the country. They have sixteen years to achieve the 28% required to meet the target ... When the Trengganu Tengah integrated land development project was opened, more growth centres will be created. [sic] This will help create jobs in Trengganu."⁷

All said and done, however, neither the image of the man nor the promise of progress was the really crucial factor. What was crucial, it seems to me in ensuring a massive win for the BN in rural constituencies was simply the vacuum in the world of Malay opposition politics. With PAS in the BN, there is now no effective, organized, Malay-based opposition in the country.⁸ The defeat of the PSRM in Trengganu and the rout of the United Independents in Kelantan established this as a fact. Indeed, in the overwhelming majority of Malay constituencies it was not so much a question of who would win; rather, it was a question of whether the UMNO-PAS combination would function smoothly. And because UMNO managed to amalgamate its vast human financial resources with PAS's brilliant techniques of communication and mobilization, the BN swept the board.

Indian Response to the BN

While it is true that the Malay community gave full support to the BN, it is fairly safe to assume that the Indians also provided firm backing to the coalition. There is, however, a problem of ascertaining this assumption for there are no Indian-dominant constituencies as such. The

6 See "The Barisan Nasional Election Manifesto," Kuala Lumpur, 1974.

7 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 10 August 1974.

8 PAS joined UMNO in a national and state level coalition arrangement on the 1st of January 1973. The factors that brought about this coalition have been analysed by the writer in "Coalition Politics," *Commentary* (Singapore), January/March 1973: pp. 4-5. See also Syed Hussein Alatas' "The Politics of Coalition in Malaysia," *Current History*, December 1972: pp. 271-277.

ethnic breakdown of 3 out of the 4 Parliamentary constituencies contested by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) show a sizeable Indian presence in each.⁹ For this reason, and also because Indians and Ceylonese candidates from other parties in the coalition were in fact fighting in preponderantly Chinese constituencies, I would regard the performance of the MIC as a more or less accurate measure of Indian response to the BN.

The MIC won all its 4 Parliamentary seats and all but 1 state seat.¹⁰ If this is any index, we should now try to explain Indian support for the BN. To my own mind, there are three possible explanations. Firstly, the Indian community - like the Chinese to a lesser extent - is apparently inclined towards close cooperation with the Malay élite in the BN. Alignment with the Malay élite is perceived as the most efficacious approach for securing Indian interests. I have argued elsewhere that this perception has gained currency since the Constitution Amendment Act (1971), and the implementation of the New Education Policy and the New Economic Policy in the last three years or so.¹¹ Essentially it is a perception which is cognizant of the renewed dynamism of Malay political pre-eminence. Since the MIC represents Indian ties with the dominant Malay élite, support for that party, and through it, the BN, reflects the community's faith in this approach to Malaysian politics.

There is perhaps a related explanation. Past patterns of support seem to indicate that as a whole, this minority community is more prepared to back middle-of-the-road political organization rather than chauvinistically-inclined parties.¹² For the majority of Indian voters

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- 9 The three constituencies with a sizeable Indian presence would be Pelabohan Klang, Sungei Siput and Telok Kemang. The odd one out would be Damansara in the Federal Territory.
 - 10 It lost the Kubu state seat in Malacca to Lim Kit Siang, the DAP Secretary-General.
 - 11 See C. Pillay, *Protection of the Malay Community: a Study of UMNO's Position and Opposition Attitudes*, unpublished M.S. Sc. thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 1974.
 - 12 For example, Indians were keen supporters of the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) founded by Dato Onn bin Ja'afar in 1951 and of the moderate, multi-racial Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia when it was established in 1968.

then, located in urban and semi-urban constituencies, the choice was therefore between the BN and Pekemas.¹³ While it is conceivable that Pekemas obtained a good portion of Indian votes, it is my impression that a far bigger chunk went to the BN. I suspect that the usefulness of working with a Malay élite in power, which has already been explained might have been the crucial factor.

Finally, the new leadership of the party might have had some impact upon the Indian electorate.¹⁴ It could well have convinced Indian voters that given its apparent vigour and its willingness to articulate Indian interests, it deserves the support of the community.

Chinese Response to the BN

Now, how would one evaluate the Chinese response to the BN? Three parties are involved in our analysis - the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Gerakan and the People's Progressive Party (PPP). Because the response of the community to each of these parties shows some important differences, our task becomes a lot more complex. The MCA shall be our starting point.

The MCA

Records show that the MCA won 20 out of the 24 Parliamentary seats and 43 out of the 56 state seats that it contested all over Peninsular Malaysia. This victory represents a tremendous improvement over the 1969 situation when the MCA secured a mere 13 out of 33 Parliamentary constituencies and 26 out of 80 state seats.

There is little doubt that the MCA has regained the confidence of the Chinese community. Again, it seems to me that one of the compelling reasons for this revival is the view that cooperation with the dominant Malay élite

13 Pekemas, formed in late 1971, by a group that broke away from the Gerakan, has attempted to be more multi-racial in its attitudes than say the DAP. This is borne out by its policies on language, education and culture.

14 The new leadership refers to men like Tan Sri Manickavasagam, Datuk Athi Nahappan and S. Subramaniam who replaced Tun V.T. Sambanthan and his group. Since taking over, the new leadership has organized an important 'economics seminar' and reorganized the party at certain levels.

essential for safeguarding Chinese interests in the post-1969 political environment. If anything, Tun Razak's oft-repeated warning to the community that failure to elect the BN's Chinese candidates would result in an all-Malay government must have convinced a lot of Chinese voters about the danger of rejecting the coalition. In Tun Razak's words, "They [the Chinese and Indians] must vote non-Malay candidates from the National Front, otherwise, they will have no representatives in the government which will be established ... Even without non-Malay candidates from the Barisan Nasional we can establish a government."¹⁵ It is significant that Datuk Lee San Choon, the Acting MCA President responded to the warning by urging the Chinese to "vote Chinese who can play a role in government."¹⁶ And, to repeat an earlier point, it was with this purpose in mind that the Chinese supported the MCA - the only Chinese-based party in the BN with a long history of relationship with the Malay élite.

The PPP

While the MCA won support to enable it to perform this role, the PPP was turned down - in spite of its newly-forged ties with UMNO. The PPP lost 3 out of 4 Parliamentary seats and retained just 2 state constituencies in the Ipoh area, "the headquarters of the PPP and its birthplace."¹⁷ There are two possible reasons for the party's defeat.

Firstly, given its geographically restricted appeal and the small number of candidates it fielded, the PPP was not regarded by the Chinese as a significant factor in ensuring community representation in a Malay-led government. In other words, the Chinese electorate could with some confidence reject PPP candidates without sacrificing the opportunity for influencing public policy from within. And apparently, the Chinese voters had an important reason for rejecting the party. The PPP was seen as a party that had betrayed Chinese interests by joining UMNO and the BN. This sense of betrayal can only be understood against the background of PPP policies and postures in the pre-coalition era. Easily the most vocal advocate of non-Malay rights, the PPP was vehemently opposed to the special position of the Malays and the status of Malay as the sole official language. Thus, while the Chinese were prepared to support

15 See *Utusan Malaysia*, 8 August 1974.

16 *Ibid.*, 16 August 1974.

17 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 19 August 1974.

the MCA because of the political advantages inherent in its time-honoured relationship with the Malay power-holders, they were not prepared to tolerate the *volte-face* of the PPP.

However, the switch to the BN alone does not explain the party's defeat. It is reliably learnt from various sources that in recent years top party leaders have been neglecting their constituencies. In fact, Datuk S.P. Seenivasagam, the President of the party, admitted, "that he had not visited his constituency in the last few years ... It is no use driving around to show my face when I can stay in the office and perform my responsibilities to the people."¹⁸

The Gerakan

Now, if 'betrayal' is the explanation in Ipoh, how does one account for the Gerakan's commendable performance in Penang, since the party, originally an opposition group, had also joined the BN?¹⁹ The Gerakan won 4 out of 7 Parliamentary seats and 13 out of 18 state seats contested. Three out of the 4 Parliamentary and 11 out of the 13 state, victories were from Penang.²⁰ In contrast, its 2 Parliamentary candidates in the Federal Territory and 1 in Selangor lost their seats.²¹

From my own investigations in Penang and elsewhere there was, undeniably, an undercurrent of resentment towards the Gerakan for joining the BN. For two reasons, this feeling did not manifest itself in the voting in Penang. Firstly, however strong the resentment, there was an even stronger sense of apprehension about voting out the Gerakan and voting in the DAP. The May 13th incident was largely responsible for this. For in a real sense it was the decline of the Alliance in Selangor and the possibility of a DAP-led government which sparked off the May 13th riots in the wake of

18 *Ibid.*, 21 August 1974.

19 The Gerakan was the first Opposition party in Peninsular Malaysia to join the Alliance in a coalition. This took place in early 1972.

20 The 4th Parliamentary win was in Taiping, Perak, while the remaining 2 state victories were in Changkat Jering, Perak and Tikam Batu, Kedah.

21 These defeats were at Kepong (Dr. Tan Tiong Hong), Bandar KL (Alex Lee), and Petaling (Goh Hock Guan).

the 1969 General Elections.²² With that experience in the background, the electorate in Penang was more cautious about dismissing the Gerakan and its partners from office. In contrast to this, the Chinese electorate in Ipoh, as we have seen, was quite prepared to show its displeasure with the PPP since the action could not result in a change of government.²³ Similarly and indeed more significantly the voters did reject - as we have indicated - Gerakan candidates standing in preponderantly Chinese constituencies outside Penang.²⁴

The fear of voting out the Gerakan in Penang as an important element in the elections was something that Gerakan leaders like Dr. Lim Chong Eu, the Chief Minister of the state, were aware of. In a number of rallies, he emphasized that there would be instability and chaos if the Opposition took over.²⁵ He also argued that if the Opposition controlled the state, the Central Government would not assist in the development of Penang - an argument which his Alliance predecessor had used against him in 1969.²⁶ These public pronouncements were backed by a more effective 'whispering campaign' which warned the voters that if Dr. Lim lost there would be a Malay Chief Minister since UMNO would in any case emerge as the largest single party. Undoubtedly, this had some impact upon a preponderantly Chinese electorate.

However, a second factor must also be considered. Dr. Lim went to the electorate with certain economic achievements to his credit. "The creation of 50,000 job opportunities involving new skills and technologies," and "the setting up of 74 new factories now in operation and construction of another 74,"²⁷ did make some impact upon the voters.

22 For an analysis of the causes of the riots see Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971.

23 This is because the majority of Perak state constituencies have a stronger Malay presence which makes it difficult for the DAP to gain control of the state.

24 All the constituencies mentioned in footnote 21 for instance have huge Chinese majorities.

25 Personal attendance at rallies.

26 Personal attendance at rallies.

27 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 22 August 1974.

All said and done then, the Chinese response to the BN through parties like the MCA, PPP and the Gerakan manifested a number of trends and tendencies. There was, fundamentally, a willingness to support the BN. The desire to protect community interests, fear of the consequences of rejecting the powers-that-be, and some appreciation of limited economic achievements contributed towards this. Support for the BN, however, was not overwhelming in comparison to the Malay or Indian situation. But as we have seen, this was due primarily to the rejection of individual parties rather than the BN as a whole.

The Opposition

The DAP

The party that gained most from the rejection of the PPP and some other candidates from the Gerakan and MCA was, of course, the DAP. The DAP captured 9 Parliamentary constituencies in all - 4 in Perak, 1 in Selangor, 1 in Negeri Sembilan, 1 in Malacca and 2 in the Federal Territory. Its tally from the state elections was 23 - again with 11 of its victories in Perak.

The question we must now ask is: why did the voters choose the DAP rather than Pekemas to represent them after rejecting certain non-Malay elements in the BN? Part of the answer has already been suggested. If the electorate demolished the PPP, for instance, because of its *volte-face*, it decided to support the DAP precisely because of its consistent, persistent articulation of Chinese interests. Restrained by law from demanding official status for the Chinese language or from opposing the constitutional position of the Malay language, the DAP succeeded nonetheless to project itself as the only genuine champion of Chinese education and Chinese culture. "The Rocket [the DAP symbol] protects Chinese culture," was a popular and effective campaign slogan. At the same time, other posters in Chinese warned that the *dacing* [the BN symbol] destroys Chinese education, that it changes the character of Chinese schools and urges determination to oppose the *dacing*.²⁸ By expressing fears and misgivings present within the Chinese community and by strengthening its own image as an effective bulwark against any attempt to erode Chinese culture, the DAP secured a lot of support in a number of Chinese constituencies.

28 See *ibid.*, 17 August 1974, for a report on that issue.

However, the ethnic appeal of the party is not all the explanation. The DAP has always been a well-organized and efficiently-run party with a core of energetic, dedicated men at the helm.²⁹ It is now only too apparent that ever since the resumption of political activities in 1971, the party has been preparing the ground in a number of urban areas for the 1974 General Elections.

Pekemas

In contrast to the DAP, Pekemas did not have a clear, easily definable ethnic position. Indeed, in spite of its non-Malay image, the party as a whole stayed away from issues such as Chinese education and Chinese culture.³⁰ Its emphasis in the campaign was on inflation, the problems of poverty and corruption.³¹ At the same time, Pekemas made a more serious attempt than the DAP to win Malay support by contesting a number of rural constituencies especially in Perak and Selangor.

Like the DAP, however, Pekemas failed miserably in Malay constituencies. Part of the explanation in both instances is, it seems to me, related to the calibre of candidates. A number of the Malay contestants from these two parties were, in fact, "push-outs," "drop-outs" and "fall-outs" from UMNO and PAS who merely wanted a chance to participate in the elections.

What is more significant in the ultimate analysis is, however, Pekemas's performance in Chinese dominant constituencies. As we have hinted a while ago, the party did very badly in these areas. At Parliamentary level, only Dr. Tan Chee Khoo retained his seat with a much reduced majority. In the state elections Ong Yi How scored its only victory in Penang. It is undeniably true that both

29 Lim Kit Siang himself, the party Secretary-General, is the best example of the DAP's determination and dedication.

30 This was apparent from a number of rallies I attended in Penang and elsewhere. However, it must be mentioned here that one of its leaders, V. David, adopted a very chauvinistic line in his campaign. See his speech in Parliament entitled, "The Concepts of Merdeka betrayed by the Alliance" which was distributed to voters in the Jelutong Parliamentary Constituency.

31 See Pekemas election manifesto in *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 1 August 1974.

these victories were due to the personal popularity of the candidates.³² As a party, Pekemas was decisively rejected by the electorate on the 24th of August.

What were the reasons for the party's annihilation? In a situation where certain BN candidates were demolished by the DAP because they had 'betrayed' Chinese interests, a party like Pekemas without any strong ethnic attraction could not be expected to do well. Besides, the party had neither the men nor the organization nor the energy to mount a powerful crusade. As an example of this, it was only in May 1974, that one of the party's leaders had asked whether, "Pekemas was going to be a serious political organization or would it maintain politics as a part-time hobby."³³ On the whole, Pekemas conveyed the impression of being a party of "has-beens"³⁴ - an impression confirmed by the voters.

PSRM

Now the Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaya also failed to live up to its own high expectations. The vast majority of its candidates stood in rural constituencies - a good portion of them in Pahang, Kelantan and Trengganu. PSRM in fact made a special bid to capture the state government in Trengganu where it fielded its men in 27 out of the 28 constituencies. As we have seen the party did not win a single state or Parliamentary seat in Trengganu or anywhere else in Malaysia for that matter. From the point of view of the number of votes secured, however, the party fared better than, say, Pekemas. For instance, "66% of Pekemas State Assembly and 63% of its Parliament aspirants lost their deposits. For Partai Rakyat, the figures are 38 and 43% respectively."³⁵

32 Dr. Tan Chee Khoon's majority in a 34,488 strong constituency was a mere 666 votes; Ong Yi How won in Bagan Jermal, Penang with a more comfortable margin - 1,531 votes.

33 This is an excerpt from a letter which V. David had written to Dr. Tan Chee Khoon, the President, and quoted in an article on the elections. See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 6 August 1974.

34 Dr. Tan Chee Khoon, V. David, V. Veerappan and Tan Phock Kin have all been in politics since 1955.

35 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 29 August 1974. This post-mortem of the elections by Noordin Sopiee is an interesting, well-written article. It is entitled "Triumph - and Blighted Hopes."

How does one account for the PSRM's dismal performance? To analyse the party's failure, one has to understand PAS's success in the past, when it was in the Opposition. In contrast to PAS, the PSRM did not have the support and cooperation of important rural élites - like the private religious instructor, the village school teacher, the village headman and so on. It is these élites who have always mobilized the votes of the Malay masses.

Quite apart from the fact that the PSRM had not spent enough time and energy building up a rural base through the active involvement of these élites, it is also true that these village-level leaders would not have, in any case, responded as enthusiastically to the party as they did to PAS in the old days. For unlike PAS, PSRM is not a Malay ethnic party given to skilful manipulation of Malay fears and Malay suspicions of Chinese ubiquity in the economy and Chinese participation in politics.³⁶ As a socialist party, the PSRM campaigned on the basis of class issues - poverty, neglect and exploitation of rural fishermen and farmers. Its manifesto for Trengganu, for instance, emphasized the fair distribution of land to all farmers, the establishment of fishing cooperatives, the reduction of licence fees for *becas* (rickshaws) and an education fund for poor students.³⁷ Right through the campaign, the PSRM stressed these issues without attempting to make any communal impact upon the electorate.

There is, perhaps, an additional reason why the party's approach failed to strike a responsive chord. The BN presented the PSRM to the Malay-Muslim voters as a party which was not in sympathy with Islam. "Sidang Roh" (A Conference of Souls), a poem by Kassim Ahmad, the party's Chairman, was used as evidence of this attitude. The last line of his poem reads ... "God is dead." Basically, it is a poem of protest against the debauchery of the ruling class. But then, as one political commentator put it, in an analysis on the eve of elections. "The last line ... 'God is dead' cost the Partai Rakyat very dearly in the Pasir Puteh by-elections recently. It might again prove very costly to the party in Trengganu in this week of decision."³⁸ To what extent "Sidang Roh" was decisive

36 For a discussion on PAS's communication styles see C. Pillay, *Protection*, ch. 4.

37 See *The Star* (a Penang daily), 11 August 1974.

38 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 22 August 1974.

in influencing the voters is difficult to determine. What we do know for certain is that the PSRM was overwhelmingly defeated in Trengganu - and elsewhere.

The United Independents

The other challenge to the BN in Malay areas was, of course, from the United Independents - the Barisan Bebas (BB) - of Kelantan. A group of independent candidates with a fair sprinkling of professionals in it, the BB was established by a former PAS MP Fakaruddin Abdullah on the eve of the General Elections.³⁹ The main purpose of the BB was to overthrow the PAS-UMNO coalition government in Kelantan. Its major campaign issues were fairly well-known allegations of corruption and nepotism in the state government.

Although pamphlets containing these allegations were widely distributed, the BB crusade failed to ignite. The lack of money and machinery was a serious handicap. So was the absence of a strong sense of moral antagonism towards corruption among the voting public. At the same time, the warning by the state government, "to Imams, Penghulus, mosque officials, teachers and government officials against any active involvement in the elections contributed to the collapse of the opposition."⁴⁰ To clinch it all Datuk Haji Muhammad Asri described the participation of the Independents "as an attempt to destroy the community's struggle which seeks to establish the *bumiputra* as the basis of national politics."⁴¹ Castigating the challenger as an opponent of "the Malay struggle" has often been an effective political weapon. Certainly it helped to complete the rout of the BB in Kelantan.

It is interesting that in the one state where they were united, the Independents failed to receive a single seat. This merely goes to confirm that Independent candidates who won in certain other states depended almost entirely upon their personal popularity.

39 Fakaruddin, a PAS MP from Kelantan in the last Parliament, was sacked from the party for attempting to dislodge Datuk Asri and his group from within. This attempt was called "The March 14th Revolutionary Movement" and had the support of certain PAS branches. Among the professionals who contested were lecturers, lawyers and former civil servants.

40 See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 16 August 1974.

41 See *Utusan Malaysia*, 20 August 1974.

EASTERN MALAYSIA

Having analysed the performance of various parties and groups in Peninsular Malaysia, we must now turn to the elections in the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. The eastern Malaysian analysis will be less comprehensive largely because the written sources that are available to me do not contain much news on the politics of that area. Nonetheless I have managed to obtain a fair amount of information from individuals who had observed the elections there.⁴²

Sabah

Curiously enough Sabah was the only state which did not hold elections to its State Assembly. The official explanation was that state elections were held just over two years ago. There is, however, some reason to believe that the Chief Minister, Tun Mustapha, was not prepared to test his strength in the state elections. His alleged actions in the Parliamentary elections in Sabah seem to validate this view.

Sabah's BN - a coalition of Tun Mustapha's dominant United Sabah National Organisation (USNO) and the Sabah Chinese Association (SCA) - fielded candidates in all 16 seats. Fifteen of them were returned unopposed on nomination day; the only contest was against a Pekemas candidate.

According to various sources a number of potential Pekemas candidates - originally the party had intended to fight in 10 constituencies - were detained by the state government and thereby prevented from filing their nomination papers.⁴³ If anything the narrow win of the BN nominee in the only contested seat seems to lend credence to this allegation.⁴⁴

42 These would be mainly journalists and students.

43 Information from local journalists who were in Sabah at that point.

44 The BN candidate obtained 6,000 plus votes as against the Pekemas candidate's 4,000 plus votes.

Sarawak

In Sarawak, elections were held for both the 40 State Assembly seats and the 24 Parliamentary constituencies. The BN consisting of the Parti Pesaka-Bumiputra Bersatu (PPBB) and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) contested all the seats. Its main rival was the Sarawak National Party (SNAP).

The most remarkable feature of the elections was of course SNAP's commendable performance. It won 18 state and 9 Parliamentary constituencies. A number of factors explain the party's performance, the most salient of which are mentioned in this analysis.

The majority of SNAP victories were in Iban constituencies. The Ibans are the largest single community in Sarawak and are numerically and culturally the most significant element within the indigenous population of the state. As the dominant factor within the indigenous population, the Ibans resented what they perceived as the political pre-eminence of the numerically smaller Muslim-indigenous community made up largely of Melanau and Malays. For them, the ascendancy of Datuk Abdul Rahman Ya'kub, the Chief Minister, himself a Melanau-Muslim, symbolized this dominance. It was felt that Iban interests were not adequately represented in the state government. The merger between Pesaka, an Iban party, and Bumiputra, an indigenous-Muslim party, in early 1973, was interpreted in certain quarters as an attempt by Datuk Rahman, the Bumiputra leader, to control and overwhelm the Iban community through the assistance of Pesaka and its leader Tan Sri Temenggong Jugah.⁴⁵ Incidentally, it was the Pesaka component in the PPBB which suffered heaviest losses at the hands of SNAP.

What reinforced Iban resentment was the close relationship between the Sarawak State Government and the indigenous-Muslim dominated Central Government in Kuala Lumpur. The tone and tenor of the 1974 election campaign revealed that a large number of Ibans perceived this relationship as inimical to their own interests - and to Sarawak's well-being.⁴⁶ This explains SNAP's

45 Tan Sri Temenggong Jugah, the traditional leader of the Ibans, did not take part in the elections. It is suggested that his retirement from politics was one of the minor reasons for the downfall of Parti Pesaka.

46 Observation made by students studying the Sarawak elections.

effective election slogan, "Sarawak for Sarawakians."⁴⁷

If Ibans responded to these slogans it was partly because SNAP had the services of a number of able, well-educated professionals who had joined state politics in the post-1969 era. People like Leo Moggie, Daniel Tajem and Dr. Jawie Masing would be among these new articulators of indigenous non-Muslim interests.⁴⁸

However Iban resentment does not explain all of SNAP's victories. It must be remembered that the party also secured a few Chinese dominant constituencies at the expense of the SUPP. Part of the explanation is, of course, SUPP's joining the Sarawak Alliance in a coalition government immediately after the 1969-70 elections.⁴⁹ The move was seen as a betrayal of Chinese interests in much the same way as the PPP's alignment with UMNO had disillusioned the party's traditional supporters. It is very likely that SNAP which has always had a degree of Chinese support made some gains from this disillusionment.

Of course, Chinese disillusionment was by no means confined to SUPP's action. A major Chinese grievance which the Datuk Rahman Government had failed to resolve was related to the question of land ownership. Chinese unemployment and under-employment were, in many ways, connected to this problem - and so was Chinese frustration with the government.

All said and done, however, it was still the BN that retained control of the state. The fear that the Central Government would not cooperate with a SNAP State Government and consequently "Sarawak would collapse and face a bleak future,"⁵⁰ must have had a significant influence upon the

47 Datuk Rahman attacked SNAP for using this slogan. See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 23 August 1974.

48 Leo Moggie holds a Master's degree in Business Administration; Daniel Tajem is a lawyer while Jawie Masing is a medical doctor.

49 At that time the Sarawak Alliance consisted of Parti Pesaka, Parti Bumiputra and the Sarawak Chinese Association. For the Alliance, the SUPP's presence meant increased Chinese support. For SUPP, the coalition afforded an opportunity to the party leadership to control and destroy its extreme left-wing faction.

50 This warning was sounded by Datuk Rahman. See *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 23 August 1974.

voters. Besides, there was no disputing that the government had ensured a degree of order and stability - in spite of the subversive activities of communist insurgents during the major part of its term of office.

Conclusion

Finally, what are the significant trends of the 1974 General Elections? How will they influence future patterns in political development? To start with, a fact that is glaringly obvious - the BN has the solid support of all communities, in varying degrees. Malay aspirations and the non-Malay search for security contributed substantially to its victory. And of course the men, money and machinery at the BN's disposal helped in the annihilation of the Opposition.

If the BN represents ethnic hopes and ethnic fears, the Opposition - or what remains of it - also manifests certain ethnic tendencies in the body politic. The DAP, for instance, derives its support from its advocacy of Chinese aspirations, similarly SNAP stands for Iban rights. The ethnic appeals of both parties succeeded mainly in situations where their opponents were perceived to have forsaken their ethnic struggles through newly-forged mergers and coalitions.

To put it more directly, ethnic politics continues to dominate Malaysian politics. In this connection, the BN's victory should not be interpreted as a triumph for multi-ethnic politics; at best it is a vote for maintaining inter-ethnic ties of a type. Neither poverty, nor exploitation, nor corruption, nor nepotism have surfaced as crucial political issues capable of motivating the masses to alter the political destiny of Malaysian society. In other words, in spite of its new links and new leaders, the BN has merely succeeded in perpetuating the pattern of politics that has existed for the last nineteen years.

For the next five years or so, however, the BN with the trust that it enjoys from all communities, has the unparalleled opportunity to fulfil some of the more basic hopes of the Malay masses and to overcome some of the more serious fears of the non-Malay communities. If it fails in its task, it is conceivable that ethnic-based parties in the Opposition will grow in strength and stature. Indeed it is even likely that the nine-party coalition itself will be confronted by grave internal convulsions.

That 1979 might not be as glorious for the power-holders as 1974 was, is a possibility that should not be dismissed lightly. For there is an oscillating pattern in the fortunes of the group in power. In 1955, the Alliance swept into power on the crest of the Merdeka slogan; in 1959, however, when domestic issues surfaced, the party suffered a few setbacks; in 1964, the Alliance scored yet another landslide on the strength of 'Confrontation' and national sovereignty; in 1969 when it was once again challenged on its national policies, it lost considerable support; in 1974 however with a new label, a new symbol, new slogans and new personalities, the BN has accomplished an even more stupendous victory. If the pattern holds true, 1979 should be a bad year for the power-holders. Needless to say, whether or not there will be a contest in 1984 will depend, of course, on how serious the erosion is in 1979.