



MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 1998-1999 ANWAR
IBRAHIM EVENT IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY OF
THE COVERAGE OF THE STORY IN SELECTED
INTERNATIONAL NEWSMAGAZINES

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Human
Sciences (Communication)

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Human Sciences
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May 2010

ABSTRACT

Focus in studies on communication and media is most often directed towards audiences, the level of influence on the audience by their local as well as international media and the audience perceptions with regard to various media content. The focus of the present study is however directed towards examining the use of metaphors in the coverage given to a Malaysian event in selected International magazines. The International newsmagazines selected for the study were: the Far Eastern Economic Review, the Economist, the Newsweek and the Time. Individual metaphors were used as unit of analysis. In all, 1318 metaphors were coded into four thematic categories and three image categories to answer two research questions. First research question was: What categories of metaphors were emphasized in the International magazines coverage of the 1998 – 1999 Anwar Ibrahim event? The second research question was: What kind of image of the Malaysian actors was contained in the coverage? Quantitative content analysis revealed that the coverage mostly emphasized the thematic category (1) political metaphors, followed in that order by (2) the social, (3) legal and (4) economic categories. It was also found that the coverage of the Malaysian actors was pervasively negative, as a vast majority of metaphors were coded as unfavourable to Malaysian actors. Implications of the findings are discussed in terms of Gramsci's hegemony theory and media framing research.

ملخص البحث

التغطية الإعلامية لأحداث أنور إبراهيم بماليزيا لعام 1998-1999 (دراسة لتغطية قصة الحدث في مجلات إخبارية دولية مختارة): دائماً ما يكون التركيز في الدراسات الإعلامية موجهاً نحو الجماهير ومستوى تأثير ذلك الجمهور بالإعلام المحلي والعالمي، إضافة إلى ذلك، نظرة الجمهور تجاه مختلف المواد الإعلامية. بينما يركز البحث الحالي نحو دراسة استخدام الاستعارة في تغطية حدث ماليزي في مجلات عالمية مختارة. المجالات الإخبارية المختارة لهذه الدراسة هي: "فار إيسترن إيكونوميك ريفيو" و "مجلة نيوزويك" و "مجلة التايم". لقد استخدمت الاستعارات الفردية كوحدة للتحليل. تم تشفير جميع الاستعارات - التي كان عددها الكلي 1318- وتجزئتها إلى أربع فئات موضوعية و ثلاث فئات صورية للإجابة على سؤالين هما؛ أولاً: ما فئات الإستعارة المختلفة التي تم التركيز عليها في أحداث أنور إبراهيم عام 1998-1999؟ أما ثانياً: ما نوعية صور الأشخاص التي احتوتها تلك التغطية؟ كشفت نتائج البحث التحليل الكمي للمحتوى أن التغطية دائماً ما تُأكدُ على الفئات الموضوعية للإستعارات السياسية، ويتبعها الفئات الأخرى كالفئة الاجتماعية والقانونية والاقتصادية. أيضاً، ومن نتائج البحث، لقد تم الكشف على أن التغطية الشاملة للشخصيات الماليزية كانت سلبية، حيث أن عدداً كبيراً من الاستعارات كانت تحمل تشافيراً غير مرغوب فيها بالنسبة للشخصيات الماليزية. ستتم مناقشة آثار هذه النتائج من حيث نظرية هيمنة جرامسي والبحوث القائمة على تأطير وسائل الإعلام.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

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DECLARATION

I here declare that this dissertation is the results of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that is has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for my other degree at IIUM or other institutions.

Nurul Huda Agneta M B Hjelmstad

Signature.....

Date.....

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*To the fond and cherished memory of my dear late Father and Mother, whose
dream was to see me to the top.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Name of Allah, the All Compassionate and Merciful. The produce of this piece of academic work has been a very long journey and without the Permission of Him, the Almighty, it would never have come into being. I am thus very happy and thankful to Allah (S.W.T) for having been granted the opportunity to pursue further academic studies to enhance my overall competence at the International Islamic University Malaysia, as well as funds to finance these studies. Without the guidance, support and friendship of the many people Allah brought into my path, this thesis would have been hard to complete.

Firstly, I am greatly indebted to Professor Rashid Moten, Dr. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, the former Dean of Admission & Records, Professor Zakaria Man, Dr. Thameem Ushama, Professor Dr Sidek Baba and the Finance Division for their cooperative efforts in making my dream come true, my admission to this University.

Much gratitude goes to Professor Yusuf Hussain, as the former Head of department of communication and current Head of department, Assoc. Professor Azmuddin Ibrahim for their support. So, also to my supervisors Professor Shawaluddin Anis, Dr Che Mahzan, and Dr Norbaiduri Ruslan for their special contributions. Professor Hassan Ibrahim, former Deputy Dean of the Kulliyah of IRKHSC, Dr. Ibrahim Zein, former Deputy Dean of the Centre of Postgraduate Studies and current Hon Dean of the Center Nik have been given a special place in the journey of my studies, to see the completion of my studies become a reality.

Professor Dr. Fazal Rahim Khan of department occupies an extra place in my heart for his willingness, sacrifices and hard work to see my research to its final. Assoc. Professor Dr. Firdaus Ahmad Azzam for her encouraging support in the earlier stage of my work with this study. Professor Abu Bakar, of University Malaya, Dr. Nur Azian of the Institute of Education, IIUM, Che Mohammad Nasir of IIUM, Waqf office. The IIUM clinic, Dr Dinon and staff must also be remembered for their great care of me following my Campus accident. The staff at the IIUM Mosque and a great number of friends, old and new, whose assistance and support will never be forgotten as well as that of many others, who deserve a special mention in this context. Lastly, but not least I am much indebted to the Hon Rector of this University, Professor. Dato' Dr. Syed Arabi Idid for his support and backing.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Too much negative reporting in the Western media on the developing world and the Muslim world in specific has been a matter of concern for the developing countries and is often highlighted by spokespersons from these countries. Mostly the developing countries are depicted in terms of crises, violation of human rights against their citizens by governments, violence, prevalent illiteracy and forms of disasters, like economic and environmental disasters.

Many events with strong political inclinations are often labelled “crisis” or the governments referred to as “regimes” with brutal leaders at the helm. The leadership is often cast as the root cause for poverty and illiteracy. Corruption is a usual term used in reports for the economic disparities within these countries. Seldom are these countries depicted in terms of the dynamic of their development efforts or progress (Luthans, 1995; Mowlana, 1997).

In literature, Wiio, (1975), Martin and Chaudhary, (1983) suggested an imbalance in the information flow around the world from the North to the South with a perceived domination by the Western media in their constant calamity reporting on the Third World. In this manner negative information is passed to the rest of the world, without giving consideration to the context and their opinion on issues.

Factors behind this trend might be found in a variety of aspects, be they cultural, political or others. Some answer might be found in the Western attitude towards the nature of reporting from these countries. In the views of the Western media, according to Wiio (1975) and Martin and Chaudhary (1983), operating in an

open, liberal system, basically free from control by the government, media reports should reveal the truth about events taking place, whether these events occur in the Western countries or in the eastern.

Reporting an unfavourable truth about a situation may however not always be desirable by any nation, especially, when this news is to be reported internationally. Another view claimed that negative news were unsettling in nature and therefore leading to frustrations and a desire for change. An approach in news reporting of this nature may not be acceptable and suitable to the sensitiveness of developing countries.

Claims by authors, among them Hachten (1994) said that the idea of the West is to focus their reports on negative information, as they expect progress, hence failure is seen as an unusual situation, and would be newsworthy. Scholars on this issue, however contend, that positive as well as negative news from these countries should be considered under the same concept 'development news' (Shafer, 1991).

The matter has become important and was brought forward in International communication debate by McBride Commission under UNESCO and mentioned in their Report (1980) in Schafer (2001). This report was suggesting what has been labelled, as the New World Communication Order and among its recommendation these countries should be given more control of news output to safeguard their integrity.

The present study focuses on the 1998-1999 political crisis in Malaysia, which apparently erupted due to the expulsion of the former Deputy Prime Minister as well as Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim from the government. The purpose of the study is to examine the use of metaphors in reporting this crisis by international magazines. The metaphors will be examined because these are common phenomena in human communication and are often used in news reports create desired images for the

readers (Cooper, 1986).

The ill treatment meted out to Anwar Ibrahim possibly viewed as abuse of or violation of human rights against him, received a great deal of interest world wide and locally. This could be understood from the reports in terms of information suggesting various means used for inflicting harm on Anwar Ibrahim throughout the crises.

Reporters and journalists from all over the world were thronging Kuala Lumpur, especially the courthouse, for an opportunity to observe the trial and/ or interview Anwar Ibrahim. Many lawyers local and international had applied for the observer status to attend the trial, as the suspicion over the fairness of the trial had created considerable interest in the Western media and the public.

Magazines selected for the study were the Far Eastern Economic Review, the Economist, the Newsweek and the Times and the time period chosen for the study was the eight months from the expulsion of Anwar Ibrahim from the government on Sept. 2nd, 1998 until April 5, 1999, the date for his conviction and incarceration. This was the period of great magnitude and attracted much attention locally and internationally.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

By way of a background to the Anwar Ibrahim event, the following provides a guide overview of the event as found in the International and local press.

In 1997, the Asian countries were hit by economic crisis and Malaysia was no exception. It was reported in *Newsweek* (November 3, 1997) that political leaders of the Eastern nations were bogging their heads in shock and disbelief, trying to find out what had happened to their economies and how and why it could happen.

The Malaysian government saw the crisis as related to the unethical behaviour of certain international currency traders. In an effort to maintain economic and

financial stability the International Monetary Fund, approached the affected nations. According to a report, the Malaysian Cabinet rejected the IMF package offer and pursued her own approach by deciding to impose capital control and to set the local currency at a fixed rate against the US dollar for its protection from further assault (September 14, 1998, *Newsweek*, pp.13-17).

The same report claimed that new regulations on stock trading to prevent short term profiting were introduced. United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the leading coalition party of National Front, which controls the government, termed such attempts of self-cure 'domestic IMF without IMF'.

In coming to the decision to use the 'domestic IMF' formula, it was reported that certain quarters in the government, especially for those aligned with the Finance Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, were not happy. On September 2, 1998, the report said that he, the Deputy Prime Minister and at that the time also the Finance Minister had been sacked from the government. (September 14, 1998, *Newsweek*, pp.13-17). The local reports suggested under a headline: 'Anwar sacked from Umno after he refused to quit party post'.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been expelled from Umno. The party's supreme council took the decision after he refused to resign as deputy president. Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad told the Press after chairing a four-and-a-half hour meeting that Anwar was given the opportunity to resign as deputy president and leave the party voluntarily.

(New Straits Time, 1998, September 4)

The ground for his expulsion was said to be his grave misconduct and following this dismissal, a book titled '50 reasons why Anwar cannot become the Prime Minister' went into circulation among the members of the government and the ruling coalition party United Malay National Organization (UMNO). A letter had surfaced possibly written by an employee of the family of the former Deputy Minister

addressed to the Prime Minister, containing certain allegations against him (September 14, 1998, *Newsweek*, pp.13-17).

A report in the Far Eastern Economic Review suggested that rumours had it that 'the book targeted the former Deputy Minister accusing him for everything from physical impropriety to graft (August 27, 1998, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp 16-17).

These rumours would have been the claimed reasons for why he could not be considered for the post of the Prime Minister of the country. Other rumours however had it, that the content of this book was fabricated and that the former Minister had obtained an injunction to stop its distribution, while still in office. Local news reports under a headline: Ex-DPM trying to ignite uprising against the government BATU PAHAT.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is trying to ignite an uprising against the Government and create public unrest for his personal motives. Umno vice president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Anwar was also trying to divert public attention away from allegations of his sexual misconduct by repeatedly talking about his so-called imminent arrest under the Internal Security Act.

(New Straits Time, 1998 September, 9)

From this time on the nature of media reports on the former Minister took on a different form. A headline in the Newsweek read; 'Here is Mud in Your Face' with reports of 'accusations of sexual misconduct and corruption in an "Asian smear war" that rivals even Washington's'. The New Straits Times, the Malaysian English mainstream newspaper was said to be 'full of dirty details' (September 14, 1998, October 5, 1998, *Newsweek*, pp. 13-15, 24-25). Local news reports suggested in a headline:

Anwar sacked for 'moral misconduct' by Rashid Yusof; Ashraf Abdullah. Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Umno leaders today that he was compelled to remove Datuk Seri Anwar

Ibrahim from the Cabinet and initiated his expulsion from Umno because of moral misconduct. Breaking his silence over Anwar's dismissal last Wednesday and expulsion from Umno a day later, the Prime Minister made it clear there was no conspiracy involved.

(New Straits Times, 1998, September 8)

The stories against the former Minister were made not only locally, but also internationally. The Prime Minister himself and Anwar Ibrahim set out to travel, locally and internationally in their attempt to present their respective versions of what had taken place. 'Before his arrest, Anwar took a whirlwind tour around the country, while the official media blacked out his speeches and gave full vent to his accuser (October 5, 1998, *the Time*, pp. 16-19). The local press under a headline said: The falling from grace of a leader who would have been PM.

FOR Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad, the man responsible for inducting former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim into active politics and the Government, the decision to drop his once heir-apparent was probably a most difficult and painful one. Perhaps, this could be likened to a decision made by a father on a son; or that of a mentor on his protégé'.

(New Straits Time, 1998 September 4)

Some of the more powerful members of Anwar's inner circle were detained, others went into hiding or fled the country, and some were taking Anwar's cause overseas and won a surprising degree of support'. Members within the ruling coalition of the government were holding informative speeches around the country in their attempt to convince Malaysians of their line of the event, that Anwar Ibrahim was a person of low conduct (October 5, 1998, *the Time*, pp. 16-19, November 12, 1998, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 22-26.).

The former Deputy Minister himself claimed to have been the victim of a huge conspiracy on the highest level. A 1997 document presented by the defence and in which Mohamed Said Awang, retiring director of the special Branch had read: 'the sexual charges appeared to be the "baseless"' (September 14, 1998, November, 16, 1998, the *Newsweek*, pp. 13-14, 24). Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir was reported as describing Anwar Ibrahim as a nice, smiling man, who was plotting against him.

However, he said the action against his former deputy, who was sacked on Sept 2, was not political and not out of fear of Anwar being too much of a challenge to him.

(New Straits Time, 1998, September 23)

Shortly, the police arrested Anwar and he lost his freedom to voice his views. He however demanded trial with the hope that this would enable him to explain to the world what in his views had taken place (October 5, 1998, *the Time*, pp. 16-19, October 12, 1998, *the Newsweek*, pp. 19-20, 24). Newsweek reported that ‘Anwar managed to hijack the proceedings briefly at the close of the first day, as he abruptly turned to the public gallery and let fly a barrage of comments’ (November 16, 1998, *the Newsweek*, p. 24).

He was soon completely denied to voice his opinion even during his own trial and whatever he wished to claim to defend himself, was considered not relevant to the case. ‘...on the second day of the trial, a wall of policeman stood behind Anwar, blocking his easy rapport with the gallery...’ (November 16, 1998, *Newsweek*, p.24).

Family members and associates it was reported found themselves under threat, should they make attempts to assist him in any way (October 5, 1998, *the Time* pp. 19-20, 16-19). Reports of physical violence against him, while in custody, surfaced on the day for his trial to commence.

This treatment became evident as he appeared in public with a 'black eye' and bruises, an obvious result of having been beaten, and according to himself he had also been denied any form of treatment for the injuries (November 9, 1998 *Newsweek*, p. 20).

The former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was to the understanding of this researcher considered a very popular leader and charismatic person. He was much liked by many locally, especially among the younger generation and internationally.

He was further described, as a person, who may be representing the confident new generation of Malaysians.

The reactions over his expulsion, treatment considered much too harsh, seeing that the former Minister appeared to be prepared and willing to go with the police, so also other events were met with very strong emotions by Malaysians, by foreigners residing in Malaysia, by neighbouring countries in the region and world-wide. (October 8, 1998, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 19-20, 22-26). The local media said for example:

There is no reason for most Malaysians to be discontented as the Government has, since independence, provided a good quality of life, the chief executive of a multinational corporation said today. Dr Lothar K. Luensmann, the chief executive officer of environment research and development company BOI Technology Holdings Sdn Bhd, added that effecting change in the Government through violent means would only bring pain to all and the nation would suffer.

(New Straits Time, 1998 September 4)

Most people did not believe the accusations levelled against the former Minister, rather found the 'smutty' stories flung at Anwar difficult to believe, as they have seen it before, unfortunately. The opposition parties in Malaysia and Non-Government Organizations began to demand a proper explanation to the situation (October 8, 1998, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp 22, 26). The local press reported:

The Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (Abim) said it was "shocked" over Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad decision to remove Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister yesterday. Its president Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman said today whatever reasons were cited for the sacking, they would have to be proven with sound evidence and full transparency'.

(New Straits Time, 1998 September 4)

Many Malaysians took to the streets in demonstrations against the situation in the capital city. So also in other parts of the country, at Embassies and other official

places by Malaysians residing in foreign countries in an effort to demonstrate their displeasure. Malaysian ex-diplomat contacted by the Review was reported to have broken down and wept on hearing the news and exclaimed sobbingly: 'My God save this country'. (October 8, 1998, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 22, 26). The local press said for example:

Police have released 107 of 132 people who were detained since on Sunday, in connection with investigations into unrest in the city. They were released on police bail while the rest are still in under police custody.

(New Straits Times, 1998, September 23)

Far Eastern Economic Review reported that 'frustrated by what they called biased reporting about Anwar in the local media and television newscasts, Malaysians turned to alternative sources for information, such as the popular 'Internet'. The Malaysian press did not ignore the Anwar story, but many Malaysians, felt that it had overlooked one side and gone overboard in reporting the other.

Many shopkeepers in the city, however, expressed their unhappiness, as the scenery was disturbing their trade. Malaysians are a peace and harmony-loving people, thus demonstrations held by the supporters of Anwar would not favour his cause, but create negative feelings.

Concerned foreign leaders in Asia initially set aside the non-Intervention policy applied in Asian countries, in their concern over Anwar Ibrahim, and statements were made by at that time sitting national leaders, statesmen and other friends in higher office of the former Minister. Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said today he suspects that the foreign media is conspiring to bring down Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad's Government by playing up the issue on the dismissal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Government and Umno. He said the foreign media seemed to have some political agenda on Malaysia to force some kind of reformation to undermine Dr Mahathir's leadership.

(New Straits Times, 1998, September 23)

The former President Habibbi of Indonesia, the former President of the Philippines, Estrada. Further, the United Nation's Vice-President, Al Gore, and the United. Nation's Secretary, Madam Madeleine Albright and many others were appealing that he should be given 'the treatment in accordance with due process'. The local press said

Indonesia-Malaysia ties will not be affected by the removal of Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. "Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad's decision to sack Anwar from the Cabinet is an internal affair of Malaysia which we hope will not affect the two countries' bilateral relations," said Andi Mattalata of the ruling Golkar Party'.

(New Straits Times, 1998, September 8)

However, not everybody believed Anwar Ibrahim. An executive at a Malaysia multinational argued 'The police would not have beaten Anwar in the glare of the world attention'. The local media suggested:

The former Governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten had recently called on the international finance community to throw its weight behind ousted Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. Patten called Anwar the epitome of "all that the global economy wants of a finance minister in a developing country," in an opinion piece he penned for the Oct 11 issue of the London Independent newspaper. His article was headlined "We must defend the finance minister with a black eye."

(New Straits Times, 1998, October 10)

There were others, the political leaders of Japan and Singapore, who although they sympathized with the expunged former Minister, due to the harsh treatment meted out to him, did not join the crowd of supporters.

Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew was saying: 'I am not saying that Anwar do not have a following. I feel more sad for Mahathir, than Anwar, because I can understand how difficult it is for Dr Mahathir, no other ASEAN leader has lent the

Malaysian Prime Minister open support' (October 8, 1998, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 19-20, 22-26). The local reported:

WHILE Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad is under siege for criticism of western governments and mass media, he enjoys the strong support in Japan. On Oct 21, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi received Dr Mahathir in Tokyo and offered a highly concessional loan for development programmes of Malaysia'.

(New Straits Times, 1998, November 26)

The expected interest for the upcoming Asian Pacific Economical Cooperation (APEC), a meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur was of much concern on the part of Malaysia 'The meeting of the 21 APEC heads of state will be a slippery affair'. The nine years old forum set up to promote globalization could not have come at a worse time. This given all the problems the Asian leaders are facing at home. Talks about free trade between the member nations of Asian, and economics was not a best issue for debate. The location of this year's meeting was also rather awkward. A senior western diplomat in Kuala Lumpur was reported as saying: 'Malaysia's current domestic situation will be on the minds of the leaders. I do not know who will bring it up'.

During a trip to Japan Dr Mahathir exclaimed that 'it would be a tragedy, if they convert Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) into a political forum'. However, the wider concern was Malaysia's overall international image. (November 19, 1998 the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 20-21).

However, the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting became another historical event in Malaysia to be remembered. The pro-government press and Television were making 'political capital' of the latest Indonesian violence to boost the rule of the Prime Minister.

The United States Vice President, Al Gore, provided them with another opportunity, very unexpectedly in his November 16 speech at an official dinner held in Kuala Lumpur in which he voiced support for the 'Reformasi' movement headed by the expunged Minister, and this in front of his host. The Foreign Ministry was reported to have fumed: 'Gore's remarks were 'an attempt to incite civil unrest' (November 6, 1998 the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 110).

These remarks, however came to incite a surge of patriotism, that may helped Mahathir and hurt his opponents and to United Malays National Organization (UMNO) dominating the government, this help was welcome.

The trial, labelled 'the trial of the century' or 'A nation on trial' by *Newsweek* began on November 2, 1998 and expanded over a long period of time. It became an international affair with an overwhelming foreign interest present in Kuala Lumpur, the Capital city of Malaysia and around the courthouse, where the trial was held. Although not many were allowed to enter (it was viewed, as interference in domestic affairs), there were international as well as local lawyers, representatives from various organizations, the Human Rights, journalists from all over the world and many others.

The entire situation in fact came to initiate a huge national drama dominating the local scene and the news agenda in Malaysia and the international media for a long time.

From a legal point of view, the nature of the Malaysian media reports on the preparations of the upcoming trial and on the trial itself, many doubted the sincerity in the event in terms of application of Human Rights, the independence of the Malaysian judiciary from the state machinery (November 7, 1998, *The Economist*, p. 13).

On November 30, 1998 another strange incident took place as one of Anwar's defence lawyers was sentenced to three months in prison. The judge found him in

contempt of court following his refusal to apologize for his filing of an affidavit accusing two state prosecutors of fabricating evidence against the former minister (December 10, 1998, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 20).

April 14, 1999 was the date for final verdict of Anwar and the date for his six (6) years incarceration for ‘using his power as Deputy Prime Minister to stop distribution of the book accusing him for physical misconduct’ to commence.

1.3 METAPHORS IN NEWS REPORTS

News reports are usually rich in metaphors, the tool used by reporters in expressing their experiences or understanding of events. Similarly, the above summary of events related from the news reports contained high number of these phenomena. Metaphors are treated with veneration and suspicion in times during which the writers’ relation to the public is not a primary interest of literary criticism. The early perception and use of metaphors was that of a cognitive tool, beautifying speech (Cooper, 1986).

Scholars of rhetoric, such as Aristotle took full account of the social dimension of metaphor. To him metaphor had one foot in rhetoric, as a tool for winning an argument, and the other in poetics. Hobbes (1651), as cited in Cooper (1986) identified the use of metaphor as one of the four prime abuses of language. Nevertheless, Hobbes (1651) thought of metaphor, as a tool for forceful and colourful expression.

The use of metaphor in human rhetoric may not be easy to explain and understand. It may serve many functions. It can offer a way to transit from known and familiar concepts into to new ideas and in this manner assist in achieving new sense in unclear matters and thus offer valuable insights.