

Asli: Nation-building main thrust

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PETALING JAYA: Strengthen national unity and key institutions – the Federal Constitution, rule of law, the judiciary, legislative and executive – and promote egalitarianism and good governance.

These are among the eight thrusts in the Merdeka Statement launched by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute's (Asli) Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) yesterday in conjunction with the nation's 50th independence anniversary.

The statement was formulated since March in consultation with 42 organisations representing

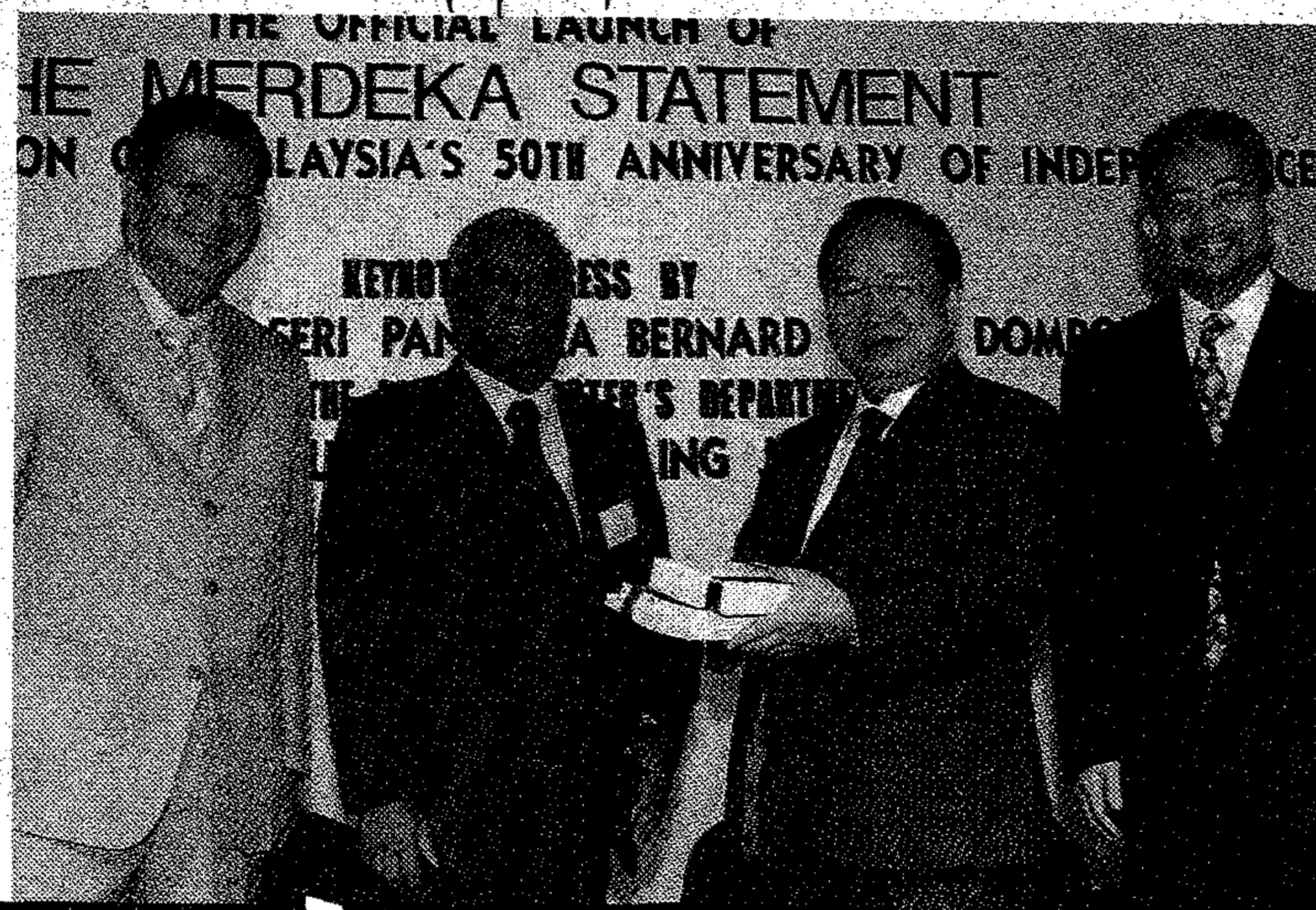
Malaysians from different ethnic, religious, vocational and academic backgrounds, Asli's chief executive officer Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh said in his speech at the launch.

"It sets out a set of nation-building principles and basic beliefs, which can constitute a philosophy to guide Malaysia for the next 50 years.

"It is aspirational, inspirational and forward-looking. It is balanced and comprehensive," he said.

Yeoh said the statement reaffirms and builds on the basic building blocks of nation-building such as the Social Contract, *Rukun Negara* and Federal Constitution.

He said that in putting forward the eight thrusts, the centre is not being confrontational but is seeking



Dompok (2nd from right) holds 'The Merdeka Statement' which he received from Ramon Navaratnam at the official launch yesterday.

consensus and building bridges.

"The Merdeka Statement is not a set of demands. It sets out the aspirations of a large number of Malaysians who want to contribute positively and constructively to the process of nation-building."

The CPPS is adopting the wish-list as the New Malaysian Agenda, with the following eight thrusts:

» **Strengthen national unity:**

New sustained efforts are urgently needed to rebuild national unity as ethnic, linguistic and religious divides have deepened, causing pain and hurt to many in the nation;

» **Enhance international**

competitiveness:

The country must remain engaged with the global economy, rapidly and continually adapting to maintain competitiveness by adopting international best practices.

Conceptualise new strategies and programmes to overcome poverty and restructure society irrespective of race, taking into account changing local and global developments, and focusing more on needs and meritocracy;

» **Create an innovation economy:**

An innovation policy should be developed as part of existing plans and policies within trade and services industries. A culture of

creativity and thinking outside the box must be cultivated in all spheres to encourage creativity and innovation;

» **Redress imbalances:**

Imbalances – poverty, intra-ethnic and inter-gender income inequalities – need to be redressed with newer strategies and more vigorous efforts;

» **Reinforce key institutions:**

The Federal Constitution and rule of law need to be defended by all Malaysians; the executive, legislature and judiciary need to be further strengthened and their independence ensured to reflect good governance; law reforms are needed to protect the fundamental liberties and rights of all Malaysians;

» **Reform the education system**

Radical change of mindset is needed for a paradigm shift in rethinking education, in developing a world-class Malaysian education system. National development entails an honest and critical self-reflection, which involves being truthful about the past we have inherited through an accurate and objective depiction and study of the nation's history;

» **Ensure quality of life:**

Quality of life includes protecting the environment, having adequate access to healthcare, basic amenities and improving the policing system to address rising crime rate, among others.

» **Improve governance, fight**

corruption:

The principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and responsibility must be strictly upheld and enforced in all sectors of society.

Asked during the press conference later if the eight thrusts are sufficient to address all issues faced by the nation, CPPS chairman Tan Sri Dr Ramon Navaratnam said the statement is comprehensive but added that the centre is prepared to take in new ideas.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, in his keynote address, said the government welcomes comments and criticisms from the non-governmental organisations and the public.



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