

**Forum speakers flay 'Ketuanan Melayu'**  
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**Aidila Razak**

The concept of Ketuanan Melayu (Malay supremacy) and the Social Contract is a political ploy used by the ruling coalition to remain in power, argued DAP vice-chairman Tunku Abdul Aziz Ibrahim.

"If there is such a thing as a Malaysian social contract, it is one that has nothing to do with (Malay) privileges but instead outlines the government's responsibility to protect its people," he told an audience of about 80 people at the Annexe Gallery in Kuala Lumpur today.

Abdul Aziz were one of four speakers at a 90-minute forum alongside UKM social scientist and Sisters in Islam stalwart Norani Othman, Malaysian history expert Clive Kessler and Petaling Jaya city councillor Richard Yeoh.

The forum entitled 'The Myth of Malay Supremacy' was organised by Research for Social Advancement (Refsa), which is also headed by Yeoh.

According to Abdul Aziz, what people perceive as the social contract is actually an understanding by the country's founding fathers that to "live together, we must work together".

"Our founding fathers were men of liberal ideas and never thought of special privileges for Malays," he said.

Abdul Aziz also noted that Malaysia, as a nation, is still a work in progress as the country has yet to find its own identity due to non-inclusive policies.

"There is only a reasonable chance for everyone to have a common Malaysian identity if we all feel fairly included by the policies which govern us... not when people feel that Malaysia is largely a Malay-centric place," he said.

### **1Malaysia concept 'vague'**

When asked if the 1Malaysia concept addresses the issue of a shared identity, Abdul Aziz said the idea championed by Najib Razak is very vague and that even the prime minister has failed to explain.

Tunku said that DAP's 'Malaysian Malaysia' is one that "does not discriminate nor endorses the torturing of its citizens."

He however added that while the phrase has been used heavily by DAP, it has been his personal belief even before he joined the party last year.

Tunku also said that the Malaysian Malaysia concept when it was first introduced by then People's Action Party leader Lee Kuan Yew in the 1960s, there was still a lot of distrust among the various ethnic communities due to vast economic disparity.

This is a view shared by Norani, who said that the concept is appropriate now as there is a large proportion of middle-class Malaysians who are "ready... to be a part of a nation as equal citizens."

She conceded however that there is still a psychological barrier, in which many Malays still

feel they are not ready to let go of their crutches.

"This is a vicious cycle where people are kept in a sort of feudal captive mindset," she said.

Norani, who is the co-author of the book 'Sharing the Nation', added that the very concept of Ketuanan Melayu make her cringe as it evokes "notions of enslavement".

"In Malay classical terms, the word 'ketuanan' implies lordship over captives, which is a pre-feudal concept that is out of sync in 1957, 1963 and today," she said.

Like Abdul Aziz, she warned against falling into the "trap" of Ketuanan Melayu, which she deemed as a "political project."

### **Origins of Ketuanan Melayu**

According to Yeoh, the term 'Ketuanan Melayu' first came about in a speech by former aide to then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah Ahmad, who in 1986 said that Malays should be dominant in political leadership.

"It was a fairly benign speech and most of us might have had no problem with it, but it has been taken to mean Malay supremacy by some Umno leaders who don't necessarily know what it means," he said.

He also said that the term should also be taken in context, as it came at a time when Umno was "at the throes of dispute" with Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah actively challenging Mahathir's leadership.

Yeoh added that the constitution only provides for special preferences for Malays in areas which already existed prior to independence, and that no new special preferences were to be added.

He contended the abuse of such affirmative policies may have actually weighed the Malay community down.

"Malays would achieve all that they have achieved, and maybe even more, without this divisive term that is Ketuanan Melayu," he said.

Meanwhile, Kessler added that what the country is currently experiencing is the third dispensation of the Merdeka agreement made by the founding fathers, the first of which came in 1969 and the second in 1971 with the New Economic Policy.

"(The second dispensation) began to die in 1999... but continued to live on unnaturally from 2004 when the government thought all was forgiven, until what happened in (the) 2008 (general election)," he said.

It is therefore the hope, he said, that this third wave will "embody the spirit of the Merdeka agreement", which had the purpose of developing an "inclusive and pluralistic" nation.

Indeed, Kessler argued that the second deputy prime minister, Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman had once said that "the unnatural continuation of (affirmative policies in aid of the Malays) would be an affront to Malay dignity."

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