

**Survival, not politics or race, our concern, law grad tells DPM**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**July 10, 2015**  
**By Anisah Shukry**

A video clip of a young Malaysian speaking of the financial struggles she and her generation face to an audience who included Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is making its rounds on social media.

In the video by the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM), the 23-year-old law graduate, who only identified herself as Zahra, told the deputy prime minister how she had grown increasingly disappointed and angry that the life she is living was not what she had envisioned as a student.

"The reality of the working world is not as beautiful as people expect it to be – on the contrary, it is torturous. Yes, I drive to the office, but the car is not mine. I am borrowing it and pay RM500 each month to my father for it.

"Usually, by the end of the month, I take the LRT to the office because my pockets are empty by that time. It has become a routine, and I am ashamed to face my parents. I should be taking care of them, not the other way around," said Zahra, at an event organised by MTEM on June 17.

But she said she had no other choice, as her salary was not high despite years of toiling for a law degree.

Buying a house would remain a dream for years to come, she said, as even paying the RM500 monthly rent to stay in a house with seven others was a struggle.

"I know I'm not alone. Many of my friends are suffering. We don't see a way out. My future and that of millions of other Malay youth is bleak.

"Honestly, we Malay youth don't care about political or racial issues, because what matters to us is the issue of survival," said Zahra.

The video, which was uploaded on MTEM's Facebook page on Wednesday morning, has drawn more than 452,000 views, received more than 34,000 likes, been shared more than 43,000 times and drawn more than 3,100 comments.

MTEM chief executive officer Mohd Nizam Mahshar told The Malaysian Insider that the video was part of the council's social media campaign to engage with the youth so that they could come up with better and more practical policy recommendations for the government.

He said the campaign, which uses the hashtag #sayaZAHRA (I am Zahra) and #sayasayangkanMalaysia (I love Malaysia), was born out of MTEM's bid to put a human face to the economic targets set by the government.

"The 11th Malaysia Plan says we will move the bottom 40% into the middle class. So we want to show how hard it is in reality. We don't want the targets to be just rhetoric. We want to show how difficult life really is for the people who have to go through this every day.

"Zahra is a real case, and that is her true story. We are trying to humanise these economic numbers and talk about the challenges of young graduates joining the ranks of unemployed."

Nizam said the youth could share their own economic difficulties with MTEM by posting it on social media with the two hashtags, or sharing it directly on the new Facebook page "Saya Zahra".

He said MTEM had received more than 200 personal anecdotes so far since the video was uploaded.

He said they planned to compile the stories and use it in various mediums, such as in videos and forums, to raise awareness among those in power the extent to which the youth were struggling.

Malaysian youth were quick to share the video of Zahra on social media, saying that it encapsulated the sentiments of a generation struggling with low salaries, high student loans and soaring cost of living.

Syazana Azlan, 26, a graphic designer, told The Malaysian Insider that she shared the video on her Facebook because it highlighted problems close to her heart, yet were rarely featured in the media.

"Right now, it's a matter of survival for us, and the government doesn't seem to be doing anything for us. Zahra mentioned in the video how there are so many big luxury homes in the country, but they're all empty – they were built for other people, not us, the majority.

"The people at the top will always have it easy, but what about us? You say, 'people first', but I don't see that happening," said Syazana.

Nizam added that the campaign was not restricted to Malays alone, as such issues were experienced by all Malaysians.

"Her video has resonated not just with Malay youth, but others. And Malaysians of all races are sharing their stories with us.

"So this shows to the government that economic problems are not confined to the Malays alone," he said.

When asked how Muhyiddin reacted to Zahra's speech, Nizam said: "You'll have to wait for our next video for that". – July 10, 2015.

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