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Managing Malaysia–Indonesia relations in the context of democratization: the emergence of non-state actors

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Abstract

This paper argues that Malaysia–Indonesia relations have become increasingly problematic and complex to manage in a post-Mahathir/Suharto era. The unequal pace of the democratization pattern in both countries has largely contributed to this state of affairs. The four key 'transnational' variables or determinants such as migrant labor, mass media, non-governmental organizations and the Anwar factor have significantly impacted on Malaysia's ties with Indonesia against the backdrop of the unequal domestic political changes. These four variables have over the years become more prominent in bilateral relations – often in negative terms. More specifically, they represent the dynamics of the people-to-people dimension in bilateral ties. As such, the deterioration in people-to-people relations threatens to significantly reshape

government-to-government diplomacy. Bilateral relations could yet face their severest contradictions when official diplomacy is incapable of reflecting accurately popular sentiments. In effect, the roles of state and non-state actors have been instrumental in influencing recent developments of Malaysia–Indonesia relations.

1 Introduction

The tensions between Malaysia and Indonesia for the past decade have been conditioned by the unequal pace of the democratization trends in both countries. Ironically, in contrast to the more economically developed Malaysia, political transformation, i.e. democratization, has taken place much more rapidly in post-Suharto Indonesia. Such a 'disequilibrium' in internal conditions had profoundly affected the bilateral relations of both countries at government-to-government and people-to-people levels. At the same time, as expected, the '*abang–adik*' (elder–younger sibling) relationship continues to exist as the present bilateral identity, perhaps more so from the perspective of Indonesia (particularly of Sumatra), which is considered as the historical and socio-cultural origin of much of the *Malay* Peninsula.

Democratization contributed significantly to the blurring of domestic and foreign policy issues such that bilateral relations have become more complicated as a consequence. In post-Suharto Indonesia, democratization that broke through decades of the *Orde Baru* authoritarian rule on the back of popular discontent and aspirations for greater participation in the political process fueled public expectations and subsequently shaped public policy-making. Whilst the democratization process in post-Mahathir Malaysia remains more or less stagnant, post-Suharto Indonesia seemed to have surged ahead and become much more liberal politically than the former.

The Indonesian middle class, as the main stakeholders in the democratization process, formed a 'natural alliance' or partnership with other emerging non-state actors, particularly with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and mass media in which there was a confluence and congruence of interests and outlook. In turn, these non-state actors' demand for greater participation and share in the wider agenda-setting and domestic policy-making processes extended also to foreign policy and diplomacy thereby posing a challenge to the state in managing

international affairs. In short, non-state actors have become instrumental in reinforcing the increasing nebulous boundaries between domestic and foreign policy issues.

Another irony is that bilateral relations at the people-to-people level no longer seem to be taken for granted as before when cross-border movement were more seamless and spontaneous. People-to-people ties have deteriorated and the sense of 'alterity' (otherness) appears to be more heightened. As such, there is a growing xenophobic consciousness and awareness in the people-to-people dimension of bilateral relations post-Mahathir/Suharto period (Priyambudi, 2010).

At present, people-to-people ties in the broader framework of international relations, geo-politics, and diplomacy are given cursory attention. Quite often, the people-to-people aspect in bilateral relations is glossed over or subsumed under other categories such as migrant labor and public diplomacy – which reflect the contemporary trend of globalization and democratization – as well as the area of conflict resolution and mediation (Bercovitch, 1996; Mahler, 2000; Schaferhoff *et al*., 2009). Even scholars who explore people-to-people relations through the paradigm of these general categories such as transnational and non-state actors lament the paucity of research on its contribution to diplomacy. Another salient issue is the lack of discussions on the role and contribution of non-governmental individuals (NGIs). The term 'transnational actors' or 'non-state actors' has often been constraint in its reference to institutions.

This paper focuses on the role of non-state actors while acknowledging the continuous importance of state actors in international affairs. Furthermore, the paper stresses the interplay of these two sets of actors whose roles are also influenced by domestic and international developments. This paper has benefitted from a series of extensive interviews with various individuals, both governmental and non-governmental. They include prominent senior politicians NGO personalities, parliamentarians, journalists, and embassy officials. In this paper, Section 2 begins with a brief survey of the historical setting that focuses on eminent personalities and statesmen as key actors in the development of Malaysia–Indonesia relations since the beginning of the twentieth century. Here it could be argued that the evolving roles of both 'state' and the 'non-state' actors over the last five decades have significantly shaped Malaysia–Indonesia relations.

In Section 3, the paper then moves on to examine the underlying reasons for the recent deterioration in Malaysia–Indonesia relations with particular focus on people-to-people ties. Bilateral relations especially since the post-democratization period have significantly been influenced by non-state actors as demonstrated in the cases of the migrant labor, mass media, NGOs, and civil society. It also includes an analysis of Malaysian perceptions of the Indonesian migrant workers.

In contrast to the government-controlled Malaysian media, the growing assertiveness of the Indonesian media has exacerbated divided sentiments between the two countries. This unequal pace in media freedom continues to remain as a major bone of contention between both countries. The precarious nature of the Indonesian media poses a threat to bilateral relations. Equally important is the continual role of non-state actors such as the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim which appear to loom large in Malaysia–Indonesia relations post-Mahathir/Suharto. Section 4 concludes that the challenges arising from the unequal pace of democratization (political mismatch) *and* Indonesia' rapid development (economic equalization) inevitably add pressure on the already-strained relationship between the two neighbors.

2 Brief historical overview and impact of people-to-people exchanges on diplomatic ties

Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations have been, and is continued to be defined (as the underlying basis) by racial and religious affinity (Islam), linguistic commonality, geographical proximity in the Malay Archipelago, and a common history. This makes for a 'special relationship' in which these sentimental concepts could be properly subsumed under the unifying factor of 'kinship' (*serumpun*), which Liow (2005a,b) termed as the 'organizing principle'. People-to-people relations in Malaysia–Indonesia express the *serumpun*-ness of the dominant peoples of both countries who are considered indigenous (Siddique and Suryadinata, 1982).

Malaysia's so-called special relationship with Indonesia – largely based on the concept of *serumpun* (kinship) – has been intensely tested time and again at both levels of interaction and in different ways for both countries. This presents a challenge to both Malaysian and Indonesian governments on how to respond and manage the dynamic evolution of their special relationship appropriately against the backdrop

of democratization. Whilst diplomatic relations continue to remain under the dictates of governments, managing people-to-people ties has become increasingly complex. Consequently, in managing people-to-people ties, the governments of both countries are faced with daunting challenges that may significantly impact on the future directions of diplomatic relations.

For obvious reasons, diplomatic relations have been the underpinning structure since post-independence, albeit with kinship as the continuing 'organizing principle'. Even so, arguably, the growing distinctness of people-to-people links also simultaneously results from and contributes to the tendency for *serumpun* to diminish its appeal in the broader bilateral relations. Over time, the presupposed 'homogeneity' of people-to-people exchange on the basis of *serumpun* or common primordial sentiments fosters expectations and when unfulfilled could lead to acrimonious and bitter disputes.

Notwithstanding the ingrained primordial bond, the people-to-people relations in post-independence Malaysia–Indonesia are intensely modern as shaped by the colonial environment. The features defining the dynamics of interaction and exchanges during the colonial period were intellectual and socio-cultural. Colonialism had disrupted the traditional economic order in the Malay Archipelago, which also resulted in a reconfiguration of the pre-existing social structures. The latter aspect of colonialism had a deeper impact in the Dutch East Indies than in Malaya where the British were careful in imposing their brand of colonialism whilst ensuring the preservation of traditional privileges, although limited, of the Malay rulers. In this setting, members of the intelligentsia emerged as influential grassroots and avant-garde nationalists at the dawn of the twentieth century (*fin-de-siècle*) (Johnson, 2009).

At the time, the notion of national sovereignty was still incipient in the outlook of these nationalists, and mixed with a more open attitude that inclined towards amorphous borders on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. Thus, it came as no surprise that geo-social proximity would have had jingoistic ramifications in the form of a political union.

In 1930s, the concept of *Melayu Raya* was proposed by several Malay nationalists, namely Ibrahim Yaakob, Ishak Haji Mohammad, Ahmad Boestaman, and Burhanuddin Helmy. Hence, the idea of Malay-ness understood and espoused by these prominent figures very much tied to the wider context of the Malay Archipelago (McIntyre, 1973). Fired by

an intellectual renaissance that was accompanied by a political awakening, these influential figures wanted to forge a strong spirit of camaraderie between the two peoples in which nationalism was defined by race and geography. Hence, people-to-people relations were 'rekindled' by a return to kinship that transcended the concept of administrative boundaries as artificially imposed by colonialism.

As such, this paper contends that modern people-to-people ties – which were eminently epitomized by intellectual and political empathy – preceded and subsequently paved the way for close government-to-government ties. With such a historic base, people-to-people relations were deeply intertwined with government-to-government relations. Yet, paradoxically, colonialism that provided the setting and intellectual construal for the politicization of the pan-Malay identity produced divergent nationalistic responses. This can be seen in the leadership character of both countries.

The role of leadership (in particular personality and style) is an important determinant in understanding the dynamics of the domestic politics as well as foreign policy-making of both developed and developing societies. Consequently, the international relations of many of the countries in Southeast Asia have often been significantly influenced by the idiosyncrasies of their leaders and such is also the case of Malaysia and Indonesia (Liow, 2010).

Different expectations between Tunku Abdul Rahman and Sukarno have already surfaced in the early years of bilateral relations. Ironically, even though Tunku was a Malay nationalist, ethnic politics did not feature prominently in the country's foreign policy from 1957 until 1970 (Liow, 2005a,b). In contrast, President Sukarno who had his own brand of hybrid socialism invested racial commonality in his diplomatic overtures to the then Malaya. Thus, political leadership makes for a complex and critical analysis that at times defies a typical postulation.

The broader context of the leadership factor had been the assumption that bilateral relations would be defined mainly in terms of ethnocentricity and thus continuity with pre-colonial past. In other words, a 'recovery' of Indonesia's pre-eminence by virtue of being the historic centre, origin, source, inspiration, etc. for the development of the Malay civilizations on the peninsula.

Equally decisive, geographically and demographically, Indonesia was also of a bigger size. Moreover, Indonesia under Sukarno's rule perceived

itself as the 'custodian' of the post-colonial Malay Archipelago. Hence, due respect and honor to Indonesia as the 'Big Brother' was expected. However, relationship between both men can be best described as at times as 'lukewarm', 'frosty', or 'confrontational' and largely due to the differences in the idiosyncratic styles and ideological differences between the two. The stark contrast in the personalities of the somewhat elitist and Anglophile Tunku, as opposed to the bold, fiery and more charismatic Sukarno, contributed to friction and tension in Malaysia's bilateral ties with Indonesia throughout most of the 1960s.The differences in the leadership style were further compounded by Tunku and Sukarno's ideological incompatibilities in the context of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and Malaysia–Indonesia relations dropped to a lower level with the instigation of the *ganyang Malaysia* campaign.

Despite the confrontational relationship between the two leaders, such sentiments did not strike a chord with the public (Des Alwi, personal communication, March 17, 2008; Hoed, personal communication, March 18, 2008).[1] This led to the *ganyang Malaysia* campaign soon being aborted and relations between the two countries improved with the ascendancy of Suharto as the new President of Indonesia.

The regime change (*Orde Baru*) in Indonesia saw the leadership of the country under Suharto committed to introducing a less flamboyant and confrontational foreign policy initiatives. Indonesia's Foreign Minister Adam Malik was instrumental in building a close rapport with the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Razak Hussein. It remains to be explored whether the Bugis/Sulawesi roots of Razak and Malik contributed to their ease of reaching agreement, but relations between the two countries were further strengthened when Razak became Malaysia's Prime Minister in 1971.[2] There is no doubt that both were staunch anti-Communists who also shared an aversion to internal challenges posed by the domiciled Chinese population (Parmer, 1967).

Unfortunately, Razak's administration was cut short by his sudden demise on 14 January 1976, and he was succeeded by Hussein Onn who was the Prime Minister until July 1981. This was a period when the

1 The fact that certain elements within the Sukarno government were against the idea of the *Ganyang Malaysia* policy contributed to the failure of the campaign.

2 Interview with Musa Hitam (former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, 1981–86 and Malaysian EPG Chairman), 2 September 2009. Musa believes that the Bugis/Sulawesi roots of certain national leaders from both sides were instrumental in facilitating and enhancing government-to-government relations.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) became one of Malaysia's top foreign policy priorities. In 1981, Mahathir Mohamad was appointed as the Prime Minister of Malaysia and remained in power for more than two decades until October 2003.

The 1997–98 East Asian financial crisis would eventually lead to the downfall of the Suharto regime. Mahathir maintained good rapport with Suharto despite the occasional annoyances. When Mahathir proposed the formation of the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) as a regional economic network to strengthen multilateral diplomacy for Asian countries, Suharto felt offended as he was not consulted. Upon Suharto's demise in 2008, Mahathir was reported to have said that Malaysia is indebted to Suharto for ending the Konfrontasi, and bringing stability to Indonesia.[3] The political departure of Suharto and the strong ties between the *reformasi* leaders in Indonesia with Anwar Ibrahim contributed to increasing suspicions at the government-to-government level.

During this period, Mahathir's popularity in Indonesia was at times irregular. He was admired by the Indonesians for his bold currency control measures, particularly in the pegging of the ringgit to the dollar (at RM3.80), and rejection of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bail-out package. However, his credibility and credentials as a democratic leader were tarnished by his treatment of Anwar Ibrahim and the response to the *reformasi* movement. Despite a succession of Indonesian leaders' support for Anwar, especially by Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie (B.J. Habibie) and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Malaysia–Indonesia relations improved to some extent with the appointment of Megawati Sukarnoputri as President in 2001.

In effect, there were problems between the two countries at both government-to-government and people-to-people level throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the challenging circumstances, Mahathir succeeded in managing Malaysia's relationship with Indonesia relatively well (Khatib, personal communication, September 18, 2008). It soon became evident that the special relationship was again about to deteriorate following the resignation of Mahathir as Prime Minister in October 2003 (Baiq

3 See 'Mixed reactions to Suharto death.' Source: <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/1560500/4042040.xhtml>, accessed 27 September 2011. See also 'Mahathir: Suharto 'tak dilupakan' [Mahathir: Suharto 'is not forgotten']. BBC Indonesia, 27 January 2008. Whilst in Indonesia in conjunction with the funeral, Mahathir offered prayers on Suharto's behalf (Kassim, 2008). 'Suharto: The end of an ASEAN era.' RSIS Commentaries. Source: <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0102008.pdf>, 27 September 2011.

and Wardhani, 2008). Policies were more liberal under the new Abdullah Ahmad Badawi administration in response to the changing political scene and new global challenges. Ironically, there appears to be a somewhat lacklustre approach on the part of the Badawi administration during the initial years in fostering and forging bilateral ties with Indonesia.

This apparent ineffectiveness may be due to preoccupation with domestic politics as Malaysians become more assertive and critical of the political system. Ineffectiveness was also evident in the way Malaysia conducted its foreign affairs when criticisms of the reporting by the Indonesian media were perceived as abrasive and arrogant by the Indonesians ('Syed Hamid: Stop the bashing', 2007). Despite Badawi being viewed as much less abrasive and confrontational by Indonesians, a perception of weak leadership and lack of political will to resolve bilateral issues contributed to a feeling of frustration on both sides. After a spat between the two countries including over the Ambalat oil and gas block in the Sulawesi Sea off the coast of Sabah (Kassim, 2005), there was some hope that future disputes might be avoided after the two leaders adopted a 'soft' approach by setting up the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on 7 July 2008 ('Malaysia and Indonesia on common ground', 2008; 'Joint advisory body set up', 2008; 'Malaysia–Indonesia form eminent persons group', 2008; *Antara News,* 2008).[4]

On 16 March 2009, the Malaysia–Indonesia EPG – which submitted its inaugural report – recommended that a seminar be held to showcase the cultural roots of the peoples of Malaysia and Indonesia.[5] Interestingly, on 17 March 2009, Badawi delivered a speech in conjunction with the presentation of the EPG documents and opening of the *dialog kesejarahan* or history dialogue on the common history and cultural traits between the two neighbors with the acknowledgement for

4 The Indonesian EPG members were Try Sutrisno, Quraish Shihab, Des Alwi, Musni Umar, Pudentia MPSS, and Wahyuni Bahar while the Malaysian members were Musa Hitam, Mohd Zahidi Zainuddin, Khoo Kay Kim, Abdul Halim Ali, Amar Hamid Bugo, Syed Ali Tawfik Al-Attas, and Joseph Pairin Kitingan. Ali Alatas, the renowned Indonesian foreign minister and diplomat, and chair of the EPG on the Indonesian side passed away on 11 December 2008.

5 According to the former Malaysian ambassador to Indonesia, Zainal Abidin Mohamed Zain, the report represented the sixth annual consultation involving leaders of both countries. The theme of the seminar was to be 'Raising the collective memory of the race' which the EPG had recommended in its report. The seminar would touch on the history of friendship, heritage and culture of the peoples of Indonesia and Malaysia who shared similar cultural roots. 2009, 'EPG proposes seminar on Malaysia-Indonesia cultural roots', *Bernama*, 16 March 2008.

the need to foster interaction at the people-to-people level, especially target groups (*golongan sasar*) such as the youth who are the future leaders and next generation.

With Najib Razak becoming the new Prime Minister on 3 April 2009, people-to-people relations did not change drastically. On the contrary, simmering tensions continued to characterize people-to-people relations. Some fringe political parties (for example, Gerindra – *Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya*) and so-called NGOs in Indonesia such as Bendera (*Benteng Demokrasi Rakyat*/Fortress of People's Democracy) vent anger against perceived injustices and abuse of Indonesian migrant labor, particularly of maids (*AFP*; 'Indonesian workers', 2010).

In recent years, stories of abused maids that received coverage in the Malaysian press would be played up or sensationalized in Indonesia. This would then serve as a flash-point for anti-Malaysia feelings to flare up. Even the Indonesian government has acknowledged the inflammatory role played by the local mass media in inciting demonstrations against its neighbor ('Local media "to blame"', 2010). Thus, people-to-people relations impinge on the developments in diplomatic ties. This is particularly so since Malaysia–Indonesia diplomacy is actually a form of people-to-people relations historically based on the 'organizing principle' of *serumpuness*, which continues as a contemporary reality.

3 Non-state actors and contentious issues

This section discusses the dynamics of contemporary people-to-people relations by focusing on the four major non-state actors as variables or determinants defining the emerging or recurring issues or themes: (i) migrant labor, (ii) mass media, (iii) NGOs and civil society, and (iv) the Anwar factor. People-to-people exchanges have been a norm in all bilateral relations. Although people-to-people ties may have existed before official relations, it is the diplomatic dimension that makes the continuation of the former possible by 'opening up' the national borders for cross-border movements.

People-to-people relations constitute an important element in foreign policy and diplomacy such that conceptually both compartmentalization and isolation are virtually impossible. In the case of Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations, the people-to-people factor merits attention as public diplomacy itself alongside the mass media and other elements. The concept of public diplomacy in the context of Malaysia–

Indonesia bilateral relations is, arguably, more dynamic and functional. Democratization in Indonesia whereby the mass of the people-to-people exchanges originate has made bilateral relations more erratic, and thus less predictable and vulnerable to the pressures from non-state actors.

Indonesian migrant labor is a thorny issue in contemporary Malaysia–Indonesia relations ('Their suffering is etched on our faces', 2007). The background of the issue was the rapid socioeconomic transformation of Malaysia during the 1980s and 1990s. Market demand for foreign labor produced a significant rise in the number of Indonesian migrants. The willingness to work long hours with low wages has made Indonesian male workers the most sought after in the booming construction and plantation sectors of the Malaysian economy.

Meanwhile, young Indonesian women were recruited as domestic maids, restaurant workers, and factory operators. This subsequently led to a relatively unrestricted policy toward Indonesian immigration. Unlike in the past, socioeconomic factors now dominate and influence people-to-people relations between Malaysia and Indonesia. Such a relationship has been symbiotic and mutually beneficial because the socioeconomic demands stemming from Malaysia's rapid development has been fulfilled by the contribution of the Indonesia migrant labor (*tenaga kerja Indonesia*, TKI).

On the other hand, there have also been multiplier effects of socioeconomic problems caused by the concentration of migrants in squatter enclaves and slums, the depression of local wages, the rise of crime rates, etc. (Kassim, 1987). Ironically, these factors have remained strictly Malaysian domestic problems, and thus have not affected adversely to bilateral ties. Instead, it is the Malaysian response to the problems and a host of other issues that have become the flashpoint and justification for Indonesian reprisals. This attitude is explained by the perception that the response is deemed unjust and unfair, and thus an over-reaction by the Malaysians. Instead, the Indonesians tend to see themselves as being victimized and persecuted; and easy targets for 'scapegoating' since they constitute the largest foreign worker population in Malaysia. As such, their compatriots back home regard violent outbursts of protests as legitimate expressions of rallying to the defence of the Indonesian migrant workers.

Protests by Indonesian politicians, media, NGOs, and the general public in response to harsh (and often perceived as unfair) laws enacted

by Kuala Lumpur against illegal migrant labor regularly threaten to plunge bilateral relations into a downward spiral of hostility and diplomatic sabre rattling. Tensions have been heightened by the publicity of the illegal Indonesian migrant worker problem highlighted in the Malaysian media and statements from certain government officials ('Foreign Workers Agreement', 2008).

In fact, Malaysian public opinion and policies concerning immigration have undergone a shift in emphasis and rhetoric. There have been increased roundups against illegal migrants for the past half a decade which only ceased in 2010. The current approach is to grant an amnesty and register the illegal migrants in a bid to reduce their number. On the other hand, there are those who adopt a more consistent attitude – the migrant labor are seen as an integral part of mainstream society, rather than on the margins or periphery or the 'other' underclass.

The presence of illegal migrant workers in Malaysia has also been exacerbated by foreigners from other countries of the Southeast Asian (particularly from Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam) and South Asia regions (Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, etc.).[6] However, due to the overwhelming numbers and status as the number one country of origin for illegal migrants, Indonesia has loomed in the public psyche and national consciousness. The 'usual' estimate is some one million undocumented immigrants from Indonesia. Nonetheless, given that the figure of three million representing the total number of illegal immigrants was quoted in connection with the Malaysian government's latest initiative to (re)register all foreign workers, 'one million' may be no longer accurate.

Unless the root causes of this problem are acknowledged and addressed coherently by both parties, given the vast number of Indonesian laborers in Malaysia and the crucial role they play in the Malaysian economy, the issue of illegal Indonesian migrant labor

6 As with the Indonesians, the other migrant workers have also been known to attract negative publicity. Fights within each migrant labor community do occur from time to time alongside cases that assume an inter-ethnic dimension (see 'Bangladeshi worker who made a pass at Vietnamese beaten up, igniting riot,' *The Star*, 9 June 2011). There have also been rioting by the migrant labor as employees in protest against shabby wages and working conditions. In 2010, a large number of Bangladeshi, India, Myanmar, and Nepali workers of an electronic factory staged a protest following the death of a fellow worker (see '5,000 riot over death of worker', *Asia One*, 16 August 2010).

continues to be the most contentious issue and a hindrance to improvement in bilateral ties. Abuse of maids by Malaysian employers constitutes one of the strongest emotive flash-points in Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations with the capacity to ignite simmering tensions between the countries.

This trend contrasts with the first decades after independence when the Malaysian government selectively welcomed Indonesian immigrants, namely talented Indonesian teachers and lecturers. Quite a number of doctors were also hired to work in hospitals, particularly in rural areas. Unlike the present scenario, Malaysians, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, used to interact with a different 'class' of Indonesians in Malaysia – many of whom were perceived as more 'cultured' and educated (Des Alwi, personal communication, March 17, 2008). Malaysian perception of Indonesia at the micro-level, among the general population unencumbered by official courtesy and diplomatic ritual, is generally colored by the level of interaction with Indonesian migrant workers, particularly household maids and construction workers. It is important to recognize that Indonesian migrant workers fill the 3-D (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) jobs that are on the whole shunned by locals with name calling such as *Indon busuk* (smelly Indons) (Sofjan, personal communication, March 5, 2009).

In addition, Malaysian perception of Indonesians has been further tainted by revelations of the number of Indonesian women who abuse their tourist visas to work as sex workers in Malaysia, perhaps demonstrating that 'class' and not just ethnicity or nationalism in itself, is also a determinative factor in contributing to frictions at the people-to-people level ('Class clash', 2007). Unlike in the past, Indonesia today is not known for exporting engineers and doctors to Malaysia, although there are such professionals working in Malaysia and other parts of the world (Dewi Fortuna, March 6, 2009). Thus, the 'superior–subordinate' and 'employer–employee' relationships have tended to aggravate the feelings of negativity among Malaysians toward Indonesians ('Common Language', 2006).

Issues of 'problematic' domestic helpers have dominated the conversations among the employers – who are mostly drawn from the professional (white-collar) ranks – and their relatives, friends, and colleagues. The anecdotes ranged from the use of black magic by maids to 'control' and 'manipulate' their employers in cases of theft ('Sri Ayati jailed in

Singapore', 2010). Problems of crime committed by Indonesians from time to time such as robbery have not helped to reduce ill-feelings and a sense of distrust. Unfortunately, there are cases where Malaysians cannot or do not care to distinguish between Indonesian tourists or students, for example, and the migrant workers. This relationship invariably has taken on a hierarchical turn (Choirie, personal communication, March 18, 2009).

As mentioned, one of the foremost sources of controversy in Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations is the issue of Indonesian maids or domestic help in Malaysia. It could be said that this issue singularly typifies the grievances between Indonesia and Malaysia over the issue of immigrant workers, and is a potent factor in reinforcing the negative images of each nation in their respective mass media. Indonesian household maids are part of the broader category of Indonesian migrant labors, and although distinguishable as a subset, are clearly not separable.

As such, the general analysis, which focuses on the broader issue of TKI, equally considers the specific issue of domestic maids. It cannot be denied that a sense of insecurity plays a role – at least subconsciously – in motivating the behavior of Malaysians toward Indonesians as foreigners. Both the Malaysian employers and the Indonesian domestic workers, particularly those hired as live-in maids, are dependent on one another: The former for the labor such as taking care of young children, or elderly and infirm parents, cooking and performing other domestic chores, and the latter for the wages to support their families in their country.

It is clear both parties are engaged in a 'superior–inferior/subordinate' relationship, but for live-in maids there is the added tension of living with their employer under the same roof. There is no clear demarcation between the work space and the private space where the maid can engage in 'normal' activities after working hours. Similarly, on the part of the Malaysian employers, particularly career-oriented women, their personal space is also being encroached upon. The situation is ripe, therefore, with the Malaysian employer and the Indonesian employee invading upon each other's personal space, for conflict.

While many do not envy the hard work of the domestic maid, many of the Malaysian employers often feel a sense of helplessness, frustration, and even unhappiness to be so dependent on their 'uneducated', 'lazy',

and 'dishonest' Indonesian employees to mind their young children or elderly parents and to look after their home. In short, the feeling of vulnerability and dependency felt by many Malaysian employers, particularly professional women, toward their maids are often manifested in their perceived demanding and sometimes aggressive behavior that has occasionally even led to physical abuse.[7] Furthermore, many employers feel victimized and let down by their maids – they are afraid and helpless of what is perceived to be latent hostility toward them that can be triggered unsuspectingly either overtly or covertly. There have been recurring cases of maids who were thought to be reliable but betrayed their employer's trust by committing theft or worse, murder ('Maid for murder', 2010).[8]

It is arguable that the asymmetrical relationship between employer and employee heightens the isolation of these existential categories in the context of the individual perspective, as opposed to the communal or political perspective. The concept of *serumpun* losses its significance at the individual level in this relationship and goes some way to explain the paradoxical or ambivalent attitude of Malaysians toward Indonesians.

The root problem is perhaps one of the individual self-interpretations of the situation by the Malaysian employers and the Indonesian employees, a foreigner whose country of origin is in proximity with Malaysia and whose motives as the big neighbor are deemed questionable. The highly visible presence of Indonesians in menial positions undoubtedly contributes to the negative perception that many Malaysian employers have toward their Indonesian employees. As long as the situation remains, with Malaysians hiring Indonesians in low status work, there will be instances of conflict and the respective governments will endeavor to use it to their own advantage, and the mass media will be happy to sensationalize isolated events as reflecting further breakdown in bilateral relations.

With the downfall of Suharto during the 1997–98 East-Asian financial crisis and the galvanizing of the *reformasi* movement that represented a

7 This conclusion was derived from a series of personal communications and discussions held with various parties in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as the author's personal conversations with professional women.

8 The first author had a personal communication with Prof. Badariah Sahamid, a judicial commissioner and former dean of the Law Faculty, University of Malaya whose elder sister was brutally murdered by her Indonesian maid who later disappeared. Dr Badariah's letters to a major English daily *New Straits Times* regarding the gruesome murder of her sister were never published but it was picked up by *Malaysiakini* (a popular alternative media).

concrete maturation of political consciousness, Indonesia experienced a rapid transition toward greater democratization. One conspicuous example is press freedom and the assertive role of the mass media in tugging at the emotional heartstrings of the people by speaking up on sensitive issues.

In contrast to the strict control over press freedom under Suharto's authoritarian regime, the post-*reformasi* period experienced a surge in the number of print and electronic media. Of these, there were in circulation around more than 170 mainstream newspapers and tabloids. Furthermore, there was the presence of 17 national televisions as well as 6 radio stations operated by the Republik Radio Indonesia (RRI) (WARC, 2009).[9]

Periods of suppression had produced the yearning for freedom of expression, and an open mass media is but a natural outlet to articulate the aspirations of the Indonesian people as in any society. It can be asserted that the huge increase in mass media in post-*reformasi* Indonesia suggests that the greater freedom of expression was wholly embraced by the Indonesian public. However, the loosening of political restrictions on the media has also resulted in the rise of what is sometimes referred to as 'yellow journalism', which, in an effort to boost sales, tends to favor sensationalism over balanced reporting, including sometimes pandering to and stoking nationalistic sentiments (T. Sutrisno, personal communication, March 19, 2008).

At the Consultative Meeting of the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) Commission 1 with the press community in March 2002, a number of politicians from various factions opined that the press was erratic, invades privacy, spreads pornography, and fans conflict. One DPR member went as far as to say, 'Before Indonesian society was oppressed by the military, now they are oppressed by the press' (Inside Indonesia, 2002). Syamsul Muarif, the State Minister for Information and Communication (2000–2004), categorized what he termed as the 'five diseases' of the press as (i) pornography, (ii) character assassination, (iii)

9 During the *Orde Baru* period under Suharto, some 60 newspapers were banned. By the 1990s, however, there were approximately 700 private radio stations, 5 national private television channels, in addition to RRI (*Radio Republik Indonesia*) and TVRI (*Televisi Republik Indonesia*). Slightly less than two decades later (at the end of 2007), there were thousands of print-media, such as newspapers, magazines, tabloids, journals, and bulletins (mostly in Java); and more than 1820 radio stations broadcasting and more than 30 local television channels.

false and provocative news, (iv) misleading advertisements, and (v) unprofessional journalists, or *bodrex*. Yet, in October 1999, the then Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid stressed that 'the information industry' was a community affair and no longer the business of government.

It is the contention of this paper that an unfettered media with sensationalistic reporting adversely impacts on Malaysia–Indonesia relations. Issues relating to bilateral relations that were once a political taboo under the Suharto era could now be openly discussed in the Indonesian mass media with 'impunity'. Many Malaysians consider that certain issues including the TKI, territorial disputes, cultural and heritage property rights have been grossly exaggerated by the Indonesian media. Certainly, the nationalistic style of reporting has stoked anti-Malaysian feelings amongst the Indonesians. For example, one contentious issue of national identity concerns elements of Indonesian culture such as the folk song *Rasa Sayang*, the *barongan*, and *pendet* dance, which the Indonesian media alleged to have been hijacked and falsely claimed as Malaysian ('Quarrel turns to music', 2008).

Border sovereignty and territorial disputes such as the competing claims over the islands of Ligitan and Sipadan off the Sabah/Kalimantan coast is also a part of the dominant discourse. Especially explosive was the claim of ownership of Ambalat that led to the recruitment of *Konfrantasi* volunteer militias across Indonesia, reminiscent of the 1963 *Ganyang Malaysia* campaign (Daud, 2008). Particularly provocative has been the mass media coverage of the treatment of Indonesian migrant labor in Malaysia and especially cases of ill treatment of Indonesian maids by their Malaysian employers. The somewhat sensational depiction of Malaysian employers meting out inhumane treatment to their Indonesian employees gave the impression that by extension the broader Malaysian society including organizations such as the volunteer force of *Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia* (RELA/Malaysia People's Volunteer Corps) and *Polis DiRaja Malaysia* (Royal Malaysian Police Force) were in some way complicit ('Class clash', 2007).[10]

10 The case of a karate coach in Nilai who was kicked and punched by plainclothes police officers for being suspected to be an illegal has only reinforced the perception of the tendency to inhumanely treat Indonesians. See '4 anggota polis diarah bela diri tuduhan cederakan jurulatih karate' [4 policemen ordered to enter their defence on a charge injuring a karate coach], Utusan Malaysia [Malaysian Messenger], 13 April 2010.

There has been a general failure to respond to the claims of the Indonesian press by the Malaysian government. This inaction has sometimes been perceived as a lack of concern about the issue and nothing has been done to quell the anxieties of the Indonesian public, which leads to another source of friction affecting people-to-people relations in both countries. This may be because the Malaysian government considers the issues so sensitive that the more diplomatic policy was not to respond publicly.

The case of the former Malaysian Minister of Information, Zainuddin Maidin, rebuking the Indonesian press for its aggressive focus on such emotive and contentious issues has only served to raise the diplomatic temperature between both countries ('Press freedom', 2008). The combative stance adopted by the Indonesian media reflected in a number of angry headlines of the *Jakarta Post* have provoked massive rallies and demonstrations in Indonesia, including one in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta, and led to further sour notes in relations ('RI-Malaysia group', 2008).

A perception of the uncompromising attitude of the Indonesian mass media (mainstream or otherwise) could also be had in the case of the Manohara (Odelia) Pinot in 2009. Manohara is an Indonesian beauty who was married to a member of the Kelantan royalty. She became a cause célèbre for the Indonesian mass media which were swift in forefronting her claims of sexual abuse and forced confinement at the hands of her former husband ('Government must take action', 2009). Many Malaysians, however, have been skeptical about Manohara's allegations even as the issue made headlines in the local press ('Daisy's fit of fury', 2009).

The Malaysian media is equally guilty of generating ill feeling in its portrayal of negative stereotypes of Indonesian workers in Malaysia. Although the temptation to encourage negative aspects of nationalism is confined to the Indonesian media, the Malaysian press can be quite eager to focus on cases of misbehavior among the migrant worker population. However, it must be asserted that the Malaysian media have been generally more restrained and had fewer tendencies to sensationalize such incidents and has more readily offered a balanced coverage on the mistreatment of Indonesian workers ('Bondage: a living hell', 2008; *The Sun*, 2008; 'PM: close ties', 2008).

This may be because the Malaysian mainstream media feel more pressured to toe the official line and take heed from government sources not to exacerbate the already strained Malaysia–Indonesia relations. Indeed, there have been instances of crimes committed by Indonesian maids against their Malaysian employers that went unreported in the Malaysian media and which when taken to court were conducted in a 'hush–hush' manner without any media coverage. It has been said that the tacit official line within the government is to be sensitive to the feelings of the Indonesians (*jaga hati*).

And hence, the Malaysian mainstream media has been intentionally sober and restrained relative to their Indonesian counterpart, thus making the situation analogous to an asymmetrical conflict in warfare where there is an imbalance in capabilities and military power. However, the situation is more or less 'equalized' in cyberspace where both sides do engage in the 'no holds barred' clashes, which sometimes tantamount to incitement of war. Indonesian blogs are known for their incendiary language and are unabashedly anti-Malaysia as can be seen in blogs like 'I Hate Malay' [http://ihatemalay.blogspot.com] and 'Anti-Malaysia' [http://antimalaysiafc.blogspot.com/].

In the final analysis, one has to be cautious when making comparison and contrast between Malaysian and Indonesian mass media. While the Malaysian 'system' allows for a parallel space to exist between the mainstream and alternative ('subaltern') mass media, there are obvious constraints on the latter such that official intrusion by government institutional agents such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) that regulates the cyberspace industry and stakeholders occurs periodically. Since there is simultaneous provision of services by the mainstream mass media (MSM) – that is, since the contents exist in both print and multimedia – exertion of political control on one inevitably affects the other.

Such regulatory inhibitions and political pressures on the Malaysian MSM no longer characterize Indonesian democracy. But it would be inaccurate to infer that the mass media in Indonesia now assumes the mantle of the Fourth Estate like their counterparts in liberal democracies. On the contrary, it would probably require a more drastic shift in political culture and attitude on the part of both state and society to realize the situation. In other words, not only must the mass media self-understand its role as a watchdog, but also just as crucially, the

government and people must also encourage and contribute toward such an environment of 'check and balance'. As such, it can be argued that the state of the Indonesian mass media represents a transition to the Fourth Estate, i.e. occupying a space between compliance and pro-activism.

In general, it can be asserted that the leaderships of Malaysia and Indonesia under the more *letoi* or soft leadership of Badawi and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono compared with the Mahathir–Suharto era had led to a more open press with few(er) restrictions but which in turn has created its own challenges and not least to further complicate the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Although attention has been given to employer–employee relationship and the intermediary role played by the mass media, it is important to recognize that NGOs are also a component in this paradigm. Most NGOs, such as the Indonesian Association for Migrant Workers Sovereignty or Migrant CARE, are openly concerned of the plight of the migrant workers, particularly in the case the domestic workers or maids, whereas local agencies, such as *Persatuan Agensi Pembantu Rumah Asing Malaysia* (PAPA/Foreign Maid Agencies Association Malaysia), strive to accommodate perspectives from both employer and employee, although it is a delicate act. According to Raja Zulkepley Dahalan, the then President of PAPA, by April 2007, some 310,601 workers possessed the required legal documents to work. PAPA has somewhat controversially classified Indonesian workers from grades A to E (Dahalan, personal communication, October 24, 2008).

PAPA has argued that almost all of the grades A to D workers prefer to work in other countries compared with Malaysia. These workers have good qualifications and skills, whereas grade E workers are barely literate or have a poor educational background, often finishing at the secondary level at most. Maids generally fall into grade E, and the disparity in social background with their employers has been inferred as contributing to friction, conflict, and misunderstanding. According to Dahalan (personal communication, October 24, 2008), the attitude of the maids toward their employers runs along ethnic lines, which borders on a stereotypical basis – Malay employers are said to be bad paymasters, whereas Chinese employers are supposed to be abusive.

NGOs have asserted that, in addition to physical abuse, maids have also unlawfully had their due wages withheld. Such ill-treatment violates

the fundamental rights of a human being, and is felt not only individually but also communally and can only entrench prejudice among Indonesians at Malaysian employers. Ultimately, this hurts the interests of the employers too, and PAPA believed that the maid industry has suffered a 60% loss in numbers which is why intermittent debates have erupted and given coverage in the mainstream media on sourcing for alternative maids ('Ng: time not right', 2007).

More directly, Migrant CARE has vehemently criticized the governments of both countries for neglecting or failing to protect workers from all forms of mistreatment. The organization stridently opposes strict enforcement of immigration regulations on illegal Indonesian workers ('Malaysia Akan Kembali', 2008). Any action on the part of the Malaysian authorities to detect, detain, and forcibly deport people without proper documentation is perceived as suppressing the fundamental rights of the workers. Wahyu Susilo, Chair of Migrant CARE, told the Jakarta Post ('SBY wants legal protection for migrant workers', 2008) that Malaysian officials must put into practice the agreement between the Badawi and Yudhoyono administrations to enhance protection for Indonesian migrant workers. He urged that the Malaysian government 'must solve the issues of passports and the frequent misconduct of its police and RELA' ('RI, Malaysia to accelerate implementation' 2008; *Jakarta Post* 2008). Hence, as an NGO, migrant CARE has adopted a rather abrasive stance toward the host government vis-à-vis the immigrant workers, which many may feel is inappropriate.

NGIs are perhaps better positioned to play the role of 'intercessor' or 'mediator', as they are usually drawn from non-partisan circles and at times their standing is enhanced given the historic role they have played in bilateral relations. Since Malaysian independence, there has been close rapport among students, teachers, and scholars from both countries that shared common intellectual training and inspiration derived from studies in the Middle East, such as those from the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Notable Malays who have studied in Indonesia include Aishah Ghani, the former Minister of Community Welfare which is the predecessor of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, and the late Mohammad Rahmat, the former Minister of Information who also served as ambassador to Jakarta.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Mahathir was able to cultivate more cordial political ties with Indonesia during his premiership could be

attributed to the personal insights and advice of Mohd Noor Yusof (Noor Azam),[11] his former political secretary who had also studied at Universitas Indonesia in early 1970s (Yusof, 2009). He could well be seen as the 'quintessential Indonesiaphile' who is nostalgic and unabashed about the *serumpun* ties that bind the two countries. In addition, Indonesian intellectuals, scholars, and famous religious personalities were highly sought after in post-independence Malaysia to fill in the gaps at newly established institutions of higher learning (Yusof, 2009). Former Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Selangor, Khir Toyo is another proponent of *serumpun*. He has gone further and called for *serumpun* to be made the basis of regional integration and spirit in relation to ASEAN (Khir Toyo, 2008). A prominent NGI from Indonesia was Des Alwi who was instrumental in ending the *Konfrontasi* and a key negotiator and plenipotentiary-at-large for the Indonesian government. His empathy with the Malaysian perspective was such that he was subsequently treated with much suspicion and effectively 'exiled' for a while before being politically rehabilitated.

Despite the challenges, intellectual exchanges through educational and academic institutions have not become completely extinct. NGOs involved in academia, such as the Malaysian Historical Society or *Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia*, have maintained excellent ties with its Indonesian counterpart, *Masyarakat Sejarahwan Indonesia* (Jaafar, personal communication, March 18, 2009). Of utmost concern, however, is that the generational change has resulted in a cooling of relations at the people-to-people level, as perhaps the original foundation for the special relationship between the two nations seems less significant to a younger generation with different aspirations. Certain influential political and business figures had played an important role in bringing the two countries closer in the early years after independence and who have since withdrawn from the public arena do not appear to have been replaced by leaders with the same concerns (Des Alwi, personal communication, March 17, 2008).[12]

11 Yusof, Mohd Noor was former Chief Editor and Deputy Director-General of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP/'Language and Heritage Hall'), the national centre for the Malay language and literature.

12 The late Des Alwi passionately argued that the younger generation from both Malaysia and Indonesia are *bodoh sejarah* (ignorant of history/history-blind) and not interested to learn from one another.

In summary, NGOs – particularly from Indonesia – are playing a more proactive and even aggressive role in influencing bilateral relations on behalf of their 'constituents'. Democratization in Indonesia has simply opened up more space for NGOs to expand their influence into diplomacy and across borders. Their role as foreign policy 'entrepreneurs' and 'manufacturers' of bilateral issues cannot be underestimated in the post-Mahathir/post-Suharto period.

Arguably the most popular of the contemporary NGIs is Anwar Ibrahim who figures prominently in Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations, particularly as one who exemplify the people-to-people ties before the 1980s. The stature and popularity that he had gained as an intellectual and scholar were mainly through his leadership of the Islamic Youth Movement Malaysia (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*, the ABIM). Starting in the late 1960s under Suharto, Anwar became active in building a dynamic network of contacts with many young Indonesians. These intellectuals either had returned from or went on to pursue their studies at influential religious institutions in countries such as Egypt and Pakistan as well as Malaysia.

This factor is what bound the Islamic *dakwah* (revivalist) movements in Malaysia including ABIM with their Indonesian counterparts – therein the contribution to the people-to-people dimension in bilateral relations during the Islamic resurgence on the 1970s and early 1980s (Nagata, 1980). However, throughout much of his political career beginning from when he was co-opted into United Malays National Organization (UMNO) by Mahathir, Anwar had appeared to shift toward the 'centre ground' of mainstream Malaysian politics, perhaps conscious that this was incumbent of him in the ascendancy to power.

Indeed, developments in Anwar's worldview and philosophy as manifested in his politics also had an impact on his relation with the Indonesians. In line with his ideological maturity and position as a top politician, he seemed to have concomitantly broadened the base of his network and contacts beyond the Islamic intelligentsia. Such cross-border affinity was to prove pivotal in lending inspiration and even – to a certain extent – legitimacy to the *reformasi* movement in Malaysia of which Anwar was to become its political symbol and focal figure (Yusof, 2009).

Although it cannot be said that Anwar made a decisive break with his past image as an Islamist and later when in UMNO as a nationalist, the *reformasi* political uprising of 1998 afforded Anwar the opportunity to

(finally and openly) align his broadened international outlook with his domestic politics. Such a 'rebranding' of his political moorings marked a significant move away from his activist days with ABIM where Islam as a total system of life has been the critical core component in nation-building (Lee, 1988).

Since post-1997, Anwar has also fostered good relations with a number of Indonesian national and grassroots level leaders and became a close friend of Adnan Buyung Nasution, one of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's chief advisors, both in his personal and political capacity. As a charismatic leader, Anwar could still tap into his impressive political experience and networking. Anwar's standing continues undiminished despite being a *persona non grata* with UMNO.

Anwar's political appeal and new-found affinity in Indonesia through the platform of the People's Justice Party or *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR) has also resulted in cooperation with Indonesian counterparts such as *Parti Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS). In the 2008 Malaysian general elections, PKR was much assisted by PKS, as well as at least one other Indonesian political party (Pers. Comm., 2008). In fact, some Indonesian leaders suggest that the elections were effectively 'won' by the Anwar-led Opposition, with its three parties managing to win 82 seats against the 140 seats secured by the 14 parties that comprise the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (BN) or National Front. While Anwar is perceived positively in Indonesia as an icon for democratization and reformation, his political arch-nemesis Najib Razak has been under intense scrutiny and faces a greater challenge in building good relations with Indonesia.[13]

Anwar's fall from grace was also seen by some as one of the factors that led to the deterioration in Indonesia–Malaysian ties (Sudjatmiko, 2008). The intense psychological and emotional effects among the Indonesians should not be underestimated, but this phenomenon precisely taps into the perspective that the Malaysian leaders remained elitist and arrogant as ever. In contrast, since the *reformasi*, Indonesia has been experiencing rapid democratization and decentralization of institutional control in managing public opinion and dissent. Ironically, the leader who possessed the stature to cement relations as well as inspire

13 Based on interviews conducted both in Malaysia and in Indonesia, Anwar is perceived as someone who is sympathetic toward many of the causes and issues raised by Indonesians, particularly those working in Malaysia. The government's plan to introduce caning of illegal immigrants was criticized by Anwar in early 2008.

people-to-people ties was denigrated in his own circles for alleged misconduct. Anwar is seen by the Indonesian masses as a Malaysian leader who can restore and improve people-to-people ties between the two countries – someone who could be relied on to listen sympathetically and empathize with the Indonesian viewpoint.

Anwar's network of contacts and influence in Indonesia continues to play a significant role in Malaysia–Indonesia relations. To some Malaysian respondents including those serving and working in Indonesia, Anwar is viewed as an opportunist who is even willing to undermine the interests of his own country in a desperate attempt to win the hearts and minds of Indonesians (Kompas, 2008). One example often cited is his advocacy for policies to ensure better treatment and welfare of Indonesian migrant labor in Malaysia, although opponents suggest that Anwar might be quick to reconsider these ideas if he ever succeeds in being elected Prime Minister.

In fact, it has even been suggested that Anwar's influence with Indonesians may even be waning slightly, having failed to deliver on his promise to form a government in September 2008 (Malaysian diplomat, 2009). Whether Anwar will remain a factor in Malaysia's future relations with Indonesia depends largely on his political fortunes and performance in the next general election due by 2013.

Recent controversies in bilateral relations have resurfaced suspicions of Anwar's supposed 'complicity' in provoking tensions despite their apparent unrelatedness. The capture and detention of seven Malaysian fishermen by Indonesian maritime and fisheries official on 13 August 2010 had an apparent retaliation with the capture of three Indonesian maritime officials by their Malaysian counterparts on the same day ('Recent protests', 2010). Both sides accused each other of encroaching on territorial waters. This event alongside the (recurrent) news of (horrific) maid abuse by her so-called employers in the state of Penang (in the northwestern part of Malaysia) sent hordes of Indonesian protesters on a psychological 'war-footing', which was sustained in the succeeding months ('Malaysia newspaper blasts Indonesian fisheries', 2010).

An incident that took place in Penang where five Indonesian fishermen were detained in September 2010 by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MME) also contributed to continuing friction ('Indonesian fishermen', 2010). The disputes and negative reporting has also exposed the Malaysian government to criticisms by the opposition.

Indeed, as the current developments in bilateral relations unfold, Anwar will be accused by his political foes of masterminding and fomenting anti-Malaysian feelings, which could – if spiral out of control – result in a disunited ASEAN.

While these accusations have a ring of conspiracy theory, and cannot be easily substantiated, Anwar has certainly leveraged on his reputation as a 'friend of Indonesia' by lambasting the Malaysian mass media. The irony is that the highly regulated Malaysian mass media are taken to task for sensationalizing and therefore, provoking the tensions in the first place. This has irked the ruling coalition and prompted a strong outcry from, for example, the Deputy Prime Minister who has accused Anwar and his daughter, Nurul Izzah, for promoting lies about Malaysia abroad ('DPM: Anwar tarnishing country's image', 2010).

Nurul Izzah – dubbed *Puteri Reformasi* – for her active role and involvement in that counter-establishment movement after her father's expulsion and arrest is also a politician and a Member of Parliament. Seen as a rising star in PKR, she is also popularly perceived in Indonesia, and is set to sustain and develop Anwar's Indonesian links in the future. There were positive remarks about Nurul Izzah as an icon of democracy and *reformasi* when compared with Megawati and Suharto's daughter (Haddad, personal communication, March 18, 2008).

In summary, on the Malaysian side, the Anwar factor is a specter that lurks behind every possible negative development in bilateral relations. His popularity makes him to be a favorite bogeyman of the Malaysian government; and his controversial statements including the more recent one on batik serve only to justify and confirm suspicions against him ('Terengganu MB', 2011).

4 Conclusions

Malaysia's relations with its most important neighbor, the Republic of Indonesia, makes an interesting case study of how the international affairs/relations of the region have undergone major transformation with the emergence and assertiveness of either new or newly transformed actors. As the title of the paper implicitly suggests, managing Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations will not be the same as in the pre-*Reformasi* era. In other words, managing bilateral relations will become increasingly problematic due to the emergence of new non-state actors, particularly in the context of democratization vis-à-vis Indonesia.

As has been argued, this trend has contributed to the boundaries between domestic and bilateral affairs inseparable to the point of being indistinct. Likewise, it would be virtually implausible (and undesirable) for the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia, i.e. the diplomatic or state actors to (continue to) manipulate bilateral relations according to institutional norms and techniques oblivious to 'outsider' influence. In other words, bilateral relations can no longer be regarded as 'hermetically sealed' – as under strict laboratory conditions – to avoid external dynamics that would disrupt normalcy of the processes.

After all, democratization in the domestic front would inevitably extend to democratization in the bilateral front, especially if the two countries share a special relationship. Thus, whilst conventional or familiar mechanisms such as the EPG and Joint Commissions would continue to play an vital role in mitigating any diplomatic fallout, resolving issues and building/maintaining bilateral good-will, and even 're-setting' relations, non-state actors are keen to be recognized as stakeholders in foreign policy.

And in this, the non-state actors principally the NGOs as well as NGIs, mass media, migrant labor and the Anwar factor assume critical and pivotal roles in either fostering or worsening bilateral ties. These factors have significantly posed a challenge to both governments in managing bilateral relations. This is why people-to-people or public diplomacy (including sports, cultural, business energy, communications technology, etc.) is rapidly becoming an integral part of government-to-government diplomacy. The Indonesian mass media are playing a critical role in agenda-setting within the overall policy-making process – urging their government to take a stronger stance on migrant labor issues.

Prominent Malaysian NGIs are known to be enthusiastic proponents of the serumpun 'concept' and therefore will be known to reassure their Indonesian counterparts of their country's historic place in bilateral relations. Hence, the implication is that managing bilateral relations (both in relation to Malaysia and Indonesia as well as generally) will be more complex and complicated, and 'chaotic', i.e. not so 'orderly' (analogous to the concept of the free market).

This means that although *serumpun* remains 'ingrained' in the psyche of both countries and 'encoded' in the politics and socialization of bilateral relations (continuity), non-institutional actors outside the

conventional confines or domain of diplomacy threaten to undermine such a fabric (discontinuity). These are the forces to be reckoned with and which cannot be easily managed or even controlled by the governments concerned.

In the case of post-Mahathir Malaysia and post-Suharto Indonesia, the rapid and faster pace enjoyed by the latter in political liberalization and democratization would necessarily have an impact on the dynamics of people-to-people relations. Another emergent trend, which is both the cause and effect of a more problematic people-to-people relation, has been the increasing ambiguity between domestic and foreign issues. The paradox is of course the greater their 'convergence' and the mutual or reciprocal impact on both countries, the greater the 'divergence' in outlook and perception, which contributes to the bilateral tension and friction (as illustrated by the issue of the Indonesian domestic helpers).

Again this illustrates the asymmetrical political developments in both Malaysia and Indonesia. This means that while there is increasing blurriness between domestic and foreign issues in bilateral relations, intriguingly enough, the underlying political developments vis-à-vis democratization has encouraged the attitude and response by both countries to diverge. In other words, the seeming amorphous boundaries between what are considered 'domestic' and 'foreign' issues have masked the dissonant psyches and indeed experiences of both peoples.

Whilst the *abang–adik* relationship would not be transient and may well perpetuate into the future, any deference by Malaysia toward Indonesia would be unambiguously restricted at the government-to-government level (a geo-political/geo-economic paradigm) where appropriate, and this will continue to be counter-balanced by the dynamics of people-to-people dimension (a socioeconomic paradigm).

The impressive economic strides and gains by Indonesia under the Susilo administration would definitely strengthen the country's prestige and leverage both in bilateral relations and in the context of ASEAN. It is expected that fewer Indonesian migrant workers would migrate to Malaysia in the near future seeking better job prospects and wages. However, to reinforce the point, Malaysia would continue to be heavily reliant or dependent on Indonesian migrant labor – TKI (not to mention the other countries as well) – to fill in the gaps in the construction and plantations industries, and not the least, to fulfill household needs (maids). Thus, it is not expected that the issue of migrant labor in

particular will diminish in importance or be conflated with other issues but continue to be a distinct factor in bilateral agenda. Indeed, this has become a part and parcel of Malaysia's own domestic issues and problems.

Developments in Malaysia–Indonesia bilateral relations will be decisively impacted by their economic strengths relative to each other, which (to reiterate) are mutually vested. The economic transformation of Indonesia will place the country in a less insecure position toward Malaysia, thus intensifying implicit or covert rivalry. At the same time, Indonesia's economic transformation enhances its attraction as an investment destination for Malaysia, thus strengthening economic complementarity and cooperation between the two countries. Hence, the growing economic cooperation will help in providing more scope for contention.

What is indubitably evident is that leadership alone cannot resolve bilateral frictions underpinned by centuries of socio-cultural interactions. The trend of authoritarian-style leadership is no longer in vogue. Both countries cannot ignore the role played by emerging non-state actors – both NGOs and multinational firms – in shaping bilateral relations. However, there is yet another group of non-state actors which intriguingly have not been given much publicity that is deserved in bilateral relations – the corporate sector and multinational firms. Currently, Malaysia experiences a significant deficit in bilateral investment. The presence of Malaysian business entities, including most prominently government-linked companies, in Indonesia epitomizes the mutually vested economic interests in bilateral relations.

As Malaysian business interests increases and deepens in Indonesia, there is much scope and opportunity for these business entities in influencing the outlook and orientation of Malaysia's foreign policy. Alternatively, as multinational firms, they may not be necessarily accountable to national interests alone, and are therefore free to influence bilateral relations from both sides (in their self-interests). Hence, only democratic (populist) pressure on governments would ensure that bilateral relations at both the diplomatic and people-to-people levels are at 'equilibrium' ('matched') – democratization countering the unintended effects of democratization.

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