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INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY

TITLE: RACIAL HARMONY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN MALAYSIA

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Malaysia is a diverse country with a variety of cultures, religions and races. Malaysia community is an integration of three major ethnics that is Malays, Chinese and Indians with many other minor ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak. The diversity in this country has become its uniqueness but is also its weakness at the same time. Racial harmony has always been our aim to achieve national unity among the various races in Malaysia. However, there are still many challenges along the way to national unity especially the deeply rooted racism.

There are many reasons that cause the society to isolate from each other according to their respective ethnic group, from geographical to political aspect. In term of geographical aspect, the community tends to live in the neighbourhood consists of residents of the same ethnic. The Chinese tend to live in the residential area full of Chinese while the Malays stay in the Malay villages. They do not get a chance to interact with each other. Some especially the elders still have the obsolete mindset and prejudice towards other ethnic groups and do not want to mix with them. If everyone has this kind of thought, how are we going to achieve racial harmony and national unity? From the aspect of mass media, every race only or prefer to watch television programmes and listen to the radio which language is their mother tongue. So are the newspapers, the society only read the news of their native language. Besides that, the vernacular school in Malaysia education system is also a factor separating the ethnic groups. Majority of the Chinese and Indians will opt for national-type (Chinese and Tamil) primary schools for their children which primarily use their mother tongue as the medium of instruction. They only get to interact with the society of the same race. Consequently, when the students from national-type primary schools enter national secondary schools, some of them face problem in communicating with students from another ethnic group. They feel shy and cannot speak properly to others because they are not fluent and weak in Malay language. As a result, they only active in their own group with the same races. In term of political aspect, the political parties in Malaysia are mostly comprised of one ethnic group only, for instance, UMNO for Malays, MCA for Chinese and MIC for Indians. These political parties only fight for the privileges for their own ethnic group putting unity aside. All of these have contributed to the increasing gap and racism in the society.

Another aspect that becomes an obstacle in achieving racial harmony and unity is the cultural aspect. The community in Malaysia comprised of many different ethnics, each have their own cultures. These cultures include religion beliefs, rituals, taboos, languages and lifestyles. A survey was carried out on 1024 citizens from the whole country in Malaysia. The result showed that there were about 16% which means that one out of six Malaysian did not know much about other religions and their cultures, and they were not interested to learn more about them (Razak, 2019). It is so sad to hear that the society do not even bother to try to understand other ethnics' cultures. People who have no enough knowledge about other cultures might sometimes be disrespectful to certain group even without their conscious which then lead to misunderstanding.

The societies with a diversity in ethnics and cultures are often associated with inequalities issue in politic, economic and social aspects which continue to worry the nations (Lim, 1985). Malaysia is no exception. There are many inequality and discrimination issues in the multi-racial society. Many feel that the policies are designed to favour Malays, the major community over the minority Chinese and Indian communities. One of the pro-Bumiputra is the Matriculation programme. This programme is a very popular choice for pre-university course among students because of its cheap fees and one year only duration. However, 90% of the places in the Matriculation programme are reserved for natives or Bumiputra while only 10% left for non-Bumiputra typically the Chinese and Indians. It looks like this education programme has a race-based quota rather than merit-based and the natives are getting some "special privileges". Besides that, it is inevitable that discrimination exists in this multi- cultural society. Racial discrimination is the result of consciousness of racial difference in cultures and skin colour, originated from people's minds (Banton & Michael, 1985). Many people have the false and bad stereotypes towards other races. Some common stereotypes are that Chinese are rich but selfish while Malays are lazy which are wrong because not all people behave the same. Recently, a Chinese landlord was accused of racial discrimination after kicking out a Malaysian Indian man from the rented room saying she preferred Chinese tenants which was not stated in advanced (Says, 2020). It is not the only case. In fact, many landlords set their preferences of tenants based on ethnicity. This can be due to the bad stereotypes as mentioned before in the society. Another example is the Mat Rempits who carry out illegal racing endangering the road users. They leave the community a bad impression against the whole Malay society because

one rotten apple spoils the barrel. If this situation is left for long period, it can invoke racial hatred.

In the recent years, technology has been growing rapidly causing social media to become famous online platforms for the community. These social medias such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are meant to designed as platforms to share thoughts and information, and to ease the communication between people. However, there exists some groups of people who misuse these social media and trying to provoke hatred among different races. The situation becomes worse when the pandemic hit causing the usage of social media to increase tremendously. Those people who have bad intentions start to spread fake news and misleading information on the social media. They also post sensitive and racism comments to induce provocation. During the pandemic, some people cannot control their emotions as the number of daily new cases of COVID-19 keep increasing. Out of rage, they try to blame the whole families or even races from one person for spreading the virus. There exist also some news companies that have biased political leanings and not neutral in reporting news. They take advantage of their influence to publish irresponsible and sensitive articles which touch a nerve of certain society.

Citizens should have self-awareness and tolerance for the cultures of other races and religions. We should learn more about the society from other races, respect them and accept them as a part of our lives. Everyone has the privilege and space to practice their traditional culture and religious belief freely without interfering others. Children need to be taught with the right values since their young age. In this context, parents play an important role as teachers and good role models. Parents as the closest people around children should educate their children so that they know the significance of ethnic solidarity. Parents themselves have to respect and treat everyone equally to become a role model for their children. Children is most affected by parents and they copy the behaviours of their parents. Good parenting will definitely nurture high ethical level in the next generation. Educational institutions can also help increase the awareness through the implementation of History subject, moral and civic educations.

In order to promote racial harmony, we need to first overcome the inequality treatment among different ethnics. Government should take actions such as amendment of policies especially the education policy. Under the education policy, all schools should adopt the same syllabus, same curriculum, unified and standardized examination and Malay language as the main medium of instruction. The political power should also be divided and shared evenly among the leaders from every ethnic. A country leader or representative are chosen because of his or her calibre and should never be based on races, religions or skin colour.

To curb with the cyber racism issue, government authorities need to take serious action by tightening the rules and enforcing them strictly. People who find guilty should be fined heavily or imprisoned to gives rise to a sense of fear in the society so that they do not commit the same crime. It is reported that government is trying to seek for a chance to authorise the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) so that they can take down fake news and racist posts from social media (Bernama, 2019).

We still have a long way to fight for racial harmony to achieve national unity in Malaysia. Everyone needs to step out of the comfort zone and interact more with other ethnic groups in order to achieve unity. It cannot be done even without the cooperation from a single person. Still remember the May 13 incident in the history? Malaysia encountered a race riots which reported a number of casualties between the two largest ethnic groups, Malays and Chinese due to rejection of status quo (Soong, 2008). We certainly do not want this kind of tragic incident to repeat at any time in the future. Intercultural competence which includes awareness, an open mind ang intercultural knowledge is a critical component in achieving nation unity (Krajewski, 2011). Race discrimination can appear in our minds with or without our conscious. Thus, we should fulfil the criteria of intercultural competence. It is our responsibility as a citizen of Malaysia to form an atmosphere of harmony in this multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

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