

## The Seventh General Elections in Malaysia Results and Consequences

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### Introduction

The 7th general elections in Malaysia on 2nd and 3rd August 1986 were not expected to bring any major changes in the strength of parties or in policies. Nevertheless, a distinct nervousness was discernible in the media and among the population after the announcement of the elections on 24th July - the catch-word in the media was "snap polls" - until the day of voting. Police and army held - prominently reported - anti-riot exercises and the papers carried exhortations for peaceful polling nearly every day. Particularly careful citizens started to stock staples like rice, meat, tinned food etc. against all eventualities and rumour was rife about possible disturbances in the wake of the elections, especially if they turned out unfavourable for the ruling BN (Barisan Nasional, National Front) which is made up for eight larger and five smaller parties. The most important parties in this alliance which is more or less constituted along communal or ethnic lines are the UMNO (United Malay National Organisation), the organization of the Malays and the most senior and dominant partner in the set-up. The second most important partner is the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), explicitly the party of the Chinese, followed by the ostensible multi-ethnic Gerakan which is, however, equally predominant Chinese. Third in importance, the junior partner, so to speak, and together with UMNO and MCA one of the original members of the alliance, is the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress), the party of the Indians in Malaysia. Apart from these bigger parties which reflect the ethnic composition of the country, the BN comprises a number of other, ostensibly multi-ethnic, parties, like the PPP (People's Progressive Party) and the Berjasa, which are, however, of less significance. It is interesting to note, that while the ruling coalition is constituted along ethnic lines, the opposition is no less so. The DAP (Democratic Action Party), though avowedly multi-ethnic with a fair sprinkling of Indians, is considered as much a Chinese party as the MCA, whereas the PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia), the Islamic fundamentalist party, is a purely Malay party in spite of its claims that its target groups are Muslims, not Malays only. Besides these two, other opposition parties, like the SDP (Socialist Democratic Party), NasMa (Parti Nasional Malaysia) or PSRM (Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia) play hardly any role at all, except in Sabah and Sarawak which have political set-ups all their own.

Though nobody seriously expected the BN to lose the elections, people were not sure about the performance of PAS and DAP for a number of reasons and it seemed that the BN's two-thirds majority might be broken. PAS had made a great impact in the elections 1982(1) and its propaganda for an Islamic State seemed to gain currency in the light of a severe economic recession, the leadership crisis in UMNO after Musa Hitam's resignation because of difference over leadership and trust with Mahathir,(2) and what was called the 'Membali incident'. Muhammad 'Libya', one of the PAS diehards and militant, had been routed out and killed together with about 20 of his supporters in a shooting incident involving police and the villagers after the latter failed to arrest him peacefully for alleged offences against the religious peace and laid siege to his house and village several days.(3) His grave in Kedah had very quickly become a sort of shrine, where pilgrims foregathered to pay homage to him and made him into a sort of a martyr. PAS was expected to make a strong showing in the northern states of Terengganu and Kelantan and also in northwestern Kedah, Mahathir's home state, and in Perlis. Crudely put, the BN thus foresaw a challenge from two opposite sides: from PAS to its Malay votebank, and from the DAP, the so-called leftists, to its Chinese vote. The DAP seemed determined to hog the latter with the emphasis on the general recession and the recent financial and corruption scandals dating partly as far back as 1982, tarnishing in particular some UMNO ministers and the MCA.(4) Some of the former were suspected to have been involved in the BMF (Bank Malaysia Finance) scandal which had exposed strange, to say the least, lending practices of the Bank Bumiputra Malaysia (BBM), the parent bank of BMF abroad, especially to Hongkong companies and the notorious Carrion group which collapsed in 1983. An auditor of BBM, Jalil, who should have looked into these dealings, had been murdered in Hongkong in 1983, under very strange circumstances and it was doubted whether the suspect arrested for his murder was really the culprit. The scandal was dragging on into the election year after the government had refused to make public the enquiry commission's report. Appointed in 1984, the enquiry commission was to look into the lending practices and other matters connected with the scandal.(5) Completed in late 1985, the report was handed in only in early 1986,(6) and eventually was published together with a government White Paper denying the charges made in the report, among them doubts on the monitoring of BBM's lending practices by Bank Negara and alleged that politicians as high up as Musa Hitam and the Prime Minister himself might be involved in the shady dealings.(7) Apart from this scandal there were other corruption scandals involving UMNO ministers and risky dealings with EPF (Employees' Provident Fund) monies.(8) The Pan-El disaster in Singapore began with the passing into receivership of that debt-ridden consortium which

was led by the business tycoon Tan Koon Swan, on 19th November 1985, and the suspension of the trading of its shares.(9) The bankruptcy of this company led to the collapse and subsequent closure of the SES and KLSE for three days, something which had never happened before, because companies connected with Pan-El were drawn into the quagmire.(10) Subsequently Tan Koon Swan was accused of insider dealing, criminal breach of trust etc., of "using borrowed funds of several companies to buy securities in another on behalf of a third".(11) This sad business was particularly unfortunate for the MCA because Tan had only got the leadership of the party in 1985 after a prolonged and bitter struggle over alleged mismanagement and fraudulent membership lists between him and Neo Yee Pan.(12) Tan consequently had to face his trial in Singapore shortly after the elections, and was convicted to two years in prison, a verdict which nobody had thought possible.(13)

The only major member of the BN to remain unperturbed by unfavourable propaganda and untoward incidents was the MIC whose leadership crisis in 1982/1983 between Samy Velu and his challenger Govindaraj had been solved by the expulsion of the latter and the foundation of the latter's new party, the DMIC (Democratic Malaysian Indian Congress).

It was assumed that Mahathir had chosen the time for election at this date at once to prevent elections becoming necessary when the recession got worse, and second before the trial of Tan Koon Swan started. Again, it is interesting to note that the first argument was also brought forward for the timing of the elections in 1982, which were held, like the ones in 1986, one year before the dissolution of parliament was due.(14) The same reason was assumed for the short time allowed between the announcement of the election on 18th July, the last day for nominations on 24th July and the actual polls on 2nd (in Sabah and Sarawak) and 3rd August (in Peninsular Malaysia). Though the time between announcement and polling is normally very short (it is said to prevent riots), this time the grace period was extremely limited, and the opposition parties, particularly the DAP, called the procedure unfair, as it did allegedly give them not enough time to launch their campaigns. The DAP even made an unsuccessful attempt to halt the elections in court on the argument that the announcement was not in conformity with the constitution.(15) However that may be, the announcement had been expected by all parties for several weeks, if not months, and government and opposition had prepared their campaigns in advance and were not caught napping (that is at least what the PAS claimed, but later events showed this to be probably not quite true).

### Winners and Losers

The great loser in the election was the MCA. Its doubts and fears proved fully justified: The DAP won 24 parliamentary and 37 state seats, mainly on the Chinese vote (state and parliamentary elections are held at the same time in Malaysia, except for the two East Malaysian states Sabah and Sarawak). Among these were four seats in Sabah and the rest mostly in Penang, Perak and the Federal Territory where the percentage of Chinese voters is particularly high.(16) Moreover, all seats lost by the BN were contested by the MCA which overall lost 50% of seats contested, or the Gerakan, the second Chinese-based party in the Natioal Front. For instance, in Penang the MCA lost seven of nine contested seats, whereas the DAP won 6 parliament and 10 state seats,(17) in Perak 4 and 13 went to the DAP, and in the Federal Territory (Kuala Lumpur) 4. The UMNO, on the other hand, could claim substantial wins in the same states, especially in Penang (5 parliament and 23 state seats). After the elections, this led to a heated controversy about who should be chief minister of Penangs state who had traditionally been a Chinese in reference to the strong Chinese vote. Now it was, however, claimed by elements in the UMNO that the post should be given to a Malay since this ethnic group actually won the state for the BN. Though finally the former Gerakan chief minister was confirmed in his position, this led to much heart-burn among both ethnic groups in Penang.(18)

Tab. 1: Election Results, 1978-1986

Party	1978		1982		1986	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
	parliamentary seats					
BN	94	57.1	103	61.3	144	57.4.
UMNO		69		70		n.a.
MCA		17		24		n.a.
Gerakan		4		5		n.a.
MIC		3		4	6	n.a.
DAP	15	21.5	6	20.3	24	20.82
PAS	5	17.7	5	16.4	1	15.58

*Source:* Crouch, Herold: Malaysia's 1982 General Election. ISEAS Research Note and Discussion Paper No 34. Singapore 1984, p.41; FEER, 14.8.1986; Tamil Nasan, 5.8.1986.

Tab. 2: Distribution of seats in parliament immediately before elections, 1986

Party	Seats
BN	135 (of 154)
DAP	6
PAS	1
Combined Opposition	19

Source: FEER, 31.7.1986.

To add to UMNO's success story, the fears about PAS gaining major inroads into the Malay vote proved to be completely unfounded. Not only did UMNO defend and hold Kelantan and Kedah, but even won Terengganu, the stronghold of PAS. PAS could only win one parliamentary and 10 state seats.<sup>(19)</sup> Obviously, the Malay electorate put more trust in UMNO's ability to uphold their interests against the other ethnic groups than in PAS's. Besides, for the mostly rural Malay voter the big town scandals like BMF and Pan-El did not mean much. For them, building of new roads or provision of clean drinking water was much more crucial, and if they did get that, they would not much bother about alleged corruption or even factional fights between Mahathir and Musa Hitam. Musa Hitam incidentally, won his home constituency, Kota Tinggi, with one of the biggest majorities ever.<sup>(20)</sup> UMNO seemed thus much more able to provide for the basic needs of the population than PAS. A second reason for PAS' loss were the overt and covert pacts with other opposition parties, like SDP, NasMa, PSRM etc. and the cooperation with the CCC (Chinese Consultative Council). Though this was not really against the ideology of PAS, as the party addresses itself to Muslims, whereas the UMNO accepts Malays only, it did not go down well with the electorate for exactly this reason. For some time even an election pact with the DAP was considered, but DAP finally rejected because the party could and would not subscribe to the PAS' objective of an Islamic state.<sup>(21)</sup> However, a silent pact not to contest each other's seats seemed to have operated in 1986 as well as in 1982.<sup>(22)</sup> Nevertheless, the election goals of neither opposition party were achieved. The DAP had set out to break the two-thirds majority of the BN and fashioned their propaganda totally along these lines, and though they could gain many seats over the results of 1982, the rocket (DAP election symbol) did not really take off, while the scales (BN symbol) were dipped in BN's favour and enabled them to retain the two-

thirds majority. It should also not be overlooked, that in actual percentages, there was really very little change among the parties; what mattered was the distribution of seats: the BN won 148 of 177, DAP 24 of 62, PAS 1 of 99 parliamentary seats contested and further the BN 299 of 351, DAP 37 of 125, PAS 15 of 265 state seats.(23) Thus, while the BN hovered, as always, around 80% of seats contested, the DAP's vote percentage moved around the 40% mark (1986: 41.8%) which has been quite constant over the years, and the PAS' around the 20% mark (1986: 22.7%).(24) The percentages polled show the same consistency over the years (cf. Table 1).

Though it was mentioned that the MIC could sit comparatively snug as its last scandal had been forgotten after Govindaraj had formed his new party, the DMIC (Democratic Malaysian Indian Congress). The elections were no cake-walk for it either because it had a reputation to lose - and lost it: that of always delivering a 100% Indian vote, i.e. vote for Indian candidates. Instead of 19 contested seats (6 parliamentary and 13 state seats) it won only 18, with the state constituency of Prai in Penang going to its DAP rival, also an Indian. This was perceived as a shattering defeat by the MIC, and the search for scapegoats did not take long to begin.(25) The fact that the lost seat in Prai had formerly been held since 1970 by the MIC made the situation worse. This defeat made headlines in the Tamil papers for days on end, more than the overall results, though it must be said that the downfall had not been entirely unexpected.(26) But this defeat by the DAP only confirmed a trend, which when it became known, served to deepen the gloom in the MIC ranks: the majorities of nearly all successful MIC candidates were substantially reduced, including that of the MIC leader Samivelu in Sungai Siput. Only the newcomers whom nobody had had expected to win by any great margin had got substantial majorities.(27) It seems that even the Indian electorate finally have enough of centagenarians as representatives of their interests. Problems and scandals in the MIC thus started immediately after instead before the elections, and they will probably continue (see below).

### Voting Behaviour

The analysis of voting behaviour very quickly led to accusations of "communal" voting levelled at the Chinese for electing the DAP. The implicit statement was that the Chinese had betrayed the BN by deserting the MCA and selfishly crossing over to the Chinese rival. Though there may be some truth in the statement, one should keep in mind that this time, many *Indian* DAP candidates who stood in strong Chinese or Chinese majority constituencies which had gone to the MCA in the previous elections, won this time e.g. P. Patto in Ipoh

and Dr. David in Puchong. It is not certain whether this can be called communal voting when the Chinese in fact did often not vote for a candidate of their own ethnic group (though the DAP is known to be an overwhelmingly Chinese party). Thus, while in constituencies with an overwhelming Chinese percentage, like Kejang (65% Chinese, 9.8% Indians), Kepong (80.6% and 8.5%), Bukit Bintang (83.5% and 7.9%), Seputeh (83.1% and 8.6%) and Sungei Besi (59.0% and 8.7%) the DAP won its greatest victories, in these places not always Chinese candidates stood and the seats were won as much with the Indian as with the Chinese vote. This applied, e.g. to Ipoh with a Chinese majority of 66.4% (Indians 19.6%, Malays 12.3%), where the Indian DAP candidate P. Pato won. Much, however, depends on the strength of the Indian electorate in the respective constituencies to which consequently communal voting in its true sense can probably only be assigned.(28) Though not having a majority in any one constituency, they "are spread like a thin layer of butter over a large slice of bread"(29) and are thus able to swing the vote in constituencies where they form 10, 20 or 30% of the electorate, and where the percentages of the other two groups are roughly equal, or where one of the other groups has a far smaller percentage than they, like in Pandamaran and Sungai Tinggi. Thus, if in any constituency the Chinese vote for a MCA candidate and the Indians for the (Indian) DAP man, the MCA will probably win with the Malay vote. If, however, the Chinese vote for the Indian DAP candidate as well, he will win. The Indians, on the other hand, can swing the vote in favour of the MCA, if the Malay vote goes to PAS or another opposition party, while they would vote MIC if they wanted to support UMNO. In this sense, the Indians are not only decisive for the results, but can also be seen to vote communally.(30) These figures show that we can probably talk of communal voting only in a very indirect sense.

### Conduction of the Polls

Despite all predictions, the polling day itself and the days after remained quiet without any untoward incidents. Quite a number of voters, though, got upset by finding on arriving at the polling station that their names had not been entered in the voting register, been spelt wrongly or put into another station's list.(31) This caused worry and delay for many people, but could not, as has been tried, be made out as rigging. The polling stations were closely watched by police and election observers, and no unauthorized person - not even the interested foreign observer - was allowed beyond the boundary of the voting premises. As there seems to be a convention that the higher the percentage of voters, the bigger the gains of the BN, election officials and BN workers made it a point to get virtually everyone to

vote, at least everyone they could lay their hands on. The old and the disabled who were ferried to the station in cars displaying the BN flag were not spared, to say nothing of public servants. For days on end papers in all languages in Malaysia had emphasized the importance of fulfilling one's duty to the state by voting, and voting responsibility. On the day itself, the Tamil papers especially singled out the women as a target group, asking them to vote after having finished their domestic duties.(32)

Estate labourers voted virtually to a man, or woman, since the MIC is extremely active among them, and their vote is sure to go to the MIC, i.e. the BN, because the MIC is closely linked with the trade union of the estate labour, the NUPW.

### The Results

Though nobody really doubted the outcome of the elections, families, nevertheless, gathered in front of the TV from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. or later in order to watch result after result being read, only interrupted by music shows and the most atrocious B-movies. Each of the three channels, the commercial TV *tiga* included, broadcast election results the whole night through until 9 or 10 a.m., in later stages only interrupted by the jubilation song of the BN. Why anybody would stay glued to the tube when the results were a foregone conclusion anyway, was anybody's guess. It was, however, by no means certain that the two-thirds majority of the BN would hold, and that was something to watch out for, as well as for the achievements of PAS in the north-eastern states. Since, as mentioned, state and parliamentary elections are held at the same time in Malaysia -except for Sabah and Sarawak which had had their somewhat controversial state elections some months earlier -, there was the added possibility that the BN would lose one or the other state of the Federation, especially Terengganu which PAS had claimed as virtually its own, or Penang with its strong and volatile Chinese electorate.

Yet, the most forceful reason for the overwhelming interest in the election results probably lies in their being the ultimate moment of truth: The mass media are in their majority controlled by the government, and for all papers stern censure laws are in existence. Thus, trust in the impartiality and neutrality of the mass media is not unconditional, to say the least, and even the strong chances proclaimed in the New Straits Times (NST) for the BN were believed to be probable, nobody would put their final trust in this paper's election predictions. The reporting of the NST mainly consisted in descriptions of election *ceramahs* by BN candidates, emphasising their merits for the public welfare, their excellent chances, their popularity in their respective constituencies etc., while at the same time denigrating



the efforts of the opposition parties, if they were at all mentioned.(33) In some cases, the treatment of the DAP and PAS candidates in the NST might have bordered on libel elsewhere. It was, however, obvious that the more serious perceived threat was the DAP, rather than the PAS, which was mostly portrayed as a spent force with insufficient election and campaign strategies. Politicians seem to have a shrewd perception where the danger lay. However, it has to be mentioned, that the articles on PAS and its ideology were of much better analytic quality and more penetrating than those dealing with the DAP whose aims and ideology were rarely discussed.(34) This was probably not done without reason, since the DAP really had a cause which could strongly appeal to a thinking public, and it was therefore dangerous even to admit that they had one. The PAS, on the other hand, was easy to pillory as it delivered itself into the hands of its enemies by its bungling campaign and propaganda and thus ruining its election prospects. By publishing, for example, its more abstruse and scurrilous programmes like denying voting rights to non-Muslims and women and promising to introduce shariat law for non-Muslims, too, in case of being elected, and in the latter stages, dwelling on such ill-conceived plans as to exclude the mentioned groups from higher government offices,(35) it alienated potential and actual election allies. More trouble was, on the other hand, taken to portray DAP's candidates, not in order to discuss their programme, but with the intention of showing their lack of valour against their BN rivals and making them look weak even in their strongholds. Anonymous cartoons depicting PAS as an extremist crossing between a dragon and a worm with multiple *kefiah*-wrapped heads and the DAP as a many-headed push-me-pull-me with only two short legs appeared throughout the campaign-period in the NST and in vernacular papers, Lim Kit Siang appeared as a mad cowboy riding a rocket.(36) The BN was in contrast portrayed as a gathering of sober, benevolent business men with children playing at their feet: the neutral, impartial, peaceful leading force which had ensured progress, peace and development to the country over thirty years.(37) These were also the catchwords in the election programme and manifesto of the BN: stability, development and progress; reject extremism, fanaticism, racism.(38) Only the BN, it was claimed, with its multi-ethnic tradition could guarantee all three while the opposition stood for either extremism or racism. In addition, all papers supporting the government used an "I-dare-you-to-vote-anything-but" appeal: While the right to vote was emphasized to be a basic democratic right, at the same time it was stressed that this right must be used responsibly and with due consideration of all implications.(39) In nearly the same breath it was stated that what a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia needs is a strong, neutral, impartial and multi-ethnic government such as the existing one. Though the May 13th scare was really

referred to explicitly, implicitly it was always clear that voting for the opposition meant a vote for the forces of destruction and would carry its own punishment.

### Campaign Topics

It was obvious that in contrast to the elections of 1982 which were fought on the slogan clean, efficient, trustworthy and an Islamic and Malay platform.(40) This time the two other ethnic groups, Chinese and Indians, were singled out for important messages. Several months ago, Mahathir had qualified the implementation of the NEP principles and the *bumiputra* policy in the private sector to encourage Chinese entrepreneurs in the face of the severe recession.(41) Besides, in his election manifesto, he gave implicit assurances to the Indian community - which is less concerned with employment rates for *bumiputras* than with the survival of their group identity - that Tamil (and Chinese) primary schools would be allowed to continue functioning without being converted into national, i.e. Malay-teaching schools and that their group culture and religion would be protected.(42) This could be understood as a direct answer to a recent movement in which the Indians - through the Malaysian Tamil Writers' Association - are particularly strongly represented: POL = People's own language.(43) In the Tamil translation of the programme, the MIC not only stressed its own influence in bringing about this state of affairs, which is only natural, but also changed the sequence of manifesto topics: in both versions eradication of poverty came first, but whereas in the English version topics on economy and stability followed, the Tamil version immediately continued with culture, religion and language and brought housing, economy etc. at the end.(44) To the Malays, the BN put the question what they wanted: liberal Islam with simultaneous progress and development or extremist Islam and a return to the middle ages and to poverty.(45) These messages hit home among the Malays and Indians more than among the Chinese as the election results showed. Moreover, both Tamil papers in the country gave their whole-hearted support to the MIC (and that means the BN) and exhorted their readers in numerous editorials to vote for BN and BN only because only the Front could guarantee freedom, employment, and fair treatment to their community.(46) The Tamil Nesan even went so far as to heavily denounce the DAP as in fact harming the Indian interests and not being able to deliver the goods, while quoting Samivelu.(47) In addition, the importance of the Indian vote was brought home to the Tamil readers. As shown, though numerically weak, it could influence the outcome decisively in many constituencies because it functioned as a critical mass. The Tamil papers dwelled on this role at length and advised their readers to vote

with consideration of their duty to the community.(48)

On the other hand, it was obvious that the support for the BN did not go so far as to deny success to Indian candidates outside the MIC, i.e. mainly in the DAP or not acknowledging their achievements after the polls. Especially the paper *Tinamani* follows a two-track line in this regard. While arguing the advantages of a 100% pro-BN vote in one column, in another article on the same page it gave detailed and favourable portraits of the Indian DAP candidates extolling their political acumen, their deep involvement and their merits in working for the community.(49) Ethnicity comes before party affiliations with the Indians. To some extent this explained the success of the DAP's Indian candidate in Prai: when two Indians contest, the electorate fell free to choose the one they consider the better bet.(50)

The same can be said for post-election reporting in the Tamil papers: all Indian DAP candidates who had won against Chinese BN candidates were portrayed *in extenso*, with the exception of Shanmugam who had defeated MIC's Suppiah in Prai.

### Election Postmortem

The election postmortem of the BN was far from peaceful. In the first place, MCA and Gerakan had to pay dearly for their defeat by losing some of their ministerships and entering parliament with reduced numbers.(51) The controversy over the choice of the chief minister in Penang with its Chinese majority has already been mentioned. The final argument in favour of retaining Gerakan's Lim Chong Yeu as chief minister was probably the consideration that a Malay would further reduce the sympathies for the MCA and the Gerakan and lose them even more votes to the DAP next time. If a pro-Lim editorial in the paper *Tamil Nesan* is anything to go by, the Indians also seem to have supported Lim instead of a Malay chief minister.(52)

The MIC, too, was most upset about the distribution of ministerships. Though it could be termed the most successful of the constituent parties, this did not help much, as it is the very junior partner in the set-up: it had to be content with one ministership and two deputy ministerships as before though it had allegedly been promised two. What hurt most was that it had to renounce the expected ministership in favour of a reshuffling of the UMMO - which had been equally successful - ministerships where internal rivalries had to be settled. The disappointment led to huge headlines and injured editorials in both Tamil papers.(53) In this connection, the victory of DAP's Shanmugam in Prai was again taken up for scrutiny. It was now said that the Indians had rendered a disservice to themselves by voting in the way they did, because they had now lost the only Indian seat in

the executive committee of Penang.(54) Suppiah himself, who had taken his constituency for granted after winning it several times running and had not put too much electioneering effort into it, was quick to look for guilty parties other than himself and found them in the weakest link of the MIC, i.e. in the person of Mrs. Valli Muthusamy, the leader of the women's wing. Originally, Mrs. Valli had been hailed as the first MIC woman candidate ever(!) who had been assigned the constituency of Mak Madin, but at the last moment, she had had to hand it over to a MCA candidate who needed a safe seat. The MIC was not prepared to sacrifice a male candidate in this contingency.(55) She had been promised a senatorship instead by Samivelu. Suppiah, however, realizing vulnerability when he saw it, accused her of working against him during the election campaign by campaigning for the opposition.(56) To add insult to injury, not only did the MIC lalp up these allegation, it also deprived her of the promised senatorship and gave it to her deputy Devaki Krishnan instead. Her refutations of the accusations went unheeded.(57) The whole truth about this matter has probably ot yet come to light, but already now it can be said, that it does not throw a very kind light either on the MIC's method of selecting and supporting candidates nor on its devotion to women's rights and equal chances.

### **The Verdict of the Public**

While the MIC was thus licking its wounds and venting its fury upon itself, it is interesting to know the public's opinion about the election results. PAS' leaders were so furious about their dismal performance in the elections that at one point they declared they would henceforth refuse to talk to the press at all, since the media had allegedly wilfully and maliciously distorted ans misrepresented its programme and aims and thus helped to defeat it at the polls.(58) This in fact shows tha PAS was absolutely shattered. The Chinese reaction was rather muted. Though the MCA defeat was a shock, it had not come entirely unexpected, and there was, on the other side, the remarkable success of the DAP which could be construed as a victory for the Chinese, after all. This, however, was somehow seen as the deathknell to MCA's claim to be the sole representative of Chinese interests in the country.(59) But it was rather astonishing that the MCA and many ordinary rallied round Tan Koon Swan during and after his trial without dropping him, though he had to step down from the party leadership after his conviction.(60) While the Malays had some harsh things to say about the alleged Chinese voting pattern and their betrayal of the BN, they were on the whole jubilant about UMNO's huge success and even about the defeat of the MCA which forced it to eat humble pie vis-a-vis UMNO.(61) The most remarkable com-

ments, however, came from the Indian side. They accused in the first place the Chinese of communal voting and deserting a sinking ship. But as the Chinese are anyway considered to be interested only in money and profit, it was only to be expected from them that they would leave the BN alone in its hour of need and give PAS a chance to upset the whole structure. Indians who had voted for the DAP had to bear even harsher criticism. They were named traitors to the government and to their own community. Not only was the BN the only guarantor of stability and security for the Indians, but also the only thin dividing line between them and PAS rule. Voting for DAP reduced BN's margin, opened the door for PAS and thus harmed the Indians. It was far better to pander to the mildly chauvinistic Malay government than to give the vote to the opposition and lay oneself open to the radicals. Besides, by voting for DAP they allowed themselves to be used for the furthering of Chinese aims at dominating the country not only economically, but also politically. This indicates, and was confirmed by some people with whom I discussed the matter, that much as PAS and a PAS takeover are feared by the Indians, there is one event that they fear even more, and that is a Chinese-dominated Malaysia. Not that they do not find PAS' Islamic concepts repulsive or would cherish to bow down to their Islamic laws, but they would any time prefer to live under an ever so extremist Malay government than under a Chinese one, however liberal. Many Indians, moreover, take a rather fatalistic view concerning a PAS government: in the long run, they consider a PAS takeover inevitable, given the present state of the country and the measures to 'Malaysianise' the society and think it just as well to be prepared. This partly explains the phenomenal success of the MIC among the Indians over the last 30 years in the face of a not too outstanding performance. The government, on the other side, knows exactly how much and how little the Indian vote means for its success: to corner this vote, it had undertaken a redelimitation of constituencies and had opened additional polling stations in some remote estate areas.

### Summary and conclusions

The Malaysian elections constituted a surprise on so far as they mainly resulted in 'more of the same' which nobody had quite dared to hope. While these results go a long way to retain or restore confidence in the stability and moderation of the country in the middle of a recession, on the ethnic front there have been some disturbing signs recently: While Mahathir fought the elections on the multi-ethnic platform and stressed the necessity of equal social and economic justice for all, this did not seem to go down very well with parts of the Malay vote who became extremely volatile in the wake of the

elections. The upshot of this was the remark by a prominent UMNO MP in Singapore of all places that it would have been better for the Malays to unite with Indonesia because then they would have been able to dominate the Chinese completely and retain Singapore.(62) These remarks drew extremely angry responses not only from the Chinese both in Singapore and Malaysia, but also from the Indians, and the King himself felt obliged to intervene in the interest of moderation and exhort the MPs not to stir racial feelings among the population.(63) Nearly at the same time, Mahathir pandered to the fundamentalist section of the Muslims by forbidding public rock concerts because these undermine the morals of the country's youth.(64) These are at least strange signs and do not augur very well for the planned Malaysian Malaysia and the new economic policy with less emphasis on the 'bumiputra' factor which is intended to be initiated in the 1990s. Nor is the increasing aggressiveness of PAS despite its losses reassuring. It even has declared 19th. Nov. as Martyr's Day, in memory of the Memali incident.(65) It might, however, be that the Malays have become outspoken only in the face of MCA's losses and leadership crisis and take this as a welcome opportunity for Chinese bashing which will stop as soon as things sort themselves out politically and economically. This is fervently to be hoped for.

### Notes

- (1) Harold Crouch: Malaysia's 1982 General Election. ISEAS Research Note and Discussion Paper No. 34, Singapore 1981, p. 41.
- (2) Far Eastern Economic Review 27.3.86
- (3) FEER 5.12.85 and 16.1.86
- (4) FEER 20.10.83, 26.1.84
- (5) FEER 27.9.84
- (6) FEER 20.3.86
- (7) FEER *ibid.*
- (8) FEER 31.7.86
- (9) FEER 30.11.85
- (10) FEER 12.12.85
- (11) FEER 6.2.86
- (12) FEER 10.5.84, 27.12.84-3.1.84, 5.12.85, 16.1.86
- (13) FEER 4.9.86
- (14) Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 1
- (15) NST 26.7.86
- (16) NST 5.8.86
- (17) Tinamani 5.8.86
- (18) NST 11.8.86, 15.8.86
- (19) NST 5.8.86

- (20) 33891 votes, NST *ibid.*
- (21) Tinamani 26.7.86
- (22) Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 47
- (23) Tinamani 5.8.86
- (24) FEER 14.8.86
- (25) *cf.* Malay Mail 5.8.86
- (26) NST 2.8.86
- (27) Tinamani 5.8.86
- (28) Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 51
- (29) NST 29.7.86
- (30) *cf.* for this the voter composition in constituencies contested by the MIC: Sungai Siput: I 16.6%, M 31, C 46; Segamat (a three-cornered contest): I 7.8, M 42.4, C 50; Telok Kemang: I 20.3, M 50.2, C 28.9; Tapah (a new MIC contestant): I 13.1, M 42.3, C 38.2; Kapar (new MIC contestant): I 14.6, M 60.0, C 25.4; Ulu Selangor: I 25.3, M 45.8, C 34.0; Seri Chahaya: I 32.6, M 45.0, C 22.0; Tengkil: I 32.3, M 62.9, C 21.1; Shah Bandar: I 26.4, M 48.7, C 24.2; Tegara: I 4.9, M 48.0, C 47.0; Pasir Kudang: I 9.3, M 48.9, C 41.7; Si Rusa (against a DAP Indian): I 24.2, M 23.3, C 41.0; Rantau: I 17.1, M 40.2, C 32.7; Lunas: I 21.4, M 50.4, C 27.7; Pangkor: I 9.6, M 34.2, C 42.7; Sungai: I 17.3, M 28.2, C 52.2; Tepong: I 14.4, M 44.8, C 40.5; Lancang (an Indian Muslim MIC candidate against PAS): I 14.8, M 67.3, C 14.3; Prai (the lost seat): I 23.8, M 27.0, C 48.0.
- (31) NST 4.5.86
- (32) Tamil Nesan 3.8.86
- (33) *e.g.* NST 31.7.86
- (34) *cf.* *ibid.* 29.7.86
- (35) *cf.* *ibid.* 31.7.86 and 2.8.86
- (36) Tinamani 27.7.86
- (37) Thus NST 3.8.86, Tamil Nesan 3.8.86 and Tinamani 1.8.86
- (38) NST 31.7.86
- (39) *ibid.* 3.8.86 (editorial) and Tamil Nesan 3.8.86
- (40) *cf.* Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 31f.
- (41) FEER 2.5.85 and 17.10.85
- (42) NST 3.8.86
- (43) *ibid.* 1.8.86
- (44) Tinamani 2.8.86
- (45) NST 31.7.86 and 1.8.86
- (46) *cf.* Tamil Nesan 3.8.86
- (47) *ibid.*
- (48) *ibid.* 27.7.86 and Tamil Nesan 3.8.86
- (49) *ibid.* 19.7.86. In this instance, K. Raman and Dr. David were singled out for praise, while in the edition of 2.8., P. Patto was shown in a favourable light.
- (50) *cd.* Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 45

- (51) Tinamani 12.8.86
- (52) Tamil Nesan 8.8.86
- (53) Tinamani 12.8.86 and 13.8.86
- (54) Tinamani 8.8.86 and Malay Mail 5.8.86
- (55) NST 2.8.86
- (56) Tinamani 8.8.86, 15.8.86 and 19.8.86
- (57) *ibid.* 16.8.86 and 19.8.86
- (58) NST 8.8.86
- (59) NST 11.8.86
- (60) FEER
- (61) NST 15.8.86
- (62) FEER 25.9.86
- (63) *ibid.* 23.10.86
- (64) *ibid.* 23.10.86
- (65) *ibid.* 9.10.86