CHAPTER FIVE

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

One of the reasons for the persisting tension among the conflicting nationalist ideologies in Malaysia is that, because of its multiethnic composition, the nature of the Malaysian nation was not clearly defined initially. Malaysia has diverse ethnic and cultural groups of which three major ethnic groups, that is, Malay, Chinese and Indian, are important groups and the indigenous people in the interior of the peninsula and in east Malaysia – Sabah and Sarawak – are other smaller groups. In this complicated ethnic mix, there are different interpretations regarding the nature of Malaysian nation. First, most Malays believe that this common culture should have as its nucleus traditional Malay culture. This would follow if it is recognized that Malaysian nationalism has Malay nationalism as its nucleus. Second, but most Chinese and Indians would deny that this is a fair claim. In their view, the Malayan nation should involve only a new political loyalty and not a denial of the multicultural basis of the present society. A third minority view, held mainly by the English-educated Chinese and Indians, is that cultural differences may remain so long as most people accept more intensive modernization and come to share a common outlook which is not deeply anchored in any single traditional culture (Wang 1981:207).

The three arguments respectively depict a 'Malay Malaysia' where Malay ethnic characteristics define the Malaysia nation; a 'multiethnic Malaysia' in which ethnic groups enjoy autonomy and preserve their own identities; and a 'Malaysian Malaysia' in which a particular ethnic identity is not relevant as the identity of the nation. Indeed, these three arguments have been frequently used by Malaysian political elites. The Malaysian political elites were unable to clearly define what kind of nation they were building. As Cheah Boon Kheng observed, 'the alliance parties failed to spell out the features of define its national identity in the constitution because they were uncertain how to define its national identity' (cheah, 2002: 5). A 'Malay Malaysia' would have been acceptable the fragile national integration. On the other
hand, a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ would have the support of the non-Malays but such a national identity might estrange the Malays, who constituted the largest single bloc in the Malaysian population.

This unresolved question is reflected in the merdeka (independence) constitution. The constitution was a product of ethnic compromise and bargaining among the elites from the major ethnic groups. Significantly, this constitution failed to clearly define national identity (Cheah 2002; Gullick 1981:115; Harper 1996; H. G. Lee 2001: 2-3; Shamsul 1997:244). Cheah noted the ambiguity regarding Malaysian citizenship in the constitution. He stated: ‘Malaya’s citizenship in the 1957 constitution…. Was known only as “federal citizenship”. “Federal citizenship “meant membership of a nation, like a membership of a club with rights and duties. Nationality, however, meant a national identity, which was something else’ (Cheah 2002: 5). T. N. Harper also observed:

The constitutional framework for the future nation… was very ambiguous. It gave limited citizenship rights to non-Malays; yet this citizenship did not amount to a nationality and the citizenship rights for non-Malays in no way impinged on the special rights of the Malays. Malayness was enshrined in the constitution; the new entity was translated as persatuan tanah melayu. The “Malayan” had no status, no legal definition at all. It was a state, but not a temple for a nation. Thus, there remained fundamental contradictions between the formation of a new nation-state and the cultural basis on which it was to evolve. (Harper, 1996:240)

In fact, some clauses of the merdeka constitution indicate incompatible identities of the Malayan nation in the constitution. For example, Article 8 (2) of the constitution states unequivocally:

Except as expressly authorized by this constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment (Article 8(2)).
On the other hand, the constitution boldly stipulates that Islam is the official religion (article 2) and Malay is the national language (Article 152). Also the traditional Malay rules, the sultans, are the supreme heads of the federation (Articles 32) and of the various states (article 70). All these are distinctive symbols of the Malay community. The clauses, thus, indicate the special position of the Malays vis-à-vis the other ethnic groups in the constitution. Furthermore, despite the clear commitment to 'no discrimination' on the bases of religion, race, descent and so on, the constitution recognizes Malay special rights as indigenous people in terms of land reservation (Articles 89 and 90) and of quotas for public sector employments and various permits and licenses (Article 143).

This ambiguous national identity raises questions regarding the national identity of Malaysia – is Malaysia a Malay nation, a Malaysian nation or a collection of nations of Malay, Chinese, Indian and so on, and, ultimately, who are Malaysians? Because the political elites at the time of independence could not elucidate the national identity, the federal constitution does not provide a clear answer to these questions. Consequently, the ambiguity of national identity resulted in competition and tension because of different constructions of nationalist identity, that is, competing nationalisms.

Within UMNO, factional disputes frequently become an arena of competing nationalist ideologies. UMNO elites construct, manipulate and employ nationalist ideologies to answer the national identity question in their attempt to legitimize their political power. UMNO factionalism has been political conflict between the incumbent leadership and elites who challenge the incumbent leadership of the party. The incumbent UMNO leader, who is also the prime minister, sets the ideological battleground, formulating nationalist ideology and vision. The prime minister, as a leader of the multiethnic Malaysia, attempts to resolve the unanswered question of national identity with his own vision and ideology. He does this by construction of a nationalist ideology through which he hopes to define national identity. For example, Cheah Boon Kheng observed:

All four prime ministers upheld and worked the social contract of 1955 and 1957 and have attempted to juggle and balance the communal demands and interests of the
The competing nationalist position of the challenger is a reaction to the incumbent leaders did not develop their nationalism into an exclusive nationalism of “Malaya for the Malays” would make the future nation-state always subject to continuous pressures and challenges from its own members and from other Malay nationalists and organizations to realize their goal in the future’ (Cheah, 2002:6). The challenge in UMNO led to find fault with the incumbent leader’s nationalist position, interpreting the Malay community’s problems as a result of the misplaced nationalism of the incumbent leader. They argue that their nationalist position provides a better future for Malay community with their nationalist position so that they win the political contest against the incumbent leader.

5.1. Democracy, authoritarianism and nationalist ideologies in Malaysia

In Malaysia, another debate concerning nationalist ideology focuses on the relationship between community and individual. This debate is closely related to the nature of politics - authoritarian or democratic politics. In 1962, Wang Gungwu, regarding democratic politics, nationalism and ethnic diversity, observed:

Already some politicians are asking if democracy is efficient enough for the building of a new nation almost from scratch.[their questions are] is nationalism in Malaya compatible with democracy? If we want our people to be identified solely and fully with Malaya … can we afford to use only the methods of persuasion and education? Do we have the time which we badly need to convert, if not most people of this generation at least the bulk of the next generation, to the national ideal? The modern state machinery can be a powerful weapon, on the one hand, for education and indoctrination and, on the other, for coercion and strict political control. (Wang 1962:209)

This observation indicates that there were political elites who considered sacrificing democratic politics for nation building – either the Malay or Malaysian
nation— or for ethnic and political stability as early as 1960s when Malaysia was barely independent.

A common characterization of Malaysian politics is that it is authoritarian. William Case argued, ‘while elections are held regularly in Malaysia, and opposition parties win parliamentary seats, civil liberties are so truncated beforehand that government turnovers have normally been difficult to imagine’ (Case 1997: 81). Similarly, Harold Crouch observed that while formal political institutions such as elections and the parliament are functioning, the government is well equipped with authoritarian apparatus to control the opposition in Malaysia (Crouch 1993: 136-137).

Authoritarian politics in Malaysia is a legacy of historical experiences such as insurgency and multi-ethnic composition of population and a logical consequence of elite response—imposition of elite-sanctioned official national identity- to the historical experiences. As this thesis shall argue, Malaysian political elites attempt to construct a nationalist vision and to resolve the issue of ethnic diversity and to integrate diverse ethnic groups. The nationalist ideology of political elites, according to them, represents the collective national will and benefits the community as a whole. Therefore, it follows that the community has consent to the vision of the elites for the benefit of the whole community. Sheila Nair captured the logic as follows: ‘the ruling elite’s claims of legitimacy are currently rooted in the state’s provision of interethnic harmony; this goal may be accomplished, according to this elite, only if civil society consents to the large programmatic mission of the state representing the nation’ (Nair 1999: 93).

Authoritarian politics in Malaysia can be characterized by the limitation on civil liberties that might be a source of alternatives to the official national identity and authoritarian suppression of any challenging ideas to it, which, elites suspect, might undermine ethnic stability. Regarding the limitation on civil liberties in Malaysia, William Case observed, ‘the government has acted systematically to cap...participation, registering and circumscribing groups through the societies act, extending a near monopoly over media ownership that dampens free expression...and using the internal security act regularly to jail ardent critics (Case 1992: 77).
Since the ideas and views of the political elites represent the will and interests of the entire community, any ideological challenge to the elites’ ideas and views, the elites claim, should be regarded as a challenge to the entire community. Therefore, the elites argue, such challenges as alternative ideas about national identity that are conceived by the contesting elites or by civil society independent from the state must be suppressed on behalf of the community’s interests, using the authoritarian and coercive state apparatus. Zakaria Ahmad observed that the Malaysian political leaders’ authoritarian politics is based on ‘strong fears that too much democratization in terms of freedom of speech and association can only quickly and surely destroy the system’ (Zakaria 1989:371). In sum political elites attempted to deprive individuals of interests and will of the community. In addition, if individuals digress from the officially sanctioned ideological path, they are exposed to a danger of being in face of sanctions by the hands of authoritarian political elites.

If authoritarian politics in Malaysia has been justified in such a way and if political elites imposed an officially sanctioned national identity to resolve the national identity problem, the resolution of the tension with a vision of national identity may weaken the justification for authoritarian politics. Mahathir’s civic nationalist vision such as Bangsa Malaysia (Malaysian nation) and wawasan 2020 (vision 2020), along with his strategy of fostering forward-looking optimism together with economic growth in the 1990s were successful in reducing the ambiguity in an aspect of national identity. In addition, economic, growth, especially within the Malay community, has reduced the Malay community’s collective ethnic fear of other non-Malay communities and increased its confidence.

These developments resulted in strong support for Mahathir’s vision in the Malay community. The support indicated a crucial shift in popular focus among the Malays from a focus on ethnic loyalty to a focus on the building of a more civic Malaysia. Khoo Boo Teik described the success of Mahathir’s nationalist vision as follows: ‘somehow Malaysians were inspired... to discover their ability to imagine themselves as a community, and to do so with a sense of the “ineradicable goodness of the nation” (Khoo, B.T 2002:22).
The success decreased the tensions surrounding the unresolved question of national identity. The development, however, raised another nationalist question – regarding the relationship between communities and individual that was expressed in the tension between authoritarian politics and opposition to it. The success of Mahathir’s nationalism through economic growth and the ensuing optimism resulted in a more confident and assertive, Malaysian society. Abdul Rahman Embong noted, ‘the new middle class come forward not only with new forms of association, self-expression, and initiative but also with new ideas regarding the proper balance among state, market, and civil society’ (Embong 2001: 63). This development increased the questioning of the necessity for authoritarian control and the nationalist assumptions behind it, that is, the community’s will and interests above individual liberty and rights.

Accordingly, the competing nationalisms have been reconﬁgures. On one hand, there is nationalism that underpins authoritarian politics and on the other, there is the newly rising awareness of individual liberty and rights as reﬂected in the demand for democratic politics and vibrant civil society as an autonomous place of free individuals. This rising demands for democratic politics assume that individual rights and liberty are more important than or is as important as the will and interests of the whole community. This assumption is different from the nationalist view that justiﬁes the elites’ imposition of national identity and the suppression of different ideas and voices in the name of the common interest of the community.

5.2. Competing nationalisms: models for analysis

This section will explore ﬁve models of nationalism. These ﬁve models can be divided into two groups for analytical convenience – ethno cultural, civic and multicultural nationalisms on one hand, collectivist – authoritarian and individualistic – libertarian nationalisms on the other.

Before explaining the models, it should be noted that the categorization is only for the purpose of analysis. That this analytical framework is about ideal types has two meanings. First, this categorization is used, at least in this thesis’ context, as a guide, note as a tool for black –or – white identification. The nationalism categorization adopted here is about relative degree and general tendency of specific
political actor at specific time-frame and in specific political context. Therefore, a political actor or a policy scheme described by one of nationalism types should be understood as having such tendency in a relative term and context, not as being exemplary case in an absolute term and context.

Second and similarly, in actual politics and in the arguments used by political elites, the two groups can be combined. For example, ethno cultural, civic and multicultural nationalisms can be associated with either collectivist-authoritarian nationalism or individual-libertarian nationalism. Therefore, theoretically, we can have six different models collectivist-authoritarian ethno cultural: collectivist-libertarian multicultural; individualistic-libertarian ethno cultural nationalisms. As the models suggested here are for analysis, in the actual nationalist arguments made by political elites, the elements of the different models are mixed.

5.2.a. Models of ethno cultural, civic and multicultural nationalisms

Nationalism is an ideology through which political elites attempt to secure political legitimacy and support. David brown has described nationalism as ‘an ideology, invented and employed by new political elites aspiring for power in the modern state, who seek alternative sources of legitimacy to replace appeals into divine right or colonial mandate’ (brown, 2000: 31). Nationalist ideology has to provide a sense of community in which people feel included and safe. Having experienced such social disruptions as the imposition or the end of colonial rule, the introduction of capitalism, an influx of exogenous elements into a traditional community, physical transplantation of a community to a new territory and so on, people seek attachment to a community. Nationalism enables people to make sense of complex social and political arrangement, caused by social and political arrangement, caused by social disruption’ (Breuilly, 1982: 343). When political elites successfully invent a national identity and suggest a nationalist vision, it is akin to provide a new home and the sense of belonging resolves the problems that people face.

First, ethno cultural nationalism, according to brown, ‘indicates that full status and membership of the national community be given only to those possessing the required ethnic attributes’ (Brown, 2000: 4). The ethno cultural nationalist view shapes the nature of the state. In ethno cultural nationalism, the state is viewed as an
agency of whichever social group in society captures it' (Brown, 2000: 36). The ethno cultural nationalist state, thus, is not neutral but biased towards the ethnic group that dominates the state. Consequently, the state is expected to protect and elevate the identity and the interests of the ethnic group that has captured it. At the same time, the ethno cultural state 'promotes [cultural] assimilation' of the minorities into the dominant 'majority ethno culture' that captures the state (Brown 2000: 127). Thorough cultural assimilation, ethno cultural state elites attempt to address the problems that develop when several ethnic groups live within a territorial boundary. As Brown argued, ethno cultural nationalists assert:

Individuals, who have not inherited such attributes, may nevertheless be able to acquire them (through intermarriage, religious conversion, language acquisition, etc.) and this process of assimilation implies the corresponding acquisition of belief in the common history and ancestry of the adoptive community. The potential problem of ethnic diversity is thus resolved by the promise of assimilation (Brown, 2000:128).

Those who are not assimilated – 'to a national government they are a foreign body in the state to be either assimilated or rejected' (Kendourie, 1960: 122) – become second-class citizens in the nation-state and may be discriminated against by the state, even if legal citizenship has been conferred upon them. Second, civic nationalism is based on the assumption that 'all citizens are granted equal status irrespective of their ethnic attributes, on the sole condition that they grant loyalty to the public institutions of the territorial community' (Brown, 2001: 5). Therefore, ethno cultural backgrounds are irrelevant when acquiring membership in a civic nation. Instead, what is important is the individual’s commitment and loyalty to the institutions of the state. The members of a civic nation proclaim their loyalty to the state, not because they have biological or ancestral links to the state but because the state, as a neutral agent, protects the safety and interests of the individual members of the national community. Brown discussed the neutrality of the civic nationalist state as follows:

If the state were viewed simply as the whole set of institutions relation to the administration of public offers in a given territory, then we might wish to regard nationalism as the development within that territorial society, of a sense of
identification with, and collective pride in, those institutions....governments seeking to defend and enhance the authority and status of the society’s public institutions, are likely to articulate legitimately nationalist ideologies. The nationalism which emerges.... is civic nationalism (Brown 2000: 36).

In the tradition, to construct a culturally homogeneous nation and to resolve the problems posed by multi-ethnicity, the state promotes ‘difference – blindness’ among its people (Brown 2000: 127.). Both civic and ethno cultural nationalisms pursue ‘the elimination of difference with its territory’ (Guibernau 1996: 101) but in different ways – integration and assimilation. The cultural integration of a nation is supposed to be accomplished via the creation of a new civic culture, which is very difficult to achieve, rather than through adoption of ethno cultural attributes of an ethnic group that dominates the state. A. D. Smith observed:

The fact that many of these dominant-ethnic states encounter fierce opposition from ethnic minorities within the state reveals the failure to “invent” a new political culture and mythology, one that can encompass or transcend the ethnic identities of both dominant and minority ethnic groups at a time when ethnic nationalism is mobilizing the peripheral, demotic communities and giving them a new, self-aware political assertiveness’ (Smith 1998:114).

Third, according to the multicultural nationalism model, a national community can be composed of several ethnic groups. Each group has cultural autonomy that the nation-state cannot violate. As David Brown observed:

[Multicultural nationalists] seek, rather, to establish an encapsulating social justice community which is bound together by common values relating to the celebration of ethnic diversity, and the commitment to inter-ethnic equity. They seek a national community within which the minorities can be guaranteed the rights and resources necessary for the attainment of their full development. (Brown 2000: 128 – 129).

Thus, a nation-state is composed of autonomous ethnic-cultural sub-units. Ethnic and cultural integration or assimilation is not an option for multicultural state
elites in resolving ethnic tension. Instead, they believe that a nation – state can be built on the recognition of difference. When state elites adopt multicultural state e in resolving ethnic tension instead, they believe that a nation – state can be built on the recognition of difference. When state elites adopt multicultural nationalism, the state and its institution can recognize the differences among ethnic groups. In this regard, Miller observed:

Multiculturalism .... Regards the state as an arena in which many kinds of individual and group identity should be allowed to co-exist and flourish. The state should not merely tolerate but give equal recognition to each of these identities. No special weight should be given to national identities indeed, such identities are somewhat, suspect, in so far as they are likely to be the product of political manipulation, where as identities stemming from gender, ethnicity, religious belief, and so forth are to be celebrated as authentic expressions of individual difference (Miller 1995: 120).

Thus, while civic nationalism is about ‘ethnic blindness’, multicultural nationalism is about ‘ethnic arithmetic’ (Brown 2000: 48, 131) and ‘consociationalism’ (Lijphart 1977) or ‘institutional plurality’ can be one of the options for this ‘ethnic arithmetic’ or ‘power – sharing basis’.

5.2. b. Models of collectivist-authoritarian and individualistic libertarian nationalisms

This categorization of collectivist – authoritarian and individualistic libertarian nationalisms is based on the analytical framework developed by Greenfield. These two types of nationalism, according to Greenfeld, have different views on where sovereignty is actually located in a nation. Collectivist – authoritarian nationalism exists when individual liberty and rights are subjected to the collective community which interests by the collective community but is actually exercised by political elites. On the contrary, individualistic – libertarian nationalism reject the idea of the collective community as a sovereign entity prevailing over individuals. Instead, it claims that every individual in the community is a sovereign entity. Based on these different assumptions, the two models have different political consequences-authoritarian and liberal politics.
Collectivist – authoritarian nationalism is characterized by collectivism and rhetorical warning of threats to the community. Liah Greenfield explained collectivism in terms of the location of sovereignty. In the collectivist tradition, it is the nation as a whole that has sovereignty. Therefore, clear emphasis is placed on the community as a unique entity rather than on the individual who constitute that community. Greenfeld argued:

The national principle was collectivistic; it reflected the collective being collectivistic ideologies are inherently authoritarian, for when the collectivity is seen in unitary terms, it tends to assume the character of a collective individual possessed of a single will, and someone is bound to be its interpreter. (Greenfeld 1992:11)

The political consequence of collectivism is illiberal and authoritarian politics, characterized by the forceful imposition on the community of the national vision conceived by political elites and non-tolerance of dissent. As Greenfeld discussed, in this collectivist community, there exist inequality between political leaders and ordinary people. And she continued that elites ‘are qualified to interpret the collective will and ... the selected few dictate to the masses who must obey’ (Greenfeld 1992:11). The interpretation of nationalist vision and goal by political elites are imposed on the community since it is only the political elites who are able and entitled to figure out a better nationalist vision for the community. It is likely that under these political elites, any questioning of, opposition to or dissent from the political elites’ nationalist vision is forbidden. Any deviance from the goals or national interests as defined by the political elites is portrayed as a challenge to the community as a whole and is suppressed in an authoritarian way.

The other important element of collectivist-authoritarian is the presence of internal and external enemies that are perceived to be threatening the communities or nation’s goal or interests. As alter contended, ‘images of a hostile world beyond... borders were evoked to whip up support at home for the nationalist cause; ongoing political tensions with other countries were artificially heightened to bolster national loyalty’ (Alter 1989:42). Threats such as the existence of ethnic groups (other than the dominant group) are used by the political elites for political purposes. The elites try to
instill a ‘garrison under siege’ mentality with, for example, anti-western or anti-colonial rhetoric, fear of re-colonization, terror of violent ethnic conflict and so on. The fear created through the alleged presence of enemies and threats to the community resonates with the insecurities of people who want to be included in the national community. Political elites channel these fears and insecurities to justify authoritarian control of the community.

Greenfeld discussed the core of individualism through sovereignty. She argued that sovereignty is exercised by ‘some individuals, who were of the people’, but essentially is owned by individuals and ‘these individuals exercised sovereignty’ in an individualistic tradition (Greenfeld 1992: 10-11). By implication, the political leaders describe themselves merely as representatives of the people who have the ultimate right to interpret nationalist goal and to shape their own future. There, in the debates and discussions regarding national goals and vision, it is natural to permit different opinions and ideas to flourish, according to nationalism in the individualistic – libertarian mode. Consequently, internal dissent is allowed, as it is not the enemy of the community but an essential part of formulating nationalist goals. Dissent is viewed as constructive criticism rather than an attempt to undermine the integrity and safety of the community.

5.3. Wawasan 2020: optimism in a new nation through development

Wawasan 2020 was an economic vision that instilled optimism amongst the Malaysian people regarding their future in the new Malaysian nation. “Malaysia: the way forward”, the paper in which Mahathir announced wawasan 2020 and bangsa Malaysia, was the most elaborate account of what he had pursued in 1980s and what he planned to pursue in the following decade. Mahathir’s main theme was that, by 2020, Malaysia would be a ‘fully developed country’ by which he meant: a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of social justice, political stability, and system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence.

Mahathir proposed a concrete goal: doubling real gross domestic product (GDP) every decade between 1990 and 2020. Mahathir hoped that the Malaysian
GDP would grow seven percent annually for 30 years. Considering the progress the Malaysian economy had made in previous decades, Mahathir argued that such a goal was realistic. Together with the national development policy (NDP), Wawasan 2020 was a blueprint for the economic growth of Malaysia.

It was noteworthy that Mahathir’s vision of an integrated nation was revealed as part of his ambitious economic development plan. This indicates that, for Mahathir, economic growth and affluence were closely related to the realization of bangsa Malaysia. Thomas Williamson summarized Mahathir’s plan of building an integrated nation through economic development as follows:

The Malaysian state’s long-standing emphasis on economic growth has aimed at completely reshaping a society split by ethnic divisions into one integrated through an imagined national economy... in Malaysia, growing affluence provides the parameters for conceiving a Malaysian nation. Economic growth, once the means toward a national culture, language and kin like ties – the ground for Malaysian nationalism – is becoming the primary model of Malaysian nationalism (Williamson 2002: 403).

This Mahathir strategy, ‘facilitated by economic development’, intended to instill ‘forward-looking optimism’ into the population, (Brown 2000: 38-39). Where the Malays were concerned, ethnic competition with non-Malays over limited economic resources had been a major reason for ethnic tension and conflict. The economic disadvantage of the Malay community had been the starting point for ethno cultural Malay nationalist arguments. For example, the ethno cultural Malay nationalists interpreted the 1969 ethnic riots as an expression of the economic discontent of the Malays whose political dominance had not been translated into commensurate economic power.

In Mahathir’s economic vision, the population’s optimism, brought about by rapid economic growth and affluence, was supposed to reduce the state ethnic division, tension and competition over limited economic resource. In a 1992 speech, Mahathir asked, ‘by the year 2020 we would have had about two generations of independent Malaysians. Will we be a united “bangsa Malaysia” or “Malaysian...
nation by then? He claimed that there were a few conditions for the building of an integrated nation. Mahathir explained the economic conditions for building an integrated nation as follows:

Managing our nation – building well will also entail that we redress the socio-economic imbalances among the various ethnic groups and the various regions in the country. Grow we no doubt must. If we do not grow we will not have the resources to redress anything. But redress we must too. If we do not redress we will self-destruct, which will reduce to naught all our growth. It is for this reason that Malaysia needs a policy of sustainable growth with equity in order to achieve this without unduly sacrificing growth and without undermining the legitimate rights of everyone, I would say we would have overcome the greatest single obstacle to national unity in this country (Mahathir 1993).

Mahathir believed that to build a genuinely integrated Malaysian nation, it was vital to address the problem of economic imbalance. The economy must be expanded first so that Malaysia had sufficient economic resources to solve the imbalance without resorting to depriving wealth from one group to distribute to another. Once the economy had been expanded and the problem of economic imbalance solved, it would then be possible for the population to place their Malaysian identity above their ethnic identities in anticipation of the benefits that the civic Malaysian nation would deliver. These developments would ultimately lead to the construction of a genuinely integrated Malaysian nation, according to Mahathir.

Mahathir initiated a significant change in his economic policies as a concrete step towards achieving his vision of a civic Malaysian nation: the further deregulation of the NEP’s ethnic redistribution rule, while maintaining its pro Malay orientation. This change aimed to expedite economic growth by providing additional economic opportunities for the non-Malay community. Mahathir believed that the economic growth thus attained would contribute to the attainment of his wawasan 2020 goals.

The new direction of the economy was enshrined in a new economic plan, the National Development Policy (NDP), which differed from its predecessor, the NEP, in that ‘while effort will continue to be made under the NDP to increase bumiputera...
ownership, no specific time frame has been set for the attainment of the equity target of at least 30 percent'. In other words, while the NEP’s goal of 30 percent Bumiputera ownership, which was supposed to have been achieved by 1990, was still intact, without a timeframe for its achievement, it was weakened. Instead of the restructuring emphasized in the NEP, more weight was placed on economic growth in the NDP.

The new policy did contribute to the significant economic growth in the first half of the 1990s. After the difficulties in 1985-86, the Malaysian economy recovered in 1987 and by 1989, the Malaysian economy was undergoing significant growth. Between 1988 and the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the Malaysian GDP grew more than 8 percent, which exceeded the goal set forth in Mahathir’s wawasan 2020. In the 1990s, the national economy was structured differently from the 1970s, which was then based on agriculture and commodities. Agricultures and mining’s share of the GDP decreased from 18.7 percent and 9.7 percent in 1990 to 8.6 percent and 6.6 percent in 2000. On the other hand, sectors of the economy specified in the wawasan 2020, such as manufacturing, contributed far more to the national economy. The GDP share of the manufacturing sector increased from 27.0 percent to 33.4 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Economic Planning Unit, 1991: 2001). In 1991, the unemployment rate was 5.6 percent nationwide. Practically, however, Malaysia was near full employment and had to rely on workers from other countries. Foreign investment increased from the late 1980s. The proportion of the population living beneath the poverty line decreased from 16.5 percent to 8.9 percent between 1990 and 1995.

While the pro-Malay aspects of Mahathir’s economic policies were weakened, they were not dismantled. Mahathir reaffirmed the government’s commitment to enhancing the Malay community’s economic power. Mahathir’s emphasized that although a civic nation, bangsa Malaysia, was Malaysia’s eventual destination, it was also equally important to lift the status and increase the economic power of an ethnic group that relatively less advanced as the first step towards becoming a fully integrated nation. Mahathir asserted, ‘we must aspire by the year 2020 to reach a stage where no one can say that a particular ethnic group is inherently economically backward and another is economically advanced’ (Mahathir 1993). To build this party, Mahathir contended:
[w]e must not neglect the challenge of economic social justice today. Those who are backward must be helped. No one must be left behind. We must all advance together. We must all reap the benefits of rapid growth and advancing modernity… if we ever forget our struggle for economic social justice, we do so at our own peril (Mahathir 1996).

The government’s performance in economic restructuring proved that its pro-Malay policies were pursued simultaneously with its emphasis on economic growth. During the sixth Malaysia plan, the government pursued a policy to produce a “bumiputera Commercial and industrial community” (BCIC). The seventh Malaysia plan reported that in 1995, 38 percent of the executives and managers of some 290 Kuala Lumpur stock exchange (KLSE) listed companies and 845 of their subsidiaries were bumiputera. In 1990, while the percentage of bumiputera employed in the agricultural sector (33.4 percent), was still larger than that of bumiputera in the manufacturing sector (17.5 percent), in 1995, the situation was reversed, that is 25 percent in manufacturing and 21.4 percent in agriculture (Malaysia 1996: 77). The number of registered bumiputera professionals increased from 29 percent in 1990 to 33.1 percent in 1995. In addition, the percentage of shares owned by bumiputera increased from 19.3 percent to 20.5 percent between 1990 and 1995, whereas overall non-bumiputera share ownership decreased from 46.8 percent to 43.4 percent in the same period (Malaysia Planning Unit 1996: 86).

In sum, the new emphasis on economic growth in the NDP worked very well, as demonstrated by the performance of the Malaysian economy in the early 1990s. The rapid economic growth would provide the basis of the population’s optimism in Mahathir’s vision of a civic Malaysia. The retention of some pro-Malay policies made the Malay community more competent and confident, thereby making it easier for the Malay community to accept Mahathir’s vision of a civic Malaysia.

5.4. Moving away from ethno cultural policies

In the cultural realm, Mahathir enacted changes that reflected his shift towards civic nationalism. Together with economics, education and language have always been at the centre of ethnic tensions in Malaysia (Muhammad Ikmal Said, 1996). In the early 1990s, the government adopted more flexible policies regarding education
and language, amending the education act, permitting foreign universities to establish twining programs and the establishing of private colleges. These policy changes enabled the non-Malay communities to pursue primary school education in the non-Malay vernacular language with fewer restrictions and also provided them more opportunities for tertiary education.

Since 1971, the medium of instruction in Malaysian universities has been Malay and this was regarded as a disadvantage by non-Malay students (Kua 1987:4). When policies promoting teaching in English were enacted, some courses in Malaysian universities were taught in English. Teaching in English was also encouraged in other educational institutions. The education act was also amended to make it more favourable to the non-Malay communities. The act allowed education minister to convert Chinese and Tamil schools to national schools, where the teaching language was Malay, if necessary. The Chinese educationists had complained bitterly about this specific regulation of the education act. This specific clause was repealed when the education act was amended (Liak, 1996: 226-228). Non-Malay students who were unable to obtain places in the government-run universities because of a quota system which favoured Malay students were able to pursue tertiary education in twining programs and private colleges (Lee RLM 1998: 401).

Like the NDP, the easing of restrictive cultural policies persuaded the non-Malay communities to accept Mahathir’s prime ministership as well as his nationalist vision. The new policies showed a Malaysian state that was more inclusive and accommodating for the non-Malay communities. In the 1970s, the state was predominantly ethno-cultural Malay nationalist. As the state became more ethnic-neutral, congruent with the civic Malaysian nation as envisioned by Mahathir, the non-Malay community had strong incentives to increasingly identify themselves as Malaysian first. Empirically, the non-Malays’ acceptance of Mahathir’s new direction was demonstrated in the massive non-Malay support for the ruling BN, particularly in the 1995 general elections. Mahathir attempted to include the Malay community, led by the newly rising Malay middle class, in his civic vision. Since the 1980s, the Malay middle class had grown significantly, largely due to the implementation of the NEP. To capture the growing Malay middle class, that was believed to be more affluent, competent and confident, Mahathir used the concept of melayu baru,
supposed to be viable in civic Malaysia. By putting melayu baru forward as a model for the Malay community to follow, Mahathir attempted to lead the entire Malay community beyond the state–protected niche of Malay favoritism and to accept his civic vision.

5.5. The growth of a confident Malay middle class

The new Malay middle class that emerged in the 1980s was different from its predecessor. As they were more affluent and independent, they were fewer dependents. Of course, it does not mean that they were completely independent from the state assistance. For example, when Mahathir retired in 2003, he still lamented that the Malay was not fully independent from the state despite his 20 years effort. Observations of the newly rising Malay middle and entrepreneurial class were made as early as the mid 1980s. Shamsul and Khoo Kay, for example found definite signs of the changing composition of Malay society in general and of UMNO grassroots members in particular. Shamsul argued that because of the NEP, there was an ‘almost phenomenal, expansion of the Malay middle class. Likewise, khoo kay noted that a ‘social structure resulting from the NEP was the creation of a more differentiated capitalist stratum’, which was further divided into ‘large capitalists’ and small and medium capitalists’.

Shamsul provided us with an insightful description of the new Malay middle class. He categorized two distinctive Malay groups—orange kaya baru was (new rich people) and melayu baru. According to shamsul, the orange kaya baru was the state-dependent middle class of the 1970s and 1980s. They were old manually oriented and based in rural areas, with mostly primary secondary school qualifications, which they had acquired before the implementation of the NEP. Through their influence at the grassroots level, they had political connections through which they secured development projects—from which they built their wealth—provided by the government under the NEP.

On the other hand, the melayu baru had different qualifications, base and background and was from a different generation. The melayu baru is the new non-manual and mentally oriented middle class (for example, professionals and bureaucrats) (shamsul 1998: 100). These new Malays were primarily the product of
the educational opportunities provided by the NEP in the 1980s and 1990s. Many Malay students, chosen from all over the peninsula and from different classes, received government scholarships to study at university in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. With degrees in business, science and technology, these new Malays had the practical knowledge and skills required in their jobs. The professional knowledge and skills made the melayu baru more competitive capitalist economic system and, more important, in the competition with their non Malay counterparts. They were based in the urban areas, where their jobs were located. Their economic fortune and future were less dependent on state assistance or development projects of the 1970s and 1980s. These characteristics of the melayu baru meant that they were more independent of the government and UMNO than the Orang kaya baru.

5.6. Melayu baru as a model for the Malay community in a civic nation

Mahathir attempted to capture this new Malay middle class with the term melayu baru and to project this new class as the model for the entire Malay community to follow. This was part of Mahathir's civic nationalist project to lead the Malay community into his civic nation vision. Mahathir civic vision, bangsa Malaysia, required the elimination of favouritism for any particular ethnic group before the Malaysian identity would replace ethnic identity as the primary identity of Malaysian people. Mahathir believed that the characteristics of the new Malay – the capacity to survive independently without state assistance – were required for the Malays.

Mahathir had long deplored what he believe to be a fundamental problem in the Malay community that had made this community non – competitive vis-a-vis the non – Malay community. In the 1960s and 1970s Mahathir denounced the syndrome of lazy Malays. Furthermore, after the implementation of the NEP, Mahathir found that state assistance, which was supposed to provide merely a head –start for the Malay community had produced instead a complacent Malay community, continuously dependent on the states patronage.

The rising new Malay middle class, given its characteristics as described previously, would be ideal for Mahathir to put forward as a model for the Malay
community to emulate. Mahathir’s melayu baru concept was first announced in his 1991 UMNO general assembly address. Mahathir said:

We must increase our efforts to turn ourselves into people who are able to take their appropriate place in this modern world. For this, we need new Malays and bumiputeras who have culture appropriate to the current trend, who are able to face all challenges, who can compete without assistance and who are well educated, sophisticated, honest, disciplined, trustworthy and efficient (Mahathir 1992).

Mahathir praised the melayu baru competence, confidence and independence from state assistance when competing with non-Malays on a level playing field and were thought to be able to compete on an international stage without state patronage. They had the correct knowledge, skill and attitude to stand on their own feet when the envisioned civic Malaysian state substantially reduced assistance to them.

In 1993, Mahathir boasted of the achievements of the melayu baru who equipped with the required knowledge and skills were successful in modern economic sectors. Mahathir, in his presidential speech before the 1993 UMNO General Assembly, said: These melayu baru were no longer the peasants the Malay community used to be identified with. They were well-educated professionals who competed equally with non-Malays, without the government help, in the fields where non Malays used to be dominant and where the Malay community was not properly represented. Mahathir further noted:

This is one of the successes that the Malays and bumiputeras achieved. This success proves that Malays and bumiputeras have ability and talent for progress and success in every area, if they really have the interest and if they are given a chance and sufficient training. (Mahathir, 1993)

Constructing the positive model of melayu baru was, for Mahathir, an alternative strategy to his exhortations to the Malay community to be independent from state assistance. To obtain Malay support for his civic vision and his policy shift towards civic direction, it was a prerequisite for Mahathir to make the Malay community grow beyond favouritism and state patronage. Otherwise, Mahathir move
towards a civic direction might be rejected by the Malay community or might be vulnerable to an ethno cultural nationalist challenge by political rivals. When Mahathir praised the melayu baru as a model for the Malay community and when Mahathir encouraged the Malay community to emulate the melayu baru, it was Mahathir’s attempt to facilitate his selling of his civic vision to the Malay community. By the mid-1990s, as the Malaysian people began identifying themselves with the Malaysian nation instead of their ethnic backgrounds, Mahathir’s civic nationalist project appeared to be successful. In the Malay community, especially, the formerly very inflammable ethno cultural Malay nationalism weakened as the euphoria of the civic Malaysian nation spread. Such development resulted in a resounding endorsement of Mahathir’s leadership during the 1995 elections.

5.7. Recession of ethnic identity and emerging Malaysian identity

Mahathir’s policies resulted in significant recession of ethnicity in Malaysian society in the 1990s, which has been studied by scholars of Malaysian politics and society. The prospect of an aspiration towards economic affluence overwhelmed the emotional attachments to ethnic symbols in the booming economy, which was specifically identified with Mahathir’s vision of a civic Malaysian nation. Abdul Rahaman Embong similarly observed that increasingly development and growth replaced the concern about ethnicity. He argued:

[E]conomic growth, market expansion and the growth of the new middle classes have impacted on personal values and practices.... “[D]evelopmentalism” ideology has taken hold among these classes... [T]his ideology has one important unintended consequence: it deemphasizes ethnicity while highlighting development and growth (Embong 2001: 62).

The population’s optimism, which had brought about the recession of ethnicity and growing inter-ethnic communication, appeared to be redirected more and more to the civic Malaysian nation. The population increasingly identified themselves as Malaysians first rather than with their various ethnic backgrounds. Halim Salleh observed that people became ‘proud to be Malaysian ‘. ‘this was new unifying factor which took most Malaysian by surprise’ (Salleh 1999: 190). They hoped that the civic nation would provide more benefits than what they would get in return for being loyal
to their ethnic identities. Thus, as Khoo observed, 'somehow Malaysians were inspired... to discover their ability to imagine themselves as a community, and to do so with a sense of the “ineradicable goodness of the nation” (Khoo, BT 2002: 22).

5.8. Civic nationalism overwhelmed ethno cultural Malay nationalism

There was a significant change in the Malay community as well. The practical benefit of the civic Malaysian nation seemed to have overcome potential ethno cultural Malay nationalist backlashes against Mahathir policies towards bangsa Malaysia, especially in the cultural area. Ethno cultural Malay nationalists used to defend Malay culture and language as the cultural foundation of Malaysia. They argued that the cultural characteristics of Malaysia as a Malay nation should be based on Malay cultural symbols. Before the 1990s, the ethno cultural Malay nationalist considered the Malay language as the prime symbol of Malay identity and culture that should form the basis in 1967 was controversial and also why the government, after the 1969 ethnic riots, introduced the education act, which legislated that Malay would be sole teaching medium in Malaysian schools.

Mahathir, in the 1990s, without much resistance, took a few bold measures in cultural policies towards the realization of civic Malaysian nation. Under Mahathir, in the first half of the 1990s, the government promoted the use of English as a teaching medium in schools and universities. There was resistance from Malay linguistic nationalists – dubbed as the Malay lobby – to the wider use of English as a teaching medium. But, as T.N. Harper observed, ‘the furor over language has not reached the pitch that it had in the past (Harper, 1996: 246). What prevented an ethno cultural nationalist backlash was not just Mahathir’s effective campaign to promote the use of English but the lack of widespread Malay enthusiasm to promote the use of the Malay language. All over the peninsula, the use of English was widely accepted without mass uproar, unlike the 1960s when the Malays were reportedly unhappy with English or Chinese signboards displayed at non-Malay shops. The upwardly mobile Malay middle class, in particular, did not want to be left behind or to lose its competitive edge by rejecting the use of English. As far eastern economic review article observed, “jingoism about the national language annoys liberal-minded
Malays, who say the one who will lose out [when they do not keep up with the change] will be the Malays themselves' (Jayasankaran, 1995:24).

Similar developments occurred in the field of education. There were reportedly 35,000 non-Chinese students attending Chinese schools in 1995. The phenomena were not confined to such ethnically mixed areas as Kuala Lumpur or Johor baru but also such predominantly Malay areas as Kelantan (Hiebert, 1995). Harpar described this development as bourgeois ambition ... overcomes[ing] ethnic scruples’ (Harper 1996: 247). Malay parents – primarily the new Malay – were sending their children to Chinese schools where Chinese was the teaching medium, for practical reasons. Shamsul once maintained that ethnic groups in Malaysia may have to sacrifice their traditions and ethnic identities because of Mahathir attempt to initiate a new national identity (Shamsul, 1998; 149-150). In Malay communities in the early 1990s, where the sacrifice seemed to be made voluntarily, it was a victory of the practical appeal of the civic nationalist vision and policies over ethno cultural Malay nationalism.

5.9. Mahathir’s leadership was endorsed in the 1995 elections

In the first half of the 1990s, the political situation in Malaysia was stable, the economy was booming and the people’s economic needs seemed to have been met. Mahathir’s vision, wawasan 2020 that is Malaysia becoming a fully developed country by 2020, was well received and appeared achievable, if the momentum of growth was maintained. A more difficult task suggested by Mahathir, bangsa Malaysia, did not seem impossible to realize. The majority of the Malays, led by the malayu baru, accepted the nationalist direction of the incumbent government, as long as the government could sustain economic growth and deliver material affluence. For the non-Malays, of course, Mahathir’s government in the 1990s was a better option than the strict NEP regime in the 1970s. The Malaysian people, by supporting Mahathir leadership that brought about the benefits, growth and stability, seemed to accept the civic nationalist vision of Mahathir.

The results of the 1995 Malaysian general elections confirmed the soaring support for Mahathir’s government from all ethnic community. It is widely acknowledged that substantial increase of non-Malay support for the BN brought
about the coalition historic victory in the 1995 elections. In additional to the strong support of the non-Malay community for the BN, there was an increase of Malay support for the BN, especially UMNO. UMNO increased its share of the parliament seats from 71 in 1990 to 1995 – the highest number of seats until then. In the state assembly elections, vote, UMNO’s rival for the Malay vote, PAS actually increased its share slightly by 0.73 percent (parliamentary elections) and 1.3 percent. Apparently, UMNO increased its share of the Malay votes at the expense of Semangat, which share of the popular vote decreased by 4.3 percent between 1990 and 1995 (Liak 1996: 223-226).

In predominantly Malay constituencies, BN increased its share of the popular vote from 54.86 percent to 59.25 percent. In Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu, the BN gained an additional one or two more parliamentary seats, compared to its performance in the 1990 elections. The increase of Malay votes for the BN and UMNO was marginal, compared to the increase of Malay support in the 1995 elections. This was because of the already high level of support from the Malay community for UMNO and BN. However, the trend of increasing Malay endorsement of BN’s rule under Mahathir cannot be doubted.

5.10. Mahathir’s collectivist – authoritarian nationalist view

The other characteristic of Mahathir’s nationalist position that completes the picture is its collectivist view of the national community. Mahathir’s authoritarian politics reflect the collectivist aspect of his nationalist ideology. Mahathir’s collectivist nationalist view revolved around the collective community’s supremacy over individual rights and freedom and the political elites’ role as interpreter of the community’s common will and interests. In the name of the nation’s collective interests, Mahathir’s authoritarian control of the community attempted to suppress any ideological disagreement or opposition and to indoctrinate the audience, thereby contributing to the prevalence of his civic nationalist ideology.

This section will explore Mahathir’s collectivist nationalist view and its political reflection authoritarianism. In this section, two main points will be developed. Firstly, Mahathir’s collectivist nationalist view revolved around the collective communities supremacy over individual rights and freedom, and political
elites’ pre-eminence as interpreter of community common will and interests. Secondly, reflecting, this ideological view, authoritarianism was deliberately used in attempts to suppress opposition to Mahathir’s nationalist ideas and to indoctrinate the populace with his collectivist civic nationalist vision.

To be fair with Mahathir’s rule over 20 years, a note is needed before explaining the authoritarian aspect of his rule. To show Mahathir’s collectivist nationalism, this section exclusively discusses Mahathir suppression of opposing nationalist vision, indoctrination attempts and demonization of opposing views and political forces. His rule, however, is not totally authoritarian. Perhaps, that is why many observers of Malaysian politics hesitate to call Malaysian politics authoritarian, inventing new appellation such as semi democracy, semi-authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, obviously the UMNO-led BN has taken power through reasonably fair elections. Actual application of suppression is hardly regarded full authoritarianism and has been done in carefully selective manner. Perhaps because of political cost, a harsh treatment such as imprisonment of opponents is used not frequently, but sparingly. Ruling political elites, together with threatening, demonization and suppression, attempt to persuade electorate to support them.

5.10. a.Mahathir’s collectivist nationalism

Mahathir had never equivocated when arguing that individual freedom and right should be limited for the good of the entire community. Mahathir’s collectivist view was related to his Hobbesian view of human society. He asserted:

Man joins his fellow men in a group for his own purpose, in answer to his own needs. He gains safety in numbers but he loses to a certain extent his individual freedom. He was willing to do this when, in the primitive setting, he was threatened with all kinds of dangers. But the modern man has no experience of the dangers of individual isolation. He, therefore, tends to see the restraint on his individual freedom as irksome and he rebels against it. He has forgotten that there is a price to pay in order to get all those things that society provides him. It is the lack of understanding and appreciation of the limits of individual independence in society that has resulted in the instability of human societies in many parts of the world (Mahathir 1985).
Mahathir went so far as to link the promotion of individual freedom and rights with the destruction of society and warned of the danger of the empowering of a vocal minority of political activists over the silent majority of ordinary citizens (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995: 82-83). He asserted that unrestrained ‘individual freedom and rights hurt entire community interests. Mahathir maintained, ‘individual freedom knows no limit. In the name of Individual freedom anything can be done, even if it hurts the community’ (Mahathir 1994).

The same logic of constraining individual liberty and rights applied to ethnic groups, according to Mahathir view. Mahathir, in a speech made in 1983, argued: we have to be conscious as well as concerned with the ethnic dimension of our Malaysian life... while we can blame history for it, it is a reality that we have to accept and live with... I am sure all of us realize that this is not an easy task, and it is made no easier by the pressures for open discussions insisted upon by the so-called “democrats”..... It is obvious that we are not going to achieve full unity, nor can we remove ethnic conflict completely. Any course that we set for ourselves will result in unhappiness for someone or others. It we are to favour one particular ethnic group, we will make them happy, but the rest very unhappy indeed. If we favour any one of the other groups we are going to get the same result. So, since we cannot make everyone happy and satisfied, nor can we favour just one of the groups, the only choice left to us is to make everyone equally unhappy (Mahathir 1983).

Mahathir blamed the “so-called democrats” who advocated for the liberty and rights of various ethnic groups, especially the minorities in a nation-state. According to Mahathir, they made it more difficult to cope with the situation of various ethnic groups coexisting in a nation-state. Mahathir maintained that as the government cannot meet all the demands of all the ethnic groups in Malaysia, the claims of all ethnic groups, whether they were in the majority or minority, had to be limited occasionally, in the interest of the nation’s stability and prosperity.

Instead of advocating on behalf of individual liberty and rights, Mahathir emphasized the need for strict ‘law and order’ in order to safeguard the peace, security and interests of the society as a whole. He maintained: a healthy society cannot exist and continue to do so without law and order. Law and order mean limits
on individual freedom. Freedom is limited because one individuals freedom may affect the rights of others or the peace and security of the society itself... to enable each member of a society to attain his rights without affecting the rights of other and the collective right of the society itself, rules are set up to control freedom in the ‘methods’ of demanding rights (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995: 96-97).

Mahathir continued, ‘the very survival of a society depends on its organization and on the readiness of the members to obey the “dos” and “don’ts” laid down by the society’. Furthermore, according to this view, even if individual liberty and rights had to be limited for the sake of the community, it will eventually benefit individuals in the long term, if the community as a whole turned out to be successful. Mahathir argued: discipline... means limiting individual desires and interests to give priority to the interests of society. Interpretation of what constitutes the interests of the individual and the interests of the society may differ from one society to another. But whatever the interpretation or evaluation, the aim of limiting the interests of the individual is the preservation of society. For each member of society, the limitations placed on him as an individual may in the short term are frustrating, but the social security thus achieved will ultimately benefit him. (Mahathir, 1986: 136-137).

The Asian values discourse reflected Mahathir’s collectivist view of the community. Mahathir was a pioneer and ardent advocate of the Asian values discourse. As Emmerson argued, according to the Asian values discourse, ‘community interest ought to override the interest of the individual when these conflict, especially when the security of the community is in jeopardy’ (Emmerson 1995). Mahathir, emphasizing the need to impose limits on the individual for the sake of the community, summarized Asian values as follows: ‘we speak of Asian values, meaning hard work, respect for authority, discipline, submission to the interest and the good of the majority and filial piety’ (Mahathir, 1996).

5.11. Political elites as interpreter of the common will of the community

For Mahathir, the common will of the community, to which individual right and liberty were subordinated, must be a vision developed by political elites as the sole authority to interpret the community’s common will. This position constituted another pillar of Mahathir’s collectivist view on national community. Mahathir’s view
on leadership provided political elites with the ideological justification to indoctrinate the population with the vision developed by them as interpreter of the common will. Mahathir once told UMNO Youth members: leaders emerge because they have more ability than others. This ability is certainly based on the fact that they are more knowledgeable. They are then in a position to evaluate an issue more accurately and rationally... [t]he evaluation made must be conveyed to his followers for their guidance. (The New Straits Times, 1977, Dec.21).

Mahathir did not change his view when he became prime minister. He noted, 'leadership, for me, at least, is the ability to provide guidance. And your guidance should be something superior to what your people can do by themselves and ideas that are not common'. In other words, political leaders have the ability to interpret the will of the community as a whole and have the capacity to determine what is good and bad for the community. Ordinary people do not have such capacity. This paternalistic view of leadership is consistent with the understanding of leadership in the collectivist nationalist view.

Mahathir’s view on political leadership is far removed from the ideas of the democratic representation of a population through their democratically elected political leader. Mahathir believed in the unconstrained power of an elected political leader, which K.Das had dubbed as ‘mandatism’. According to K.Das, the mandatism of Mahathir meant that once a political leader had been elected by popular vote, he or she had the unreserved power and right of decision-making during his or her tenor, regardless of what the voters thought. Mahathir used this view to justify the suppression of any ideas that opposed or varied from the political elites vision for distracted by sectional or individual views and interests as it will eventually benefit the community. Mahathir said, ‘if everyone is allowed to have his own way, nothing can be achieved (Das 1986: 88).

Hence, there was no room for civil society to debate the nationalist goal or common will and come up with alternatives. In Malaysia, civil society is seriously curtailed, or, at best, is subjected to state power. The characteristics of Malaysian semi-democracy—regular and relatively fair election and the nonexistence of civil
liberties – that William case observed, is a logical consequence in Malaysian politics under Mahathir (Case 1993).

In sum, Mahathir’s view was collectivist in the sense that a national community as a whole took precedence over individual liberty and rights, including ethnic liberty and rights as well. In addition, the population view must be shaped in accordance with the vision of political elites as the authoritative interpreter of the common will of the community. Therefore, individual liberty and right and any ideas that might distract from the achievement of the common must be limited and suppressed for the benefit of the entire community. This collectivist view of a community justified the suppression of other ideas on the nature and goals of the national community that were different from the ruling elites and rationalized the elite’s monopoly on defining the national community and its goals.

Mahathir’s collectivist view is reflected in his authoritarian suppression and manipulation of those viewed as opposing his nationalist vision. Mahathir’s nationalist vision and ideas had been challenged by opposition parties, non-Governmental organizations, critical mass media and ethnic elites as well as individuals. According to the collective nationalist view, as ideological challenges to the elites nationalist vision are considered challenges to the common will of the entire community. Furthermore, the elites attempted to indoctrinate society to accept their vision, which they viewed as the right answer for the community. Hence, Mahathir’s authoritarian politics, as demonstrated in how he suppressed challenges to his civic nationalist vision with legal devices and how he manipulated mass media to facilitate acceptance of his nationalist vision, warrants further exploration.

5.11.a.Authoritarian suppression of potential challengers to Mahathir’s vision

Malaysia, especially under Mahathir’s administration, has been viewed as a semi-democracy. According to William case, its politics is closer to authoritarian politics than to democratic politics. Although opposition parties are permitted in Malaysia, Mahathir never regarded opposition as necessary. He argued there are places, which as you know, have no opposition, at all and I think they progressed fairly rapidly’. The targets of Mahathir’s suppression included not only opposition parties but also social organizations and NGOs which were critical of Mahathir.
Regarding pressure groups, that is NGOs and other critics of the government, Mahathir said: the activities of pressure groups in our country must be monitored by the government ... if pressure groups are allowed to go so far as to set aside laws and the machinery of governmental power and to bring about a state of anarchy, the entire population will suffer. From anarchy there is no return to a life of peace and order. One power struggle after another will take place. When this happens, it will be rather late to dream of the old tranquility (Mahathir 1986: 120).

The suppression of opposition parties, NGOs and other political forces was systematically and institutionally supported by various laws at Mahathir’s disposal. The internal security act, which allows the government to detain people without trial, was frequently used to crackdown on opposition parties and NGOs critical of the government. In 1987, for example, more than a hundred members of opposition parties, social and religious activists were detained under the ISA. The government also uses the sedition act and the official secrets act frequently to harass individual opposition politicians when they make controversial comment or reveals government wrongdoings.

The government also intervenes directly to ensure that the mass media reports only views favourable to the ruling elites or to prevent the dissemination of alternative and competing views. The most well known case involved the shutting down of the star, Sin chew Jit poh and Watan during operation Lalang in 1987. Before being shut down in 1987, the star regularly published articles critical of the Mahathir government by the first prime minister, Abdul Rahman and a former opposition politician, Tan Chee Koon. Watan, owned by Khir Johari a former minister and a close ally of Abdul Rahman, took a similar critical stance towards mahathir and his government. In 1987, the government, without explanation, withdrew the licenses of the three publications. The star resumed publication in 1988, only after a major shake-up of its editorial board.

Such suppressive measures effectively constrain the activities of opposition parties, NGOs and individuals in airing their critical and alternative views and prevent them from disseminating their alternative views. Thus, Malaysian civil society is unable to construct and formulate effective alternative vision that can compete against
the vision constructed by the state elites. The extensive indoctrination and the suppression of civil society consolidate Mahathir’s civic nationalist vision.

5.12. Indoctrinating the community with Mahathir’s vision

Mahathir used the mass media as an effective indoctrination tool. This strategy, while ensuring that Mahathir’s views were accepted, prevented, in even any indirect way, the dissemination of alternative ideas and vision among the Malaysian people. The Mahathir government exercised its control of the mass media primarily through the ownership of the media by the component parties in the ruling coalition. Through its trustee companies, the ruling coalition owns nearly all the mainstream mass media. Through its investing arm, reigining, UMNO own the New Straits Times press, which publishes such major Malay and English newspapers as the New Straits Times, Sunday Times, Business Times, the Malay Mail, Sunday Mail, Berita Harian and Berita Minggu. In 1994, UMNO also obtained a major stake in Utusan Melayu, which publishes Utsan Malaysia, a mass circulation Malay newspaper. Furthermore, other than the government-owned TV station, Radio Televisyen Malaysia UMNO, directly and indirectly, owns or exerts influence on the private broadcasting stations, TV3 and metro vision. The government’s dominance of the Malaysian mass media does not stop here. The major political parties in the ruling coalition, MCA and MIC own such English, Chinese and Tamil newspapers as The Star, Nanyang Siangpao, Tamil Malar and so on.

The government uses the mass media under its control to ‘construct its own version of the Malaysian social reality for its own political ends’ as Mustafa Anuar summarized. The coverage of mainstream newspapers and TV stations is significantly biased towards the ruling party and its leadership, Mahathir. Mustafa K. Anuar maintained: the majority of these mainstream media are owned or controlled by individuals or groups who are closely aligned to the powers-that-be. And this means that generally the mainstream media have an ideological bent or a political preference that is collectively in the run up to general elections (Anuar, 2001: 8).

Such coverage maximizes the exposure of the government propaganda or carries out “popular persuasion”, as termed by UMNO. The mainstream mass media is viewed as another arm of the ruling party. Muzaffar Tate described the behavior of
mass media as follows: the coverage of the news by TV, the radio and the press remains as selective as ever. TV and radio still carry on with their brainwashing, reporting the opinions of ministers as statements of fact, identifying patriotism with the ruling party, and toeing the party lines the hallmark of democracy. The press remains as sycophantic as ever to the people in power; it gives detailed coverage of mundane happenings around the country but provide the barest attention to matters of real import such as the epic trial of a former deputy prime minister (Tate, 2000:11).

Francis Loh and Mustafa Anuar argued that the government justified the mass medias subservient attitude of following the government line as responsible development journalism (Loh & Anuar, 1996: 100). Every issue was depoliticized, so as not to criticize government activities, unless, of course, the issue would contribute to the popularity of the ruling elites, especially Mahathir. The issue was oriented toward the form of the economic development that was the core basis of Mahathir civic nationalist vision. Thus the mass media promoted a sense of naturalized affinity between the Barisan National and the electorate through images of ethnic harmony, nation-building and other vision emotionalism. According to Hilley: the promotion of such, through a populist ideology of growth, has helped cast UMNO as beneficent provider, while concealing the contradictions and weakness of the development process itself. Thus the Malaysian media is constantly awash with photo opportunity, message, slogans sound bites nationalist songs and jingles, editorial and corporate advertising all extolling the common challenge of on word industrial development. The message are both overt and subliminal, whether it be Mahathir’s almost daily appearances on the front page of the new straits times, star or Utsan Malaysian opening another industrial plant, or the telefakta information adverts (TV2) displaying (Over Catchy Music) simplified statistics of improved industrial output (Hilley 2001: 122-123).

Suppression and indoctrination were mobilized to advance Mahathir civic nationalist view, while preventing any potential ideological challenge. These authoritarian aspects of Mahathir’s rule show another side of the success of his civic nationalist vision.
5.13. Mahathir’s rhetoric of threats to the civic Malaysian nation

Mahathir’s rhetoric of external threats to the nation contributed to the prevalence of his civic nationalist vision. Inculcating a siege mentality justified Mahathir’s authoritarian politics, strengthened Mahathir’s nationalist legitimacy and mobilised the Malaysian people towards his civic nationalist vision. This strategy characteristically reflects Mahathir collectivist authoritarian nationalism. This section then explores Mahathir’s demonization of the west, which, according to Mahathir, was an external threat that encroached on the independence and interests of Malaysia and Chinese chauvinism and Islamic extremism, the internal threats to harmonious and peaceful ethnic relationships within Malaysia.

5.13. a. Case of external threats: demonizing the west

Mahathir’s strident criticism of cultural, political and economic aspects of the west was an attempt to prop up his legitimacy as a protector of the western civilizations is that their declining culture, if emulated, would have a devastating impact on Malaysia.

Mahathir’s observed that western culture had lost respect for marriage family values, elder, and important customs, conventions, and traditions and was riddled with single parent families which faster in crest, with homosexuality, with cohabitation, with unrestrained avarice, with disrespect for other and, of course, with rejection of religious teachings and values. Declining western culture posed a threat to Malaysian society because western culture was copied is good or bad. And Mahathir warned that the consequence might be disastrous. He argued today Malay values are changing without systematic study and without guidance. Anybody can attack the current system and set up new value. This results in senseless conflict and confusion. It is time the Malays realized this and thought out the right steps to ensure that such a vital and potent tool as a system of values was properly used for the good of the Malay community. The economically powerful west threatened Malaysia small but prosperous economy according to Mahathir. Mahathir went so far as to suggest that the more developed (primarily western) countries deliberately attempt to undermine the newly found wealth and prosperity of such developing countries as Malaysia. In a speech at a 1997 World Bank meeting, Mahathir explained why the Asian economic crisis happened. His argument was that the strength of the developed
countries economies or even of a handful of major international funds which cannot accept the realities of a prospering Asia could undermine developing country prosperity. He contended: we dismissed the rumor that Malaysia would go the way of Mexico. We know now that even as Mexico economic crash was manipulated and made to crash, the economies of other developing countries too can be suddenly manipulated and forced to crash. ... [Q]uite a few people who are in the media and in control of the big money seem to want to see these southeast Asian countries and in particular Malaysia, stop trying to catch up with their superiors and to know their place (Mahathir 1998).

When addressing a Malaysian audience, Mahathir was more upfront, raising the issue of rercolonisation and foreign dominance in his diagnosis of the cause of the Asian crisis. Mahathir reasoning was that with such international economic regimes only by making the target countries poor to the extent of having to beg for help colonization can be achieved. Raising the specter of colonization, Mahathir asserted (Mahathir & Ishihara, 1995: 75-76). :

We have seen how companies and banks in the neighboring countries have been crippled and forced to be sold off to the westerners. If we allow these multinational to cross our borders, can we avoid the same fate from befalling us? We will become only workers in foreign firms.... There will no longer be national industries. There will be no more NEP. There will be no more privileges for bumiputeras in the economic field ... even if we are paid higher salary; our status will be nothing more than slaves to them. Actually we will be colonized.

In addition, Mahathir argued that the west attempted to destabilize the already weak social fabric of Malaysia by spreading such western concepts as democracy and human rights. He maintained that such political ideology was rooted in the western arrogance, even racism. He argued: they will not be satisfied until they have forced other countries to adopt their ways as well. Everyone must be democratic, but only according to the western concept of democracy: no one can violate human rights, again according to their self righteous interpretation of human rights. Westerners cannot seem to understand diversity, or that even in their own civilization differed
over time... it comes from the perception that white people are better than colored people. It is a cultural phenomenon (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995: 75-76).

An example of how the Mahathir government dealt with so-called external political threats is the accusation it made against the former United States vice president Al Gore, of meddling in Malaysian internal affairs. At the Asia-pacific economic council summit meeting in November 1998, Al Gore expressed his sympathy for Anwar, who had been sacked two months before the meeting, and for the reformasi movement. Then Mahathir deputy, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, criticized Al Gore’s remark, reflecting Mahathir views. The demonization of purported external enemies united the population to rally behind the current political leadership. Mahathir’s rhetoric of western conspiracy during the 1997-98 economic crises transformed the population favorable and friendly perceptions of the west before the economic crisis to a hostile one. Indeed, Mahathir attempts brought about an intended consequence—political mobilization in support of the incumbent leadership. Christine chin observed: during the early phase of the crisis, expressions of the particularized identities and interests were subordinated to the larger and more patriotic concern of defending the currency and the economic... key social forced rallied to the defence of the prime minister. Wanita (women) MCA’s campaigns for women to come together and demonstrate their national love and pride had seen the participation of between 5000 and 10,000 women and each state, while wanita UMNO Eshan wanita campaign encouraged women to save for the country. Malay and non-Malay middle-class women especially pledged to save as much as they could, to donate their jewellery as a way to increase the country reserves and, when possible, to buy only Malaysian – made products (Chin 2000:1049).

Mahathir anti-western arguments created a siege mentality in part of the population. They claimed that culturally, Malaysia was threatened by the superpowers. In the international arena or even by a handful of multinational capitalist, politically the west attempted to forcefully impose their political system and ideologies which, according to Mahathir did not fit into the multiethnic and thus fragile Malaysia. Mahathir adopted such anti-west arguments as an important element to support his nationalist legitimacy as a protector of the community who would speak up on behalf of Malaysian interests.
5.13.b. Ethno cultural threat from Chinese chauvinism

Mahathir also attempted to strengthen the support for his civic nationalist vision by identifying ethno cultural threats from the Chinese community, which he dubbed as Chinese chauvinism. In UMNO politics, demonizing non-Malays has not only been a common tactic it has also been effective in securing power within the party and guaranteeing general support from Malay society. Mahathir, as prime minister, effectively used this tactic too.

There is, however, a difference between the earlier ethno cultural Malay nationalists and Mahathir rhetoric. Mahathir demonization of the non-Malay community was sufficiently sophisticated to avoid extensive alienation of non-Malay as his civic nationalist vision must be accepted by the non-Malay community as well. Mahathir did not rebuke the entire non-Malay community. He only criticized small and carefully chosen sectors of said community which he considered as groups who attempted to impose their minority view on the majority view or who appealed to non Malay ethno cultural nationalism, there by destabilizing a harmonious civic Malaysian society. Mahathir, in 1981, warned: the dissenting minority, if they are true citizens, must accept what the majority wills or tolerates. Of course they may express their opposition and they may try by legal means to change things in their favour. But their test of loyalty as citizens is their willingness to accept and live with what they cannot change. Unfortunately, there are minorities who seek to revolt or to migrate the moment conditions within their own country are not as they wish them to be. They vociferously declare their loyalty but to them loyalty means simply having thing their way (Mahathir 1981).

Mahathir implied that a substantial majority of the non Malays, other than the chauvinists, were continuing with his civic nationalist vision, supporting whole heartedly the incumbent BN government. His criticism was carefully structured; he used the term minority instead of non Malay to avoid offending the whole non-Malay community, while still targeting the small group intended.

The best known example of Mahathir action against the Chinese – chauvinists, was operation Lalang in 1987, during which the police arrested more than a hundred
critics of the government, including opposition politicians, social activists, educationists, in the tensions between the Malay community (led by UMNO youth ) and the Chinese community (led by DAP, MCA and GERAKAN). According to Mahathir, it was one section of the Chinese community specially the DAP, that had been chauvinist, playing with racial rhetoric. It had caused the ethnic tension in 1987, in a speech to parliament immediately after the mass arrests, Mahathir maintained: the police found that a few opposition party members and their associates have purposely blown up issue relating to race. The DAP in particular has often been playing up issue relating to the Chinese and the Indian openly. They have been giving the picture that the government is oppressing these races. They held public meeting rallies, demonstrations and other activities to inflame these people against the government and the Malays (Mahathir 1987).

Furthermore, Mahathir freed from blame the other Chinese parties in the ruling BN coalition that had aligned with the DAP. In the same speech, Mahathir contended, “[DAP] also challenged the Chinese and Indian political parties in the government and accuse them of not championing the rights of their people. The latter, thus challenged, have therefore tried to compete in playing up similar issues” (Mahathir 1998). Hence, Mahathir argument was other sections of the non-Malay community, which truly agreed with his civic vision and did not intent to play up racial issues, did so only at the DAP instigation. By placing the blame squarely of the DAP and its supporters, Mahathir “divided and rule” tactic avoid offending the non-Malay, who were innocent victims of the DAP’s manipulation, as pro-government, where as the DAP, which was ethno cultural nationalist, was against his civic vision.

Mahathir also took the opportunity to show case his commitment to maintaining an environment conducive to the building of a civic Malaysian nation. While blaming the ethno cultural nationalist or chauvinist. Mahathir in the same speech, stated, ‘our country has a multi-racial population that believes in different religions. Therefore, it is not only difficult to achieve unity but we are also susceptible to divisions and tensions because of the sensitivity of racial, religious and cultural issues. he pledged unequivocally that his government would take all necessary action to overcome such ethno cultural nationalist challenges: ‘the government will not hesitate to take strict measures to curb those with intention to
caused disorder and stand in the way of the government’s responsibility and effort to ensure peace and stand in the country for the prosperity of the people.

By demonizing a small group of non-Malays as ethnic chauvinist, Mahathir attempted to tap the population’s fear of instability to bolster support for his civic nationalist vision. Mahathir used the possibility of ethnic conflict as a constant threat to the stability of multi-ethnic Malaysian nation to justify his collectivist-authoritarian nationalist view. Using this fear factor, Mahathir was able to consolidate support from a section of society that already agreed with his vision, while undermining those who supported other nationalist positions.

5.13.c. Ethno cultural threat from Islamic extremism

Where the Malay community was concerned, Mahathir adopted a similar approach of rebuking and demonizing a small group of ethno cultural Malay nationalists, that is, the Islamic extremists, to strengthen his civic nationalist position while undermining ideas different from his vision of Malaysian nation. It was, however, more complicated in the Malay community. Errors made while handling any issue related to Islam would alienate the entire Malay community. Although there had been a substantial boost of support from the non-Malays in the early 1990s Mahathir had to maintain majority support from the Malay community for his political legitimacy. Accordingly, Mahathir’s approach with regards to the Malay community involved promoting a version of progressive Islam that fitted into his civic vision, while reproaching and suppressing Islamic extremism as a threat to civic Malaysian nation.

5.14. Mahathir’s progressive and tolerant Islam as alternative to extremism

Mahathir’s “progressive Islam” was characterized by an emphasis on the modernizing and tolerant aspects of Islam. Mahathir warned that a rigid interpretation of Islam would jeopardize economic development, one of the foundations of his civic nationalist vision. He emphasized instead some elements in the Islam that would justify the stress he placed on economic development. Mahathir argued: the challenge for those who would try to seek out way of Islamizing the discipline of management by reference to old practices and books, is made more difficult by the neo-conservative approach of some Muslims who demand a total reintroduction of a
hotchpotch of ossified ancient laws and regulations devised to deal with situations which have long since disappeared (Mahathir, 1987).

Mindful of the glorious past of Islamic civilization, Mahathir asserted that Islamic teaching and culture, in fact, promoted the development of knowledge, skill and economy. He argued that, in its time, Islamic civilization was a leading and modernizing force in the development of human society. He said, remember always that Islam, when it came, was a modernizing force that sought greatness to the early followers of the faith: greatness in the field of economy, industry, the sciences, the arts and military prowess. At the same time, Mahathir promoted a version of Islam that emphasized tolerance and justice, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As Mahathir must avoid alienating the non-Malays, he kept a delicate balance between fostering Malay Islamic identity while respecting the non-Malay fear of Islam. Mahathir had to assure non-Malays, who were primarily non-Muslim, that there was a place for them in Malaysia and that his moderate Islamic vision would not affect the non Malay secular way of life. Mahathir contended; in multireligious Malaysia, the government, which is led by Muslims, has to show to all quarters, Muslims and non-Muslim, that its administration based on the concept and principles of Islamic justice is truly fair... it is important that administration in Malaysia led by Muslims, prove that their rule is fair to all, is non-partisan and non-oppressive.

He emphasized that the Malaysian government, led by Muslim, was tolerant. He stressed: although Malaysia is governed by a predominantly Malay-Muslim government, there has been no attempt to oppress non-Muslims. The Malaysian government is very tolerant and the respect for the religious observance of the different religious groups. No one can say that by being so is not Islamic... though Islam has been accepted as the official religion of Malaysia, other religions are allowed to be practiced ... In Malaysia where Islam is the religion of only 60 percent of the people, not only is freedom to practice other religions meaningful and important but it implies an acceptance of tolerance and accommodation on the part of the Muslim majority.

Mahathir portrayed his version of Islam as being secular, development-oriented and tolerant of other religious beliefs or cultures, which was acceptable by a
majority of Malay Muslims and which did not alienate the non-Muslim non-Malay population. Mahathir version of Islam was probably the best compromise he could make while still committing himself to his civic nationalist vision.

While developing a version of Islam as an alternative to more extremist interpretation, Mahathir suppressed extremist Islamic groups to distance the Malay community from them. Mahathir depicted the extremist Islamic group as a small ethno-cultural and fanatical section of the Malay community that threatens the future of the Malaysian people. By highlighting how extremism posed a threat to the comfortable and prosperous life of the Malaysian people, Mahathir could amass support for his civic nationalist vision, in which moderate Malay Muslims and non-Malays could co-exist.

Mahathir did crack down on militant or extremist Islamic groups: there was the Memali incident in 1984, the banning of al-arqm in 1994 and more recently the al-maunah case in July 2000. A group was stopped by the military under the ISA. Mahathir used the al-maunah incident to warn of the threat of extremism and the vulnerability of ethnic harmony, Mahathir specifically identified his government with promoting racial harmony and al maunah—and by implication any Islamic extremists—with threatening the stability of the nation. In an interview published immediately after the incident, Mahathir contended: non-Muslim are now feeling uncertain they fear that there is a move by the Muslims racial society like Malaysia. The government has implemented programmes to instill muhibah and promote good relationship between the people of various races. This has been successful, but these people do not even value the racial unity in the country. They set out to do something which they know will create distrust among the people the perception that the Muslims are out to victimize the non-Muslims.

Mahathir also linked Islamic extremist with PAS. In the al-maunah case, Mahathir claimed [al-maunah members] make up the extremist group among PAS supporters. Although the al-maunah is not PAS-owned, the members are people influenced by anti-governments campaign carried out by PAS. For Mahathir, PAS represented to keep the Islamic identity of Malay within moderate boundaries; PAS embraced a stronger version of Islam, aiming to establish an Islamic state. In addition, after more
religious leader were recruited grassroots support for the PAS had grown substantially since the 1980s. Mahathir viewed these developments as threats to his political power and the success of his vision. He attempted to cast an extremist mould on PAS to marginalize it and to keep the majority of the Malays within his vision of Islam.

Mahathir’s tactic of demonizing Islamic extremism strengthened his civic nationalist argument. By exploiting the non-Malay fear of extremist Islam, Mahathir attempt to capture their support. By developing his own moderate and progressive version of Islam he attempts to capture the Malay community. Mahathir tried to marginalize all other Islamic party, for example PAS. The Malaysian people, convinced by Mahathir rhetoric of the ethno cultural threat were meant to be the question. Mahathir gained the population endorsement in the 1995 elections.

At the same time, Mahathir’s nationalism was collectivist. He effectively employed the coercive legal apparatus to suppress any potential challengers to his civic nationalist vision and manipulated the mass media to indoctrinate the population to accept his vision. Another aspect of Mahathir’s collectivist nationalism is his rhetoric of threats to the national community. Mahathir’s demonization of the western threat propped up his nationalist legitimacy as the protector of the Malaysian nation. Mahathir rhetoric of ethno cultural nationalist threats to the nation from Chinese chauvinists and Islamic extremists, sophisticated enough not to be merely another ethno cultural nationalist argument, was intended to further garner the population support for his civic nationalist vision.

This exploration of Mahathir’s nationalism and its success in the 1990s is crucial in understanding the 1998 UMNO factional dispute as it helps clarify why different nationalist language were used in the disputed did not develop into an ideological conflict between Mahathir civic nationalism and his challenge exploitation of ethno cultural Malay nationalism which was once very explosive as explained in the examination of the 1969 and the 1987 disputes. In other words, Mahathir’s attempt to resolve the nation identity issue was, to a certain degree, successful as it substantially and the change of ethno cultural Malay nationalism gaining enough support from the Malay community.
As an aspect of a problem becomes less urgent, the other aspect of the problem unresolved may rise on the surface of debate. An unresolved nationalist issue regarded the relationship between individual and community, and then become increasingly central in the issue of the nationalist identity after the 1990s. The relationship between the individual and the community was rarely debates in the community as it had been imposed by political elites. As the tension between ethnic identities and nationalist identities decreased, the question of the relationship between the individual and community became increasingly important.

Although Mahathir successfully combined civic nationalism, collectivist nationalism reflected in his authoritarian control of society and very rapid economic growth in the first half of 1990s, it was not guaranteed that he would be able to maintain this particular combination. The growth of a more independent and confident Malay community produced not only strong supporters of civic vision among the Malays but also a demand for more liberal politics, which was potentially critical of Mahathir’s authoritarian nationalist control of society.
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