

**Unpatriotic non-Malays: Gov't should ask why  
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Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi should be commended for stating in Parliament that the reason Chinese and Indians made up only a tiny proportion of Army recruits was because their "patriotism spirit is not high enough".

This is because he has inadvertently brought out into the open a perception which is shared by the majority of Malay leaders and also possibly by a very large proportion of the Malay population. It is a perception that should not be suppressed - on the contrary, it needs to be fully aired and dissected so that rational thinking and fact-based policy formulation shall prevail.

What has been criticised as a "racially biased, shallow and chauvinistic" statement questioning the loyalty of young Malaysians may in fact be correct.

Non-Malays may be much less patriotic than Malays which accounts for their low enrolment in the military and civil service, as well as for their lack of participation in other national activities when patriotism and loyalty to the country are showcased. But it could also be wrong as it ignores other factors that may be instrumental in explaining the low number of recruits.

In many countries of the world, it has been found that the main factor underlying military recruitment is the socio-economic class that recruits come from. This is likely to be a major explanation for the past and current trend of recruitment in Malaysia too. It is unlikely that we will find recruits coming from youths of the middle or upper class of Malaysian society - whatever their community or sense of patriotism - now or in the future.

The only way to find out whether this larger perception of the lack of loyalty and patriotism of non-Malays - as compared with other communities - is correct or wrong is to carry out rigorous studies on the disputed subject and not to silence the messenger. Following from these rigorous studies and the wide dissemination of their findings, a more rational discussion and analysis can take place in Parliament and in the public arena.

It is important that these studies on the subject of patriotism and loyalty amongst different communities in the country as well as on the related issues of the lack of non-Malay participation in the army and other sectors of the public service should be conducted by credible and independent researchers. In view of the sensitive and controversial nature of the topics, it may be too much to expect our local social scientists and researchers to conduct these studies without fear or favour.

Outsourcing the studies to reputable institutions from abroad which have a strong track record for carrying out ethnic perception research - in collaboration with local teams - may be a possible way forward in carrying out these urgently needed studies.

At the same time, there is a need to sustain the public space to explore, analyse, and arrive at a more informed, coherent, and sympathetic understanding of how our multi-ethnic society works and does not work. For that reason, we should not seek to silence these statements, baseless or shallow or insensitive as they may be.

If politicians in the country remain true to the facts and their views are based on the

scrupulous adherence to evidence produced by researchers and more informed stakeholders, it can only benefit our nation by holding them to higher standards of knowledge, responsibility and governance.

Finally, if there is indeed a lack of loyalty and patriotism amongst young non-Malays, then clearly the country is in deep trouble and we should address the root causes immediately.

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