

## **Malaysia-Australia Relations during Dr. Mahathir's Prime Ministership: A Consideration for the English School Perspective**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Australia-Malaysia political relations under the prime ministership of Dr. Mahathir had experienced a bumpy kind of relationship. During the span of 22 years of his leadership, the Australian government had found it difficult to have cordial political ties with Malaysia. Dr. Mahathir was seen to be a leader who was critical about western policies, including Australia. Their political ties between the two countries became sour when several controversies and incidents took place that had distant both countries from the close political ties in the past. As a result, only one official visit was made by Dr. Mahathir to Australia throughout his tenure as the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Interestingly, despite the bumpy political ties, other spheres of their relationship remained in-tact and unaffected. Even though the two countries had experienced ups and downs in their diplomatic relationship, it should be noted that despite the periods of strong rhetoric expressed on the Malaysian-Australian relationship, they were actually confined at the governmental level and did not affect other areas of the relationship.

Both countries kept strong economic and business ties, though both Malaysia and Australia had gone through some rough patches in their relationship. The good relationship of the two countries was well manifested in the economic field, security, education, and other spheres of the relationship. (Funston J, 1996 : pp.92-93, Mahathir Mohamad, 1997 : pp.8-9; Mahathir Mohamad, 2014).

The important questions that can be drawn out of the scenario: how was the overall relationship between the two countries prior to the administration of Dr. Mahathir? What were the issues that had made Malaysia and Australia experience a straining political relationship during Dr. Mahathir's Prime Ministership? What were the forces that had kept the ties between these two countries remained strong despite the troubling governmental relations?

In so doing, the author finds that the English School theory offers better explanation and understanding in relation to the case of Malaysia and Australia, especially during the administration of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Both countries' interaction exemplified the features of international society as argued by the English School scholars.

This paper shall discuss the early relationship between the two countries and the controversies that had shaped their relationship during Dr. Mahathir's administration. Before concluding, this paper will highlight the important tenets of the English School theory that proves to be relevant in understanding the dynamism of Malaysia-Australia relations under Dr. Mahathir's administration.

### **II. HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF MALAYSIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS**

Malaysia's formal relationship with Australia began in 1955, when a Commission (which later became Australia's High Commission to Malaysia after Malaysia gained its independence in 1957) was set up in Kuala Lumpur (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007). Interestingly, both countries have been part of each other's history for many years in many ways, even way back before Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. In the early years before Malaysia's independence, Australia played a tremendous role in its firm support of Malaysia's security. It is to be noted that security consideration was the main factor that had shaped the early Malaysia- Australia relationship.

Australian forces had fought on several occasions side by side with the Malaysian forces in the defence of the latter's freedom and independence. During World War II for example, Australian troops were closely involved in defending Malaya (1941-1942) and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak (1945). They had also provided a temporary interim military government in Sabah and Sarawak right away after the Japanese forces had surrendered to the Allied Forces during World War II (Williams B, 1992 : p.2&8).

Australia's commitment in the security of Malaysia continued during the Communist Insurgency (1948-1960), which is also known as the *Malayan Emergency*. Australia made a major contribution in dispatching troops, arms and food to Malaysia. Malaysia then was seen as "a key strategic point in the region" to

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stop the expansion of communist ideology to the region. The expansion of communism in the 1950s had alarmed Western democracies to be cautious of the threat posed by the communist China that would move southward and would bring a domino effect to the fall of South East Asian countries to embrace their ideology. Fearing that communism would eventually reach Australia, Robert Gordon Menzies, the then Prime Minister of Australia from 1949 to 1966, saw the importance of Australia's cooperation with its neighbours, especially in defending the country from external threats (Fraser M, 2001 : p. 227; Woolcott R, 2003 : pp. 54-57).

It is important to mention that in the post-World War II years, it is sometimes forgotten that Australia was closely involved in the establishment of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. As a matter of fact, Australia was the country that had supported and sponsored Malaya's application to become a member of the United Nations in 1957. Soon after independence, Australia was among the first 15 countries that had established official diplomatic relations with the Federation of Malaya and extended its recognition on the newly born country (WoolcottR : 2003; pp. 54-57).<sup>3</sup>

Australia's strong commitment to protect the sovereignty and the independence of Malaysia was again manifested during the *Confrontation* (1963-1966), the period when the Indonesian government opposed to the idea of the integration of the Malaysian Federation which include Peninsular Malaysia with Singapore and the Borneo island states of Sabah and Sarawak. With the request made by the Malaysian government, Australia dispatched its troops in 1965, joining the British, Malaysian and other Commonwealth countries to protect Malaysia from the threats posed by Indonesia (Cochrane P : 2001; p.203). In other words, it can be said that Malaysia was indeed Australia's closest friend in the region (ZainahMarshallsay, 1996 : p. 90). Security cooperation between Malaysia and Australia continued when in 1971, Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore formed a pact on military cooperation, called the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) (James Cotton & John Ravenhill, 1997 : p.5). Since then, military cooperation between the two countries continued to develop through the umbrella of the FPDA.

Not only defence cooperation, it is also important to reckon the role of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in Malaysia. The AFP had contributed greatly to the security and maintenance of order in the country through its close relationship with the Royal Malaysian Police. Its presence and cooperation in Malaysia had endured more than forty years and indeed the longest in the world (Smith, *Remarks by the Australian High Commissioner in Appreciation of the Malaysian Media*, 15 May 2014 at <http://malaysia.highcommission.gov.au/files/klpr/Speech%20%20Media%20BBQ%202014.pdf>). Opened as a liaison post in Kuala Lumpur in 1973, the AFP's first international post was meant to assist with drugs investigations in Malaysia and the region. Its role was later expanded to cooperation and collaboration in crimes related issues such as money laundering, human trafficking and terrorism. Such collaboration had enabled the Royal Malaysian Police and the AFP to share intelligence information and forged closer relationship between AFP and the Malaysian law enforcement agencies that had paved the way for the AFP network in the Asia Pacific region (AFP Celebrates 30 Years in Malaysia at <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2003/december/afp-celebrates-30-years-in-malaysia>).

Besides defence and security cooperation, both countries are also engaged in many other spheres of cooperation. One of the important aspects of the relationship is the educational links between both countries. It is necessary to mention that educational linkages share a long history of cooperation (Williams B, 1992 : 13). One of the success stories has been the Colombo Plan<sup>4</sup>, from which many Malaysians secured scholarships to study in Australian institutions of higher learning. Indeed, the Colombo Plan was a clear manifestation of Australia's strong educational commitment and support to Malaysia and the region in general. As a result, many Australian-educated Malaysians were heavily represented in politics, economics, academia and other fields in Malaysia. In short, it can be said that for many years, Malaysia and Australia had enjoyed close and warm relationship.

The importance of economic engagement had brought the two countries even closer. The world is economically interdependent and trade is an important part of most domestic economies. Malaysia and Australia were no exceptions. On the economic side of the relationship, both countries were indeed important economic partners. Both Malaysia and Australia have benefited greatly in the comparative advantages offered by one another. However, things began to change direction when Dr. Mahathir came into power and became the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. Both countries' political relationship entered a stormy period as their ties were challenged by several issues and controversies. At times the Malaysian government was offended by remarks made by Australian Heads of Government. There were also times when Malaysians were offended by the

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<sup>3</sup>Australia played an instrumental role in the Federation of Malaya's independence. Many Australians were involved in the early years of the nation's independence. For instance, Sir William Mc Kell, the former Australian Governor General, was involved in the drafting of the Malayan Constitution (The Reid Commission). Meanwhile, the first governor of the Central Bank of Malaya was also an Australian, Tan Sri William Wilcock.

<sup>4</sup>The *Colombo Plan* was a Plan for Cooperative Economic Development of South and South-East Asia. In Australia, the Colombo Plan is best remembered as an educational scheme that provided scholarships to students from Malaysia and other Asian countries to study or train in selected universities and institutions in Australia. For further information on the Colombo Plan.

Australian media that portrayed negative image of the country. The following sub-section shall discuss the controversies that had soured the political ties between the two countries.

### **III. THE BUMPY YEARS OF POLITICAL TIES**

Under Dr. Mahathir's leadership, the two countries' relations had gone through some rough patches. The souring of relationship can be traced back in major events that had taken place while Dr. Mahathir was in his capacity as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. At times Malaysians were offended by remarks made by the Australian Heads of Government, as well as press criticisms and the negative images being portrayed by Australian-produced television programmes about Malaysia. These sensitivities have caused disruptions in Australia- Malaysia relations that had 'distance' these two countries "apart and away from the easy cooperativeness of the past" (Crouch : 1994, p.206).

Scholars and analysts have attempted to explain and describe this troubled relationship by giving cultural differences (Camilleri R, 2001), style of leadership (Snyder C A, 2006) or even social reality (Shamsul AB, 1996) as the main reasons behind the 'problematic' relations between these two countries. As a matter of fact, Dr. Mahathir has often been very critical of Western policies and ideas. The introduction of *Look East Policy* in the 1980s for instance was a model championed by Dr. Mahathir to encourage Malaysians to learn, appreciate and emulate the economic successes of Japan and South Korea, while trying to avoid from relying so much on the West. In other words, it is a move to inculcate Japanese and South Korean work ethics as well as managerial system so as to improve the Malaysian's work performance and productivity (Lim Hua Sing, 1984 : p. 231). This in one way or another had affected Malaysia's relationship with Australia. Australia is seen as being part of the Western world.

This sub-section shall highlight five prominent events that had taken place that actually strained the relationship between the two countries while Dr. Mahathir was in his capacity as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. These include the execution of two Australian citizens, Barlow and Chambers who were found guilty for drug trafficking, the screening of the Embassy drama and Turtle Beach films, the 'Recalcitrant' episode, the Anwar Ibrahim case as well as the campaign on the war against terrorism.

#### **i. The Execution of Barlow and Chambers**

The starting point of Australia-Malaysia rift can be traced back in a series of incidents beginning in 1985 when two Australians were arrested and found guilty for drug trafficking. In this particular event, two Australian citizens, *Kevin Barlow* and *Brian Geoffrey Chambers* were found guilty of possessing 179.56 grams of heroin between them (Camilleri, 2001 : p. 97). They were the first two Westerners to be given the death penalty in Malaysia for possessing drugs. The Malaysian Law states that anybody that is found guilty of possessing 15 grams or more of heroin or morphine would be given a mandatory death penalty.

Many efforts were made by the Australian government in order to save the two from the gallows. Indeed, during the trials of *Barlow* and *Chambers*, the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke had sent a personal letter to Dr. Mahathir urging that the two Australians be given a fair trial and the execution should not be done until undergoing all possible legal means (The Age, 07 July 1986 : p. 1). However, the court had found that both of them were guilty and the execution had to be carried out under section 39 (B) of the Dangerous Drugs Act. As soon as the execution was carried out, Bob Hawke was quoted as saying;

"We have done all that we could to try to persuade the Malaysian authorities that, whatever the view they had about the guilt of these two young men, it was barbaric to take their lives" (Baker, 1986: p.3). Bob Hawke's remarks had made a lasting impression to the relations between Malaysia and Australia (Mauzy, 1999: p.340). His use of the word 'barbaric' was perceived by many Malaysians as referring to Malaysians, rather than to the execution. Besides, such a statement clearly implied that the Australian Prime Minister of belittling the Malaysian judicial system. The hanging of Barlow and Chambers for drug trafficking can be then assumed as the starting point of the 'souring' of relationship between Malaysia and Australia. Bob Hawke's 'barbaric' remark had really made an impact on both governments' relationship.

#### **ii. The Screening of the Embassy Teledrama and Turtle Beach Film**

##### **a. Embassy Teledrama**

The political tension between Malaysia and Australia went from bad to worse when in 1990 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) broadcasted a television drama series. Entitled *Embassy*, the dramawas perceived by the Malaysian government as portraying negative and false image about the country, especially on the issue of illegal logging in Malaysia It was believed that the screening of the drama was done with bad intentions. Rita Camilleri describes the drama was set in an "Australian diplomatic mission in fictitious, Islamic, multicultural state of *Ragaan*, a Southeast Asian country, somewhere North of Singapore and South of Thailand" (Camilleri R, 2001 : p. 107). This description obviously could not be another country other than Malaysia.

What worsened the whole situation was the fact that the drama itself was thought to be produced by the Australian government-owned and funded television network, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Had that been true, it would have indicated the indirect involvement of the Australian government in the production of the drama. But the Australian government immediately disassociated itself and denied that it had any editorial control over the ABC (Byrnes M, 1994 : p.176).

In October 1991, during the Commonwealth Head of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) in Harare, where the *Harare Agreement* was made, both Prime Ministers had agreed to disassociate themselves from "inaccurate and distorted media reports of each other's affairs" (Searle P : 1996, p.60). Later, on 06 November 1991, Hawke had informed the Parliament of Australia about his meeting with Dr. Mahathir in Harare and that both leaders had agreed to normalize both countries' relationship and would disassociate their governments from inaccurate and confusing reports by the media (ZainuddinMaidin : 2008 : p. 104).

Indisputably, the actions taken by both the governments of Malaysia and Australia were actually wise in avoiding unnecessary losses that might occur had the so called 'conflict' was prolonged. The consequence of the rift would not only affect the relations at the governmental level, but also to Australian investment in Malaysia since the situation had posed a threat to both Australian and Malaysian investors (The Age, 22 July 1991: p.7).

#### **b. Turtle Beach Film**

Not long after the *Embassy* affair, a new issue came up. This time it was about a movie called the *Turtle Beach*. Screened in 1992, the film was actually based on a book published in 1981 by an Australian writer, Josephine Blanche d' Alpuget who later married to Bob Hawke.

The controversial aspect of the film was the fact that there was one part in the film that caused great concern to Malaysians. However the film had actually 'departed' from its original story line of the novel. The particular part of the film that was controversial showed the cruelty of Malay villagers who were slaughtering Vietnamese asylum seekers as they arrived ashore at Pulau Bidong, Terengganu (Camilleri R, 2001 : p. 126).

The atrocities committed by the Malays as depicted in the film, were greatly criticized by Malaysians, especially by the Malaysian politicians. They saw there was a bad intention behind the making of the film. Naturally, many Malaysians perceived the film as a negative portrayal of Malaysia, especially the Malays, that would tarnish the image of the country at the world stage.

Disappointed by the new issue, this time the Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir was quoted to have said "It is difficult for us to be nice to the Australians as they are so inclined to telling lies and insulting those they claim as friends". In the same article, the Australian Foreign Minister made it clear that the film was a mere 'fictional drama' and had no government's influence. Nevertheless, the Malaysian Prime Minister was firm in his view that the "Australian media had exceeded the bounds of press freedom to manufacture lies about Malaysia" (Australian, 17 March 1992 : p.3).

The Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi had also expressed his concerns over the release of the film. Abdullah Badawi was reported to have said that he had hoped the release of the *Turtle Beach* would not upset the improving relationship between Australia and Malaysia since the last controversies that they had (Australian, 26 February 1992 : p.3).

It took about several weeks though after the issue came out before Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir finally accepted the explanation given by the Australian government that it had no connection at all with the production of that film (Australian, 20 March 1992 : p. 4).

#### **iii. The 'Recalcitrant' Episode**

It may be regarded that the 'recalcitrant' incident was indeed the most sensational issue that had ever happened between Malaysia and Australia. To some commentators, this issue was also known as the 'R' conflict. As stated earlier, both the Malaysian and Australian governments had been very careful in their dealings with one another, as a result of the previous trouble that they experienced during the 'barbaric', *Embassy* and *Turtle Beach* incidents.

In its efforts to have a greater engagement with the Asian region, Australia had proposed for the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 under the Hawke's administration. Its main purpose is to enhance cooperation between members and to support the economic dynamism between the countries in the Asia Pacific region, besides minimizing barriers to regional trade when the European Union (EU) and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) were building special trade alliances. APEC groups some of the world's richest countries like the United States, Japan and Canada together with some less developed countries (Chalmers Johnson : 1993, p.55). APEC generally had the support from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United States and Japan. Paul Keating succeeded Bob Hawke in 1991 and under his leadership, Australia played an important part in developing APEC and strengthened bilateral ties with many countries of Asia.



When the first APEC summit meeting was held in Seattle in 1993, Dr. Mahathir had expressed that he would not attend the meeting, hosted by the President of the United States Bill Clinton. Out of the fifteen leaders invited for the first APEC summit, Dr. Mahathir was the only leader who declined the invitation (Camilleri R, 2001 : p. 141). Dr. Mahathir decided not to attend the summit and stayed home for the United States and other countries gave a 'cool response' to his proposal of creating an Asian trading bloc, such as the EAEG and the EAEC (Philip S, 'Malaysia Premier Demands Apology', *The New York Times*, 08 December 1993 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/09/world/malaysia-premier-demands-apology.html>).

The spat between Dr. Mahathir and Keating sparked when the Australian Prime Minister referred Dr. Mahathir as a 'recalcitrant' for declining to attend the summit. Keating's comment became a very big issue in Malaysia and can be considered as one of the most sensational issues ever happened between the two countries. Quoting Peter Searle, "...the nature of the Malaysian response to the 'recalcitrant jibe' was in many ways a repeat of the earlier *Embassy* episode and involved much the same cast of characters, though its rapid escalation into a full-blown crisis owed much to the media and some hard comment on both sides" (Searle P, 1996 : p. 61).

In one of his early comments about Keating's comment, Prime Minister Mahathir had said that Australian journalists "...lacked manner[s], that's why I say they do not have Asian character and, as such, their claim that they are an Asian nation has no meaning whatsoever" (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 November 1993).

The controversy over the recalcitrant spat finally ended when the Malaysian government had a special cabinet meeting held on 1 September 1993. The meeting was held specifically to discuss over Keating's remarks on Dr. Mahathir. The government of Malaysia had decided not to prolong the issue after considering the reactions and feelings of the peoples of both countries, besides Keating's regret over the spat he created. The Malaysian government was of the opinion that the issue had made Australians realized about the sensitivities of the people of Malaysia and as such, could avoid such an issue from recurring (BeritaHarian, 12 December 1993, pp. 1-2)

#### **iv. The Anwar Ibrahim Case**

The sacking of Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia was indeed one of the crucial moments in the history of Malaysian politics. His dismissal from the Malaysian cabinet did not only cause disturbance in Malaysian domestic politics but also attract the attention of other countries (including Australia).

In July 1997 the Malaysian economy experienced a recession. The Asian economic crisis had earlier affected South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. As for Malaysia, the value of its currency, the *Ringgit*, was devalued and the Malaysian stock market dropped to terribly low levels. At first, the government did not anticipate that such turmoil could ever happen to Malaysia due to its strong economic fundamentals. In fact, for ten consecutive years, the Malaysian economy performed tremendously well by achieving "eight per cent plus growth annually" (Mahathir Mohamad, 2000 : p. 7).

When Malaysia was hit by the crisis, the government was careful at looking for the best mechanism to address the problem. It had always been the stance of the Malaysian government that to solve the economic turmoil, the country would never resort to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance. Dr. Mahathir says that "...there was no way Malaysia would surrender its economy to the IMF even though it was the only way for the country to achieve economic recovery" (Mahathir Mohamad, 2000 : p. 7). The primary reason was that the government was of the opinion that the IMF did not understand the local conditions in Malaysia and therefore the remedy used in other countries would not be suitable for Malaysia. He further explains that the country's focus was not merely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth but also 'growth of equity' among all the communities in Malaysia. Having said that however, the former Deputy Prime Minister, who was also the Finance Minister, had adopted policies that were believed to direct the economy of the country to even worst situation. The Prime Minister described that the policies implemented by Anwar Ibrahim were a reflection of IMF's policies. Unhappy with the situation, the Prime Minister dismissed Anwar from his position.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard, criticized the action taken by the Malaysian authority over Anwar Ibrahim. He was quoted as saying, "it is always disturbing when you see political opponents of somebody arrested for no apparent, compelling good reasons". The Prime Minister further commented that he wanted to see political differences in Malaysia "solved not through the use of the police or apparatus of the state but rather through the ballot box" (The Age, 26 September 1998 : p.25).

In an earlier development, Howard had made a comment on Malaysia by saying that Malaysia appeared to be "drifting towards authoritarian rule". He was obviously unhappy with the political development in Malaysia and the Malaysian government lodged a diplomatic protest over Howard's comments (The Age, 26 September 1998: p.25). Obviously what appeared from the Anwar Ibrahim case was that it had created another controversy between the two countries. John Howard's criticism over the independence of the judiciary in Malaysia had implicated sour reaction from Malaysia. Howard also believed that the sodomy conviction of Anwar Ibrahim was politically motivated.

#### **IV. THE ENGLISH SCHOOL THEORY AND MALAYSIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS**

The central concept of the theory is international society. Bull defined a society of states (or international society) as "a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions" (Bull, 1995 : pp.8-18). Conscious of common sentiments held between them, order would still exist despite the anarchic nature of international system. Hence, Burchill and Linklater argue, there is a high level of order and cooperation between states, although they live in an anarchic condition (Burchill S and Linklater A, 2005 :pp. 9-11).

In order to ascertain the relationship between Malaysia and Australia by using the English School theory, as with any other states, it must somehow fulfil certain important requirements. The relations between Malaysia and Australia must conform to the international society norms, which is the basic unit of the English School theory (Ming HwaTing : 2008; p.4-6). As defined by Bull, an international society of states must meet certain criterion, which include (i) common interests ii) bound by a common set of rules and (iii) common institutions (Bull and Watson, 1984 : p.1).

It is important to emphasize here that both Malaysia and Australia share a common interests, that is, to maintaining the stability and security not only of the region but also the world as a whole; from which international law is observed. This is well manifested by the commitment shown by both countries through their defence cooperation since the beginning of their relationship. Besides defence and security interests, economic interests is another important aspect of common interests between the two countries. The importance of economic cooperation through trade and other means is reflected through the potentials that each country could gain. Having said that, economic cooperation through trade ties and other means (such as education and tourism) between these two countries had developed tremendously over the years, even during the trying times of their political relationship.

Another important criterion mentioned by Bull of international society is by having common rules. Bull asserts in his *masterpiece* that the rules function as the guidance to achieving the common interest. In the case of Malaysia and Australia , the common rules that bind the two countries come in the form of international laws and conventions that are embodied in multilateral treaties or conventions such as the law of armed conflict, diplomatic and consular conventions as well as the law of the sea. The adherence to these so called rules and laws manifest the commitment of the two countries in fulfilling their mutual interests.

The final criterion of Bull's international society is common institutions. It is not difficult to demonstrate how both countries (Malaysia and Australia) share common institutions. It is indeed well related to the common interests that both countries inspire to attain. Hence the common institutions are well reflected as the means or instrument in materializing their common interests. Both countries' memberships in many international institutions were obvious examples of their shared common institutions.

Throughout their bumpy political ties during the administration of Dr. Mahathir, other spheres of the relationship continued to develop without witnessing any serious repercussions out of their leaders' political spat. Economic relationship through trade ties, defence and security cooperation, education as well as the people-to-people links continued to prosper. The so called 'order' that existed during those trying years can be attributed to the English School theory's argument of international society. The 'order' was the result of both countries being members of the international society.

Besides, the misunderstandings and differences that both countries experienced were well managed and resolved through proper means. It is also interesting to note that both countries were willing to normalize their ties and mollify the souring of their political relationship for a larger interests that could benefit the peoples of both countries.

During an interview conducted by the author with Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister admitted that in many occasions he was unhappy with the Australian government on many issues. In fact most of the issues that had cropped up were sparked off by Australia. Asked why Malaysia did not cut off diplomatic relations with Australia, Dr. Mahathir replied that it was never an option because both countries would lose many opportunities offered by one another.

Besides, Dr. Mahathir also admitted that both countries had been close for many years, shared many commonalities such as interests, rules and institutions at international level, which resonate the arguments forwarded by the English School theory about international society. Hence, the authors are of the opinion that, the 'sweet and sour' ties between Malaysia and Australia during the administration of Dr. Mahathir is best understood from the English School perspective of the international society.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Throughout 22 years of dr. Mahathir's prime ministership, Australia had found it difficult to engage close political ties with Malaysia. There had been several events and controversies that had soured their governmental relationship. At times the Malaysian government was offended by remarks made by Australian

Heads of Government. There were also times when Malaysians were offended by the Australian media that portrayed negative image of the country.

An interesting observation about the two countries relationship was that even though the two countries had experienced ups and downs in their diplomatic relationship, they were actually confined at the governmental level and did not affect other areas of the relationship. Both countries kept strong economic and business ties, though both Malaysia and Australia had gone through some rough patches in their relationship. The good relationship of the two countries was well manifested in the economic field, security, education, and other spheres of the relationship.

The researcher has adopted the approach that is advanced by the English School scholars of International Relations. The concept of international society and its consequential result of international order fitted well with the topic under study. Although not many studies have been undertaken that employ the perspective of the English School theory, especially in understanding bilateral relationship between states, the arguments forwarded by the scholars of this theory are found to be very much relevant to the case between Malaysia and Australia. Both countries fulfil the requirement of being a member of the society of states, or the so called 'International Society'.

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