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Malaysian Indian Community: Victim of 'Bumiputera' Policy

By Dilip Lahiri

Once comprising 12 per cent of the population, Malaysia's two million Indians make up less than 8 per cent of the population today. Apart from the economic discrimination they have suffered under Malaysia's Bumiputera policy since 1971, a number of sensitive issues affecting the culture and religion of the Malaysian Indians have come up.

Two particularly prominent legal controversies were the Shamala and the Moorthy cases. In the first, in 2003, the (Muslim) husband of Shamala Sathiyaseelan gained custody of their two children and had them converted to Islam without consulting his wife. The second case involved Moorthy Maniam, whose body was buried with Muslim rites by the Kuala Lumpur religious authorities despite his widow's claim that he had remained a practicing Hindu until his death.

At the peak of the Moorthy controversy in January 2005, nine non-Muslim ministers had submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Badawi asking for the matter to be discussed by the Cabinet. But Badawi convinced them to withdraw their request. At about the same time as these controversies, a proposal by civil society groups to set up an inter-faith commission was rejected. Likewise, an attempt to hold forums on the question of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom was stopped by Badawi.

Many people had felt that holding the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) general assembly during Deepavali in 2007 was insensitive. The party is the largest

constituent of the coalition in power. Yet another example of insensitivity was the demolition in October 2007 of the 100-year-old Sri Maha Mariyaman temple in Shah Alam on the eve of Deepavali. The UMNO general assembly itself witnessed the now familiar spectacle of youth leaders brandishing and kissing their keris (Malay daggers) and threatening to shed Chinese and Indian blood if Malay supremacy was questioned.

The formation of the radical Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), reportedly in 2005, to fight for Hindu rights, was another indication of rising alienation. HINDRAF comprises around 30 Hindu NGOs and its leaders are mainly lawyers. Detailed information on HINDRAF since its formation is not available from HINDRAF related websites, though biodata on some of its leaders is accessible. HINDRAF is opposed to the constitutional provision perpetuating Malay supremacy and special privileges. Other issues that HINDRAF champions are religious freedom, the abolition of Indian poverty and investigation into the deaths of Indians in police custody.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On 31 August, 2007, the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's independence, P. Waytha Moorthy, a HINDRAF lawyer, filed a symbolic class action suit against the United Kingdom in a court of Britain for leaving Indians unprotected and at the mercy of a majority Malay-Muslim government which

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had violated their human rights as a minority . The lawsuit claimed 4 trillion British Pounds as compensation, and also sought to strike out Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution which provides for Malay supremacy.

HINDRAF organized a rally on Sunday, 25 November, 2007 to submit a petition at the British High Commission addressed to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. Malaysian police refused to grant a permit for the rally, and set up roadblocks along roads leading up to the rally to screen motorists entering the city centre and identify “troublemakers”. They also advised the public not to participate in the rally. Many shops around Kuala Lumpur were closed on that day for fear of trouble from the rally. One day before the rally, police arrested three HINDRAF lawyers, P. Uthayakumar, P. Waytha Moorthy and V. Ganabatirau on sedition charges. Uthayakumar and Ganabatirau posted bail of 800 Malaysian ringgits each, but Waytha Moorthy refused bail as a sign of protest

On the morning of the rally, about twenty thousand people gathered near the Petronas Twin Towers, a symbol of modern Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, carrying life-size portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and Mahatma Gandhi, to indicate the non-violent nature of their protest. The mostly ethnic Tamil protesters, apart from calling for reparations from the United Kingdom for sending them to Malaysia as indentured labourers over a century ago, demanded from the Malaysian government business licenses, better paying jobs, university scholarships and other privileges reserved exclusively for native Malays. Their demonstration was the first by ethnic Indians on such a large scale since national independence was achieved in 1957.

Five thousand members of the riot police dispatched to the scene broke up the rally using batons, tear gas and water cannon with skin irritant chemicals against the unarmed protestors. 136 persons were arrested. The Sedition Act was invoked against the arrested HINDRAF activists, though on the following day, police had to release the detained leaders, including HINDRAF President Waytha Moorthy, legal advisor P. Uthayakumar and V.S. Ganapathi Rao for lack of any evidence of their alleged seditious statements. On 27 November 2007, Prime Minister Badawi stated that the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows suspects to be detained for an indefinite period without charge or trial, could be used against the demonstrators arrested on 25 No-

vember 2007.

Many students also face suspension under the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 which prohibits undergraduate students from taking part in demonstrations. Under this Act, those arrested and charged in court are suspended and are allowed to resume their studies only if the cases against them are dropped or if they are acquitted. Hence, those who participated in the rally on 25 November, 2007 could face suspension of their studies

As noted above, Badawi had earlier warned that his government would invoke the Internal Security Act against the demonstrators if needed. The government also attempted to link the peaceful HINDRAF rally with terrorism via the media. As of 11 December 2007, the HINDRAF leaders had all been acquitted by the judicial courts due to lack of evidence and the flimsy nature of the prosecution case. On that

day, HINDRAF also put out a strongly worded “18 point demand for Malaysian Indian rights”. In order to contain the movement, not being able to charge them according to valid evidence-based legal processes, on 12 December 2007 Badawi personally signed the detention letters to imprison the HINDRAF leaders under the draconian ISA for two years. The detained HINDRAF leaders have now gone on hunger strike from Jan.20, 2008. The police, in turn, has threatened that the first five arrests were just the beginning and more could follow.

Opposition lawmakers have condemned the police's alleged excessive use of force against the demonstrators, who had voiced their grievances in a peaceful manner. While agreeing that

Tamil grievances run deep, some opposition lawmakers and civil rights activists were also concerned about the religious and ethnic character of HINDRAF's movement. Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim urged HINDRAF's leaders to consider a more balanced and inclusive approach when addressing Tamil grievances, saying that complaints and grievances should be directed at Badawi's coalition government for neglecting the plight not only of Indians but also other ethnic groups.

BACKGROUND TO THE UNREST

Malaysia, which celebrated 50 years of independence from British colonial rule on 31 August 2007, had a fairly good record of communal harmony all these years. After the violent

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anti-Chinese riots of the late 1960's, there has been no major ethnic violence in the country.

The Malaysian Constitution adopted at the time of the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1957 provided for special treatment to the Bumiputeras in government employment and in the matter of admission to educational institutions. In the aftermath of the 1969 riots, the Malaysian government introduced, in 1971, the New Economic Policy (NEP) to provide affirmative action programmes for the majority "Bumiputeras" (sons of the soil) i.e. ethnic Malays, in business, education and the civil service to compensate for their economic and social backwardness. The NEP used many tactics to give the bumiputera a bigger slice of the economic pie. There were government contracts for construction, the importing of foreign cars and other business opportunities exclusively for bumiputera. Developers were forced to sell a portion of their property to Malays at a discounted price. Every public company was obliged to give a minimum of 30% of their shares to Malays. Even jobs in the government were reserved specially for them. All these laws were meant to raise the Malay share of equity and to create a whole new line of affluent middle class Malays. No effective action was taken on the NEP promise of reducing poverty, even among the Bumiputera.

While there does not appear to be a bias in favour of Bumiputeras in the matter of taxation, instances are repeatedly cited, without the availability of authentic data, pertaining to alleged racial discrimination against non-Bumiputeras in many other fields to include:

- allotment of business licenses
- closure of Tamil primary schools
- award of government scholarships
- granting of citizenship to Indians
- granting of permits for taxis
- allotment of shopping lots
- admission to universities
- appointment of lecturers

In 1991, the NEP was revised under the New Development Plan (1991-2000) to achieve further socio-economic upliftment of the Bumiputeras. The same preferential treatment of the majority Malays has continued under the New Vision Policy (2001-2010).

The NEP's success — or lack of it — is a subject of heated debate. Although the NEP targeted a 30% share of the economy for the Bumiputera, the figure, according to official government statistics, has never been reached. On the other hand, a report by the think tank Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI) claimed in October 2006 that Bumiputera equity in the corporate sector is a lot higher than the target of 30 per cent. Prime Minister Badawi immediately rejected it as wrong.

It has been claimed by some activists among Indian and Chinese origin Malaysians that the NEP and its successors have crippled their communities. This is probably an exaggeration, at least in terms of aggregate economic ownership. Overall, affirmative action policies have not been detrimental to the Chinese and Indians: official statistics indicate that their absolute poverty has been reduced faster than poverty

among the Bumiputera, and that their income and share of ownership has grown. This is referred to as the "expanding pie theory"; the Bumiputera share of the pie would increase, without reducing the size of the non-Bumiputera slices of the pie. However, this refers to an aggregation of the non-Bumiputera population and does not consider intra community inequality.

The latent discontent over discrimination was exacerbated by more recent religious tension stemming from Malaysia's creeping Islamisation. Malaysian politics has adopted an increasingly religious flavour reflected in developments such as the expansion of Sharia courts vis-à-vis civil institutions. Islam was always an important component of Malay national identity. Mahatir, the

previous Prime Minister, had declared that Malaysia was an Islamic state. Malaysia has also vigorously projected its Islamic personality in external fora. But for the first time in Malaysia, a religious framework has now been instituted within the national socio-economic development plan. Islam Hadhari was recently introduced in the Ninth Malaysia Plan as a "comprehensive and universal framework for the nation". Islam Hadhari, literally translated, means Civilisational Islam, a theory of government based upon the principles of Islam as derived from the Holy Quran. This initiative has been very much a brainchild of current Prime Minister Badawi, who introduced the concept in 2004, some months after his ascension to premiership.

For Islam Hadhari to be considered constructive towards

The radical Hindu Rights Action Force is opposed to the legal provision perpetuating Malay supremacy and special privileges. Other issues that it champions are religious freedom and the abolition of Indian poverty.

the government's stated national unity efforts, it should obviously be acceptable to all Malaysians. But non-Muslims, not surprisingly, find it difficult to reconcile to one religion, in a multi religious and multi ethnic society, as the sole basis of socio-economic development. A spate of recent incidents has served to perpetuate their fears.

In October 2005, a non-Muslim student complained that she was barred from her university convocation because she refused to wear the tudung. Early this year, a directive was issued for all policewomen, Muslim or not, to wear the tudung for official ceremonies. The failure of some girls to wear the tudung resulted in their removal from a school netball team. There have been recent incidents of Hindu temple cleansing in the Klang Valley, bulldozers completely obliterating 100-year-old deities. Local authorities want to prosecute couples for 'public indecency' (holding hands) on the ground that this is un-Islamic. Non Muslims were told not to use the term "Allah" while referring to their own gods in their texts or prayers. A forum discussing the rights of religious freedoms as provided in the Federal Constitution was recently disrupted.

All this had led to a rather fraught situation. The Indian grassroots agitation must have been building up for some time. Yet the HINDRAF groundswell apparently took the government and observers completely by surprise as it was an unexpected challenge to the Malaysian social contract, typically taken to mean agreement to provide the non-Malay and other non-indigenous peoples of Malaysia (mostly the Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indian) with citizenship, in return for their unquestioning acceptance of special privileges to the Malays and indigenous people of Malaysia.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE MALAYSIAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

Nearly 85 per cent of Indian Malaysians are Tamils, and about 60 per cent of them are descended from plantation workers. Of the eight per cent Malaysians of Indian origin, 80 per cent are Hindus, 15 per cent Muslims and the rest are Christians or Sikhs. Tamil or Malayali Muslims go to extraordinary lengths to deny their Indian ancestry, and side with Malay Muslims rather than Indian Hindus to wangle their way into the bumiputera preserve.. Malaysia's Sikhs and Gujaratis also distance themselves from the Indian definition

which has become a metaphor for backwardness.

After the May 13, 1969 anti-Chinese riots in Malaysia, a new multicultural pact embedded institutionalized racism in Malaysia's 'ethnic democracy', with guarantees of Malay dominance and preferential treatment, but also paying at least lip service to combating poverty among all Malaysians. While median family income of Malaysian Indians, according to official statistics, is higher than that of Bumiputeras, certain segments of the Malaysian Indian population live in the direst poverty, and form part of the lowest strata in terms of economic ownership. Indian origin Malaysians constitute about 8 per cent of the total population, but official statistics say Indians own only 1.2 per cent of traded equity (40 per cent is held by the Chinese). According to HINDRAF, 15 per cent of Malaysia's juvenile delinquents are Indians, about 50 per cent of all convicts in prisons in 2004 and 41 per cent of

the beggars in 2003 were Indians. The percentage of Indians in the civil service fell from 40 per cent in 1957 to less than 2 per cent in 2005. According to official records, 30-35 Indian origin Malaysians per 100,000 committed or attempted to commit suicide annually, as compared to 10-12 Malaysians per 100,000 in 2006. In education, Indian origin Malaysians made up less than 5 per cent of the total university intake of over 45,000 annually.

The current agitation in Malaysia by its citizens of Indian origin against discrimination and violation of human rights is principally by the Hindu members of the community. Apart from the economic hardships they face due to the Bumiputera policy of the government, they have a genuine but specific grievance:

Badawi personally signed the detention letters to imprison the HINDRAF leaders under the draconian ISA for two years. The police has threatened that the first five arrests of Indian leaders was just the beginning and more arrests could follow.

Their immediate concern is the large-scale demolition of Hindu temples. Descendants of Indian immigrants who are fourth or fifth generation Malaysians had lived through the last 50 years of independence without facing any serious religious persecution. They are suddenly faced with demolition of their places of worship. The government justifies the demolition on the ground that these temples were built on municipal or public land without official sanction. Some of the demolished temples, like the Malaimel Sri Selva Kalliamman Temple in Kuala Lumpur, were in existence for the last 100 years. It was demolished when about 300 devotees were inside, offering prayers. Last month, the Sri Mahamariamman Temple in Selangor, which had a huge following of Tamils, was demolished along with the squatter colony sur-

rounding it.

With creeping Islamisation by the ruling UNMO led coalition, and attempts to convert Malaysia into a one-party Islamic state, many Malaysians, mainly people of minority Chinese and Indian origins, are getting restive. Malay leaders make no bones about Islam being the official religion of Malaysia and Bumiputera the state policy. For Muslims, marriage, divorce and property are governed by Sharia courts. They are prohibited from converting to any other religion. But what is disturbing to India is news emanating from Malaysia in recent times about treatment of non Muslim Malaysians. A child was reportedly snatched from its Hindu mother for refusing to bring it up as a Muslim. Just before last Deepavali, the Sharia Department of the Malaysian government issued instructions to Muslims not to greet Hindus on the occasion of Deepavali. The Malaysian Indian community is apparently seen as adopting an adversarial position with respect to both cherished elements of mainstream Malay nationalism and identity— the Bumiputera concept and Islam.

Malaysia's minorities are banding together to resist the steady encroachment of Sharia (Islamic law) into their lives - from banking and halal food to family matters, education and personal issues such as religious conversion. Unsettled by the decision of a court last month that it had no jurisdiction in Islamic matters and that a non-Muslim had no remedy under common law, the minorities, led by moderate leaders, are starting to resist.

THE Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government has throughout left the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and its leader, Samy Vellu, to handle the Indian community. Since Malay voters were largely responsible for ensuring the success of MIC candidates during general elections, the MIC leadership was very dependent on UMNO. Samy Vellu, leader of the Malaysian Indian Congress who has been a minister in successive Malaysian governments, is said to be more interested in promoting business deals than in addressing the plight of Hindus who call him "Uncle Tom". There seems to be a widespread feeling among Malaysians - particularly Indians - that this is the writing on the wall for Samy Vellu, who was booed and jeered at an Indian cultural function in end December. Some members of Indian political parties aligned to the BN have also asked the MIC leader to account for the allocations of money and patronage that the MIC had

received from the government.

The majority of Indian Malaysians have traditionally been staunch supporters of the ruling BN over the years. In return, they expected the ruling coalition to safeguard and enhance their interests, rights and benefits. However, this did not happen. A widespread feeling has grown in the Malaysian Indian community that the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)-led Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government has become increasingly insensitive to their interests. As a result, many Indian politicians and activists are questioning the formula of an ethnically-structured democracy within which they are invariably at the bottom of the heap. The change of tack to a more aggressive posture was driven by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF). It rapidly caught fire due to the prevailing discontentment, disenchantment and disillusionment amongst Indian Malaysians.

Apart from the economic hardships they face due to the Bumiputera policy, the Indians have a genuine but specific grievance: The large-scale demolition of Hindu temples. This, incidentally, is justified by the government.

IMPACT OF THE NOV 25, 2007 DEMONSTRATION

The protests appear to represent a political awakening of at least a segment of the Indian ethnic minority in Malaysia. They suggest that economic, political and religious discontent is on the rise and that Malaysians no longer fear as much as before the consequences of demonstrating. Further protests can be expected in the future. Many are of the opinion that, but for the actions of HINDRAF, Indian minority issues would not have received national attention. At the same time, taking into account the different stances of the Hindu and non-Hindu Malaysian Indians, as well as the difference of approach within Hindu

Malaysians among those who wish to resist overt discrimination and those who wish to continue to depend on the charity of the Malay leadership, there is little possibility of the Malaysian Indian Tamils following the LTTE pattern.

The government is said to be trying to use both the carrot and the stick to prevent further demonstrations. On the one hand, there is a heavy handed attempt to intimidate HINDRAF leaders and activists. On the advice of some hawkish UMNO leaders, Badawi authorised a crackdown, in the process jettisoning his reputation for tolerance and fair-mindedness. Deputy Prime Minister Najib's statement that the government would have to take stern action against HINDRAF leaders in order to placate Malay anger also had racial overtones. These statements gave the impression that a

Malay-dominated government was prosecuting a Hindu minority group. Prime Minister Badawi was said to have been incensed that HINDRAF leaders had used extreme language to characterise the plight of Indians in Malaysia and over-reacted.

Malaysian leaders probably did not realise the extent to which the tough measures used by the police would draw international attention in the US, UK and India, particularly the use of tear gas and water cannon against innocent bystanders. International human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have also urged the government to allow freedom of assembly and not to invoke the ISA. A signature campaign to obtain the release of jailed HINDRAF leaders is snowballing.

On the other hand, efforts are being made to appease non HINDRAF elements. The Attorney-General withdrew the attempted murder charges against the 31 detainees. In an apparent attempt to cool tempers in the wake of the arrests, Badawi met a number of Indian community leaders. At the meeting, the Prime Minister called for a frank dialogue. Mr A. Vaithilingam, president of the Malaysian Hindu Sangam, and Mr P. Sivakumar of the Malaysian Indian Business Association spoke candidly. While Mr Vaithilingam spoke of temple demolitions and the impact of shariah law, Mr Sivakumar outlined the economic deprivation of Indians.

In the wake of protests by ethnic Indians over the demolition of Hindu temples, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi has apparently ordered a pause and continuous monitoring of all Hindu shrines. The task of monitoring has been given to MIC leader Samy Vellu, who said no temple, whether legal or illegally built, will be demolished without "thorough check and discussions" with his Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), a component of the ruling coalition. Some economic sops for the Indian community are also expected. Malaysian authorities have also denied reports that the government had imposed a ban on migrant workers from India. But officials had earlier confirmed that they had stopped granting visas to Indian workers, in apparent retaliation for the rallies by Malaysian Indians last year.

THE HINDRAF protest has damaged Malaysia's tolerant image and Badawi's concept of Islam Hadhari as a balanced and moderate form of Islam. The events culminating in the Nov. 25, 2007 rally have also challenged the authority and popularity of the Premier.

There has also been considerable speculation about the impact of the HINDRAF protests and mobilization on Malaysia's next general elections, widely expected before April 2008, when the disqualification of charismatic opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim, comes to an end. The November 2007 HINDRAF led rally may have affected the way the Indian

community views the ruling combine. Not that Indian voters can change the overall results of the national elections. Nor can the opposition as a whole gain an upper hand, based on the share of votes at the last election. The status quo, therefore, does not face danger of a big change in government at the federal or state levels. But the Indian factor, together with several recent events, might well represent a tipping point, as the Chinese in Malaysia are also rattled by the discriminatory Islamic trend of race relations. The best the opposition can hope for is that, working together (a big if) they might just manage to prevent the ruling BN from obtaining its traditional two third majority. This itself would be a big tsunami in Malaysian politics.

The Malaysian government will be closely watched by the international community as it seeks to address the issues raised by HINDRAF.

MALAYSIA AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

Malaysia's racially discriminatory measures while implementing the Bumiputera policy are undoubtedly in contravention of the core UN human rights instruments. But the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not a treaty requiring a declaration of commitment, or periodic reports of implementation, and in any case predated Malaysia's independence and entry to the UN by many years. Malaysia has not signed any of the three main human rights instruments which have legally codified specific human rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration – the Convention on the elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on Political and Civil Rights, or the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Thus, Malaysia seems to consider itself not bound by their provisions, and, in any case, as a non-signatory, is not required to submit for international scrutiny periodic reports on its implementation of these Conventions.

On the other hand, Malaysia, a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), signed the ASEAN charter on November 21, 2007. Both under the ASEAN charter and also as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Malaysia has pledged to "promote and protect" human rights. Human Rights Watch urged the Malaysian government to honor its pledges to those international institutions as well as uphold its human rights obligations under international law.

EFFECT OF MALAYSIA'S BUMIPUTERA POLICY AND INCREASING ISLAMISM ON INDO - MALAYSIAN RELATIONS

Both Malaysia and India have tried to insulate these issues

from bilateral relations, which are strong and growing, or from the welcoming atmosphere for the large numbers of Indian tourists visiting Malaysia. Nevertheless, there is a lively awareness on both sides of the faultlines between the Muslim Bumiputera led Malaysian polity, its antagonism and disregard for the interests of the largely Hindu Malaysian Indian community, and the inevitable sentimental involvement of the Indian public with the hardships of a substantial

community of Indian origin.

On the Malaysian side, this ambiguity has manifested itself in its being the most difficult among ASEAN countries towards India on a range of issues, apart from being vocal and activist on international Islamic OIC sponsored causes. Malaysia's mentorship of Bumiputera inspired policies in a country like Fiji has also had adverse effects on Fiji's community of Indian origin.

BRIEF HISTORY OF MALAYSIA

Malaysia's geographical position places it between the great Hindu, Islamic and Christian civilisations to the west and China and Japan to the east. The shipping routes from China to the west pass through the region, and the most direct route passes through the Strait of Malacca. This has made Malaysia a natural meeting place of trade routes and cultures,

The history of the Malaysian area can be seen as successive phases of outside influence, followed by the final assertion of Malay independence.

- The first phase saw the domination of Hindu as well as Buddhist culture imported from India. This reached its zenith in the great Srivijaya kingdom based in Sumatra, which ruled most of the Malay world from the 7th to the 14th centuries.
- The second phase began with the arrival of Islam, which began in the 10th century, and led to the conversion of most of the Malay-Indonesian world and the breakup of the Srivijayan empire into many smaller sultanates, the most prominent of which was Malacca.
- The third phase was the entry of European colonial powers: first the Portuguese, who captured Malacca in 1511, then the Dutch and finally the British. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 drew a frontier between British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, which became Indonesia.
- The fourth phase of foreign influence was the mass immigration of Chinese and Indian workers to meet the needs of the colonial economy created by the British.

The Federation of Malaya was established as an independent, multi-racial nation in 1957. In 1963 Malaya became Malaysia with the acquisition of the British territories in North Borneo and Singapore. The Chinese-majority Singapore and the Federation decided to part ways in 1965. Malaysia survived this crisis as well as the confrontation with Indonesia from 1962 to 1966.

Since 1970 the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) has ruled Malaysia almost as a one-party state, co-opting the Chinese and Indian leaderships through the device of the "National Front coalition."

Successive UMNO governments have been determined to break the Chinese domination of the economy and the Indian domination of the professions, and to create strong Malay business and professional classes. This has been achieved by imposing the Malay language on the education system and through systematic positive discrimination in favour of Malays. These measures have caused a decisive shift of power in favour of the Malays and resulted in great resentment in the Malaysian Chinese and Indian communities.

Source: Wikipedia

Dilip Lahiri has served as India's Ambassador to France, Spain, Peru and Bolivia. Currently, he is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

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