

**Closed-Door Roundtable Discussion
on
Issues Impacting the Malay community in Singapore
Session Five: The Singaporean Malay Identity — What to Strengthen or Adapt?**

Tuesday, 28 March 2023

Li Ka Shing Seminar Room 1-1
Li Ka Shing Building
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
National University of Singapore (*Bukit Timah Campus*)

PROGRAMME

2.45 pm – 3.00 pm

Registration

3.00 pm – 3.05 pm

Welcome and Introduction

Dr Mohamad Shamsuri Bin Juhari
Research Fellow
Institute of Policy Studies

3.05 pm – 3.35 pm

Presentations

Speaker

Associate Professor Mukhlis Abu Bakar
Head
Asian Languages & Cultures Academic
Group
National Institute of Education

Discussant

Mr Khairu Rejal
Director
Majulah Community and
Investment Principal
Investible

3.35 pm – 4.45 pm

Discussion

- What are the factors that have contributed to identity formation of today's Singaporean Malay community?

- What have been the impacts of the current ethnic identity on Singaporean Malays?
- What can we do to correct ethnic identities that are detrimental to the well-being of the community as well as the nation?

4.45 pm – 5.00 pm

Summary Remarks

5.00 pm

End

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SYNOPSIS

Research tells us that human identity plays a predominant role in shaping our individual motivations and responses. Identity is a continuously evolving product of a person's own reflexive understanding of their "life history". Others have said that the state plays a dominant role in "constructing" the identity of its citizens by way of governmental policies and legislations. These conceptual explanations concerning identity formation have a bearing on the state of Singapore's Malay community. For instance, though society has generally taken precautions against making negative racial remarks on any community, many from within and outside of the ethnic group still unconsciously harbour the stereotype of "the lazy Malay". These stereotypes can be traced back to colonial times and early post-independent Singapore, where colonialists, politicians and community leaders have placed blame on "problematic Malays" when accounting for the socio-economic problems plaguing the community. The implications of this have been far-reaching. Stereotypes attached to the Malay identity have led to a sense of resignation for some members in the community, and resentment for others.

Given that Malay identity formation has had some roots in colonial history, one of the issues to be surfaced in this roundtable discussion are the implications of our historical narrative in shaping Malay identity. Other issues to be discussed include how Malay identity can be strengthened, especially among youths, and how stereotypes can be negated both within and beyond the ethnic group.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

MUKHLIS Abu Bakar is Head and Associate Professor at the Asian Languages & Cultures Academic Group in the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University. Associate Professor Mukhlis was trained in speech perception, a field that straddles the disciplines of phonetics and cognitive science, for his masters and doctoral studies at Bangor and Edinburgh universities in the UK. He went on to work on Malay linguistics at the National University of Singapore, his first academic appointment. His interest in education brought him to NIE where he developed an expertise in literacy practices in preschoolers before expanding into bilingualism and biliteracy. In recent years, he picked up phonetics again, specifically socio-phonetics, researching on pronunciation, standardisation and identity in the Malay language. In between, he ventured into madrasah education. He is

co-editor of Bloomsbury's 2021 *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Cultural Identity from Early Childhood to Early Adulthood* and Editor of Routledge's 2018 *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World*.

KHAIRU Rejal is a venture capital professional with over 15 years of experience investing in early to growth-stage companies, across the US, China, India, Australia and Southeast Asia. In 2010, he founded Majulah Community, a non-profit organisation dedicated to creating pathways for young Singaporeans to be change agents of tomorrow. Majulah's core programmes include student mentoring and coaching, overseas service-learning projects, environmental conservation, technology evangelising and humanitarian crisis missions. Mr Khairu also serves on several committees of other non-profit organisations and has led initiatives in the social impact sector for over two decades.

MOHAMAD SHAMSURI Bin Juhari is Research Fellow in the Society and Culture Department at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). Prior to his foray into the field of research, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri had acquired a wide range of work experiences in the education service, ranging from classroom teaching to senior management and leadership positions in various academic institutions. He has taught students across diverse backgrounds and abilities, from at-risk youths to those in the Gifted Education Programme. He has also designed and facilitated curricula at the Secondary, International Baccalaureate Diploma, Undergraduate and Masters levels. Following a previous portfolio where he headed the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri's scope of research at IPS focuses on issues pertaining to the local Malay-Muslim community, specifically in relation to identity, family and education. He received his PhD in education from the University of Birmingham. He also holds a bachelors and masters in sociology from National University of Singapore as well as a postgraduate diploma in education from National Institute of Education.

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