

3 Malay/Muslim groups joining hands to tackle issues shows 'we can solve any future problems': Masagos

Hariz Baharudin

The Straits Times, 29 August 2018

SINGAPORE - The way three key Malay/Muslim organisations have collaborated to uplift the community has demonstrated to Singapore society that "we are a community that can solve any problem that we face in future", said Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli on Tuesday (Aug 28).

The trio are: the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis), self-help group Mendaki and the People's Association Malay Activity Executive Committees Council (Mesra) - popularly known as M³.

Mr Masagos, in lauding how they helped the community to punch above its weight and progress with the nation, said: "This strength from coming together puts them in an even better state to lead the community (amid) a very uncertain future.

"Therefore, M³ is a proposition by the Malay/Muslim community to the community at large that we are a community that can solve any problem that we face in future, because we have done well in the past and we have the strength and the ability to do so."

Mr Masagos, who is also Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, was speaking to reporters at Mendaki's annual post-National Day Rally policy forum, held at the Lifelong Learning Institute in Paya Lebar.

The M³ collaboration was highlighted by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the National Day Rally on Aug 19 when he noted their aim to combine resources and volunteers.

Mr Lee added that by joining hands with the Government, they can also help to tackle some of the challenges the community face. These include getting more children to attend pre-school, empowering and mentoring youth, and supporting those left behind because of drugs or social problems.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs and Health, Mr Amrin Amin, gave a presentation on the healthcare announcements Mr Lee had made at the Rally, including the Merdeka Generation package in which half-a-million Singaporeans born in the 1950s will receive Government aid for their medical expenses.

Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow of the Institute of Policy Studies, gave a presentation on social inequality.

He sketched several ways Singapore society can collectively increase opportunities for all, including making sure necessities are affordable and available to everyone, and increasing volunteerism.

The 60 community leaders, professionals and Malay/Muslim academics at the event also posed a range of questions to the three men during a panel discussion, which was moderated by fellow and associate editor at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Dr Mustafa Izzuddin.

These largely centred on such topics as the rising cost of living, housing issues and how youths can play a part in M³.

Several were concerned about the perception that other Malay/Muslim organisations that are not part of M³ could be seen as "less important".

Stressing that it was not the case, Mr Masagos assured them all the other organisations are important and he values and respects them.

He explained that the M³ was mentioned by Mr Lee because their efforts covered Malay/Muslims across the nation.

Mr Amrin later told reporters: "The session today shows many people have thought very deeply about issues close to their heart, such as housing, cost of living and healthcare.

"They have seriously considered their options in healthcare, the different choices they have, and I think there is an increased awareness of our challenges as a society and community."