

Students offer 'M'sian first' hugs amid racially-charged rhetoric

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Aidila Razak

A week after racist slurs were hurled at the Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu rally, three students conduct a novel social experiment to see if Malaysia is indeed as racially-fractured as rally may suggest.

In the social experiment, the three college students blindfold themselves and stand at a thoroughfare at a Klang Valley higher education institute.

Taking turns, students S Sathisvaran, Choo Jian Tatt and Muhd Shukri Rahmad hold placards declaring themselves as "Malaysians first" and their respective ethnicities second.

"Hug me if you agree!" the placard reads.

The idea came about when the trio, all interns at Tarantella Pictures, brainstormed ideas on a social experiment that is both important to them and close to the hearts of Malaysians.

"I've always wanted to produce a film which has a multiracial theme," media and communications student Sathisvaran told Malaysiakini.

"(I got) lots (of hugs)! It was very overwhelming!" he gushed.

Tarantella Pictures managing director Sharad Sharan said the students wanted to show the beauty of Malaysian society.

He added the credit goes entirely to the three students, with Tarantella only providing some technical support.

But according to Sathisvaran, it took a lot of convincing to get Tarantella on board as the management was worried the topic might be "too sensitive".

"So I had a tough time explaining it's just a message (we want to) get out there and test the response.

"We were very close to shutting down the idea due to its sensitivity. But I fought for it and took the risk," he said.

Deeply moved

His efforts seemed to have paid off even before the video of the social experiment hit the Youtube page 'Prank Asia'.

A passer-by who caught Sathisvaran in action took a photograph of him, which was shared

more than 3,000 times within 24 hours.

Ashley Grieg, who posted the photograph, said Sathisvaran was in tears after he received hugs and words of encouragement from people of various races.

“Deeply moved, I approached him and gave him a long, warm hug and told him: “Whoever it is that you are, I’m proud of you. I’m proud of what you’re doing here. Thank you for giving us all hope that there is a better tomorrow waiting for us.”

“I walked away in tears... and a renewed sense of hope for our beloved Malaysia,” Grieg wrote.

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