ABSTRACT

Prophet Mohammed’s birthday has always been a day of celebration for the Muslims of Singapore, until the outbreak of the race riot on this special day in July 1964. This riot, together with the September riot, was the first large-scale racial violence involving the Chinese and Malay communities of Singapore.

The objective of this Academic Exercise is to examine the historical background, causes and impacts of the race riots of Singapore in 1964. Besides sketching the historical background and examining the causes of the outbreak of the two racial riots, this exercise also seeks to piece together some of the incidents of the riots and to highlight their main features. Attention is also given to the impact that the riots have on the policies of the Singapore government.

Through this exercise, the significance of the riots breaking out barely a year after the merger of Singapore and Malaya and the events taking place before and after the riots were much observed. Political instability and communal fears were created by rivalries between the Federal and Singapore governments. This was further exacerbated by the attempts of Indonesia to disrupt racial harmony and political stability of Malaysia through its policies of Confrontation. These together with the historical differences of the two communities and a number of other factors culminated in the outbreak of the racial violence.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject, difficulties prevail when obtaining official information and reports. Apart from reports in local and foreign newspapers and periodicals, there has been little information on the actual incidents taking place in July and September 1964. However, information gathered during interviews with witnesses of the riots, has to some extent made up for the lack.

It is hoped that this exercise will be of some use to those interested in the racial violence of Singapore and will encourage more researches on the subject.