# Misinterpretation on Rumors towards Racial Conflict:
# A Review on the Impact of Rumors Spread during the Riot of May 13, 1969

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## ABSTRACT

A rumor is a short-lived, unverified report, usually anonymous in its origin. Rumor exists, especially in a turbulent society. In fact, a plural society that comes from various background exhibits greater potential of its dissemination due to the diversity of aspirations and interpretations in obtaining information based from opinion differences. Malaysia had experienced the problem during the riots in Kuala Lumpur on May 13, 1969. The spread of rumors does not only affect the life victims and the destruction of the property, but also determines the path and direction of the nation's politics. This change is in line with the prohibition of debate on sensitive matters which are enshrined in the constitution. The objective of this article is to assess the relationship between rumors and conflicts in a society. The initial discussion focuses on factors that determine the rate of spread in the society. It focuses on the authorities measures, inclusive of safety, administrative and legislative measures to control its dissemination. Finally, it focuses on the short, medium, and long-term implications arising from its dissemination. It can be concluded that the May 13 incident is an effective mechanism in controlling the conflict in the country. This does not mean that the spread of rumors specifically on negative matters will be discontinued. It relies heavily on the government's sensitivity towards the current situation, therefore, necessary actions should be taken to address the dissemination in order to avoid similar events to recur.

**Keywords:** *Rumors, racial conflict, May 13 incident, plural society, misinterpretation.*

## INTRODUCTION

In daily interactions, our conversation often focuses on general and common things which do not bring any harm or bad impact to our lives. However, intense situations, our conversation will lead to more specific topics. Thus, this is where the role of rumors begins. In this context, some of the features of the rumors are potentially identified. One of the dominant features presented in this form of information is its unknown source of emergence and its dissemination speed. In fact, it is difficult to verify the information reliability and validity (Brunvand, 1980). This situation will take place if the official source from the authorities or the media commonly referred by the community is not available or delays the report of the actual situation (Horowitz, 2002). This is due to the unsystematic proof reporting methodology in verifying the report (Allport & Postman, 1965). Failure to ensure the validity of the report forces the community to act on the basis of the report although the report could lead to confusion.

In a plural society, the tendency for riot to occur based on rumors is higher due to the variety of existing aspirations. The existence, both natural and artificial remain potentially dangerous that could be the element that sparks the conflicts and riots in the society. Malaysia, as a plural society also experienced this situation during the racial riots in Kuala Lumpur on May 13, 1969. In comparison with other areas, this article attempts to examine the relationship between the spread of rumors and riots by focusing on three

important matters. The first matter focuses on the determination factors on the emergence of rumor which sum up the structure of the society, the political structure's weakness, and the collective behavior of the individual in response to the two situations referring to the two previous aspects. The next matter focuses on the necessary steps taken by the authorities which include security measures which are short-term solutions, administrative measures referring to medium-term solutions and legislative measures which are long-term solution in putting the situation to an end. The final matter involves the evaluation of the impact of rumors, particularly the relation among the races in Malaysia and the perception of the authorities in assessing the current changes in line with the measures taken.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PLURAL SOCIETY AND RUMORS: A PERSPECTIVE

Before analysing the relationship in detail, there are three matters that should be considered. First, discussions on the background of the plural society after taking into account the colonial presence in any area including its domination of the society. This leads to the second discussion of how far the democracy of education was implemented as a result of the relationship between the colonial and local communities through the established education system. This aspect will also assess the political structure based on the democracy formed during the colonial administration which could be appreciated among the elites and mass community after the country obtained independence. Lastly, the discussion is more important as it is closely related to the self-collective behavior in response from the two previous matters mentioned earlier. Hence, this article will not discuss the concept, theory or model of the plural society which has been widely discussed by scholars (Banks, 1965; Furnivall, 1956; Kuper & Smith, 1969; Rubin, 1960; Smith, 1965). On the contrary, this article will present case-by-case comparison examples to provide an overview of how far the individual's collective behaviors are influenced by the rumors which have potentials to provoke riots especially in the former British colonies countries.

The process of uniting the Malaysian society has taken place rapidly between the 18th and 20th centuries. The increase in the process of socialization was driven by economic interest in line with the current wave of imperialism in Europe. This colonial economic network demands large-scale labor to form a distinctive community adjacent to the locals. They are presumed to be present to find a living before returning to their home country. The assumption was almost a reality when the recession hit the world economy in the 1930s. Due to this, it influenced the colonists to bring some of them back to their home country. Yet, some of them choose not to choose that option and forced to form one unification of plural society after the World War 2. The dilemmas faced by the post-war colonialists were not only closely related to the image of the warfare, but the rise of localized nationalism and the self-determination of the United States at that time. In fact, the future scenario of their colonies in the Cold War competition creates space for communist blocks, both from Russia and China in spreading their ideology. Some countries have gradually gained independence after the war until 1957. However, this encouraging situation is still overshadowed by the political instability resulting from the vacume which are left behind by the colonial powers as can be seen in India, Burma and Indonesia.

The Federation of Malaya also experienced similar problems during the period of 1945-1957 witnessing the deterioration of racial relations between the Malays and the Chinese at that time. The communist party through MCP, largely consists of Chinese, has launched its opposition to fulfil their ideological aspirations as well as exacerbate existing

racial tensions. Although independence was ultimately obtained in 1957 (Cheah, 2004), it is still considered incomplete as it was not followed by the desire to unite the entire Malaya population to form a national identity. This can be justified by the complications and difficulties of the any basis submitted particularly in relation to national education (Ibrahim, 1981; Ramanathan, 1985; Haris, 1990).

The plural society seemed to be fragile since the idea of Malaysia was formed on September 16, 1963 including Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak, as well as Malaya as part of its components. Although this idea still exists today, Singapore's participation had to be removed on August 9, 1965 due to the bold voice expressing the Malaysian-Malaysia slogan. This crisis also caused a dispute between Kuala Lumpur with Jakarta and Manila as well as the communist elements that have not yet been eliminated although the Emergency was ended in 1960.

As a result, these racial uncertainties have also been clearly translated through the pattern of voting in elections held after independence as shown in the table 1 below. The table shows that the development was encouraging at the Opposition party which earned 30 seats (% 48.2) out of the total votes in the 1959 elections. It was a huge increase over the previous election in 1955 which only gave one seat to the opposition. Although their vote declined to only 15 seats in the 1964 election, the downturn was still being met by the Chinese people's participation in the city which in essence began to dispute the framework of society and political structures formed before independence. This is evident in the 1969 election which saw an increase of seven seats exceeding their achievement in the 1959 elections.

Table 1: Comparison of performance of the alliance party and the opposition party
in the election post independence in the peninsular of Malaysia.

| Year | 1959 | | 1964 | | 1969 | |
|------|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| Party | seats | % vote | Seats | % vote | seats | % vote |
| Alliance | 74 | 51.8 | 89 | 58.5 | 66 | 48.5 |
| Opposition | 30 | 48.2 | 15 | 41.5 | 37 | 51.5 |

Source: Mohd Ashraf Ibrahim, *Gagasan Bangsa Malayan yang Bersatu 1945-57*, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004.

This explanation further leads to the extent of the elites trying to apply democracy education among the society. In the context of understanding, it is important to consider the education policy of the colonies that may differ from one region to another. However, the differences do not affect the interests of colonial economists who need labor and raw materials from the colony for their industry. Hence, it is not necessary to provide the education system in line with the establishment. For example, the Malaysian education system was not only implemented according to race, but also for certain classes. Evidently, the existence of three educational streams, 1) English stream for the elites; 2) vernacular stream for the ordinary people; and 3) religious stream. The religious stream is for those with their own initiatives which also include the immigrant education stream, both Chinese and Indian. Hence, it is impossible for most educated elites which are from English education background to apply democracy education to the communities they represent although it may occur in the early stage of the formation of the sociopolitical framework in Malaya at that time. This is a fact and evidently justified since the National Language Act 1967 did not obtain good response from both Malays, and non-Malays.

The May 13 riots in 1969 was an explosion of emotion among non-Malay enthusiasts celebrating the victory and concern of the Malays on their political survival. This emotional collision has been described by Karl Von Vorys as follows:

> The country was in no mood for detached objectivity, nor had it the patience to wait for a comprehensive factual assessment. People were convinced that the hegemony of the Alliance had ended and that the political system was in crisis. It was only a matter of time before both would collapse (Von Vorys 1976, p.308).

In that chaotic situation, the elites from both sides are said to be unable to control the collective actions of their followers. Based on rumors, the Malays acted when they thought their friends were attacked by the Chinese in Setapak, while the Chinese unite with their secret society as a protection against the attacks of the Malays who would destroy their property (Slimming, 1969). To understand the behavioral aspects behind the conflicts of these two groups, cultural backgrounds should be observed and analyzed. Malays are fond of practicing martial arts for protection and defense, while the Chinese have their special tribe or the secret society which have been rooted in their cultural background. The differences in these two cultures are the root of the discussion of this article in comparison with other scholars assuming that rumors work in the final stages of a conflict. On the other hand, this article will try to identify the stage the rumor takes place after taking into account the cultural background.

The knowledge of Malay martial art *"silat"* was referred as a martial self-defense which acts as a mechanism for the practitioners to defend themselves against enemy attacks. In other words, a person who has the *"silat"* knowledge could not arbitrarily attack other parties without any solid reason other than for self-defense. This precautionary function is a discipline that must exist in the attainment of every practitioner's attitude through spiritual and physical training continuously, both inside and outside the ring. This condition makes Malay practitioners more individualistic though they are traditionally taught in groups under the leadership of a teacher as their instructor. However, the Malays in certain circumstances are able to set aside individual traits in their consciousness by forming a collective movement to defend their dignity if challenged as shown in the May 13 riots that will be discussed later.

Their unity in this situation will emphasize the figure of a person who is considered a hero and this heroism affects through a generational mechanism to symbolize brave and courage (Fatimah, 1982).

The Chinese show a slightly different social solidarity. Although they are bound by family and regional ties, the culture of forming a secret society is another social element among the Chinese that could not be excluded. Basically, the objective of forming the secret society is mainly for protection, welfare and social well-being in line with the political uncertainties in their home country. However, when they migrate immensely into the country, the culture was being implemented for the same purpose. This position by itself has made their social system totally contradict with the aspirations of the local people and the colonial empire that held them at that time. It is not a surprise that there were many colonial records of riot incidents which are often triggered by the Chinese throughout their administration in Malaya (Purcell, 1967; Blyth, 1969). The independence obtained by the

Malaya clearly did not affect their existence. In fact, there are claims claiming that the May 13 riot was triggered by their institution (Majlis Gerakan Negara, 1969).

The discussion of riot reflects the incomplete differences in the cultural background since the current situation underlying the incident was not considered. It refers to several initial tense situations, during the election and post-election. In order to determine the level of conflict between this group and when it started, there are two assumptions that need to be explained. Mahathir Mohamed's first assumption was to clarify his observations of the attitude of the Malays who often buried their feelings and would only express it through unrestrained rows (Mahathir, 1970), while the second assumption was based on the official report published in October 1969. This second assumption attempts to chronologically trace the series of provocative events which were triggered by the Chinese against the Malays. Several conflict incidents such as the emergence of the Three Stars *"Bintang Tiga"* after the Second World War, riots in Pangkor and Penang in 1957 and 1967, the long-standing election campaign, the corpses parade and celebrations victory on May 9, 10 and 11 stimulated the anger of the Malays to do the same for the Chinese (Majlis Gerakan Negara, 1969). However, for this article, the focus will only be confined to the atmosphere of the election and the post-election since rumors play a great role to trigger riots in that particular time zone.

During the election, the tense situation leads to two murder incidents between the end of April and early May of 1969. The first incident was calmly solved by the security authorities. The authorities advised the deceased family members to not complicate the situation. However, the second incident provoked the Malays by organizing a body corpse parade one day prior to the Election Day. The results were announced on the night of May 10. Rumors started to spread by informing the society that a victory parade will be held the next day. The news was overheated by claiming that the presence of the Chinese in the parade would destroy the lives and destruct the property of the Malays. The rudeness in the context of words during the parade had triggered the Malays to respond towards the Chinese. Within a day, all the Malay martial arts teachers merged into a group called Red Waistband Movement (*Gerakan Selendang Merah).* By forming this group, all the Malays were given an intense, immediate and open training to prepare themselves for any possibilities (Razha, 1990). It is not a surprise when rumors claimed that the Chinese will attack the Malays created a riot in the evening even the parade was planned in the evening of May 13.

## RUMORS, PLURAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ROLE OF AUTHORITIES

Since most riots can only be detected after it has happened, it is quite difficult for the authorities to detect at the level or the risk of a rumor before riot happens. However, compared to India (Akbar, 1988; Naidu, 1980), Malaysia was fortunate enough that the scale of the riots did not spread to the other areas. Authorities seem to have acted swiftly by closing the borders of the country, both in the north and south to avoid any risks based from the existing riots. However, the riots that took place received focus and attention at the international level due to its location in the capital of the Federation. The foreign media reports, particularly the biased view from the West, have affected the image of the country in the eyes of international audiences (Abdul Rahman, 1969). Hence, several measures, securities, administration and legislation have been taken by the authorities to address the riot, thus preventing the spread of rumors that may arise as a result of the riots.

The first step taken by the authorities in response to the riot was to declare isolation in Kuala Lumpur on the night of May 13. Simultaneously with the declaration, Kuala Lumpur was divided into two zones to isolate the two conflicting races temporarily. Zone on the east of the Gombak River includes Kampung Baru and Chow Kit reserved for the Malays, while the western area is reserved for non-Malays. The following day, the emergency declaration was extended to the rest of the country as provided in Clause 149 of the Federal Constitution. Simultaneously, Parliament and the elections for Sabah and Sarawak have to be suspended. The *Majlis Gerakan Negara* (Mageran) was formed to fully implement law enforcement during the suspension period.

Under this function, police and military operations can be coordinated and co-operated to identify and subsequently deploy subversive and extremist elements that are believed or suspected to propagate rumors that compromise racial ties in the country. According to official government reports, 33 joint operations have been mobilized and from the operation, more than 2,000 people have been arrested (Majlis Gerakan Negara, 1969). This step was taken immediately to address rumors that were still hovering after riots. The sources of rumors are believed to have been obtained from foreign media reports that were attempted on a cyclostil copy even though the reports had been banned for distribution.

In order to strengthen the country's mechanism in controlling information in line with the situation, a body named as an *Information Co-ordination Center* was formed as the placed directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Mageran. The body is responsible for delivering Mageran's instructions relating to the control of information from time to time as an administrative oversight mechanism on the print media operating in the country. A preliminary instruction was delivered by this body on May 15th to all press and magazine editors in the country which sets out their publications on May 16 to a date which will be confirmed later. Through this filtering mechanism, the press of political parties has canceled its publication (The Straits Times, 1969, p.1). The diplomatic level and international relations staff, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie who is also one of the members of Mageran's experience and service was been fully utilized. His vast experience as Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Ministry has been a valuable asset for foreign journalists and foreign diplomats through a briefing he often gives from time to time to propagate any developments that have arisen from the riots (Von Vorys, 1976).

Subsequently, the government began to introduce several legislative measures which were supposed to control the flow of information from and beyond the country. In fact, there has been a legal mechanism in controlling the flow of information in this country. The Sedition Act, for example, through sections 2 and 3 (E) has defined incitement publications as: including any writing or printed material and any similar form of substance which contains any display in any form or manner expressing words or views, and any copy of the writing or something related to the writing posed as a publication, would be considered incitement if it is suspected of attempting to display racial and classified anxieties among the population of this country (Malayan Law Journal, 2006, p. 5 & 6). A filtering mechanism through the Special Regulations and other Publications was also formed when it was gazetted on 21 May 1969.

This special rule gave full authority to the government to inspect any press release before it was printed. According to these rules, a legitimate authority may at any time require the owner, editor, printer or publisher of any publication, or the owner or manager of a printing press or printing business, or any person who is in the process of printing or

publishing any item to furnish to him any articles intended to print or publish for safety and approval purposes (Warta Kerajaan, 1969). Under this rule also, the Minister may ban or specifically publish any article which he deems likely to harm public order or national safety (Ibid, 1969).

At this point, there has been concern from the press itself about government-imposed filtration laws. It is not just about the extent of the interpretation of the law on the parties involved, but it even shows the reliability of the authorities towards the role of the press as the fourth authority in the objective as the country's mechanism to check and balance. The concern was voiced by L. C. Hoffman, Straits Times's Editor-in-Chief, argues that the press is the media that the government should use to address the problem of information arising from the riots (Mohd Safar Hasim, 1996; Sunday Times, 1969). This situation has prompted the government to do everything necessary to transfer the newspaper to the interests of the country which was only possible from August 1972 and completed in February of the following year (Mohd Safar, 1996).

Further legislative measures are more important as it is an amendment to the Federal Constitution. The amendment brings two objectives, namely, separating sensitive and controversial issues from political debate and general discussion so that parliamentary democracy can run fully and form the economic equality between races that can create unity among the population of this country (Kertas Putih Kerajaan, 1971). However, for the discussion of this article, only the first objective will be given a special focus. The prohibitions included in this amendment are Malay as the national language (Article 152), the rights of the Malays and Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak (Articles 153 and 161), the sovereignty of the Malay rulers (Article 181) and non-Malay citizenship Part III). The amendments have however been shown by the amendments to the Sedition Act 1948 through the Emergency Requirements Authority Ordinance number 45 of 1970 as provided for in section 3 (F) of the act. The passage refers to the limitations imposed on freedom of expression as set out in Article 10 by inserting subsection 4 in the relevant clause (Ibid, 1971). In addition, amendments were also made to clauses 63 and 72 of the Constitution to limit freedom of opinion among members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies as stipulated in the proposed amendments (Abdul Razak, 1975).

The prohibition on debating sensitive matters as proposed in these amendments has been able to stabilize the country's political environment as well as restricting the spread of rumors that may arise in connection with the situation. It was proven during the next election held in August 1974 which saw no incidents reported as in the previous elections. The situation was also helped by the shift in the political environment during that time and the short-term election campaign which did not provide the space to irresponsible elements in favor of the restored state (Pillay, 1974; Parker, 1979).

## THE IMPACT OF RUMORS OF MAY 13 RIOT

In detecting, identifying and evaluating the impact of riots in a society, especially in a plural society, authors are keener to evaluate the impact of the riots without taking into account the potential of rumors which could trigger riots within the society. The tendency of riots might be influenced by their failures in defining clear boundaries to distinguish between the impact of rumors which triggers the riots and the impact of riots itself. Even though rumors are elements that could potentially trigger a riot in a society, the function of a riot does not necessarily stop at that level. This statement consequently leads us to the question of what

is the most effective mechanism in detecting and subsequently identifying the potential impact of rumors on riots, since it could only be detected after the riot occurs.

In the effort to unravel the question, a book by Donald L. Horowitz "The deadly ethnic riot" concluded that a rumor is an element that ignites the conflict in a community. This is due to the nature of the rumors which are spread rapidly with no proof of validation from the right source which consequently influences the target group to act on a particular purpose to guarantee harmony within the society (Horowitz, 2002). Although the assumption is true, it is reflected as a generalization as it does not take into consideration the cultural and social institutions that supports the cultural background. This generalization perspective may be influenced by the adaption of the political science discipline orientation that is more likely to view a phenomenon in a macro perspective. This could be explained as the political science generally focuses on power or anything that enables the power in a society at all levels. This anthropologist made the racial element inherent in the plural society in India and Malaysia as her focus of research. This is an opportunity to examine the plural society in both countries by highlighting the similarities and differences inherent in the conflicts of both countries. For instance, the background and origin of the Indian community in Malaysia are derived from their home country. Thus, it is necessary to identify the similarities and differences that underlie this community, particularly in the context of spreading rumors within the community. Unfortunately, this matter was not examined thoroughly (Naidu, 1980).

The common generalization by the two scholars could not be a guideline for the Malaysian society today in determining exactly the difference between the impact of the riots and the impact of rumors that trigger the riots. Undeniably, rumors play a critical role in sparking a riot. However, other stages that influences the spread of the rumors need to be considered. This also includes the cultural background and social institutions that support the cultural background of the community. This fact will lead us to the question of the extent to which cultural backgrounds supported by these social institutions are capable of influencing the flow of rumors that will inevitably affect the outbreak of conflict in society.

In the context of the riots of May 13, the announced results of the May 10 election have created an uncertain situation in Malaysia's political environment. Although the Alliance is still able to retain its dominance through UMNO, the Malay community is worried since Selangor and Perak portrayed a voting trend that does not favour them when the Alliance and UMNO could not initially form a government in the two states. At this stage, various assumptions and speculations have emerged. The question of who will be appointed as the Chief Minister of the two states have also lingered in their minds. Without any reference specifically to the *constitution* for the two states, both parties reacted based on misinformation arising from the uncertain situations. Since both states practise the monarchy system, the appointment of the Chief Minister for both states must be acknowledged by the Sultan's approval based on certain criteria, among others, must be a Malay and a Muslim.

If the criteria are not met, it is definitely not possible for a person to be appointed as the Chief Minister even though the candidate has gained the confidence of the majority of the members of the States Legislative as expected by the opposition at that particular time. The politician's statement from the opposition calling for a re-election to resolve the crisis in Selangor has particularly complicated the situation (Lim, 2012). The MCA's withdrawal from

the Cabinet increased the concern of the Malays despite the fact that this issue reflected their reaction towards the Chinese voting trends that has trust issues towards the party.

Despite the complicated political situation in the two states specifically Selangor, the issue has been resolved since UMNO and the Alliance successfully formed a government in the state through a neutral stand by *GERAKAN*. However, the Malays still expressed their worries and concerns since the same party has planned to celebrate their victory on May 11, which happened to be the same date as the formation of UMNO 23 years ago. In fact, the worries and concerns were mixed with emotions such as anger due to the funeral procession which happened two days earlier. Based on these emotions, the Malays were ready with all the possibilities and rumours. Thus, when UMNO Selangor planned to parade on May 13, they spontaneously joined the parade. At this stage, no one was able to ascertain that weapons were not carried by the rioters during the parade. However, as a precaution, they were prepared with any possibilities to defend themselves. At this stage also, any rumours heard or spread has the possibility to trigger riots as both groups seemed to be well prepared with the necessary equipment to face and defence themselves with any possibilities.

When a riot occurs, the authorities need to take all necessary actions, including security, administrative and legal measures in putting the riot to an end. The actions taken somehow play a role in controlling the spread of rumours which may exist based from the riot. This is important to calm the situation while also restoring public confidence to carry out their activities as usual. These are the medium-term action plan that is normally taken by any authorities in stabilizing the situation. However, the question is to which extent the measures taken by the authorities, specifically a legislative measure is effective when there is a sudden shift exists in today's information dissemination? In other words, since the action taken is reactionary in nature towards the situation, it certainly does not take into account any changes after the riot takes place. In the long term perspective, this leads to a paradox.

The conflict exists due to the widespread gap between the freedom of online media and the controlled freedom from the print and electronic media. This is also closely linked to human right issues that were outlined internationally as well as the freedom of speech as provided in the Article 10 of the Federal Constitution. This polemic certainly has formed a perception that the government does not take into account the current shift to merely maintain is status quo. However, the evaluation of the statement must be fully understood by taking into account the pattern of sociopolitical structure formed during the colonial period to create a racial pattern dichotomy as demonstrated by the collaboration of the non-Malay NGO and the opposition parties, while the Malay religion and Malay traditional movements are inclined towards the ruling party.

*'Bersih Rally'* is a clear example to define the phenomenon. In fact, this situation is more dangerous than the May 13 riot since the pressure is potentially religious-based which are seen to sacrifice more lives. This is due to the defensive nature by each party in sustaining their respective religious interests. The potential of rumors being spread is high as everything is online and everything is at their fingertips. Anyone has the right to express and share their opinions at a speed rate without any control. This is the risk that needs to be faced and put into consideration if freedom of opinion is implemented. The government appears to be more cautious in dealing with this scenario. From the legal point of view, the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 was repealed to allow the Communications and

Multimedia Act 1998 to be enforced. On current development, the Anti-False News Act (AFNA) 2018 also been introduced.

Those laws reflect the government's attempt to adapt to the current situation without affecting its control over the country's political structure. At the same time, it also intends to take advantage of the economic benefits of virtual technology which can benefits the country. The Act is expected to create a balance between online freedom of opinion and the economic benefits gained for racial harmony among the society in this country. However, only time could determine and answer the question of to what extent that this mechanism could operate based on the upcoming changes?

## CONCLUSION

The community's daily interaction among each other often triggers general or common conversation with no implications in the community. However, in a community especially a plural community, the topic of conversations will often lead to more specific topics. Consequently, rumors will occur and if the role of rumors is not dealt properly, it leads to conflicts. Since many new independent nations are still in the process of formation, the tendency for conflicts due to the spread of rumors is high due to the diversity and variation of aspirations among the community.

Malaysia is definitely one of the nations who belongs to this category. Malaysia experienced the same conflict as shown through the May 13, 1969 riot in Kuala Lumpur. The rumors are spread by stages and are heavily influenced by cultural backgrounds and social institutions that support the cultural background. Due to the riots, the authority managed to take action by blocking the event from spreading to other areas despite a lot of lives and property has been destroyed. The action taken by the authority has also prevented other possible rumors arise from the riots. The implications that arise are not necessarily the automatic response from the rioters although the response could lead to tense situations which has potential to trigger a riot. In this context, any action taken by the authorities is only medium term impact. Despite the impact of the long-term which should lead to the existence of polemics between freedom of opinion from one side and racial harmony with the other, the government's initiative to introduce laws has provided the readiness and willingness in adapting to the current situation. The May 13 riot itself can be seen as a highly effective mechanism that acts as a barrier in preventing similar riots in the future. However, recently, the tensions among the races based on religion issues are quite prominent. Rumors, especially online rumors are potentially more dangerous and this challenge must be addressed and observed attentively by the authorities.

## BIODATA

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