

'Identity crisis' confronts Malaysia, forum told

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PETALING JAYA - Malaysia is trapped in an identity crisis and people are urged not to allow extremist viewpoints to undermine the community trust that were built from the past.

Rafizi Ramli, Chief Executive of Selangor Economic Advisory Office, speaking in the public forum "What Does It Mean To Be Malaysians?" Wednesday, said that the society's main problem is, it is trapped in a world of distrust where people's views are polarized and narrowed down to racially-based perspectives.

"We as a community and country has allowed distrust to evolve as an identity," he said in the forum organised by the DAP state assemblyman for Kampung Tunku, Lau Weng San.

"It is a joke what we have been through lately. Distrust need to be put aside," he added.

Therefore, he said extremist views should be left out from the fringe and has urged to start dialogue to exchange viewpoints in finding the most rational view that benefits all 'Malaysians' without championing a certain race group.

Also, one of the panelists, Subang Jaya state assemblyman Hannah Yeo, urged the public to stop supporting any racial causes by voting out those race and religious based political parties.

The 31 year-old politician, who has an Indian-Chinese mix marriage background, said she hopes that in the future her child's birth certificate will only state "Malaysian" and not based on any racial distinction.

Leon Donald, DAP Sarawak Assistant Publicity Secretary, said that although both Sabah and Sarawak have no racial problems being a part of the country, they are facing an identity issue with their partnership in the Federation.

The Sarawak representative said, "For us, there can be no dominant race. We see ourselves as Sarawakian first, and Malaysian second."

Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin had earlier this year taken the stance perceiving himself as Malay first and Malaysian second.

According to Leon, Sarawakians were disadvantaged when it comes to job employment saying that, "When we look for jobs, Sarawakians are always the last to get anything," explaining that his Oxford-educated cousin failed to secure a job in Kuching while Malays from the Peninsular are positioned as heads of departments.

In his views, the election outcome of March 8, 2008 was the reason to why the Borneo states have recently been given much coverage to voice out their opinions and listened to.

He also claimed that the results of 308 explains the excitement over the upcoming Malaysia Day on Sept 16 which includes Sabah and Sarawak for the first time, because Umno-BN had gained considerable support from the Borneo side in the last election.

Azmi Sharom, who also spoke in the forum, said that the term "Malay rights" does not exist in the Federal Constitution except for "special position" (of the Bumiputera).

According to the law associate professor in University Malaya (UM), Article 153 gives permission to the government to take "affirmative action", but limited to the Constitution, and did not state special discounts to purchase luxury houses should be allocated only to a certain group.

Azmi, who has 20 years of experience in UM, said that there needs to be a national ethos - basic ground rules - that are shared by everyone to run the country and he noted they are already enshrined in the Constitution.

However, these basic ground rules have been badly abused and misinterpreted which clearly showed that there is no strength of leadership to "walk the talk", he said.

Others who attended the forum were DAP MP for Petaling Jaya Utara Tony Pua and V Gnanabathirao, a former ISA detainee.- *MM*

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