

## UNDERSTANDING POLITICS IN SABAH AND SARAWAK: AN OVERVIEW \*

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*Dalam pendahuluan ini beberapa ciri proses-proses politik, ekonomi dan sosial di Sabah dan Sarawak dibandingkan dengan proses-proses yang berkaitan di Semenanjung Malaysia. Ia juga menjelaskan beberapa hujah yang diketengahkan oleh penulis-penulis yang lain dalam karya ini. Empat pola semasa dalam perkembangan politik Sabah dan Sarawak dikenalpasti dan dihuraiakan. Keempat-empatnya adalah: pendominasian politik Sabah dan Sarawak oleh kaum Bumiputera Muslim ekoran daripada kemerosotan pergerakan nasionalisme - etnik Kadazandusun dan Dayak pada tahun 1990an; penginstitutionan proses politik disebabkan parti-parti politik dan birokrasi semakin mantap di Sabah dan Sarawak; penggantian politik perkauman dan daerahan oleh satu proses politik baru yang memberi keutamaan kepada pembangunan, malah bercirikan 'politik wang'; dan, pindahan kuasa daripada kerajaan-kerajaan negeri Sabah dan Sarawak ke arah Kerajaan Persekutuan, khasnya disebabkan kehendak-kehendak peruntukan pembangunan lebih daripada Kuala Lumpur yang, menurut perlembagaan negara, bertanggungjawab ke atas agihan dan peruntukan belanjawan pembangunan negara.*

It is still not uncommon for many who study Malaysian politics to focus on developments in peninsular Malaysia and to neglect Sabah and Sarawak in their descriptions and analyses. This neglect is sometimes glaring when one attends "Malaysian Studies" conferences. On these occasions, presentations focusing on Sabah and Sarawak are limited, and often included only as a second thought. Discussions of these two states are only given their due attention in separate "Borneo Studies" meetings, organised for instance by the Borneo Research Council, or in specialised journals like the *Borneo Review*.

It is in the spirit of promoting the understanding of politics in Sabah and Sarawak among those who traditionally focus only on the Peninsula, and incorporating this understanding into our generalisations of Malaysian politics, therefore, that *Kajian Malaysia* offers its readers this special double-issue entitled *Sabah and Sarawak: The Politics of Development and Federalism*.

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This introductory article compares certain features of the political, economic and social processes in Sabah and Sarawak to the related processes in the Peninsula. By highlighting similarities and differences between the two, and by incorporating some of the major points raised by the authors of the articles contained in this volume, four major trends in the development of politics in Sabah and Sarawak are identified and elaborated. It is hoped that this overview will be a useful guide for those still unfamiliar with developments in Sabah and Sarawak as they venture into a study of politics there, or when they generalise about Malaysian politics as a whole.

## DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF ETHNICITY AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

It is important to remember that the populations of Sabah and Sarawak are even more heterogeneous than in the Peninsula. Indeed, no one ethnic group constitutes a majority in Sabah or Sarawak, as do the Malays in the Peninsula. The Bumiputera of Sarawak comprises many ethnic groups of which the Iban, who accounted for about 30% of the total population in 1988, constitute the largest group. Together with the Bidayuh (about 8%) and Orang Ulu (about 5% - mainly Kenyah, Kayan and Kelabit but also including smaller groups of Penan, Punan, Lun Bawang, etc) they are increasingly referred to as Dayak, at least by those in the Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS). The vast majority of the Dayak are non-Muslims. The other two major Bumiputera groups are the Malays (about 21%) and Melanau (about 6%). The Malays and a majority of the Melanau are Muslims. The Chinese, the vast majority of whom are non-Muslims made up the rest of the population, about 30% of the total (*Annual Statistical Bulletin Sarawak, 1988*).

Similarly, the Bumiputera of Sabah is also made up of many ethnic groups of which the Kadazandusun, who accounted for about 28.2% of the total population in 1980, constitute the largest group. The other large bumiputera groups comprised the Bajau (about 11.8%), the Muruts (about 4.8%), the Rungus, Suluk, Orang Sungai, Kedayan, Bisaya, etc (about 19.2%) and Malays (2.8%). About 6.1% are regarded to have originated from Indonesia while another 5.7% are listed as "Others" (principally Filipinos and Cocos Islanders). The Chinese constituted the remainder of the population, about 21.4%. And whereas the majority of the Kadazandusun, Rungus, Muruts and Chinese are non-Muslims, the others including those originating from Indonesia and the Philippines are Muslims (*Annual Statistical Bulletin Sabah, 1980*).

When political parties were first formed in the late 1950s, many of them were organised as multi-ethnic parties as in the cases of the original Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP) and the Sarawak National Party (SNAP). In fact multi-ethnic parties like Parti Berjaya and Parti Bersatu Sabah subsequently ruled in Sabah as well. Such multi-ethnic co-operation was facilitated by less rigid ethnic boundaries separating one group from another, unlike in the Peninsula. This was especially so prior to the introduction of electoral politics. Subsequently, perhaps beginning from the 1970s, the Peninsula's brand of politics wherein political parties are organised along ethnic lines increasingly became the norm in Sabah and Sarawak as well. Nowadays, it has become commonplace to categorise the populations of the two states into three major groupings, at least for political purposes: Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese. Hence, in contrast to the situation in the Peninsula where the electoral contest is mainly between Malay Bumiputera and non-Malays, electoral competition in Sabah and Sarawak is often a three-cornered contest. However, especially during the 1980s and the early 1990s, electoral competition increasingly developed into a contest between the Muslim Bumiputera and non-Muslim Bumiputera, with the Chinese supporting the group it considered more accommodating to its interests. In this regard, the Chinese electorate and parties in Sabah and Sarawak, unlike their counterparts in the Peninsula, are sometimes cast in the role of "king makers". The solid support of the predominantly Chinese SUPP (Sarawak United Peoples Party) for the Muslim Bumiputera-led PBB (Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu) in the 1987 and 1991 Sarawak elections sealed the fate of the non-Muslim Bumiputera PBDS. On the other hand, the withdrawal of Chinese support for the multi-ethnic but Kadazandusun-led Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) in the 1994 Sabah elections, in contrast to its support for the PBS in the 1986 and 1990 elections, reduced the PBS' majority in 1994 to only two seats. On this occasion, the PBS was primarily successful in the Kadazandusun-dominated constituencies.

## RISE OF KADAZANDUSUN AND DAYAK CONSCIOUSNESS

This new configuration in the electoral contest arose because of the emergence of a new political consciousness among the non-Muslim Bumiputera communities: the Kadazandusuns in Sabah and the Dayaks in Sarawak. Because of educational and economic opportunities made available to Bumiputeras as a result of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971-90), a new Dayak and Kadazandusun middle-class appeared on the political scene. Many of them were young, well-educated and articulate. They were also more wealthy and therefore able to finance their political activities. However, increasing numbers of them became frustrated as their ambitions to acquire higher political positions, which they believed to be more commensurate with their abilities, as well as their position as the largest

indigenous groups in their respective states, were thwarted. In both cases, they considered themselves to be discriminated against and dominated by the Muslim Bumiputera, apparently favoured by the federal authorities, also dominated by Muslims.

The development of this new phase of Kadazandusun and Dayak "ethno-nationalist" consciousness has been investigated by several scholars (Leigh 1991, Loh 1992, Jayum 1993 and Mason 1995). These studies show that the middle-class leaders successfully mobilised the rural population, if perhaps ephemerally, by harping on the lack of development in the rural areas where the Kadazandusun and Dayak populations predominated, and by promoting a revival of their respective cultures which the middle-class leaders emphasised had also been neglected by the Muslim-Bumiputera dominated Barisan governments in both states. Popular ethno-nationalist movements developed in both states and reminded one of the similarly popular ethno-nationalist movement led by the new Malay middle-class in the Peninsula in the 1960s, whose ambitions were also thwarted by non-Malay domination of the economy. A change of government occurred in Sabah when the multi-ethnic but Kadazandusun-dominated PBS won the 1985 state polls. The PBS consolidated its victory in the following two elections and ruled for a total of nine years before its ouster in 1994. However, the PBDS' bid for power in Sarawak in 1987, and again in 1991, was unsuccessful. At any rate the rise of these ethno-nationalist movements led to a worsening of ethnic relations and much acrimony in both states, as did the Malay ethno-nationalist movement in the Peninsula in the late 1960s, culminating in the May 13 ethnic riots which was followed by the introduction of the New Economic Policy.

However, both the Kadazandusun and the Dayak movements appear to have petered out by the mid-1990s. The PBS itself was replaced by a coalition of Barisan parties in 1994, while the PBDS was forced to seek re-admission into the Sarawak Barisan coalition which it finally rejoined in 1994, after a three-year wait. In this regard, a new trend towards greater domination of politics by the Muslim Bumiputera parties might be in the offing. This emerging trend is related to the strengthening of political institutions in Sabah and Sarawak, yet another trend. I shall first discuss the strengthening of political institutions in the two states before elaborating on the increasing domination of politics there by the Muslim-Bumiputera.

#### WEAK POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

But first, the relative weakness of political institutions in Sabah and Sarawak must

be considered. There is a historical dimension to this. Although James Brooke established himself in Kuching in 1841, and the British North Borneo Company appointed W. H. Treacher as Governor in Labuan in 1881, and in spite of administrative reforms introduced in the early twentieth century, nonetheless, the administrative systems of both territories lagged behind that of British Malaya. The Brooke's rule of Sarawak has been likened to that of a fiefdom while in Sabah, it has been said that the chartered company was less concerned with governance than with catering for the business interests of its London-based investors. It was not until 1946, after the Second World War, that these Borneo territories were ceded to the British Crown and for the first time came under the direct rule of the British Colonial Office.

The colonial state in the Peninsula was further reformed and extended, largely to meet security goals in the struggle against the Communists during the Emergency (1948-60). But it also resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive administrative system which linked Kuala Lumpur to outlying areas throughout the Peninsula. After Independence in 1957, this security *cum* administrative system underwent further reform for implementing and monitoring rural development projects (Ness 1967). No similar administrative reforms were conducted in the Borneo states in the post-War period. No equivalent reach by the state into the rural areas of Sabah and Sarawak occurred. In fact, it was partly in anticipation of enjoying similar rural development projects which were ongoing in the Peninsula that Sabah and Sarawak leaders were attracted to the Malaysia proposal. The relative lag of the administrative systems in Sabah and Sarawak hold true even in the 1990s.

Likewise, the political parties in Sabah and Sarawak are relatively weaker too. Whereas those in the Peninsula have developed comprehensive systems linking far-flung branches to headquarters, and (in the case of the Barisan parties) ventured into business activities, set up party "war chests" and acquired control of the mass media to facilitate their electoral activities, most Sabah and Sarawak parties remain dominated by personalities whose charisma and personal fortunes determine the strength of the parties concerned.

For instance, the withdrawal from politics by three former chief ministers of Sabah, namely (the late) Fuad Stephens, (the late) Mustapha Harun and Harris Salleh also led to the demise of their parties: although UNKO (United National Kadazan Organisation), USNO (United Sabah National Organisation) and Parti Berjaya, respectively, were all in power in Sabah at some point. Besides, in Sabah and Sarawak, party loyalties are frail and until more recently when "anti-hopping" laws were passed in the early 1990s, it was common to see elected representatives abandoning their original parties and joining the winning party after an election.

The domination of parties by particular personalities spawned patronage politics or the politics of clientelism, in turn related to the structure of the economies and societies in Sabah and Sarawak.

The statistics available indicate that Sabah and Sarawak, like the rest of Malaysia, experienced rapid economic growth in the 1970s and early 1980s. In the Peninsula, foreign direct investments in the then newly-created "free trade zones" and other industrial estates facilitated the growth of the manufacturing sector, indeed, the rapid growth of "export-oriented industrialisation". But this was not the case in Sabah and Sarawak. Instead, rapid growth occurred in the "agriculture, forestry and fishing" and "mining" sectors. In 1980 as well as in 1990 these sectors accounted for more than 50% of the GDP for both states whereas they constituted only 30% in 1980, and dropped to 23% of total GDP for the Peninsula. Whereas manufacturing began to contribute increasingly to the Peninsula's GDP rising from 22% in 1980 to 30% in 1990, it merely contributed 8% (largely paper and paper products) to Sabah's GDP in 1990 while in Sarawak it accounted for 17% (largely petroleum-based industrial chemicals) for that year. In 1989, manufacturing in Sabah and Sarawak absorbed less than 8% of those gainfully employed whereas in the Peninsula it absorbed one-fifth of the same in 1989-90. And whereas more than 80% of the bulk of export earnings in the two Borneo states in 1980 derived from crude petroleum and liquified natural gas, sawlogs and sawn timber accounted for only 30% of the same in the Peninsula. By contrast machinery and transport equipment and manufactured products accounted for almost 40% of total export earnings in the Peninsula. (Wee 1995: 48, 52-3, 76-7). Focusing on the peninsula, one had the impression of Malaysia joining the ranks of the NICs (newly industrialised countries). Not so when one focused on Sabah and Sarawak; the impression was an economy still dependent on the export of primary commodities as in neighbouring Philippines and Indonesia. Indeed, most of Sabah and Sarawak's manufactured goods were imported from the Peninsula, Singapore and Japan.

In the absence of industrialisation, the transformation of Sabah and Sarawak societies was less dramatic. Even in the 1980s, the urban working class remained small and the vast majority of the population in the two states, some 80%, continued to be domiciled in the rural areas and largely engaged in agricultural pursuits. In such a situation, traditional community leaders normally wielded much power and influence over the population through a network of patron-client ties. Not surprisingly, therefore, the political parties were themselves dominated by powerful patrons.

## THE STRENGTHENING OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

But some changes have occurred. In spite of possessing their own state bureaucracies, which under the terms of the Malaysia Agreement afforded them much autonomy and scope of activities, "federalisation" of the bureaucracies, especially in Sabah, has proceeded unabated (Loh 1992). By this is meant the physical expansion as well as the widening scope of departmental activities assumed by the federal bureaucracy directed from Kuala Lumpur. It further implies standardisation of administrative procedures in accordance with practices in the Peninsula. This has curtailed to some measure arbitrary rule. The reason for this federalisation is funding for development plans, which the federal government controls and the state governments desire (Shafruddin 1988 and Wee 1995). Hence federalisation of the bureaucracies in Sabah and Sarawak can also result in more development funds being made available.

Changes have also occurred vis-a-vis the political parties. With the entry of UMNO (United Malays National Organisation, the dominant party in the federal ruling coalition) into Sabah politics in 1991, a formidable political party made its presence felt especially among Muslim Bumiputera communities for the first time.

In its first ever outing in the 1994 state elections it captured almost all the Muslim Bumiputera dominated seats it contested. Although the Sabah Barisan coalition which it led lost to the PBS in the polls, UMNO successfully weaned over PBS members to the Barisan cause and within a month, had replaced PBS at the helm (see Jayum, this volume<sup>#</sup>). UMNO's possession of a more comprehensive organisation, access to skilled officials and large amounts of funds, and control over the media suggests that it would not be easy to dislodge the party in future elections.

Though not comparable to UMNO, nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the Muslim Bumiputera dominated Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) and the Chinese-dominated Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP), the two major parties in the Sarawak Barisan ruling coalition have been more resilient than the other Sarawak parties, and outlived changes of leadership. It appears that these two parties have become permanent features of the political landscape in Sarawak and will continue to have a say in determining who rules there.

But the consolidation of these parties also alert us to the fact that the non-Muslim Bumiputera do not have comparable party organisations, that they will find it increasingly difficult to mount successful challenges of the Muslim Bumiputera

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<sup>#</sup> References to authors in text without specified years refer to their contributions in this volume.

parties now heading the Barisan coalitions, and that, perhaps, the three-cornered electoral contest will reconfigure towards one increasingly dominated by Muslim Bumiputera with the others (the Chinese and non-Muslim populations) playing supporting roles, as in the case of the Peninsula.

This is most plausible due to two additional factors. Firstly, with federalisation of the bureaucracies and the enhanced role of Kuala Lumpur in the two states, the federal leaders will have even more say over who comes to power in Sabah and Sarawak. It is apparent that preference will be given to UMNO to lead any ruling coalition in Sabah, and the predominantly Muslim Bumiputera PBB to do the same in Sarawak. Secondly, the latest round of the redelineation of electoral boundaries in the mid-1990s has resulted in an increase of Muslim Bumiputera dominated seats (for Sabah see Loh; for Sarawak see Aeria). The demise of the non-Muslim Bumiputera ethno-nationalist movements discussed in the earlier section, the emergence of stronger political parties among the Muslim Bumiputera, the enhanced role of federal authorities in administration, and the recent redelineation of electoral boundaries exercise, all suggest a trend towards Muslim-Bumiputera domination of politics in Sabah and Sarawak.

## POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT

This reconfiguration of politics is further related to the emergence of a "politics of development" in the two states. As mentioned earlier, Sabah and Sarawak also experienced rapid economic growth during the 1970s and early 1980s. After the short but severe recession in the mid-1980s, growth resumed in the two states as in the Peninsula. However, whereas growth in Sarawak as in the Peninsula was quite spectacular registering an average of 8-9% during the early 1990s, that for Sabah, then governed by the opposition PBS lagged behind, only registering 4-5% for those same years. Sarawak's more successful economic growth under a Barisan government was showcased during Sabah's state elections in 1994. The PBS government was held responsible for creating political instability which in turn caused the slower rate of growth in Sabah. To rejuvenate the economy, UMNO Sabah and its partners announced a variety of development projects - rural development programmes, low cost housing schemes, improved facilities for schools, the setting up of a university in Sabah, industrialisation through establishing free trade zones, all packaged as a "New Sabah" which would be ushered in if the PBS was rejected and the Barisan parties voted into office. Seed grants for some of these projects, as well as funds for a myriad other purposes - independent Chinese schools, rural cooperatives, roads, drains, clinics and mosques - were distributed during the campaign period (see Loh). Consequently, the PBS' previously comfortable majority was reduced to only two seats. Through

post-election defections, the Barisan parties replaced the PBS at the helm. The details of the electoral results and the manoeuvrings which occurred subsequent to the polls are discussed in Jayum Jawan's contribution in this volume. It is noteworthy that the defections to the BN were explained in terms of facilitating development projects for the people.

The politics of development was also the theme of the 1996 state elections in Sarawak. Not only did the Barisan government there remind the electorate of its achievements through a mass media blitz, publications and an exhibition which was moved around to all corners of the state just prior to the official election campaign period, but funds were also made available and seed-grants announced for still further development projects throughout the campaign period. Andrew Aeria's article in this volume discusses in detail the "politics of development" of Sarawak's Barisan government. An appendix to his article lists the official development projects announced and financial handouts made by the incumbent Barisan government between 15 August to 8 September 1996 which he compiled from various newspaper sources. However, he warns us that "money politics" was also widespread and that some of this was tantamount to political bribery for the purchase of votes in particular constituencies. There was therefore more to the politics of development than meets the eye.

Be that as it may, the Barisan parties won handsomely especially in the rural constituencies; this included non-Muslim Bumiputra-dominated constituencies. The details of the electoral results are further considered by Aeria. In fact, the PBDS explained its *volte-face* in rejoining the Barisan coalition in just those terms: to facilitate development projects for the people (as in the case of the PBS's defections in Sabah discussed earlier). Tan Chee Beng's article which focuses on the Badeng Kenyah in Belaga District does not address the involvement of the community in the 1996 elections. But his ethnographic study of this marginalised community based on his visits in 1992, 1994 and 1995 indicates clearly that this minority group also values development. In fact some villagers have joined the PBB in order to facilitate relations with the political leaders and "government agents" which they hope will result in development projects for their communities. Tan details, too, how the villagers seize the opportunity of the rare visits by PBB politicians and government officers to remind the visitors of their electoral promises and their moral responsibilities.

However, Michael Goldman's article which focuses on the contest for urban Chinese votes in Sibu and Kuching in 1996 warns us against jumping to early conclusions about a trend towards the politics of development among all communities. For the essence of the SUPP's campaign turned around the need for a strong Chinese presence in the Barisan government in order to ensure that

Chinese economic interests were given their due attention. Yet, the opposition DAP (Democratic Action Party) won three urban Chinese state constituencies for the first time. A political novice representing the DAP even defeated the SUPP chief although as deputy chief minister, the SUPP chief was clearly in a position to deliver the usual goods and services as well as new development projects. By analysing the rhetoric of the DAP and SUPP during the electoral campaign, Goldman concludes that the DAP's breakthrough was due primarily to its successful appeal to the urban voters to reject the Barisan's money politics and "cronyism", and to put a stop to the further erosion of Sarawak's autonomy under Barisan rule. Whether this means that the politics of development appeals only to the poorer rural voters in more dire straits, and that the better-off urban voters, in less dire straits can be appealed to on political grounds, in fact can make a distinction between the politics of development and money politics remains to be seen. But significantly, ethno-nationalism which had engulfed the Dayaks was being beaten back by the delivery of development projects, and the promise of still more, as in Sabah. The weaknesses - *qua* institutions - of the PBDS and the PBS too, probably facilitated the erosion of these ethno-nationalist sentiments.

#### THE FEDERAL FACTOR

Finally, any study of politics in Sabah and Sarawak must consider the role of the Federal Government. In his article Lim Hong Hai reminds us that the Malaysian federal system, *by design*, empowers the federal government more than it does the state governments, the cases of Sabah and Sarawak included. The development process has further facilitated centralisation as discussed earlier. Hence although Sabah and Sarawak were afforded more rights and greater autonomy than the other Peninsula states, as emblemised by the "Twenty Points" (see Loh), the status of Sabah and Sarawak in the federal system is fast becoming akin to those of the other Peninsula states. No wonder the PBS successfully tapped into regionalist sentiments, as apparently did the DAP in 1996 among Sibu and Kuching voters (on the PBS, see Loh; on the DAP, see Goldman).

But Lim also discusses the political *process*, especially the comprehensiveness of the BN and the UMNO party systems, and how they allowed for the centre to further dominate over the state governments. Kuala Lumpur can, if it wishes, determine just who and which parties come to power. In Sarawak's case for instance, the first Chief Minister Stephen Kalong Ningkan and his Iban-dominated party SNAP (Sarawak National Party) were considered too independent-minded by the federal authorities. By declaring an Emergency in 1966, the federal leaders were able to remove Ningkan and forced his party into opposition. Penghulu Tawi Sli, from the then Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak, who with federal support was

appointed to replace Ningkan proved, however, to be too weak a leader. His party was also allegedly antagonistic to Muslim Bumiputera interests. Following the 1970 state elections, he was replaced by Rahman Ya'kub, then federal Minister of Education, who was hand-picked by Kuala Lumpur to head the new Parti Bumiputera-dominated government. Through persuasion and pressure, the federal authorities also succeeded in getting SUPP and Pesaka to work with Rahman Ya'kub, rather than SNAP. Further persuasion led to the merger of Parti Bumiputera and Pesaka which emerged as the PBB in 1973. Indeed, the federal authorities were also instrumental in persuading SNAP to join the Barisan state government in 1976.

Still later in 1981, as increasing groups of Malays became disenchanted with Rahman Ya'kub, Abdul Taib Mahmud who was then a federal minister was hand-picked by Kuala Lumpur to replace Rahman who was appointed as the new Governor. And when Rahman set up a new party, Permas, and teamed up with the PBDS to challenge Taib Mahmud in the 1987 state elections, federal support for Taib was as crucial as SUPP support for him in his defeat of the Permas-PBDS "Maju team".

Likewise, the federal government's intervention in support of Mustapha Harun, then Governor, in his dispute with Donald Stephens in the mid-1960s, was instrumental in forcing the latter to relinquish the Chief Ministership of Sabah only two years after the formation of Malaysia. This occurred when Stephens protested Singapore's exit from Malaysia and expressed a desire to re-examine Sabah's continued participation in the Federation. Federal support for Mustapha in the 1967 state elections facilitated victory of the Alliance made up of Mustapha's USNO and the Sabah Chinese Association. Ironically, about 10 years later Mustapha himself was pressured by the federal authorities to vacate the Chief Ministership in 1976 after Kuala Lumpur grew impatient with his maverick ways, and when he allegedly threatened secession. The new Parti Berjaya, headed by Stephens and Harris Salleh, which defeated Mustapha's USNO in the 1976 polls, was clearly hatched with the blessings of Kuala Lumpur. However, support from the federal government does not automatically ensure victory as the PBS' defeat of Harris Salleh's Berjaya in 1985 indicates. But the tensions and intrigues involving the federal authorities which marked PBS' 9-year rule from 1985-1994, reminds us of the critical role of the federal authorities in Sabah and Sarawak politics.

This was especially clear after the PBS pulled out of its uneasy relationship with the federal government to support the then opposition *Gagasan Rakyat* coalition on the eve of the 1990 general elections. Following the victory of the Barisan Nasional government yet again, relations between Kuala Lumpur and Sabah rapidly deteriorated. The PBS Chief Minister Pairin Kitingan was charged on

three counts of corruption, his brother and several other PBS supporters were then detained under the ISA on the charge of promoting Sabah's secession, and federal funds for Sabah began to be diverted away from the state government to a Federal Development Office administered by federal officers (see Loh). And of course, UMNO then ventured into Sabah politics. All these contributed towards the eventual swing away from the PBS to an UMNO-led Barisan coalition which now rules Sabah.

## CONCLUSION

By drawing comparisons between the two states and the Peninsula, four emerging trends have been discerned. Sabah and Sarawak are multiethnic societies but due to the different ethnic patterns prevailing there, their electoral politics have unfolded quite differently from that in the Peninsula. Originally, multi-ethnic parties were common. Then a three-cornered race involving Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and the Chinese prevailed. However, with the rise of ethno-nationalism among the non-Muslim Bumiputera beginning from the 1980s, it became increasingly a contest between the two Bumiputera groups with the Chinese playing the critical role of kingmaker, their votes determining which Bumiputera group would come to power. With the demise, at least temporarily, of the non-Muslim Bumiputera ethno-nationalist movements in the early 1990s, reconfiguration of the political process seems underway, perhaps towards a political system more clearly dominated by the Muslim Bumiputera, as in the case of the Peninsula. This is the first observable, perhaps the most significant, trend.

This reconfiguration of the political process involved changes to three other features of the existing political system. Secondly, political institutions - which were previously weak allowing particular personalities to dominate and manipulate the administrative and party instruments for their own ends - appear to be strengthening. This is exemplified by the entry of UMNO into Sabah and the consolidation, *qua* institutions, of the PBB and SUPP in Sarawak. Federalisation of the bureaucracies in these two states has also proceeded considerably. While this has resulted in centralisation of powers, nevertheless, it has also resulted in further routinisation and regularisation of government, reducing the scope for arbitrary rule.

A third observable trend is the emergence of a "politics of development" and money politics, which explains support for the Barisan coalition which has delivered considerable development projects and opportunities to the electorate, and promises to deliver still more. This new "politics of development" appears to have replaced the politics of ethno-nationalism in the rural areas. But money

politics might have turned the tables against the Barisan/SUPP in the urban areas.

It is obvious that the politics of development requires maintaining good relations with the federal authorities who alone, constitutionally speaking, are responsible for determining the scope and distribution of the development budget. In the 1990s, the federal authorities increased the development allocations for Sarawak but reduced that for Sabah. In fact, the reduced funds made available for Sabah were further re-directed away from the opposition PBS state government to the Federal Development Office which the federal authorities themselves controlled. The increasingly critical role of the federal authorities which accompanies the emergence of a politics of development, and the strengthening of political institutions - through federalisation of the bureaucracies and UMNO's entry into Sabah - clearly indicate that Sabah and Sarawak will be even less autonomous than before. As Kuala Lumpur's presence is increasingly felt, the status of the two states within the federation will become more akin to that of the other Peninsula states. This is the fourth discernible trend.

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