

First step is a change in education policies

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Tony Pua says more parents are opting for Chinese schools

KUALA LUMPUR: National unity should start with changes in education policies which will lead to mutual respect, love, justice and equality among the younger generation.

This was the general sentiment among 100 young professionals who attended the "Young Malaysians Round Table discussion on National Unity and Development in Malaysia: Challenges and Prospects for Nation-Building."

Vernacular schools were a hot topic with arguments for and against them while the merits and demerits of nation-

al schools were also discussed.

Panellist Tony Pua, from the Education Malaysia blog, said more Malaysians were sending their children to Chinese schools due to a decline in the quality of education in national schools.

"More non-Malays are getting uncomfortable with national schools which they feel are becoming more Islamic."

Panellist Dr Azmi Sharom from Universiti Malaya said national schools needed to create confidence among non-Malay parents.

"It is good to get all the races in a school. But many parents

feel the environment in national schools is getting more Islamic."

Participants also wanted national unity to be taken to a higher level.

Most felt Malaysians should no longer talk about "tolerating" one another.

Panellist Tricia Yeoh, from the Centre of Public Policy, said many found language to be a stumbling block in creating a Bangsa Malaysia.

"We did a study on youth in the Klang Valley. It showed that English speaking youth had a better mix of friends from different races."

The study, called "Young Ur-

ban Malaysians study on National Unity and Development", also focused on Malaysians from vernacular schools.

"It found that Malaysians mixed with their own kind more as they felt comfortable to a common language."

Yeoh, who rounded up the discussion, said participants wanted Malaysians to appreciate one another besides understanding, accepting and providing equal treatment to all.

Some participants also felt that Malaysia should do away with information on race and ethnicity in forms.