

Media Coverage: The Bukit Antarabangsa Landslide

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ABSTRACT

In the intersection between communication and crisis, the mass media play a significant role in influencing not only public definition and interpretation of the situation but also evaluation of responses from relevant agencies, decision makers and those affected. The media is not dominated by one actor but represented by multiple actors and discourses, each negotiating to ensure that their views predominate and are able to influence people's interpretation and understanding. This paper, based on critical discourse analysis, will examine a Malaysian newspaper's coverage of a landslide in an upper middle class housing area in Kuala Lumpur. The 'Bukit Antarabangsa tragedy' which occurred on 6 December 2008 killed 5 persons and led to the evacuation of thousands of families. The paper will investigate how discourse representation was carried out, examining which voices were privileged or systematically excluded and how voices were recontextualised and how they were framed in relation to each other and in relation to the writer's voice. The analysis highlights the structures of reporting of the various dominant actors, namely, the ruling central government, the opposition state government, the previous state government aligned to the ruling dominant party, victims of previous landslide, current landslide victims and landslide experts, to legitimise or challenge specific responses, actions and decisions.

Keywords: Media, communication, crisis, critical discourse analysis, recontextualised

1. INTRODUCTION

A devastating landslide occurred in Bukit Antarabangsa, an upper middle class neighbourhood in Hulu Klang, Selangor at 3.30 am on Saturday, 6 December 2008. Five people perished in the landslide and more than one thousand residents were told to evacuate as their homes were declared unsafe for occupation. In addition, the landslide cut off access by the main road to the residential areas at Bukit Antarabangsa, trapping hundreds of residents.

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Within the same vicinity, another hillside tragedy, the collapse of the Highland Towers, had occurred on 11 December 1993 claiming forty-eight lives. Subsequently nine other landslide-related incidents occurred in the Hulu Klang area (Bernama, 2008). As such, the local residents have been fighting for years for more comprehensive regulations against indiscriminate hill slope development.

Given this history, the Bukit Antarabangsa tragedy drew a great deal of attention from the general public. In times of crisis like this, the mass media plays an important role in influencing not only public definition and interpretation of the situation but also in evaluating the responses from relevant agencies, decision makers and the affected victims. Consequently, the media is not dominated by one actor but represented by multiple actors and discourses, each negotiating to ensure that their views predominate and influence significant groups' interpretation, understanding and actions.

This paper will therefore examine the discourse representation of the tragedy by examining which voices were privileged or systemically excluded and how voices were recontextualised (i.e. as direct quotes, indirect discourse) and how they were framed in relation to each other and in relation to the writer's voice. The investigation was undertaken using the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) employed by Fairclough (1992; 1995a; 1995b; 2003). The corpus consists of 116 articles published from 7 December to 20 December 2008, in the local English daily, *The Star*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Mass Media Coverage on Disaster*

The media's important role in disseminating information in times of disaster cannot be denied. Media discourse sheds light on the risks and hardship faced by the victims and exposes the weaknesses associated with government policies which contribute to the disaster. Sood *et al.* (1987) reinforces that the media plays a vital role in influencing public opinion about the criticalness of a disaster. In addition, Gaddy and Tanjong (1986) and Garner (1996), highlight that the media is instrumental in perception creation and evaluation particularly towards state response and disaster preparedness. Kodrich and Laituri (2005) also stress that the role of media in disaster communication is vital as there is an increased demand for information concerning its severity, public safety and relief operations, and governmental responses.

2.2 *Discourse Frames*

Discourse on media coverage of disasters mirrors a meaningful picture. The recontextualisation of voices and how they are framed will reflect the changes in relationship between stakeholders and how the emotive coverage of the disaster engages the audience. According to Lupton "...media texts produce and reproduce meaning in the choice of topics covered and the way those issues are represented through relative positioning, choice, and use of language - reproducing dominant ideologies or discourses" (cited in Kodrich and Laituri, 2005:470). In a disaster situation like the Bukit Antarabangsa tragedy, the media is reliant on local and state government for information and as Kodrich and Laituri (2005: 470) rightly point out the information "...can be biased due to differing political

agendas”. As such, they add that the analysis of discursive contexts and constructions and the subject positions “... may contribute to the individualising of social problems and the marginalisation of individuals who are vulnerable to emotional, psychological, and social distress ...”. Additionally, Sorenson (1991) emphasises that media news discourse is not ideologically neutral as mass media news reporting constitutes a specific type of discourse with its code and conventions.

2.3 Landslides in Malaysia

Malaysia has seen rapid growth in the last decade and is poised to attain a fully developed country status by the year 2020. This economic quest contributes to “over-zealous rapid development without stringent environmental protection measures” (Chan, 1998:14). This rush to attain developed status is made at the expense of environmental principles. Rules and laws pertaining to development are sometimes compromised to accommodate greed and wealth. Politicians and policymakers contribute to this environmental degradation. Slack enforcement by the relevant authorities pertaining development results in tragic consequences like the Highland Towers tragedy in 1993 which caused the death of forty-nine people. Shaluf and Ahmadun (2006) highlight that to date, Malaysia has experienced nineteen natural disasters, out of which 30% were due to landslides which caused 1,038 fatalities. It has been ascertained that most of these landslides occur on cut slopes, embankments alongside roads and highways in mountainous areas, near high-rise apartments and residential areas (Lee and Pradhan, 2006: 661). Lee and Pradhan (2006: 661) further highlight that “In Malaysia, little attention has been paid to the people who live within landslide-prone areas”. This lack of preparation to manage the forces of nature has been more often than not attributed to ‘acts of God’. However, Chan (1998:15) reveals that the frequent occurrences of landslides “coupled with increasing awareness and improved education amongst the public have made such claims less and less tenable”. The media too has played a crucial role in highlighting these occurrences as ‘acts of humans’ rather than ‘acts of God.’

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation of the present study is undertaken using the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) employed by Fairclough (2003)

According to Fairclough (1992) texts (including media texts) are essentially intertextual whereby they are composed by elements of other texts. Intertextuality denotes “the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth” (Fairclough, 1995a:84).

Discourse representation is a “form of intertextuality in which parts of other texts are incorporated into a text, and usually explicitly marked as such, with devices such as quotation marks and reporting clauses” (Fairclough, 1995a:107). It is a major part of the news: representations of what newsworthy people have said (Fairclough, 1995b). He states that

the mass media's power to present a certain event or group of people is evident in the selection of texts/voices.

This article investigates how discourse representation (i.e. which and how other voices are included or significantly excluded, how the the voices are attributed, and how other voices are textured in relation to the authorial voice and in relation to each other) may be varied or manipulated in the construction of reality to evoke certain feelings and images within the audience.

Accounts usually draw a basic distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' discourse representation. In the case of direct discourse (DD), the words represented are in quotation marks, and there is an explicit boundary between the 'voice' of the person being reported and the 'voice' of the reporter. As for 'indirect' discourse (ID), the quotation marks disappear and the represented discourse takes the form of a clause grammatically subordinated to the reporting clause. In this case, the voices of the reporter and the reported are less clearly demarcated, and the words used to represent the latter's discourse may be paraphrased by the reporter (Fairclough, 1995b).

3.2 Data

The sample data is derived from one of Malaysia's local daily: *The Star*. The chosen articles were published between 7 December 2008 and 20 December 2008 and the total number of issues containing articles on the Bukit Antarabangsa disaster was 116. The newspaper articles covered various aspects of the disaster, ranging from the number of casualties to personal accounts of the victims. The discourse was examined for variation and cohesiveness and similarities and differences.

4. Analysis

4.1 A Case of Negligence

One of the representations of the landslide is that of negligence. The news report presents the claims made by several sources on how the landslide could have been averted if action had been taken earlier. This is evident in the data analysed in Extract 1.

Extract 1

RESIDENTS PLAN TO SUE

Residents affected by the landslide at Bukit Antarabangsa plan to sue the relevant government authorities for compensation.

A task force set up to represent the residents feel it has enough grounds to sue as the authorities had failed to act in time to avert the tragedy that claimed four lives. Task force chairman Datuk M. Muniandy said that the committee had engaged lawyers to prepare the lawsuit and to identify the defendants.

"We have strong evidence to back the suit. The residents had been reporting about the slope instability for about two years."

"Because of the hilly terrain, the residents were always alert and cautious and had reported landslides, even sinkholes with the third one going about 6m deep," he

told reporters after a meeting with Selangor police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar here yesterday.

Task force secretary Raymond Jegathesan claimed that when residents complained that trees started to fall, the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) attributed it to strong winds and continuous rain.

Over 20 years ago, a block of houses under construction collapsed near the current landslide area but no action was taken to strengthen the slope.

“Now lives have been lost and people have lost their life savings.”

The meeting between Khalid and the residents’ representative was surprisingly not a fiery affair as anticipated.

Both parties discussed looting, entry of outsiders into the affected hillside.

Residents also claimed that seven to eight reports had been lodged on looting and there was also photographic evidence of people in uniform misbehaving.

Nevertheless, Khalid urged residents to lodge reports over their complaints.

(*The Star*, 10 December 2008, p.N6)

Extract 1 indicates that such a disaster was imminent in this area as there were warning signals. The relevant authorities were alerted of the soil instability as the area had experienced numerous landslides in the past. The warning signals reported by the residents were not taken seriously by the authorities and it was not thoroughly investigated implying negligence. The disaster was attributed to the complacency of the relevant authorities. It was felt that such a disaster could have been averted if the authorities had been more vigilant and if they had in place more stringent policies on hillside development. The relevant authorities’ lack of action and lax policies is implied as a contributing factor to the disaster.

The news report shows a high level of dialogicality with many of the statements being attributed to specific agents both animate (i.e. Datuk M. Muniandy – Task force chairman, Deputy Commissioner Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar, - Selangor police chief, and Raymond Jegathesan – Task force secretary, the residents) and inanimate (i.e. Ampang Jaya Municipal Council). The boundaries between the representing discourse and the represented discourse can be considered high as there are many instances of direct discourse (DD) (i.e. *the daily quoted Datuk M. Muniandy as saying “We have strong evidence to back the suit. The residents had been reporting about the slope instability for about two years.” “Because of the hilly terrain, the residents were always alert and cautious and had reported landslides, even sinkholes with the third one going about 6m deep”. The daily also quoted Raymond Jegathesan as saying “Now lives have been lost and people have lost their life savings.”*) as compared to indirect discourse (ID) (i.e. *Task force secretary Raymond Jegathesan claimed that when residents complained that trees started to fall, the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) attributed it to strong winds and continuous rain, Residents also claimed that seven to eight reports had been lodged on looting and there was also photographic evidence of people in uniform misbehaving, Khalid urged residents to lodge reports over their complaints*). The journalist maintains a high-boundary strategy to distance himself from the statements made by the Task force chairman and secretary

respectively. This is to highlight that the claims of negligence made by the residents are not supported by the newspaper. By this, it avoids implicating the daily in any way with these claims. A high boundary strategy may have been applied to maintain neutrality in reporting.

The accessed 'voices' consist of the Task force committee (i.e. the chairman, Datuk M. Muniandy and secretary, Raymond Jegathesan), and the government authorities (the Selangor police chief Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar and Ampang Jaya Municipal Council). It should be noted that the claims are by the task force which is made up of residents of Bukit Antarabangsa. There is no mention of geological experts to back up the residents' claims. This questions the authenticity of the task force's claims. In a way, this weakens the credibility of the residents' claims. This is reflected clearly when the journalist states "*Over 20 years ago, a block of houses under construction collapsed near the current landslide area but no action was taken to strengthen the slope.*" This information is written without any attribution so there is ambiguity as it is unclear where the 'fact' was obtained from, i.e. the residents, experts or others. The inclusion of the government authorities, i.e. the Selangor chief police officer is to stress that the police were there to maintain security and to protect the residents from further loss due to looting. Ampang Jaya Municipal Council is included to draw attention to the lack of empathy of the council towards the residents numerous complaints. It also highlights the lackadaisical attitude of the council towards complaints that were life threatening. It also implies that the disaster could have been avoided if the council had taken immediate actions.

The statements made by the accessed voices of the chairman and secretary are categorical assertions, where they are to be taken as facts. However, these assertions are not backed by expert opinion which makes their claims insubstantial. The assertions are merely implying that the landslide could have been averted if the relevant government authorities were more vigilant. The voices of the representatives of the task force did not use any modals to create ambiguity in their assertions, making their assertions as statements of facts without any room for argument.

Extracts 2 and 3 call for hillside development rules and procedures to be set and followed. The first extract "*Time to end slip-ups*" begins with a statement of fact (*It has been raining*) followed by ID quote of an expert that "*we cannot blame the rain all the time*", emphasising the tone of the article that landslide is a man-made phenomena. The opening statements are meaningful in the context of previous landslides as a former Minister of Works attributes the cause of landslide to the forces of nature. The consensus of the experts is that hill slope development can be safely carried out if proper measures are taken by the relevant authorities.

Extract 2

TIME TO END SLIP-UPS

It has been raining for many days. This was one of the common comments heard after the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide which claimed four lives last Sunday, with one still missing. But we cannot blame the rain all the time, says geotechnical engineer Dr. Gue See Saw.

“We have to accept that we have a high rainfall in Malaysia, so we have to design and build structures that can withstand it,” says Dr. Gue, who is also a Fellow of the Academy of Science Malaysia.

He adds that hillside projects can be carried out safely if proper investigation is conducted on the slope before it is developed.

“We need to ensure that the slope is stabilised before carrying out developments in the area. The construction of the building should be done under strict supervision and developers should ensure the safety and sustainability of the buildings,” he says.

Strengthen political will

Dr. Gue is one of many who joined the public outcry against the lack of responsibility on the part of developers and the authorities involved in hillslope developments. Since the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide tragedy, residents have been up in arms against possible recurrences of a similar tragedy if nothing is done to halt further development.

But as the Highland Towers tragedy is painfully reminding us, Malaysians have short memories.

Whenever a tragedy occurs, we clamour and howl for blood but once the dust settles, we erase it from our conscience. Resolved action rarely follows the heated words. Life goes on. Hillslope development continues to thrive, until another tragedy occurs.

The fatal landslide in Bukit Antarabangsa occurred less than a week short of the 15th anniversary of the Highland Towers tragedy which killed 48 and rendered thousands homeless. It was the third landslide in the week, occurring just days after a landslide in Ulu Yam killed two sisters in their sleep.

In the last 15 years, there were 13 major landslides in the Hulu Klang area, of which five were in the Bukit Antarabangsa area.

Strong political will is crucial for change, says local government expert and lawyer Derek Fernandez. “Areas of high risk are known, development on hill slopes exceeding 25% is not allowed according to guidelines issued by the department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia, but this was rarely followed by the state governments”.

He cites the project by Selangor Dredging Bhd (SDB) Properties in Medan Damansara that comprises 21 bungalows costing between RM10 mil and RM15 mil each as an example.

Competent experts

Shaik Abdul Wahid, director of an engineering consultant company, feels that professionalism is wanting across the board in the development projects nationwide.

“It is sad that even with the excellent level of engineering we have, the basics have not been covered. All one has to do is to take a drive and look around. One will

hardly fail to notice open areas subjected to rapid erosion, slopes consisting of all forms of rubbish from construction material to even soil. Our construction methods, even for the lowest basics such as drains, have deteriorated to a level that is hard to describe,” he notes.

He claims that the method usually used for testing soil does not normally provide reliable samples while most slope-related designs tend to confine attention mainly to within boundaries of the project area without considering the surrounding areas.

Abdul Wahid is critical of the dumping method, where developers cut out the soil and dump it down the slope. “Where a slope is constructed by simply dumping soil without compaction, soil inside the slope is loose. Regardless of vegetation cover and drainage provided, water will still get into the slope, loosening soils, washing away fine particles in the soils and causing piping and rapid erosion, and in time, slips,” he says.

Improve working system

All agree that a more harmonised framework and system is needed to facilitate safe development projects, specifically hillside developments. Currently, any application submitted by the developer goes through 11 departments, not including Ikram and the Public Works Department.

“In theory, the local authorities are supposed to investigate on site but you find that they have no resources to do it or it is not done with seriousness. Many local authorities don’t have consultant engineers nor is supervision undertaken for each stage of development. Consequently, in practice, the documents were given in a manner that would render them as nonsense because the people receiving the reports have no expertise to evaluate them,” he (Fernandez) says.

(*Sunday Star*, 14 December 2008)

Extract 2 explains how landslide can be prevented in a built environment. There is a high degree of dialogicality as most of the statements are attributed to experts in the area of building and development, namely, a geotechnical engineer, a lawyer cum local government expert and an engineering consultant. As experts they have privilege access and as such there is frequent usage of direct attribution from them, particularly in the direct speech. Examples of DD are “*We have to accept that we have a high rainfall in Malaysia, so we have to design and build structures that can withstand it*”, says Dr. Gue; “*Areas of high risk are known, development on hill slopes exceeding 25^a% is not allowed according to guidelines issued by the department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia, but this was rarely followed by the state governments*”, says Derek Fernandez; “*It is sad that even with the excellent level of engineering we have, the basics have not been covered.*”, he (Shaik Abdul Wahid) notes. Quoting the experts in direct speech lends credence to technical discussion of the text as well as shows that the writer has done research with credible sources before writing the report.

There is high usage of categorical assertions by experts on the procedures to be followed to ensure safe hill slope development, such as soil stabilisation, proper earthworks and drainage, regular supervision and maintenance of the whole area. The use of modals 'are supposed to' and "need to" emphasises that certain procedures were not followed, such as, "In theory, the local authorities **are supposed to** investigate on site but you find that they have no resources to do it or it is not done with seriousness" (Fernandez) and "**We need to ensure that the slope is stabilised before carrying out developments in the area**" (Gue). In the latter statement, Gue uses the inclusive pronoun 'we' to refer to all parties concerned with hill slope construction, particularly, the local authorities and developers. Similarly, another construction expert, Shaik Abdul Wahid, blames the local authorities and developers for low standard of construction, "**Our construction methods, even for the lowest basics such as drains, have deteriorated to a level that is hard to describe**".

The experts direct the landslide problem to specific agents for non-adherence of slope safety procedure. By so doing, the experts provide clarity and emphasis on the parties accountable for the problem, in this case, the local authorities and developers. For example, Shaik Abdul Wahid blames developers for improper earthworks which lead to loosening of slope soil, "**developers cut out the soil and dump it down the slope**". Fernandez cites the problems of the lack of political will and professionalism among the local authorities, "*development on hill slopes exceeding 25^o is not allowed according to guidelines issued by the department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia, but this was rarely followed by the **state governments***". Pertaining to the lack of supervision, "*the **local authorities** are supposed to investigate on site but you find that **they** have no resources to do it or it is not done with seriousness. Many **local authorities** don't have consultant engineers nor is supervision undertaken for each stage of development*".

In addition, the writer of extract 3 makes some assertions as statements of fact to show the seriousness of the problem (i.e. *It was the third landslide in the week, occurring just days after a landslide in Ulu Yam killed two sisters in their sleep. In the last 15 years, there were 13 major landslides in the Hulu Klang area, of which five were in the Bukit Antarabangsa area*). This is followed by other statements which as a result of past experience, are made as statements of fact, "*Whenever a tragedy occurs, **we** clamour and howl for blood but once the dust settles, **we** erase it from our conscience. Resolved action rarely follows the heated words*". However, the use of inclusive pronoun 'we' in this case which refers to Malaysians in general, shows that the writer is not optimistic that all the hue and cry will be followed by concrete action.

Extract 3

THE ROOTS OF TRAGEDY

You don't ban cars because of accidents. You make sure that people drive carefully, roads are built better, cars are safer and in good condition, people use safety belts and only qualified people drive, to mention just a few measures to reduce road deaths.

Short-circuiting any of these, or compromising on these standards, results in higher accident rates and a greater number of deaths and injuries when accidents happen. Like all public concerns, road safety has to be managed.

The recent hill slope tragedy at Bukit Antarabangsa just outside Kuala Lumpur is yet another example of management of the process of property project assessment and development going awry.

The problem in this case is not hillside development but the wrong kind of hillside development. The solution is not banning hillside development but ensuring that hillside development takes place under carefully controlled and supervised conditions to reduce the danger of landslips.

What are the prerequisites for that? First and foremost we need honest and competent local councils and authorities. Honesty is all important, because if the integrity of councilors and council heads can be compromised, the decision-making is going to be bad and in favour of the developer, no matter what.

Next is competence. That's necessary at least at two levels. First, you need it to be able to establish what are the standards for hill slope development. Next, you need that to be able to monitor and establish for certain that developers adhere to the standards agreed upon.

The questions to ask are these: Are our local authorities honest enough to turn down inducements that developers may offer and stick to professionalism and integrity? Are they competent enough to ensure that proper safety standards are set and adhered to?

If the answers are "no" to both those questions, then we should go about taking measure such that the answers are affirmative soonest. Honesty and integrity come first.

(*The Star*, 12 December 2008)

Extract 3 is written by a regular columnist of *The Star*, and as such the statements are in the authorial account. There are no statements attributed to other persons.

The article begins with statements of fact: "**You don't ban cars because of accidents. You make sure people drive carefully. Like all public concerns, road safety has to be managed**". There are no modalities in these statements showing the writer's high level of commitment, that this is how the matter should be handled. In terms of speech usage, the author through the possessive pronoun 'you', emphasises that the matter involves everyone and addresses the readers directly.

Pertaining to the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide, the author makes a moral assertion, "*The problem in this case is not hillside development but the wrong kind of hillside development*". Again there is an absence of modalities ('not banning hillside development but ensuring that hillside development takes place under carefully controlled and supervised conditions') denoting the writer prefers to say it as a factual assertion that, hillside development can occur if precautions are taken.

On the measures needed to be taken, the writer uses the question form to dialogue with the readers. "*What are the prerequisites for that (prevent landslide)?*" The question is

rhetorical as the writer goes on to provide the answer as well. The writer makes a categorical statement (“*Honesty is all important, because if the integrity of councilors and council heads **can** be compromised, the decision-making is going to be bad*”), with the use of modality ‘*can*’ denoting a median level of commitment. The writer further defines the second prerequisite needed to prevent landslide, namely, competence of the local authorities (“*you need it to be able to establish what are the standards*”, “*you need that to be able to monitor*”). The use of personal pronoun ‘*you*’ directly addresses and places responsibility on the local authorities.

In the final paragraph, the writer continues to use the question form to engage the readers. (“*Are **our** local authorities honest enough..? Are they competent enough...?*”) To these questions, the writer implies that the answer is “no”. If that is the case, the writer continues with the suggestion that, “***we should** go about taking measures.*” The use of the possessive pronoun ‘*our*’ denotes that the local authorities work for the public and are accountable to the public. On the other hand, the use of personal pronoun ‘*we*’, denote that the author speaks on behalf of the public. The use of the modality ‘*should*’ indicates a high level of commitment expected from all parties concerned, that the local authorities should be accountable to the public and the public should be responsible to ensure that the local authorities do what they are supposed to do.

4.2 Political Blame

The March 2008 election in Malaysia changed the political landscape in the country. Selangor, the richest state fell to a opposition party, the Pakatan Rakyat. As a result, frequent political attacks are made by both Pakatan Rakyat and Barisan Nasional, the former state government, against each other over corrupt practices and other wrong doings. The Pakatan Rakyat wants to prove that it is a better, caring and a corrupt-free government who has the interest of the people at heart. The Bukit Antarabangsa tragedy took place in an upper middle class area in Selangor which had a history of landslides. Selangor has always been a Barisan Nasional stronghold and this disaster gave Pakatan Rakyat an opportunity to point out the inefficiency and corrupt policies of the previous government, reinforcing that the people made the right choice in voting them into office. This unfortunate tragedy gave Pakatan Rakyat an opportunity to disclose the proactive actions taken by them in ensuring safety of hillside developments. *Extract 4* draws attention to the political scenario in the state.

Extract 4

99 HILLSIDE PROJECTS APPROVED SINCE 2000

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim (PKR-Bandar Tun Razak) has declassified state information to reveal that a total of 99 development projects on hills were approved by local councils in Selangor since 2000.

He said that 33 of them were approved between 2000 and January 2005 while 63 were approved between February 2005 and February this year.

Three others have been abandoned.

Speaking to reporters at the Parliament lobby, he said 64 projects were ongoing, 21 had yet to start while the status of 11 projects could not be determined as yet. Currently, 27 projects came under the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council, said Khalid, adding that of these, 10 of them were located in Bukit Antarabangsa and 11 in Melawati.

On June 27 last year, Khalid said a committee meeting under the state government had rejected the application by Superview Sdn Bhd to revive an abandoned project at Jalan Wangsa 9, Taman Wangsa Ukay.

Since April, Khalid said the state government had been monitoring hillside developments and ordered those which did not comply with regulations to stop work.

“We have ordered some projects to stop work in Subang and Kajang areas,” said Khalid.

He said that inspections would continue as part of the government’s monitoring process.

He added that between 1993 and 2008 there had been 18 major landslides in Selangor – in Ampang Jaya (nine), Subang (three), Selayang (two), Kajang (three) and one in Hulu Selangor.

(*The Star*, 11 December 2008, p. N28)

Extract 4 shows a high level of dialogicality where many of the statements made are attributed to a specific agent: Selangor Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim. The direct attribution to this ‘voice’ serves to highlight the difference between the voice of the reported and the voice of those reported. Fairclough (1995b: 81) mentions that an important variable in the representation of discourse is the degree to which boundaries are maintained between the representing discourse and the represented discourse – between the voice of the reporter and the person reported. The represented discourse is incorporated into the representing discourse, summarised rather than quoted, using indirect discourse (ID) in many cases. For example, “*He said that 33 of them were approved between 2000 and January 2005 while 63 were approved between February 2005 and February this year*”. The Selangor Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim’s voice is represented mainly in ID and once in DD (e.g. “*We have ordered some projects to stop work in the Subang and Kajang areas,*” said Khalid). This is significant as the journalist is attempting to distance himself from the Menteri Besar’s claim, as the journalist does not want to be linked in any way if the claims are not true.

The accessed ‘voice’ is that of Selangor Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim as being the current chief minister of the state he is accountable for government agencies like Ampang Jaya Municipal Council as Bukit Antarabangsa comes under the jurisdiction of this council. Therefore the voice of Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim increases the credibility of the reporting. However, the voice of the previous government and Superview Sdn Bhd is excluded and therefore they are not given a chance to explain their side of the story.

The statements made by Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim are categorical assertions, where they can be taken as facts as he is the chief minister and privy to confidential information. He therefore may have made the assertions to distance himself from the decisions made by the

previous government as the development was a contributing factor to the tragedy. There is only one instance of modal used by Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim (i.e. *He said that inspections would continue as part of the government's monitoring process*). This shows a high degree of commitment by the current state government to ensure that such tragedies do not happen in the future.

The site visits and probe on the cause of landslide ensued after the initial shock of the landslide and the subsequent action of evacuating the affected parties. Many people were interested in knowing the outcome of the investigation; the findings hold many answers to the equally many questions swirling around the heads of various parties: developers, municipal councilors, victims, and the public in general. The findings will determine whose house is unsafe for occupancy, who needs to evacuate, who can go home, and most importantly, who is at fault.

Extract 5

SOME HOMES DECLARED UNSAFE

Most residents affected by the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide tragedy are expected to be allowed to return to their homes.

However, some would have to abandon their homes as they have been declared unsafe.

A three-page report of the tragedy containing these recommendations was handed to Selangor Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim at about 12.45pm yesterday.

Khalid said that he had not had the time to read the report in full and could not make further statements on its contents.

He said he had directed Gombak District officer Huzaini Samsi and Ampang Jaya Municipal Council president Abdul Hamid Hussain to study the report and visit the areas where houses were to be abandoned.

“The state government will then discuss the report from the council chief and district officer to see what help we can offer to the residents who will move back and also those who will have to shift out.

“There are also a few areas listed in the report where we will need to conduct some work to ensure future safety,” he said yesterday.

Khalid said he would visit the site on Sunday to announce the houses that need to be vacated and the help that the state government would offer.

Some 3,000 Bukit Antarabangsa residents who had to evacuate their homes after the landslide have been waiting anxiously for the report.

The affected residents are from Impian Selatan Condominium, Taman Bukit Jaya, Taman Bukit Mewah and Taman Wangsa Ukay.

It is learnt that police at Bukit Antarabangsa handed the summary of the report to Huzaini as he was the state government representative on site.

He then took the report to the state secretariat building and handed it to Khalid. It is also learnt that the report by the Public Works Department, Malaysian Public Works Institute and Geological Department did not contain full details of findings

such as the cause of the landslide, the soil composition, data of rainfall in the area on the day of the tragedy and the current status of the surrounding slopes.

It did, however, list the affected homes in several categories like stable, low risk, high risk and unsafe for occupation.

State tourism, consumer affairs and environment chairman, Elizabeth Wong, said the report only listed houses that had to be abandoned while for those that could be occupied, it only stated when the residents could move in.

The dates for residents to move in are important as some of the areas require work to stabilise surrounding land or slopes before the homes can be occupied, she said.

(*The Star*, 20 December 2008, p.N32)

Extract 5 shows a high level of dialogicality with many of the statements being attributed to specific agents both animate (i.e. Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim – Selangor Menteri Besar, police at Bukit Antarabangsa, and Elizabeth Wong – state tourism, consumer affairs and environment chairman) and inanimate (i.e. report by the Public Works Department, Malaysian Public Works Institute and Geological Department). The direct attribution to these ‘voices’ serves to highlight the difference between the ‘voice’ of the reported from the reporter. The degree to which the boundaries are maintained between the reporting discourse and the reported discourse – between the ‘voice’ of the reporter and the person reported - is considered an important variable (Fairclough, 1995b). However, in the above excerpt, the boundary between the representing discourse and the represented discourse can be considered low as there are only two instances of DD (i.e. “*The state government will then discuss the report from the council chief and district officer to see what help we can offer to the residents who will move back and also those who will have to shift out.*” “*There are also a few areas listed in the report where we will need to conduct some work to ensure future safety*”) as compared to ID (i.e. *Khalid said that he had not had the time to read the report in full and could not make further statements on its contents, He said he had directed Gombak District officer Huzaini Samsi and Ampang Jaya Municipal Council president Abdul Hamid Hussain to study the report and visit the areas where houses were to be abandoned, Khalid said he would visit the site on Sunday to announce the houses that need to be vacated and the help that the state government would offer, It did, however, list the affected homes in several categories like stable, low risk, high risk and unsafe for occupation, State tourism, consumer affairs and environment chairman Elizabeth Wong said the report only listed houses that had to be abandoned while for those that could be occupied it only stated when the residents could move in, The dates for residents to move in are important as some of the areas require work to stabilise surrounding land or slopes before the homes can be occupied, she said*). The represented discourse is incorporated into the representing discourse; condensed rather than cited. Thus, the high usage of ID here shows that paraphrasing has occurred and this suggests that some of the words reported in the excerpt may not be the actual words used.

It is interesting to observe that there are two statements which are not attributed to any source (i.e. *It is learnt that police at Bukit Antarabangsa handed the summary of the*

report to Huzaini as he was the state government representative on site, It is also learnt that the report by the Public Works Department, Malaysian Public Works Institute and Geological Department did not contain full details of findings such as the cause of the landslide, the soil composition, data of rainfall in the area on the day of the tragedy and the current status of the surrounding slopes). However, these two statements are linked to a similar source that is undisclosed. The reporter also chooses to use the second person pronoun in the statements, rather than using the first person pronoun to show that it is he who found out the information from the undisclosed source. Perhaps the reporter has been asked not to reveal the source's identity if information is given to him. This implies that the mysterious source could be an insider whose job might be at stake if his identity is revealed in the press.

The accessed 'voices' consist of the attributed voices listed above: both animate and inanimate. Fairclough (1995b) notes that a very high proportion of media output in news consists of the speech of mainly prominent people in the various domains of public life, such as politicians, police, lawyers, many categories of experts and so forth. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the accessed voices in excerpt 5 are from the pool of people listed by Fairclough: politicians, police, experts' report. It is worthy to note then that the 'voices' of the affected parties such as the victims, are not heard at all. Instead, they are only mentioned collectively in the excerpt as part of the story. It is ironic that their voices are not heard given that they are the victims of the landslide who are undergoing a lot of hardship. Perhaps the opinion of the affected parties is not important in this juncture as their thoughts may not attribute anything substantial about the landslide other than to air their grouses of the hardship that they are currently facing.

There is a high degree of commitment to act by the main 'voice', Khalid. His statements are filled with the modal 'will' (i.e. *The state government will then discuss the report from the council chief and district officer to see what help we can offer to the residents who will move back and also those who will have to shift out, There are also a few area listed in the report where we will need to conduct some work to ensure future safety, Khalid said he would visit the site on Sunday to announce the houses that need to be vacated and the help that the state government would offer*). The use of 'deontic' modality shows the high level of commitment by Khalid to act on his statements. It is also noteworthy that in his statements, he interchanges the use of personal pronouns, 'he' and 'we', and the proper noun, 'the state government'. This interexchange of pronouns serve to highlight the fact that he and the state government are one entity and that they are both working together as a unit to get the work done for the victims and how to best help them.

Apart from the use of modals, there are also instances of categorical assertions (or statements of fact). They are found in the reporter's statements as well as the accessed voices' statements. By using categorical assertions, there is no room for any kind of doubt in the mind of the reader. For example, the statement *some would have to abandon their homes as they have been declared unsafe* informs the reader that the affected houses are indisputably not safe for occupancy. In another categorical statement by Khalid, *he had directed Gombak District officer Huzaini Samsi and Ampang Jaya Municipal Council president Abdul Hamid Hussain to study the report and visit the areas where houses were*

to be abandoned, makes it very clear what Khalid has done: given directives to two officers to analyse the report and subsequently, make a site visit to the proposed abandoned houses.

One of the recommendations to prevent future landslides is to adopt the Hong Kong's land code. The recommendation came from the government's Public Works Department and the Public Accounts Committee. *Extract 6* is a news report of the Deputy Prime Minister's interview with journalists.

Extract 6

MALAYSIA MAY ADOPT HK'S HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT RULES

Kuala Lumpur: The Government may introduce planning legislation similar to Hong Kong's guidelines of hillside development to prevent more landslides in future.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Government was willing to consider any suggestion when he was asked to comment on the statement by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) that it would look into introducing a new hillside law based on Hong Kong's Buildings Ordinance.

Najib said many tragedies could be avoided if the authorities approve development orders based on objective technical evaluation of the environmental impact assessment. "We should not focus on profit and put aside the people's safety and environmental concerns," he said.

"We do not want landslide tragedies to happen again because there is a lot of public anger"

"There is much cynicism as well that statements may not be heeded by the relevant authorities, he said when asked to comment if the Government would hold local councils responsible for approving any high-risk development project.

In 2006, the Federal Court ruled that the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council was not liable for the pre- and post-collapse events at Highland Towers, which killed 48 people and left thousands homeless. "We have to discuss whether we can put in place mechanisms to prevent high-risk development projects," he told newsmen after launching the book *Taib Andak – In a Class of His Own* at Menara Maybank yesterday.

(*The Star*, 12 December 2008)

Extract 6 shows a moderate level of dialogicality, with statements from the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Federal Court. However, only the Deputy Prime Minister's statements are in direct discourse. There are two process types that can be observed in the extract. The first is the verbal process involving the Deputy Prime Minister that the government is willing to consider any suggestions. The latter expresses his view but does not take any action. Action is seen in the second process type, that is, material process, where it is reported that the Federal Court 'ruled' that the Municipal Council is not liable for the collapse of Highland Towers.

The government's low level of commitment to adopt Hong Kong's hillside development rules is indicated by the choice of the modalities 'may' ("The Government **may** introduce planning legislation"), as well as 'could' ("tragedies **could** be avoided if the authorities approve development based on objective technical evaluation"), which indicate the speaker's uncertainty on whether the tragedies can be avoided.

On the other hand, when making a general moral statement, the author, as expected of a politician, speaks with high level of commitment, such as "We **should** not focus on profit and put aside the people's safety and environmental concerns," and "We **do not** want landslide tragedies to happen again because there is a lot of public anger."

4.3 Personal Trauma

One of the popular methods of including the 'voice' of the non-prominent people in public life would be through narratives. This is when the media publishes reports of individuals or groups related to the issue/incident. *Extract 7* is an example of a narrative of a victim from the landslide.

Extract 7

VET WITH A HEART OF GOLD

KUALALUMPUR: Veterinarian Dr. Yogeswari who died in the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide tragedy on Saturday had a heart of gold.

As her funeral was being held yesterday, friends related how they had lost a good person.

She died trying to save her children.

The 40-year-old had used her body to shield Avinesh Raj, 11, and Priyanka, three, but a beam fell on her back, fracturing her ribs and causing massive internal bleeding. Independent animal rescuer and founding director of animal sanctuary Furry Friends Farm Sabrina Yeap said she had lost a good friend and supporter.

"Dr Yoges helped me a lot by charging only a nominal fee to vaccinate, neuter and treat rescued cats and dogs.

"She also did not take any money when boarding rescued dogs and cats at the clinic," said Yeap tearfully.

According to Yeap, Dr Yogeswari was such a likeable person that it was very easy to warm up to her.

She said this was evident when workers from a coffee shop where the veterinarian had her meals rushed to her home when the landslide occurred.

"They told me that they helped extricate her from the rubble.

"The restaurant supervisor said they tried everything possible to resuscitate her," said Yeap of the veterinarian attached to the Anicare Veterinary Clinic in Wangsa Maju.

Dr Yogeswari was cremated at the Cheras Crematorium at 3pm yesterday.

She was born a Chinese and was adopted by an Indian family at a young age.

She traced her biological family through an advertisement in the newspapers not long ago and had kept in touch with them.

Her adoptive parents died some time back.

Relative Ravindran Poobalan said the family organised a gathering with Dr Yogeswari (and she) was a very friendly person by nature.

“She was always greeting people with a smile or a pat on their back. Her children were the world to her,” said Ravindran.

Caroline Joseph Raj, 41, said that she got to know Dr Yogeswari seven years ago as their children were friends.

“We all will miss her.”

(*The Star*, 8 December 2008, p. N10)

Extract 7 again displays a high level of dialogicality where many of the statements made are attributed to a specific agent: friends, Sabrina Yeap - Independent animal rescuer and founding director of animal sanctuary Furry Friends Farm, workers from a coffee shop, restaurant supervisor, Ravindran Poobalan - relative, Caroline Joseph Raj- friend. Boundaries between reported and reporting discourse can be considered rather high as many of these agents' statements are in DD (i.e. “*Dr Yoges helped me a lot by charging only a nominal fee to vaccinate, neuter and treat rescued cats and dogs*”, “*She also did not take any money when boarding rescued dogs and cats at the clinic*”, “*They told me that they helped extricate her from the rubble*”, “*The restaurant supervisor said they tried everything possible to resuscitate her*”, “*She was always greeting people with a smile or a pat on their back. Her children were the world to her*”, “*We all will miss her*”). From the cases of DD in the excerpt, it is clear that most of the statements are describing the victim, Dr Yogeswari. The remaining two statements are about how they tried to rescue her. It is significant that these statements are in DD for several reasons: (1) the reporter is distancing himself from the statements made by the agents as he does not know the victim prior to this incident and it is hard to gauge the accuracy of the agents' claims; (2) this also lends credibility to the narrative that the reporter is not making up this story but has done some investigation on the victim by interviewing those who knew her; (3) by using specific agents and attributing their claims in DD, the reader will empathise more and feel as if he also knows something about the victim. Thus, the use of DD in a narrative and attributing these statements to specific agents are salient in capturing the heart of the readers.

There are also instances of ID in the above excerpt: *friends related how they had lost a good person, she had lost a good friend and supporter, According to Yeap, Dr Yogeswari was such a likeable person that it was very easy to warm up to her, She said this was evident when workers from a coffee shop where the veterinarian had her meals rushed to her home when the landslide occurred, Relative Ravindran Poobalan said the family organised a gathering with Dr Yogeswari (and she) was a very friendly person by nature, Caroline Joseph Raj, 41, said that she got to know Dr Yogeswari seven years ago as their children were friends.* Once again, the use of ID implies that the reporter has paraphrased the statements of the reported. However, the agents of the statements are made very clear to illustrate who said what. It is also interesting to note that the reporting verb used very

frequently in the ID is the neutral verb, 'said'. This does not reveal much of the feelings or thoughts of the reported, except for what is being said in the statements. Stronger reporting verbs such as 'emphasised', 'agreed', 'explained', 'agreed', 'acknowledged', 'asserted', 'commented', 'described', 'asserted', would describe what someone has said more accurately. Perhaps this was the intention of the reporter: to remain neutral in his reporting so as to make his report more objective.

The accessed 'voices' in the above excerpt are from various circles: social (*friends, Caroline Joseph Raj, workers from a coffee shop, restaurant supervisor*), professional (*Sabrina Yeap*), and family (*Ravindran Poobalan*). The reporter covers various circles to infuse a more holistic representation of Dr. Yogeswari. Some of these accessed 'voices' are not named, probably for a couple of reasons. One, there are too many of them (friends, workers from a coffee shop), and they are not deemed important enough to be mentioned (workers from a coffee shop, restaurant supervisor). This is even more apparent when the latter two accessed 'voices' are heard via another accessed 'voice', Sabrina Yeap. Their statements are framed within Sabrina Yeap's statements. However, the workers from a coffee shop and the restaurant supervisor play a significant role as accessed 'voices' because they are the ones who lend a sense of social aspect to the victim. This also shows that Dr. Yogeswari was such a *friendly* and *warm* person to everyone, regardless of their background, and that they had gone to great lengths to rescue her.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the victim's immediate family members are not given space at all. Could this be because the family members refused to talk to the press? Or were they too distraught to give a statement? Or the reporter wishes to respect the privacy of the deceased's family? The latter would definitely make the reporter more humane in the eyes of the reader.

This excerpt is rather distinctive as it contains only one modal. Furthermore, the modal used is 'will', which shows a high degree of commitment by the user. The user actually comprises many people, although it is not specifically mentioned who they are. It can be presumed that in the statement, *We all will miss her*, the inclusive pronoun would include the victim's family members, relatives, friends and from professional to social associates.

The other statements made are all categorical statements. Most of these statements are essentially about Dr. Yogeswari: personality, work ethics, background. These statements of fact help to give the reader an idea of the kind of person the victim was according to those who knew her personally. She is described as *a good person, a good friend and supporter, likeable person, a very friendly person by nature*. Furthermore, Dr. Yogeswari is also said to be a person who *had a heart of gold* and *it was very easy to warm up to her*. Thus, by using categorical assertions to describe Dr. Yogeswari, the reporter achieves two aims: (1) the victim is a nice person according to those interviewed, and not according to the reporter who does not know her; (2) there is no doubt as to what is said about the victim.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis highlights how the coverage was framed to draw attention to negligence. The reporting focuses on the impact of the disaster on residents who are worried of their safety and furious at the lack of intervention by the relevant authorities in preventing such a

disaster. This is in light of the fact that the area experienced numerous landslides in the past. The voices of the reported through the reporter and the prominent and non-prominent people highlight the anguish of the residents in wake of the loss of lives and property. The media also highlights that careful planning with proper environmental measures should be put in place and enforced to avert such tragedies in the future. Additionally, Malaysia should attain fully developed country status in the year 2020 by not compromising on environmental principles. The media therefore plays a powerful role in exposing and educating the common man on environmental degradation brought about by rushed development and relaxed policies.

The political blame game is highlighted with high dialogicality where many statements are attributed to specific agents such as politicians, the police and experts. This distances the reporter from what was reported and draws attention to the way politicians and people in power play to the gallery to gain political mileage in times of tragedy. In short, the greed for wealth and power should not be entertained and the 'acts of humans' should be minimised, if not eradicated to prevent such disasters in the future. Malaysia should instead emulate the best practices on hillside development which has been successfully adopted by other countries. This will enable the Malaysian government to conserve the natural environment and minimise tragedies.

The discourse representation also brings out the voices of the victims of the landslide who suffered personal trauma through the loss of loved ones. The analysis looks at the how the media covered the loss of lives accurately and sensitively. Baring witness to a sudden death always brings out an outpouring of grief by those who knew the victim directly or indirectly and the media reporting is able to introduce these voices in an emotive way. The analysis also highlights that no comments were sought from immediate family members of the victim by the press. This move by the journalist is construed as positive as the press is portrayed as being understanding.

In conclusion, the textual analysis draws attention to the 'voices' of various stakeholders and how the 'voices' were framed to emphasise negligence, political maneuvering and grief associated with disasters of such magnitude. The media plays a crucial role in gathering and providing information about these disasters to the general public, government officials, relief organisations and environmental groups. The media thus facilitates discussion about the causes of such disasters, and the preparedness and response of the authorities in the wake of such occurrences. The media plays the role of a commentator, interpreter and gatekeeper. It cannot be denied that public opinions are formed by the media as information is packaged and framed to shape the way in which the public receives, digests and reacts to the news.

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