

# Racial profiling the norm for Malaysians

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**PETALING JAYA:** The racialisation of institutions and public spaces is a big problem in Malaysia, causing Malaysians to have a limited world view.

This was one of the main points raised at the talk, "Is Close Ethnic Relations A Distant Dream?" last Tuesday, the fourth and last in a series of talks on the Ethnic Relations Module Alternative Course.

"The racialisation process gives its influence to everything in a situation, to the extent that in our world view, we see 'race' in everything," said Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (Ikmas) academic Dr Sumit Mandal.

He said the diversity in Malaysian society was constrained under the major labels of Malay, Chinese and Indian, and that people should embrace cultures rather than racial categories, as the latter restricted the community's creativity.

"This is not to say that we reject our race. We appreciate our language and culture as well as each other's, but we

don't hold on to racial categories rigidly," he pointed out.

Organised by Youth for Change, the Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall's youth section and the Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, the course was held following public debate over how the module, taught in public universities, depicted certain issues, such as the 1969 riots and the role of indigenous groups.

Another speaker, social scientist Dr Lim Teck Ghee said the West Malaysian model of ethnic relations, built on the politicisation and institutionalisation of ethnicity, was deeply flawed.

The former director of the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute's Centre for Public Policy Studies, said cultural differences could be a threat if they were allowed to affect judgment with notions of inherent superiority or dominance.

"Extremist politicians and civil servants have been allowed to tap into chauvinistic feelings on many fronts. This short-sightedness has made harmonious relations, especially among Malays and non-Malays, and

Muslims and non-Muslims, a more difficult, perhaps an impossible dream," he said.

Lim, however, did not rule out the possibility of close ethnic relations in Malaysia, citing social cohesion and empathy among various ethnic and religious groups in East Malaysia as an example.

He stressed on the need for leaders to devote attention and resources to improve such relations.

"There needs to be education leading to tolerance. Stop teaching negative views of other ethnic groups

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and religions. Encourage young people to have contact with people from other groups, as only through contact can they understand.

"We need to teach them that modern societies are pluralistic and how to cope positively with this pluralism."

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pg 14

