

KAJIAN MENJANA INTEGRASI NASIONAL DALAM MASYARAKAT MUDA (MINDA MUDA)
“PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONGST YOUNG MALAYSIANS”

Centre of Public Policy Studies (CPPS), National Young Lawyers' Committee (NYLC)
Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) recently conducted a qualitative study focusing on young urban Malaysians in the Kiang Valley. This forms Stage I of the full project, inputs of which will contribute to the formulation of the Stage II quantitative study. The qualitative study comprised 8 in-depth pair interviews and 1 focus group discussion with young Malaysians of the three main ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese & Indian) between the ages of 18 and 30. The section on Methodology below provides a more detailed outline.

OBJECTIVE

The scope of the research study was based primarily on the following core objectives:

- a) To unearth the young Malaysians' life values system, hopes and aspirations for the present and future.
- b) Attitudes towards and aspirations for National Unity in Malaysia, inclusive of racial, religious and social integration.
- c) Brainstorming from the youth's point of view, how such a process of unification is envisaged to take place.

The research findings will be used to strategize and provide effective and actionable consultation on the forward plan for National Unity amongst the young citizens in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

1. Discussion Guide

The discussion guide was developed by the Centre for Public Policy Studies with some consultation with local academicians and a market research consultancy.

2. Research Work

All qualitative research interviews were conducted by the Research Analysts of the Centre for Public Policy Studies and Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute.

a) In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews of pairs (one male and one female were interviewed at the same time, with the exception of Group 8 with two females, and Group 1 with one male). All respondents were from the Klang Valley, and had either completed or were enrolled in a tertiary education institution course, public or private. Respondents were selected based on classification of age, race and spoken language. In-depth interviews allowed for an extensive probing discussion with respondents, lasting up to at least two hours per session. Opinions and viewpoints were exhausted as much as possible in order to get maximum feedback. The following shows the classification of respective in-depth interviews conducted.

b) Focus Group Discussion

A single Focus Group discussion of five persons was conducted, comprising two Malays, two Chinese and one Indian, ranging from 22 to 30 years of age. All respondents either had completed or were enrolled in a higher education institution course. All the respondents were employed in a range of vocations. The focus group was conducted in order to explore the opinions obtained from *a group environment with a mixed-race setting* as opposed to single-race in-depth interviews.

3. Logistics & Administration

Interviews were conducted at the premises of Dynamic Search Sdn. Bhd., an objective and impartial Market Research Consultancy was responsible for the following: -

- Providing premises and logistical facilities
- Project Assistant for the interview sessions
- Audio recording of all interview sessions

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative study carried out by the Centre for Public Policy Studies covered both in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. These comprised three broad research arms and objectives: to unearth young Malaysians' life values, needs and concerns for the present; to understand their attitudes and expectations towards Malaysia specifically with respect to education, national unity, religious tolerance and racial harmony; and finally to gain feedback of their future prospects, both for the nation and individual.

Based on the current research study, it was found that young urban Malaysians (between the ages of 18 and 30) are very socio-centric in nature. Racial intermingling starts at a young age, and is more apparent amongst English-speaking groups when compared with their vernacular-speaking counterparts. However, inter-racial interaction starts to dissipate over time. The English-speaking groups are more socially and politically aware, placing greater importance upon issues of national concern. However, all groups emphasize that individual career, education and family take priority.

Malay groups tend to rate the local public tertiary institutions higher than private colleges — whereas the Chinese rate them the other way round. All, however, agree that foreign universities have the highest standard. If given the choice, all would choose to study abroad. Where English-speaking groups are prepared to select national-type schools for their children, vernacular-speaking choose select Chinese-type/private Muslim schools. This perpetuates the increasingly fragmented Malaysian society.

The young urban individual displays conflicting sentiments towards Malaysia. The young are contented with the Malaysian lifestyle and modernization process, but show great disappointment at systems that fail within the country. They are cognizant of heightened racial and religious problems that are perceived as propagated by national leaders and/or policies. Stumbling blocks to national unity are religion, language, culture, special rights and racial policies (responses differ according to ethnic background). Malays are generally more positive towards the situation, rating racial and religious harmony higher than do the Chinese.

Unfortunately, government policies towards improving national unity have not been perceived as prominent or successful. The JPNIN has very little public awareness, and this has detrimental effect upon its efforts to promote national unity through activities and events.

Malaysia's future is predicted to be overall positive and bright, achieving Vision 2020 through economic development. However, despite such advancement, some are wary of potential inter-racial and religious tension. It is the English-speaking group that is becoming frustrated and disillusioned with national issues, mainly because they are more socially conscious to begin with. Such disengagement from society, combined with a sense that Malaysia may not necessarily fulfill their individual life goals, leads especially the English-speaking Chinese to believe that migration abroad is the best solution. Vernacular-speaking groups are less aware of and feel personally removed from socio-political issues and problems, preferring to live in their respective insular pockets of society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government's mission is to promote a greater understanding and sense of integration through relationships and social interaction, in forming a united national Malaysian identity. It aims to do this by encouraging people of different races to interact in its events and activities. Their objectives and aims resonate with Malaysia's Vision 2020 in establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared identity.

However, based on the feedback gleaned from the present qualitative study, it is not entirely clear to the young urban Malays, what this common and shared identity really is.

There exist vast differences in opinions between individuals from ethnic backgrounds. The languages spoken also seem to determine very different viewpoints towards Malaysia. Because it is the vernacular speaking groups that appear to be insular in nature, concerted efforts should be taken to ensure they are not marginalized from the mainstream. For example, there ought to be translations of newspapers into different languages, as opposed to the current situation where people of different races are exposed to different mass media. Media propagates certain viewpoints, and dichotomies between cultures continue to grow if not addressed quickly.

It is evident that it is in fact the English-speaking groups that cultivate more inter-racial friendships. Language is no barrier, and most are exposed to similar mass media, appreciate similar lifestyles and share a common identity. Despite ethnic differences, they are willing to adapt accordingly. This group is also particularly appreciative of cultural differences and prefers to acknowledge cultural diversity within their inter-racial interactions. The government would do well to focus its efforts on upholding national unity amongst English-speaking urban youth.

Efforts to promote national unity have not all failed. Respondents recognize this especially during festivals and functions, where all races readily intermingle. However, it is also acknowledged that this is a very external and superficial affair. In order for national unity to be enhanced, it is imperative that the nation's leaders themselves do not perpetuate racial discrimination either through their remarks or implementation of preferential policies, the latter of which effectively negates all national unity and government efforts.

Stumbling blocks to national unity were perceived to be religion, language, culture, special rights and racial policies. If the government is serious about tackling national unity for the sake of the country, work needs to begin with these core issues, sensitive though they may be.

Lastly, more efforts should be taken to undertake comprehensive research in understanding the urban youth, their aspirations and goals for the future. There ought to be political will within the government that is receptive and positive to absorbing new ideas and recommendations for the sake of national unity, and the country's dream of achieving a developed nation status by year 2020.

PREPARATION FOR STAGE II

Stage II of the Young Urban Malaysians Study will be carried out through a nationwide quantitative survey covering all regions of Peninsular Malaysia.