

## **“All Malaysians need to believe that they have a place under the Malaysian sun”**

*Contributed by Coenraad ter Welle (Intern, Centre for Public Policy Studies)*

**Kuala Lumpur, 3 April 2007:** Probably for the first time in the history of the Bar, royalty officially graced a program at the Bar, namely the 1<sup>st</sup> Young Malaysians Roundtable Discussion on National Unity & Development in Malaysia “*Challenges & Prospects for Nation Building*” co-organised by the Centre for Public Policy Studies, Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI) and the National Young Lawyers Committee, Bar Council. The Crown Prince of Perak, His Royal Highness Raja Dr. Nazrin Shah arrived at the Bar Council Secretariat building at about 9am to deliver the Keynote Address and officially open the Roundtable.

Raja Nazrin started his address by highlighting the importance of nurturing the youth of Malaysia and warned against the danger of neglecting them:

“We like to say that our youth are the future of this country, but then we proceed to ignore or marginalise them. We want our future generations to be able to think and act wisely, but then we do not give them sufficient opportunities to do so. ...In my view, this is not a good way to prepare those who will take our place. If the young are to be good leaders and citizens, they must be exposed to more than just abstract concepts. Even those nation states which have failed miserably have had great political ideals.”

In a strong message of hope and leadership and recognising the problems of unity in Malaysia, Raja Nazrin called upon all Malaysians to “stay the course”.

“I am aware that there are many Malaysians who are deeply troubled at the state of national unity in this country. What I have tried to do today is disabuse you of the notion that there are any “quick fix” solutions in nation building. ...I hope we will do our best to guard against cynicism and hopelessness. ...Failure, may I remind you all, is a costly option.” he said.

His Royal Highness set out 7 guidelines for nation building:

- Malaysians of all races, religions and geographic locations need to believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have a place under the Malaysian sun.
- When solutions are sought to problems in nation building, we must be careful not to assume away problems.
- Nation building requires accommodation and compromise, and we should not be so idealistic that we are incapable of also being practical.
- Enforced solutions must be avoided if nation building is to succeed. ‘Might’ cannot and must not be shown to be ‘right’.
- Nation building occurs in a society which is open, tolerant and forward-looking. All forms of extremism, chauvinism, racism and isolationism must be guarded against and soundly sanctioned socially and politically.
- Nation building is a process as opposed to an outcome, and trust is an imperative which has to be built.

- Political, social and economic incentives must reward good behaviour and penalise bad.

Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairperson of the Centre for Public Policy Studies and Ms Ambiga Sreenevasan, President of the Malaysian Bar also spoke to welcome the participants and emphasise the importance of unity in Malaysia.

Attended by more than 150 participants, there were 3 panels of 11 speakers in total discussing the impact of ethno-religious politics in Malaysia, whether the Government's education policies have been successful instruments in national development and ways to forge a young Malaysian identity towards national unity. Healthy and open discourses were conducted on the issues, and there was insufficient time to accommodate all the participants who wished to speak.

In the round-up at the end of the discussion, participants agreed on a 20-point Consensus Document which culled key concerns from the Roundtable, and made suggestions for lobby efforts with Government and policy-makers.

Feedback received from the participants regarding the Roundtable was extremely positive, and many hoped that the co-organisers will proceed to take concrete steps to influence the relevant parties dealing with national unity in Malaysia.