



COMMUNITY CONCERNS FROM A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction:

Over three roundtable discussions held on Oct 8 and Oct 9, 2012 we discussed the concerns of Indians, Chinese, Malays, Ibans, Kadazans, Orang Asli and other indigenous community concerns.

These discussions recognised that Malaysia is not homogeneous but a 'grouping of communities' and sub-ethnic communities with distinctive history and cultural heritage. The traditional divide of Bumi and Non-Bumi, Malays and non-Malays is inadequate as there are many different sub communities within each community

Over the three roundtables, there were a number of recurring words and experiences describing deep seated feelings of emotions among Malaysians.

- Deep fears and insecurities among Malays towards others. Also cynical and distrustful of what government is doing in supposedly the lower 40% income people especially in some quarters
- Chinese concerns for safety and security and longer term business and well-being
- Deep sense of marginalisation and alienation experienced by displaced plantation workers and urban poor Indians.
- The categorisation as 'dan lain-lain' of Bumiputra's of Sabah and Sarawak is deeply offensive including perceived Peninsular Malaysia's dominance of East Malaysia resources
- The humiliation experienced by Orang Asli's as the "Orang Asal" that they had to prove that they are OA. This has to be verified by an official of the State. They also have to prove their ownership of their customary lands that they have lived for generations which they naturally resent.

All these depict a deep seated community and sub-ethnic feelings of distrust.

Therefore while we want to adopt national and holistic approaches, we must recognise the needs and concerns of each sub group or community is still necessary.

It is necessary to see all as Malaysians and necessary to understand their needs, concerns, fears and aspirations.

We have identified ten common concerns which cut across all communities and can serve as a useful basis for inter-community consensus.



COMMON CONCERNS: 10 KEY DIMENSIONS

1. Addressing poverty and inequality
2. Ensuring equality of citizenship
3. Enhancing democracy and human rights
4. Empowering through education and skills training
5. Enlarging employment opportunities including civil service and promotion basis
6. Fighting crime and ensuring public safety and security
7. Fostering greater autonomy for Sabah and Sarawak and ensuring decentralisation of local government
8. Enlarging business and economic opportunities in the whole of Malaysia
9. Increase inter-religious understanding and tolerance
10. Ensuring more effective governance and implementation

1. ADDRESSING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Issues:

- Sizable poor among the natives of Sabah and Sarawak who have not benefitted much from the NEP
- Complaints from Orang Asli that the services and provisions are not reaching them nor empowering them
- Neglect of urban poor families especially rural communities from Kampongs & displaced plantation workers currently in high rise flats
- Intra-ethnic inequalities ignored

Solutions:

- Ensure that all poor communities irrespective of race and religion have access to poverty eradication problems
- Give priority focus to intra-ethnic inequality and reduce this income gap
- Enhance self-reliance and self-help approaches in addressing poverty including capacity building including community development and enterprise strategies
- Utilise NGOs by providing grants to enlarge outreach & effectiveness
- Delivery agency such as civil service staff must be multi-ethnic and have cultural sensitivity



- Establish a Social Inclusion Unit in the PM's Department to monitor effective delivery

2. ENSURING EQUALITY OF CITIZENSHIP

Issues:

- While recognizing the provisions in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution towards special measures, participants affirmed the importance of equality of citizenship as per the Federal Constitution thereby rejecting the concept of 'Ketuanan' & dominance of one community over the other or one region over the other
- Questions were raised on the effective implementation of the NEP which seem to be abused by the elites and continues to marginalise sections of the Bumiputra communities especially poor Malays, the Natives of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli and non-Malays as well
- 'Sense of Belonging' is a key component of citizenship. Even those with wealth – income and properties can feel insecure as citizens

Solution:

- To move away from race-based to income-based or need-based policies targeting the poor and low income families (bottom 40%)
- To ensure that the rights of the Orang Asli in the Federal Constitution and their place be incorporated into Article 153 and other provision where their lands can be protected as equal citizens of Malaysia
- To ensure all public policies and programs are administered with a sense of fairness, equality and justice including good governance

3. ENSURING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Issues:

- A great injustice highlighted was the issues pertaining to land rights of Orang Asli and the Natives of Sabah & Sarawak to their customary lands
- There is a general rise in the level of understanding towards democracy and human rights among the citizens but it was felt that certain political leaders sought to deny this
- With the rise of alternative media, the citizens call for a greater accountability and transparency especially freedom of access to information
- Competitive politics calls for a shift of political discourse from ethnocentric discourse towards social justice
- The politics of fear and the notion of a strong protector state

Solutions:

- Political leaders must have the political will to recognise the 'empowered citizens' & those with access to the internet by engaging them positively and creatively
- Human rights, freedom and democracy and religious understanding be taught in schools
- Human rights justice, fairness, equality of opportunities becomes the corner stone of public policy

4. EMPOWERING THROUGH EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING

Issues:



- While Federal government has made allocations for Tamil Schools there is still a neglect of infrastructure development of these schools. Similar experience of Mission schools.
- In addition, students are academically weak in Bahasa Malaysia which impacts their advancement & integration into secondary schools.
- The issue of national unity and weak inter-ethnic and religious understanding of one another
- There are overall concerns over the quality of education in national schools. This is analysed in the Education Blueprint

Solutions:

- The Federal Government must adopt Vernacular schools as fully-aided schools with full financial allocation including acquiring the land. This should apply for Mission schools too.
- The quality of teaching especially Bahasa Malaysia must be improved so as to ensure very child is able to pass this subject and perform at the secondary school level
- The quality of education must be enhanced so as to ensure effectiveness
- The national unity and integration agenda be enhance to include the recruitment of more non-Malay teachers
- The mother tongue/ community languages of all communities should be taught in schools as compulsory subject to avoid poor implementation of this policy
- Enhance scholarship opportunities in an open transparent manner and provide special measure for those in the bottom 40% income group

5. ENLARGING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Issues:

- Concerns was raised on the imbalance of employment opportunities for non-Malays in the civil service and Malays in the private sector
- Concerns was raised for the depressing wages due to low-paid foreign workers which has effected employment opportunities of young Indians
- Federal job opportunities in Sabah and Sarawak is occupied by West Malaysians
- Limited job opportunities for Orang Asli youths

Solutions:

- The need for greater opportunities and introduction of quotas to ensure better opportunities for non-Malays in the civil service
- Introduce incentives for private sector recruitment of Malays and monitor these developments
- To ensure effective recruitment and monitoring system
- Establish the Equal Opportunities Commission as recommended by the NEM

6. FIGHTING CRIME AND ENSURING PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY

Issues:

- Major concerns for human safety due to perception of increasing crime & lack of effective action
- Increasing participation of especially Indian youth in violent crimes as perpetrators of crime and gang activities



- Review root causes of marginalisation and neglect for the rise of youth crimes amongst all racial groups

Solutions:

- Need to address root causes of crime by creating alternative education, skills training & employment opportunities for youth especially from high risk neighborhoods.
- Enhance crime prevention initiatives by strengthening local neighborhoods especially in high risk neighborhoods and high rise flats.
- Ensure effective policing by enhancing effective investigations and prosecution services.

7. FOSTERING GREATER AUTONOMY FOR SABAH AND SARAWAK AND ENSURING DECENTRALISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Issues:

- Sabah & Sarawak feels disempowered by Peninsular Malaysia's dominance and control of national resources (eg. petroleum), including West Malaysian civil servants dominating federal positions in Sabah & Sarawak
- Local government as the third tier of government is ineffective as there are no local government elections. Thus the system is non-inclusive and unaccountable to the people

Solutions:

- Greater federal-state autonomy and increased access to state resources for equitable development of Sabah & Sarawak
- Federal jobs in Sabah & Sarawak to be accessible to Sabahans & Sarawakians or they be given first priority
- The immigration abuses be stopped and previous problems resolved.
- Greater decentralisation, public accountability & partnership at the local government level including return to local government elections

8. ENLARGING BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WHOLE OF MALAYSIA

Issues:

- The initial good efforts of NEP which has effectively created a new Malay middle class has seen the efforts diverted towards creating an 'elite business class' which has resulted in abuse of resources and rising income disparity and inequalities
- The weak equity and business position of Indians and other minority Bumiputra communities was highlighted
- The rise of corporate greed and corruption has negative effects on the lives of citizens.
- Concerns that both capital and talent outflows from Malaysia would undermine its future

Solutions:

- Enlarge the support for the 'middle class' within all the communities through improved education, professional development and skills training
- Enhance entrepreneurship development and improve access to business loans
- Provide coordinated information and capacity building to access the program of the Federal Government



- Develop centralised and coordinated efforts to increase equity and participation in the stock market
- Establish monitoring mechanism to ensure no communities lags behind in targets and achievements through a better social inclusion and monitoring mechanism.
- Ensuring conducive policies and securities for domestic investment and talent returns through fairness and just policies

9. INCREASE INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND TOLERANCE

Issues:

- Increasing religiosity and Islam in public places and schools (eg. Islamic Banking and Halal Certificate) especially among Muslims and its impact on cultural identities and relations with others
- Restrictions placed on religious freedom of Non-Muslims, especially non-Muslim Bumiputras of Sabah and Sarawak and conversion efforts by Islamic groups

Solutions:

- Need to teach religion and religious pluralism/ understanding tolerance in schools
- Need to increase inter-faith dialogue and cooperation
- Strengthen constitutional protection of religious freedom and ensure that there is a respect for all religions

10. ENSURING MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Issues:

- There is a feeling that political leadership is not very credible or effective
- While there are various programmes, the monitoring is ineffective at the grassroots and therefore it does not reach the intended target group
- The continuing problem of corruption is causing great inefficiencies and abuse of the system and eroding public confidence
- As merit is not the operating framework, mediocrity and inefficiency dominates
- Lack of compassion & insensitivity towards cultural and religious diversity is impacting effective delivery negatively and causing Disunity

Solutions:

- Improve public accountability and transparency through stakeholder consultation including providing access of data and information to NGOs.
- Improve governance at the grassroots through participation of stakeholders especially at the district and local government levels.
- Review the Red Book of Tun Razak and the Operations Rooms to ensure effective delivery to target groups at the grassroots
- For citizens to elect political leaders with integrity and credibility and to unseat those who fail to serve well.
- Ensure multi-ethnic and multi-disciplinary civil services teams who are culturally and religiously sensitive to all communities and sub ethnic groups.



Conclusion

- There is a need to ensure inclusive public policies which are not 'top down' but 'bottom up' and ensures all are included in the development process for a Better Malaysia
- There is a need to enhance the civil service and ensure it is both politically, religiously and racially neutral and more meritocratic to serve every Malaysian especially the bottom 40% with greater sensitivity.
- There is a need for a renewed interest in ensuring civil society and NGOs complement the efforts of government
- There is a need for a special unit which monitors social inclusion at the grassroots so as to ensure the needs and concerns of all those in the bottom 40% are addressed effectively
- There is a need for 'fairness' and application of 'reason' & reasonableness based on social justice in all human effort to build a better Malaysia for all.

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These thoughts were presented on Oct 11, 2012 at the Roundtable Discussion on National Conversations –Malaysian Perspective