

**1Malaysia: What's it all about, Najib?**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Oct 5, 2009**  
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Academics and activists have urged premier Najib Abdul Razak to clearly define the concept of '1Malaysia' before it is perceived to be nothing more than "another branding exercise".

Over the past few weeks, the tagline has been bandied about at various corporate initiatives such as the launch of the 1Malaysia F1 team, 1Malaysia earthquake fund for Sumatra and government-sponsored projects like the 1Malaysia lantern festival.

Merdeka Centre director Ibrahim Suffian (*right*) said that this might be an attempt by Barisan Nasional (BN) to divert the public's attention from social issues.

"Over the last two years, issues stemming from ethnicity and perceived frustrations of minority culminated in the Hindraf rally and right-wing statements from the political parties," he said.

Given the widespread public dissatisfaction, the 1Malaysia exercise is "just something to show that the PM has the idea to address the problem".

However, he cautioned that, once the euphoria and excitement have died down, people will still go back to the fundamentals to make a judgment.

"Everyone likes to jump on the bandwagon when something is new but ultimately, the acceptance level would largely depend on whether the minority gets fair treatment.

"Beyond the rhetoric, people want to see if anything has changed in the government. Najib is facing a much more challenging situation".

**Not a new concept**

Asked if private companies are taking advantage of the situation to promote their interests, Ibrahim had this to say: "It is good if their efforts are noble but bad if it becomes a commercial activity with a branded harmonious connotation to it. It loses its value then".

On the similarities between DAP's 'Malaysian Malaysia' aspiration and the 1Malaysia concept, he said that 1Malaysia embodies a cultural and social point of view, while 'Malaysian Malaysia' is based on the demand for fair and equal rights and opportunities for everyone.

Help Institute Department of Politics and International Relations head Aruna Gobinath shared his views, also pointing out that 1Malaysia is not a new concept.

"The British colonial government (produced) a trump card, saying we will never get independence unless we unite. And we did. We became 1Malaysia long ago," she said.

However, racial politics have since resulted in bad policies, she said, and this has divided young people.

"I believe that we have perhaps lost two to three generations of Malaysians due to this. The intention of 1Malaysia, if not original, is noble. But more needs to be done to encourage

buy-in, and it has to be more than just (the use of) gimmicks".

"If we talk about 1Malaysia, we have to talk about giving people an equal opportunity to have a share of the economic pie. We must make people feel proud of being Malaysians because there is room for them in the country".

She said that most people have the understanding that 1Malaysia is about racial unity, as a result of the vague nature of the campaign.

"Sweeping statements are sweeping statements. To encourage buy-in, the government needs to have the concept tabulated and clearly translated into concrete action steps," she said.

### **'Don't politicise issue'**

Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia member Jayanath Appudurai agreed that ordinary people do not know the real meaning of the concept, despite the funds spent on the promotion campaign.

The 'Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia' group was formed on Sept 16 by concerned citizens as an initiative to unite Malaysians in embracing diversity.

Jayanath said the government should work to deliver its promise of equality for all.

"People like the idea of equality, but this needs to be translated into policy. Poverty, for example, needs to be seriously addressed. The bottom 40 percent of the population own only 13 percent of the country's wealth, while the top 10 percent own close to 40 percent," said the former civil servant and statistician, citing official data.

"The discussion still includes misinterpretation of Article 153. The special position of Malays and other bumiputera is clearly defined, and we do not dispute this. But nowhere is this interpreted as *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy). Unfortunately this is still what 1Malaysia is explained as".

He said he believes that 1Malaysia is a short-term concept, perhaps to assist the BN to regain support in the next general election.

"But I would be surprised if they use this campaign for the election. If they truly believe in 1Malaysia, they will understand that it is an issue which must not to be politicised," he said.

Dismissing the 1Malaysia earthquake fund as "crass", Jayanath said companies should not use the 1Malaysia concept as an opportunity to obtain publicity.

"We are responding to a humanitarian situation because people need help," he noted.

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