

## COVID-19: Unveiling the Ethnoreligious Relations in Malaysia

Romzi Ationg, Azizan Had & Gaim Lunkapis  
Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu  
Sabah, Malaysia  
E-Mail: mrationg@ums.edu.my

### Abstract

*The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province. Since then this infectious disease has speeds globally, resulting the implementation a Movement Control Order (MCO) in almost all, if not, all countries around the globe as a means of minimizing the spread of the disease. Apart from that, the imposition of MCO also is vital to diminishing panic among the global population, a situation ignited by the fact that the disease brings a significant impact to not only human health but also involves various areas of human life. In Malaysia, though the disease is mainly a medical issue, it also unveils the ethnoreligious relations among the population within the country. Nevertheless, even though scholars often described the ethnoreligious relations in this country as weakening, as of to date, examination on the ethnoreligious relations in Malaysia during the outbreak of such disease remain limited. Thus, explanation on what exactly is the present ethnoreligious relations among the citizens in this country during this shocking incident of pandemic respiratory disease linked to COVID-19 is inadequate. Therefore, using media reports analysis, this paper analyzes the ethnoreligious relations in this country that unveils during the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19, and thus ascertain how actually the disease has unveils such phenomenon. This paper explores the prospects of a national improvement which focusing on either maintaining or consolidating an ethnoreligious harmony in this country regardless of what the situation they are encountering.*

*Keywords: COVID-19; Ethnoreligious Relations; Malaysian Politics*

### Introduction

An examination of contemporary ethnoreligious relations in Malaysia and specifically during the period of COVID-19 required us to note that this country and specifically West Malaysia is ethnically fractionalized. Scholars such as Shaffer (1982) and Hirschman (1986) rather described Malaysia as a laboratory for the study of politics of identity which often characterized by ethnoreligious issues. It is also described by Shamsul (2001) and Im (2013) as the country dominated by ethnic politicization due to its nature of society which they call the 'plural society'. Ethnic politicization, as Rabushka and Selpslie argue, is "the hallmark of the plural society, and the feature that distinguishes it from its pluralistic counterpart is the practice of politics almost exclusively along ethnic lines" (1972, p. 20). In further explaining the concept of a plural society, Rabuska, and Selpslie (1972) as well as Furnivall (1939) and Smith (1965), they portrayed such society as a society that comprises two or more elements or social orders which live side by side in one political unit<sup>1</sup>, but less mingling with one another. Most importantly, this society also deeply divided culturally and that the population meets only in the marketplace. Adding to such characteristics, in this society "each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals, they meet, but only in the marketplace, in buying and selling" (Furnivall, 1948, p. 304).

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of political unit here refers to a territory that usually having a boundary or a line that separating it from other territory set by political authority and is govern by its own political organization.

Given that it is a plural society, many suggest that ethnic division within Malaysia generally coincided with an economic division: the non-Malay-Muslim and specifically the Chinese control the world of business, trade, and work in farming, but the Malay and other natives (Bumiputra) dominated the state administration and majority remain in the rural or underdeveloped areas. This has been the colonial legacy as it appeared that during the colonial era, the colonial power consigned the Malays to villages and the Chinese to new towns (Sua, 2013; Suwannathat-Pian, 2009; Hamid, 2007; Muhammad, 2000; Shamsul, 1986; Yegar, 1984). For this reason, Layapan, Ationg, Zulhaimi & Sapan (2019), Ationg (2018), Guan (2009), Pham (2005) and Sanders (2002) pointed out that the separation of communities according to ethnic and economic activities made the society inherently unstable and prone to ethnoreligious conflict because this led to the extermination of 'common social will' among the ethnoreligious groups.

Nevertheless, ethnoreligious conflict had never evolved significantly during the colonial era because the colonial elite decided to carry the duty of holding together the society by becoming the arbitrator (Ationg, 2017). By insisting that they had the responsibility to ensure the maintenance of socioeconomic improvement and harmony in this land, the colonial elites eventually linked the country administrative with their policy. Among the policy was to encourage the influx of cheap labor forces from various countries to develop the economy. In the process of policy implementation, the colonial elites also buffered all ethnic groups from working together to oppose them. The result of such policy implementation has been the creation of heterogeneous which exposed to the problem of ethnoreligious conflict.

When the colonial era ended which led to the establishment of 'Persekutuan Tanah Melayu' (the Federation of Malaya or the peoples nowadays calls it as West Malaysia) and later the formation of Malaysia, issues on politics, economy, education and many areas in this land have been polluted by ethnic chauvinism, and such sentiments are especially affecting the relationship between the Malay-Muslim and the non-Malay-Muslim. The tense ethnoreligious relationship between both ethnoreligious groups especially escalated when ethnic nationalism through political competition among the established political parties characterizes by ethnoreligious grouping begun. The 1969 tragedy described such an uneasy relationship between different ethnoreligious groups in Malaysia, and specifically in West Malaysia. This tragedy is a racial riot that led to the declaration of *darurat* (national emergency) throughout West Malaysia by the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (the ruling king of Malaysia) on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1969 following the announcement of 1969 election results that ignited disappointment among the two competing ethnoreligious groups over not only politics but also socioeconomic issues. Though the tragedy ended following the establishment of a coalition government called Barisan Nasional (BN, National Front), a coalition government of all ethnoreligious political elites, through consociationalism, ethnoreligious sentiments continued to affect Malaysia.

The outburst of any issues even can ignite and re-emerge the ugliest looks of ethnoreligious relationships in this country. As Ationg, Clark, and Pietsch (2018) explained, the Lahad Datu Standoff is a brief security crisis from early February 2013 which arose when a group of rag-tag militiamen from Simunul and Tawi-Tawi islands of southern Philippines arrived by boats in Sabah and began occupying several villages. Proclaiming themselves as the 'Royal Army of the Sulu Sultanate', the gunmen engaged in several firefights with the Malaysian police as well as beheaded and mutilated several captured Malaysian security personnel. Such development prompted Malaysian forces to deploy fighter jets in a successful operation to flush out the intruders. Though this was a conflict between the intruder and the Malaysian forces, there were racists comments and behavior against other ethnoreligious groups by several parties that emerged in social media. This suggests that any issues arose are expected to affect the ethnoreligious relations between the citizens of different ethnoreligious background in this country. Accordingly, though the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19 is mainly a medical issue, it also prevails in the

ethnoreligious relations among the population within the country. It appeared that there also were racists comments and behavior against other ethnoreligious groups by several parties that emerged in social media during the period of the outbreak. Based on these comments, one may question whether the ethnoreligious relationship in this country is so bad, thus required a thorough response from the government and all parties within the countries.

## Problem Statement

As explained, Malaysia, like other Asian countries such as Indonesia and Singapore, is a country with significant numbers of ethnic groupings, thus often described by scholars as a pluralistic society (Sua, 2013; Suwannathat-Pian, 2009; Hamid, 2007; Muhammad, 2000). As of to date, among the key ethnic groups in this country are the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Kadazandusun, Iban, and others. These ethnic groups rooted in different cultural backgrounds, and for this reason, there are many differences between these ethnic groups in terms of religion, language, and culture in this country. Moreover, an ethnic group generally interested in defending and prioritizing their culture and customs, thus drove a wedge between the different ethnic groups, particularly between Malays and non-Malays (Yaakop, 2014). Accordingly, ethnic relations problems often arise in this country, and therefore, with such characteristics of the population, nation-building has always been a major issue in the Malaysian political agenda (Heng, 2017).

In explaining such an argument, Heng (2017) suggests, since the early independence of Malaya in 1957 and thereafter the creation of Malaysia in 1963, the Malaysian government constantly uses the model of a nation-state to create a sense of collective national identity in this country. In doing so, the Malaysian government makes it clear that the state plays a dominating role in this top-down approach. The key characteristic of this top-down approach has been the application of what Lijhpat (1968; 1969; 2003) calls consociational democracy in the process of state formation. The consociational democracy is an approach that required solid cooperation between elites from different ethnic groups that transcend cleavages at a mass level. The key principles of consociational democracy are the need for the creation of a 'grand coalition' among the elites of all segments of society, the establishment of mutual veto<sup>2</sup>, the application of proportionality-based representation within the grand coalition, and creation of segmental autonomy<sup>3</sup>. That is, with the implementation of these key elements, it was expected that ethnic relations in this country will always be maintained, if not be improved. Such expectation, however, has not necessarily remediated the existing ethnic relations problems or as what we shall call as the problems of the ethnoreligious relations in this country, a social relation between different ethnic groups where religious variance has always been the key determining factor.

Nevertheless, despite the aspiration to curb any uneasy phenomenon of ethnoreligious relations, scholars such as Jaafar and Akhmetova (2020), Ationg, Guinness, Ibrahim, Esa, Rahman, Hiew, Moi (2020), Ationg & Guinness (2020), Azlan (2019), Ationg, Zulhaimi, Ibrahim & Hashim (2018), Heng (2017), and Balasubramaniam (2007) portrays that ethnoreligious relations in Malaysia still intensely debated. The debate on ethnoreligious relations especially becomes more intense during elections and, as explained, it is appearing in the social media that some netizens highlighted ethnoreligious issues during the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19. Considering the emergence of such comments which may lead to ethnoreligious discontent among the citizens of Malaysia, one might wonder of what exactly the

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of mutual veto here refers to the consensus among the groups on the majority rule principle.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of segmental autonomy here refers to need of creating a sense of individuality and allows for different culturally based law.

status of ethnoreligious relations in this country during the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19. If this is indeed the case at the time of the outbreak, then how the disease unveils such a phenomenon? Therefore, this paper analyzes the ethnoreligious relations in this country that prevails during the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19 and thus ascertains how the disease unveils such a phenomenon. It is expected that this paper also explores the prospects of a national improvement that focusing on either maintaining or consolidating ethnoreligious harmony in this country regardless of the situation they are encountering.

## Methodology

During the fast-spreading of COVID-19 pandemic disease globally, the people, the mainstream media, and all parties have voiced concerns over human vulnerabilities based on what is happening in China and Italy. The dramatic increase in the number of death due to COVID-19 in both countries lead to such apprehension. As of March 28, 2020, it is reported by the medias in conjunction with the report by the European Surveillance System (TESS) that there have been over 601,530 laboratory-confirmed cases with an estimated mean infection rate of 2.5% as well as more than 27,440 of death worldwide. Specifically, in some countries such as China, Italy, and Malaysia, the number of deaths is reported by the media to a total of 3,295 (from 81,394 cases), 9,134 (from 86,498 cases) and 27 (from 2,320 cases) respectively as of the same date. Apart from providing the world about the toiling numbers of death due to COVID-19, the media also allow the readers around the world to gain knowledge and information on any issues related to it. As such, a media report analysis was used to detect the present ethnoreligious relations in Malaysia during the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19.

For this paper, media reports of COVID-19 and the ethnoreligious relations among Malaysians during the outbreak were collected and stored in one document. The collected media reports and discussions are being stored in one document to allow for data filtering as well as a total control over what is in this media report and discussion analysis-based paper. Such a move was necessary to ensure that the obtained data is represents the phenomenon being studied or to ensure the construct validity of the data. It simply aims at detecting and correcting errors and inconsistencies in the data gathered so that the data be cleaned to pass consistency and validation, a procedure that involves the removal of unverified data (Olteanu, Castillo, Diaz, & Kiciman, 2019, July 11; Rahm & Do, 2000). Data cleaning is especially required when dealing with data from multi-sources, in which it includes identifying and thereafter overlapping data or to match the records referring to the same real-world entity as well as substitution of incomplete data. This, in turn, helps minimizes any systematic bias perceptions about the topic being discussed. It is thus important to note that for the sake of ensuring the validity of the data obtained, as according to Kapoor, Tamilamani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi, and Nerur (2018), only the credible information from various sources that are associated with this paper. To be specific, the credible sources of data in this study refers to sources that are more reliable than others such as newspapers, journal articles, books, broadcast news, and official reports.

## Findings

In this research, we sample more than three thousand news articles in Malaysia from major newspapers such as The New Straits Times (NST) ( $n=249$ ), the Star ( $n=1709$ ), Berita Harian and Harian Metro ( $n=245$ ) since early January to the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The research, however, only focused itself on the 'news' section of each newspaper. This is done to exclude all unrelated news which also utilizes the term correlated to coronavirus such as in the sport or entertainment section which are irrelevant. We also crisscross material from local news agencies like *Bernama* and international news agencies such as *Reuters* and *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) to investigate the news dispersed especially to Malaysian

newspapers. Looking at Table 1 the number of news related to the term 'coronavirus' was high during the early days of the pandemic in early January. The number of news related to the Wuhan has been reported and used side by side with the term coronavirus by the news media agency of the world. However, the number decline until April 2020 while the number related to the cases in Malaysia related to the term such as 'church cluster' and 'tabligh cluster' rose significantly. This can be understood when the number of cases in China had significantly reduced while the number of cases in other countries including Malaysia continues to climb. A review of the Malaysian newspaper since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in Malaysia since January 2020 revealed that there are some key features related to ethnic and religious relations in the country. To look at the relation between ethnic and religion with regards to the coronavirus pandemic, the research search for terms related to ethnic and religion in Malaysia in addition to the term coronavirus such as the term Chinese, communist, *tabligh*, *jihadi*, church cluster, and religion. In this study, we will divide this form of the relationship into three parts: the early phase which includes misinformation and misunderstanding related to the virus, the middle phase which includes the clusters which have developed in Malaysia as a result of the spread of the virus into the country and finally the current phase where religious and family relations has been constrained as a result of the second phase.

### *Early Phase*

At the beginning of the coronavirus case in Wuhan, China, most newspapers referred to the virus as a Chinese coronavirus. The first uncovering of the new virus by the Chinese authorities in the Wuhan region steered all the world's leading news agencies like Reuters and AFP to address it as 'Chinese coronavirus'. This proceeded until January 18, and even when the virus disseminates to Bangkok it was still adverted to as 'Chinese coronavirus', let alone its carriers were Chinese nationals from Wuhan province. While news from this Western media is utilized in local media, the term persists when local media uses news written by the Western media (see for example "Second Case of New Coronavirus in Thailand", 2020). In covering news related to the virus, local media have often colligated the virus to Wuhan and China. For example, in the Reuters news that was published in the Star newspaper, it was stated that 'Thailand has found a second case of a new Chinese coronavirus', relating the virus to Chinese. Other than that, there are several other news relating coronavirus with Chinese in the newspaper, among them is on the 24<sup>th</sup> January, where another news from Reuters was published in the Star entitled 'South Korea confirms second case of Chinese coronavirus', 'Suspected Chinese coronavirus patient gives birth to baby by caesarean' (28<sup>th</sup> January), 'HIV drugs touted as weapon in war on coronavirus' (4<sup>th</sup> February 2020), 'New Chinese coronavirus cases show slight fall' (15<sup>th</sup> February) and 'Seventy trapped after Chinese coronavirus quarantine hotel collapses, more than half rescued' (7<sup>th</sup> March 2020). All the news that was published in the Star newspaper was from Reuters news agency which uses the term 'Chinese coronavirus' in their article. This was patent during the early stages of the spread of the virus in the country. Looking at the statistics about the usage of the term 'Chinese coronavirus', there are a total of six articles in the 'Star' newspaper using the term out of 5740 articles on coronavirus, while there are a total of three news using the term Chinese coronavirus in the NST. One of the earliest news articles published in the NST newspaper "Malaysia Free of Wuhan Coronavirus" provided an explanation of the virus in the first paragraph of the article coronavirus "which is traced to Wuhan, China" to describe the unknown virus. The term that was used is less racial than the term Chinese coronavirus which has been used previously. In Berita Harian, the term 'coronavirus dari China' was reported one time in the newspaper out of 262 articles explaining the coronavirus in China. The article entitled 'Tempoh kesan symptom 5.2 hari' explains that an average period of 5.2 days is required to detect the exposure toward Chinese coronavirus.

Looking at academic journals since early this year, the precise term of 'Chinese coronavirus' was used in 69 journal articles covering every field of knowledge. However, the term 'Wuhan coronavirus' was used extensively in academic journals worldwide where it is employed in 734 journal articles. Furthermore, there are about 26,700 journal articles about COVID-19 since early January 2020. The use of the terms in

the news media and academic journals show how misdirected the media of the world in relaying information throughout their information channel where the virus is wrongly colligated with ethnic Chinese. This has resulted in mistreatment toward Chinese and Asian living in Western and European countries. Even though in Malaysia there are no pertinent cases of local people excruciating ethnic Chinese, there are several cases in other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States of subjugation against the Asian community and ethnic Chinese.

The media also often linked the eating habits of Chinese people to consuming exotic foods such as bats, dogs, pigs, and cats that are said to lead to conditions where viruses in these animals can infect humans through body fluids, mucus, faeces and water pee. This is ascribed to the occurrence of acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002 and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) in 2012. Table 1 explains that the number of news relating bats to coronavirus was high wherein the NST there were 22 news, *Berita Harian* (23) and the *Star* (65). There are many more explanations given for the association between these exotic foods and their association with coronavirus. For example, an article in *Berita Harian* on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 by Jamari Mohtar and Chia Chu Hang entitled “Ekosistem, manusia rosak jika hidupan liar musnah” gave examples of how uncontrolled wildlife trade resulted in the dissemination of new diseases such as Aids, Ebola, and coronavirus. There are many other articles written in the same manner which tries to enhance awareness among the local of the great dangers of killing and hunting wild animals. However, when such an explanation is generically given, thus leading to grave misunderstandings among societies where every Chinese deliberated to be eating exotic foods. Besides this, about 59 academic journal articles are linking the Chinese habit of consuming exotic animals to the coronavirus. This is in addition to a series of misguided videos on social media showing Chinese eating bats soup plus the increasing number of deaths, quack remedies, and vaccine conspiracies that are compounding public fear about the coronavirus and stockings of racial stereotypes. Although several articles in the media deny such racial and stereotype views and misunderstandings, many still believe them. While China's culinary tradition encompasses a vast array of ingredients that many elsewhere may turn their noses up at and there are legitimate concerns over the country's hygiene standards and live animal markets, the bat is not commonly consumed.

### *Middle Phase*

Another misunderstanding occurs after the outbreak of COVID-19 outbreaks in Malaysia where there is a group called clusters spreading outbreaks in the same group. In Malaysia among the earliest clusters spread in the country is the *tabligh* cluster, a group of Islamic preachers gathered in a large congregation and one of these groups held a meeting at the Sri Petaling Mosque where one of its members was infected by a COVID-19 without his knowledge. The meeting was held between February 27 until March 1 at the Sri Petaling Mosque in Kuala Lumpur and one of the earliest infected with COVID-19 was a pilgrim from neighboring Brunei Darussalam which was positively scanned with the virus after returning to his country after attending the meeting. Newspaper reports relating *tabligh* to coronavirus are also high. The NST reports 73 news from January to April, *Berita Harian* (84), and the *Star* (222). Besides, about nine journal articles colligate the pandemic to the *tabligh* movement in Malaysia, India, and Indonesia where the movement held its meeting. The spread of this epidemic COVID-19 into clusters in the Malay-Muslim population marked the start of a change coronavirus outbreak of plague that was initially linked to the nation to outbreaks associated with religion. This has resulted in negative comments on social media especially for those who use #coronajihad in social media platforms such as Twitter (Murni M. Noor, 2020). However, there is no academic journal associating the ‘*tabligh*’ with the pandemic. This is mainly because the topic is relatively new at the time of writing, but it is expected that soon, there would be some more articles relating *tabligh* with coronavirus. Following the *tabligh* clusters, there are other clusters associated with religion such as the church clusters in Sarawak where there were also several deaths recorded during the outbreak.

The spread of coronavirus outbreaks has also led to a growing number of rumours and fake news as well as rumours that are especially prevalent on social media about the spread of the disease and how to treat the disease. Every day there are various fake news spreads, so the information ministry must spread information about it in the press to curb the fake news. The Communications and Multimedia Ministry (KKMM) tries to counter the spread of fake news by enlisting fake news through the national news agency, Bernama daily. In total, about 120 news sections are that contain between three to five fake news is debunked by the ministry every day. Most of the fake news that was spread is related to the spread of the virus to certain people, areas, places, and clinics, misinformation, the Movement Control Order (MCO), and assistance to the needy. Among the fake news that was debunked is the news that

### *Religious and Family Relations*

However, the spread of the coronavirus epidemic has led to strained relationships between family members and multicultural communities. This is because of the more frequent contagion that results from the closeness of society. The rules that were created during the corvid also made public relations more strained. No more greetings and words of encouragement in the community of friends that lead to friendship. Even members of the public are no longer encouraged to shake hands and distance themselves while meeting and talking. Such cases of disobedience during the MCO has always been reported in the newspaper. Among these is the news in Berita Harian on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 'PKP: Masih ramai yang degil' which explains that there are many who were still bringing their family to town thus breaching the MCO. One of the negative aspects of MCO is when faced with the demise of family members especially among those who have been diagnosed with coronavirus. Family members can no longer visit the deceased and only several members of the family are able to visit the funeral of the deceased. Only the immediate family was allowed to send the body to the grave and in most cases, only the hospital staff was allowed to bathe and send the body to the grave. For those on duty overseas, returning home members of the family are not allowed to wait at the airport, and they must be quarantined for 14 days to prevent the spread of the disease. Frequent acts of worship such as prayer are no longer allowed, and this practice must be performed in their own homes.

### **Recommendations**

The initially stated overarching aim of this research was to unveil the ethnoreligious relations in the country during the outbreak of the respiratory disease caused by COVID-19, and thus ascertain how the disease unveils such a phenomenon. It is expected that this paper also explores the prospects of a national improvement that focusing on either maintaining or consolidating ethnoreligious harmony in this country regardless of the situation they are encountering. The paper tries to answer the question by looking at newspaper and journal contents during the outbreak in Malaysia starting from January to 19<sup>th</sup> April when the paper is written. While recognizing the limitations of our analysis, we believe we have largely achieved this in our explanation of the media and academic portrayal of the coronavirus or COVID-19 in the findings part of the paper. We have examined newspapers and academic journal starting from January 2020 and emphasized on words related to coronavirus in the news media and academic journal as well as focusing on the contents of every article to evaluate how the media and journal portrayed the pandemic with regards to its explanation on religious and ethnic contents. We have noted the number of articles in the news media and academic journal which explains the disease and its relation to religion and ethnicity.

With regards to the limitation of the paper, we acknowledge that the study only looks into articles written in English and Malay in the news media while there are also newspapers in other languages distributed in Malaysia such as Nanyang Siang Pau, China Press, Shin Chew Daily, Oriental Daily News, Kwong Wah Yit Poh, Guang Ming Daily (in Chinese) and Indian newspapers such as Tamil Nanban and Vanakkam Malaysia which operated daily. Because of language and time constraints, we are unable to access these newspapers and interpret their contents within a short time. It is recommended that these newspapers will

be analyzed in the future to analyze their contents which would show us pieces of information related to other races' view of the matter. Besides, the research does not include popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and analyze its contents with regards to the comments made by members of the social platforms. It is hoped that soon such research focusing on social media platforms can be used to explain the ethnic and religious relations in Malaysia.

The paper, however, had given us a glimpse of what happens in Malaysia and the world during the early period of the COVID-19 outbreak. The key finding of this paper is that the outbreak of respiratory disease caused by COVID-19 have prevails the ugliest look of racism in Malaysia. Having said that, however, it is important to noted that not all Malaysia are interested in providing racial comments in accordance with the outbreak. Instead, in general, the ethnoreligious relationship in this land remain encouraging with the tendency skepticism against other ethnoreligious groups among the citizens. This growing phenomenon of ethnoreligious skepticism is one area that required through respond from the authority. Therefore, this paper suggests that the authority as well as the law enforces throughout the country gives no chances to anyone who made attempt to fire up the ethnoreligious sentiments in Malaysia. For this reason, the authority is urged to re-examine the existing law pertaining to media social use by making it to be more rigorous. This includes adding some measure that could severely prevents the mainstream newspapers and all kind of publication from publishing views which has implicated by ethnoreligious sentiments. By doing so, it is hoped that such move will effectively curbs the growing of ethnoreligious problem in this country. It is also hoped that such move will provides an opportunity for a national improvement that focusing on ethnoreligious harmony consolidation in this country regardless of the situation they are encountering in the future. The consolidation of ethnoreligious harmony in this country is vital in the process a national improvement as well as preventing Malaysia from becoming a 'failed state'.

## Conclusion

This paper provides explanation of what exactly is the present ethnoreligious relations among the citizens in this country during this shocking incident of pandemic respiratory disease linked to COVID-19. The paper found that, despite the growing interest among the citizens in ethnoreligious sentiments, the ethnoreligious relationship among the people of Malaysia generally remain intact. The phenomenon of growing interest in ethnoreligious sentiments, however, required immediate and stringent response from the authority as to ensure that such problem would not further affects Malaysia. This paper thus suggests that the authority is required to re-examine the existing law pertaining to media social use by making it to be more rigorous. This includes adding some measure that could severely prevents the mainstream newspapers and all kind of publication from publishing views which has implicated by ethnoreligious sentiments. By doing so, it is hoped that such move will effectively curbs the growing of ethnoreligious problem in this country. It is also hoped that such move will provides an opportunity for a national improvement that focusing on ethnoreligious harmony consolidation in this country regardless of the situation they are encountering in the future.

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