The Interweaved and Imbedded Impact of the Rukun Tetangga Community Relations Programme on Malaysian Nationhood as Governed by the Rukun Negara National Ideology.

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian 'Rukun' national programmes saw the light of day in the aftermath of the tragic May 1969 inter-communal conflicts. Following the introduction of the national ideology Rukun Negara in 1971, the Rukun Tetangga Scheme (RTS) was introduced in 1975 to enable the local communities throughout the nation to harmoniously help enhance residential social security. The objectives of this research study are to attempt to understand the extent the nation's national ideology, the Rukun Negara, is being imbued in the enforcement and practices of the Rukun Tetangga national community security enhancement programme. The research methodology used was mainly the qualitative approach, with an extent of data derived using the quantitative methododology. Official data from government documentary sources, in-depth interviews with relevant department officials, and observations in the course of the research study over six months were employed. The major findings of this study show that there is [invariably] still a considerable concern for community security. The **youth** also tended to be in different towards the goals of the RTS (Rukun Tetangga Scheme). and felt that the activities needed to be made to be 'felt' by them and all residents. This, they felt, can help bring all residents to come together and build communal bridges and solidarity more meaningfully.

Keywords: "Rukun Negara", "Rukun Tetangga Scheme", "communal solidarity", "ethnic groups", "youth".

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian 'Rukun' national programmes saw the light of day in the aftermath of the tragic May 1969 inter-communal conflicts. The nation had apparently been in denial, not taking into account in totality the then-growing socio-economic differences between the diverse ethnic groups in the nation. Further, the freedoms in democratic political participation and expression, arising from the post-independence legacy of Westminster parliamentary and party democracy, were pushed to the fore, and to possibly to 'bursting' point, as witnessed in the unruly street demonstrations of political parties after the 1969 general elections. Something then needed to be done. Under the statesmanship-like leadership of then-ruling Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman and his able deputies, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and Tun Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman, the nation began to be put on course towards social stability and economic development.

The conflicts which saw an open expression of suppressed negative inter-racial sentiments needed to be understood, and the energies motivating such socially destructive behaviour could be well-channelled into organized, cohesive and constructive nation-building efforts.

Thus, it was seen to be imperative that communal relations be studied and activities resourced on the ground

for all Malaysians to partake in, in the belief that one's contribution was important and constituted a meaningful share of national well-being.

THE CARDINAL MALAYSIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUE

Inter-communal and national integration was the most pressing issue in the post-1969 period and is often said to be still so today by various scholars (Eds. Lim T. G, others, 2009). The prevailing outlook of the 'Malaysian', having his/her origins from the often referred to 'divide and rule' British colonial policy, and the latter's privileged regard for the indigenous Malay community and the Malay 'Rajas', very much based on political expediency, economic interests and possibly from a genuine concern to maintain communal peace and political stability in Malaya then, is still an open book. It could well be for all the above factors that the 'Malaysian' has remained racially and religiously polarised.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The primary objective of this research study is to attempt to understand the extent the nation's national ideology, the Rukun Negara, is being imbued in the enforcement and application of the Rukun Tetangga national community security enhancement programme.

The study will also attempt to evaluate the extent the above national programme has contributed towards enhancing inter-ethnic solidarity

METHODOLOGY

The primary research approach employed in this study is a qualitative one. The following research procedures were used in this study for data collection.

1. interviews with the town/district unity department officials,
2. official data from the local and central government departments of national integration,
3. in-depth interviews with identified adult and youth residents. The respondent list is ascertained with the information provided by the unity department officials.
4. secondary data as based on research carried out on related studies to this present research study, reference works and discourses on the themes of this study, and,
5. observations made by the researcher, particularly in relation to the everyday manifestations and attainment of the goal of community solidarity amongst residents of selected housing schemes.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The word 'Rukun' in the Malay language refers to a set of principles, rules or laws that are followed or are required to be followed by the peoples of a particular community or nation. (Kamus Dewan, http://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Search.aspx?k=rukun).

As much as this above term can signify an overbearing social setting where there is imposition of authority and behavioural strictures from above, in the Malaysian multi-ethnic context it is consciously used to establish the universal value and desired, pragmatic acceptance of the sense of commonality among the diverse Malaysian communities. That is, the rules for community interaction and togetherness as such *, stand commingled, that is, being blended thoroughly into a harmonious whole, with the nationhood value of 'healthy community relations'*, positing the irrefutable need and the importance of the everyday manifestation of the latter.

The above official third edition of the above Malay dictionary (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1998, p.1155), also denotes the conceptual semantics of the term 'rukun', and signifies- being of one mind and heart, collaboration, being supportive of one another, and living in unity.

Community relations can therefore be defined as "… the particular state of affairs in an area where potentially conflicting ethnic, religious, cultural, political, or linguistic groups live together" (Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge University Press 2016). It can relate to and involve some form of social engineering or mediating with 'conflicting' or diverse groups.

This above discussion is particularly essential in heterogeneous societies which appear to be the norm today, as tribalism, commonly in the form of group-ethno nationalisms, can tend to seek to 'lay out territories' for single groups, thereby resulting in repressive competition and aggression against those who differ. This thus can be most counter-productive in complex societies today which often depend on people and professional workers flowing across national borders. This can then tend to generate divergent ways of community and cultural life (Sennett, R. 2012).

In order to allow for positive 'competition' among diverse communities and yet engender healthy collaboration and **sharing**, the above concept, 'rukun' or rules, in the Malaysian community relations context particularly, is seen as that which promotes a **mutuality of respect for one another's beliefs, cultures and histories**, as premised within the laws of the land (with reference to the Malaysian Federal Constitution-Articles 5, 8, 19, 11, 12, 14, 15, 152, 153, 2006); and forthwith, the practice of volunteerism and non-coercion (Mah-Kamariah & Philip Koh, 2005; with reference to the preamble of the Rukun Negara document).

As the above researchers have postulated, the *Rukun Negara* is directed towards,

…ensuring a liberal approach to (the Malaysian Nation's) rich and diverse cultural traditions- multicultural and pluralistic affirmation, not on mono-cultural or bicultural (dimensions), i.e. one hegemonic discourse definition vs "the Others", … these are the *Ends- the teleos* of our nation- state,….the conventions which should become (the) "habits of our hearts & minds" and practices of our institutions and curricula.

The importance of rightful space for the 'Other' was emphasized by Aristotle even in his time, who was perhaps the first Western philosopher who advocated the notion of promoting 'unity in diversity'. He regarded **the city-state as a *'synoikismos'- "a coming together of people from diverse family tribes- each 'oikos' having its own history, allegiances, property, family gods,… similar people cannot bring a city into existence"** (*op cit., Sennett, R. P.). A political entity or community "obliges" peoples of different orientations to deal with one another with a sense of mutuality for one another, as it was expected by each for oneself from the others. The optimal economic benefits for the "city"- the nation, was the ultimate goal.

However, in the post-industrial, modern age, the everyday life challenges that tend to pit one individual against another, in the rush for position, power and status, people, instead of withdrawing from others different from them, are 'constantly obliged to relate with them'. Robert Putnam (2007), the scholarly and renowned sociologist, has conversely pointed out, that people are initially inclined to dissociate themselves from those different from them. That is, 'to hibernate'.

The above, latter point needs to be constantly borne in mind as well by a national leadership, even if nations and societies appear to be caught up in the seemingly mindless, materialistic race to 'out-perform' one another primarily economically. Thus, for healthy and constructive community relations, particularly in multifarious societies, communal groups should not allow their differences to be exacerbated. **'Social walls'**

today do not bequeath and result in 'well-being' of our future generations. History is a stark reminder of this. What certainly fosters common, perpetual 'well-being', even with the nation's evolving and sometimes communal, crass challenges, are the human, altruistic values and bonds consciously nurtured bridging the peoples of this multicultural society.

Undergirding positive social bonds, it can be emphasized, is the strength of the nation's **leadership**. John Maxwell (2007) puts forward the principle and quality of "teachability" of modern leadership. It is required to have the leadership's *ears to the 'ground facts'*, and it will therefore then be willing to listen, learn, and ensure, as the nation's trusted leaders, to help bring about 'progress, growth and improvement in the quality of life'. The **empathetic relationship** that a leader builds with his people establishes thus, an equalising process and benchmark for the leadership, that then helps control and level off the motivations of self-interest and potential breaches of the vast powers embedded with positions of leadership.

It is essential to stress at this juncture that the cardinal characteristic of good leadership is *trust*. Once this is established in the general society, then economic growth and progress ensue. How this can be built is of course with good, ethical and 'rightful' governance principles, which embrace engagement and involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of the state. As Steven Wong (NST, July 3, 2019 p.14), reports, the findings of researchers Paul Zak and Stephen Knack in the United Kingdom's Royal Economic Society's *The Economic Journal* indicate that high-trust societies produce more output than low-trust ones. Steven Wong elaborates,

Growing mutual suspicion virtually guarantees that countries proceed down a vicious spiral. First, **society becomes polarized along its many fault lines**, and then it fragments and crumbles. …empirical studies (demonstrate) the importance of trust, however, few address *the really critical issue of how to either build or recover it when it is on the decline*. …**Trust (is), if not more, potent than investment, technology and education put together.**

This brief study as such, on the community Rukun Tetangga social development approach, intends to establish the importance of healthy community relations among diverse peoples. The extent the powers-that-be conduct this above programme among the diverse population, exuding **trust** in their efforts among the people with their commitment and intentions, which can then go a long way in solidifying positive community relations.

In the Malaysian context then, the Rukun Negara, as one 'apex' Malaysian national document (the national 1957 Federal Constitution is the nation's supreme law), subsumes and signifies the need to actualize a broad and balanced modus operandi of community relations, exemplified in the overarching national governance processes, and most importantly, in society's every day, common interactions.

Looking at the Malaysian Rukun Tetangga Scheme (RTS) further, it was particularly launched in 1975 after, and with a direct bearing on the bloody communal riots of May 1969. At that rather epochal time, the primary purpose of this noble, people-oriented programme by the then-national government was the peoples' safety and peace in the expanding residential community locations in the nation. This was the result of growing urbanisation flowing from the global and national economic growth experienced. Albert Berry and John Serieux (2006) report that although the world economy slowed down in the 1980-2000 period particularly due to the oil crisis, growing internal corruption and governmental mismanagement and political crises, the distribution of world income among individuals in nations generally improved to some extent. People generally then had more disposable income, although inequalities among groups of the national citizenry continued to be a festering issue.

In Malaysia, the economy, as in many newly developing nations emerging from the often oppressive and exploitative years of colonial rule and domination, was seen as the definitive pathway to economic prosperity. This was aspired not only in terms of the potential resulting material benefits of capitalistic

development often modeled on the 'proven' western, industrial revolution development programmes, and which is dependent and based on the exploitation of depleting natural resources, evoking belatedly, ethical questions of accountability and sustainability of the use of the natural resources. As such, today economic development processes are beginning to be seriously questioned, although the immediate and short-term 'rewards' have had their sway.

Nevertheless, on the material and physicalist (physicalism)- that is, an almost 'one substance', perspective of reality, Zainal Azlam and Deepak Bhattasali (World Bank Report, Working Paper No.27, 2008, p. 4) report that,

Malaysia saw a total income rise of 6-7 percent each year from 1970 until 2000. There was increased industrialisation of the economy from the mid-1970s, with the growth rate reaching nearly 10 percent in the late 1980s. … The overriding objective of the NEP (New Economic Policy, 1970-1990), which was maintained in the NDP (National Development Policy, 1990-2000), and the NVP (National Vision Policy, 2000-2010), was to preserve national unity by eradicating poverty irrespective of race, and by restructuring Malaysian society to reduce the identification of race with economic function and geographical location. Direct policies to assist the Bumiputera (indigenous community) obtain parity with the non-Bumiputera in income and wealth lay at the heart of the distributive strategy. Growth with equity remain the guiding principles of (the nation's) development strategy.

And further, as substantiation of the above economic analysis, Mohamed Ariff (1998), appraising Malaysia's economic performance, observes,

Malaysia's track record in terms of economic development is very impressive. Per capita income increased from US$304 in 1965 to US$4,465 in 1996. The overall incidence of poverty (percentage of poor households) in the country declined from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 8.9 in 1995. The ratio of Bumiputera (indigenous) household means income to that of others has improved from 1:2.3 in 1970 to 1:1.3 in 1995. The quality of life has improved enormously in terms of amenities in relation to population size. In short, only a few developing countries can come close to Malaysia's excellent economic development track record.

Thus, the Malaysian government's 'well-engineered' New Economic Policy (NEP), in 1970 after the occurrence of the 1969 riots (as discussed above) set the economic transformation with the rise in incomes of the general populace. Nevertheless, for the expanding middle-classes in the 1970s and 1980s, an issue that came to the fore in relation to developmental planning outcomes, was that housing (together with other essential social needs- health, education, transportation and so on) became an expanding and socially intense demand issue.

In as much as national development is often increasingly envisioned and measured in direct economic terms and benefits in all nations today, the undergirding social need for the attainment and realization of nationhood was often sublimally and silently felt and possibly desired by the general populace. It has thus been argued that economic-material development can contribute to positive nationhood values and attainments. This was primarily envisioned as national integration, and in diverse, multicultural societies, the achievement of social cohesion and the sense of oneness among the nation's peoples.

Nation-building in Malaysia was in fact a cardinal and crucial goal from the very beginning of the nation's march towards independent nationhood. The Rukun Negara (RKN), the nation's national ideology, launched soon after the tragedy of the 1969 racial riots, as Zainah Anwar (2016., www.sistersinislam.org.my/news), a prominent nation-builder, points out, was to guide our nation towards,

- **achieving greater unity of all her peoples,**
- **maintaining a democratic way of life,**

- **creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared,**
- **ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions, and**
- **building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology.**

The above national ideology succinctly propounds what we need to *uphold as the national citizenry*, for peace and national prosperity. As the above writer further elaborates, we need to stand firm and be whole-heartedly committed to the RKN principles.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel as we (can then) twist ourselves into knots, (and get) mired in **despondency because of fear and anxiety about recent trends dictated by belligerent supremacists who seek to disempower, dominate or destroy those who do not share their world view and their self-righteous claim(s) to perfection.** Our journey towards the objectives of the Rukun Negara has been outstanding in some areas and over some periods, and perilous in others. **Right now there is a foreboding sense of the fragility of what it means to be Malaysian. Let us go back to the Rukun Negara and the wisdom of its values.** *The Rukun Negara was an inter-communal national consensus on principles and objectives built from the ashes of the race riots of 1969* (ibid).

Nonetheless, even to the present day, the nation's indigenous and major communities- the Malays and other native Bumiputeras [Note: The term '**Bumiputera'** or 'Bumiputra', is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bhumiputra' (भूमिपुत्र), which roughly translated means 'sons of the soil'. In both Malaysia and Bruneithe term is used to refer to a member of the majority Malay ethnic group. It can also refer to members of certain other native indigenous groups (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Bumiputera_**)], and the non-Malays particularly, appear not to interact with one another. This state of ethnic relations in the nation, similarly as in some other similarly demographically constituted nations in the present-day, such as India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Rwanda, Myanmar and others, where colonialists like the British, had supreme authority over the affairs of the peoples of the lands involved, implemented colonial policies which predominantly were based on a racial ideology accentuating differences, which have over time, led to the hardening of racial sentiments, projecting particularly a social climate portraying a disconcerting, advancingly embedded situation of a 'us' and/versus 'them' social phenomenon (Azeem F., Mohamad Zaini A.B., 2007).

It is often earnestly asked by Malaysian moderates and the middle-of-the-political-spectrum social activists- **What (then) can the powers-that-be carry out in the social domain, to encourage people of diverse backgrounds to bond and together help build their nation,** economically and socially, towards a sense of identity of oneness and a *common nationhood?* The vertical social divisions of race, kinship, and class primarily provide the individual and communal urgings to form associations projecting utter exclusivism, because people tend to feel comfortable with others of 'their own kind'. This, of course becomes socially damaging for the socio-political trajectory towards national integration.

However, face to-face interactions in building social capital, which signifies that knowledge and power can be the inherent or cultivated attributes of a citizenry of a nation for instance, can then be the bulwark for cohesive nationhood. This is corroborated by research studies based on social contact theories (Allport,1954; Lieberman. 1998; Pettigrew,1998) which show, that **increased interaction can produce familiarity among the social actors, which in time can lead to acceptance** (Valenty and Sylva 2004, in Ezhar Tamam p.58).

In this study, the concept of social capital is advanced in that it is a social phenomenon that when cultivated positively can constitute the collective value of all 'social networks' (people who know one another as members of a community/society/nation), and thereby develop the inclinations and desires to assist one anoth for the good of all. It engenders the norms of social reciprocity. It is also emphasised here that through these social capital networks- one in the multicultural Malaysian context is the Rukun Tetangga community programme, broader, inclusive identities and solidarity can be concertedly striven to, gradually translating

the "I" outlook to a "We" identity (https://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/).

BROAD VIEW OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA

An essential condition laid down by the British government to the Alliance coalition party in 1957, was that the three major races living in Malaya then, must live in harmony. A **common nationality** for the whole of the Malayan Federation was strongly proposed by the Reid Commission formed by the British government in1956 to prepare a constitution for the soon to be independent Malaya. The plural nature of its peoples was a crucial issue, and the above commission, taking this issue into particular consideration, emphasised 'undivided loyalty' by all Malayans who desired to become citizens of the independent Malaya. (Sophie Lemiere, 2014; Khong K.H, 1984;.http://kudaranggi.blogspot.my/2007/12/reid-commission.html).

This above commitment stand by the above Commission, was then included in the Merdeka (independence) agreements, which then became duly embedded in the nation's Federal Constitution.

As much as scholars have characterised the Malaysian Federation as a "coercive consociationalism" (Mauzy 1993), (Note: *Consociational* democracy is often adopted in countries that are seen to be deeply divided into distinct religious, ethnic, racial, or regional segments—conditions usually considered unfavourable for stable democracy. The two central characteristics of *consociationalism* are government by grand coalition and segmental autonomy), the nation has persevered in its efforts of sustaining social solidarity. There pervades in the nation a state of "stable tensions", driving the nation to plod on in an ambience and sense of being **"united in diversity"** [Shamsul Amri, Anis Y. Yusoff, UKM Ethnic Studies Paper Series No. 18, May 2011, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia].

The Malaya-Malaysian nation has had its beginnings as from the pre-colonial period before the 16th century, when the 'Malay world' was made up of small feudal polities often referred to as 'kerajaan'. The ruler or 'Raja' was regarded as the vicegerent, the earthly representative of God, and as such the sovereign, all-powerful ruler. The polity's governance thus, saw no separation of church and state. It was in this period, in the 13th century, that Islam, saw its birth in Malaya (ibid).

The 16th century saw the beginning of the colonial era in the Malay world. Apart from the coming of the imperial-colonial powers one after the other into the Malay-'Kerajaan' world, resulting in the exploitation of its rich natural resources and the 'opening' up of its lands for trade and inter-communal interactions, thereby bringing the locals into western material-consumerist forms of life, the two significant markers of this era can be said to be, i) the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the 1700s, and ii) the French Revolution in 1869. The latter importantly saw the separation of religion, which was instituted by the last colonial power- the British, to be the domain of the traditional rulers, from the state government which was to be under the control of the colonial powers.

The division of the 'Church' from the state was particularly conducive for the implanting of democratic principles of governance, which were modeled on the then British Westminster system of democracy. This form of governance which has continued to be practised up to present-day Malaysia, with the British-bequeathed 'divide and rule' policy, has become embedded in the national psyche as the form of rule and social management that is most appropriate and duly desired by Malaysian society. This is so as the peoples are constantly aware that their everyday living and the functioning social climate in national life, is one that is imbued with the multifarious cultural elements of the nation's heterogeneous society. Thus, the nation's trajectory in national development today is vacillating in a state 'stable tensions', in all likelihood.

The re-emergence of the 'Church', that is, religion, and in the context of Malaysia, with Islam as the nation's official religion, where all Malays are said to be Muslims (Federal Constitution, Articles 3(1), 160), has seen some new developments in the last few years. Since the 'Islamisation' programme by Dr. Mahathir

Mohamad (fourth Malaysian prime minister), in 1985, primarily to politically win over the Muslim community to align with the long reigning, Barisan Nasional (BN), thus to minimise the growing influence and sway, then of the Islamic Parti Islam Malaysia (PAS), there have been loud voices to transform the nation into a full, or a predominantly Islamic state (refer Zaid Ibrahim, 2015).

The renowned University Malaya former law lecturer, professor Gurdial Singh Nijar, has categorically pointed out that Malaysia is a secular state, as based on the aspirations of its founding fathers, who were fully cognizant of the multi-cultural and multi-religious social milieu of the nation. State criminal laws cannot be enacted as the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the nation. It stands firmly in protecting the fundamental liberties of all its citizens. Islamic criminal law punishments, such as the now much-discussed 'hudud' laws, by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as to their relevance today and their legality, even with the state-sanctioned Kelantan (state) Syariah Criminal Code Enactment of 1933, and the Terengganu (state) Syariah Criminal Enactment of 2003, which clearly go against the spirit of the Federal Constitution (9th Schedule, List II, item 1; Articles 3, 4, 5, 162, 12 (1), 9).

The above scholar, Gurdial Singh (ibid), stressing the **basis and values upon which the Constitution was constructed,** brings to our attention that the national ideology of the nation, the **Rukun Negara**, embraces the **twin cardinal principles of the of the rule of law, and of a democratic constitution. Parliament exists as on the nation's Merdeka Day** (independence in 1957), to oversee the implementation of 'public' (technical rules of evidence and procedure), and personal laws, and is **sufficiently endowed with enabling authoritative jurisprudence, to ensure that justice will be the paramount value and consideration in the life of the nation**, and that the 'constitutionality' of the Constitution must be safeguarded at all times (Article 4, Federal Constitution, 1957).

On the crucial issue of the nation's stability and resilience to stand in **solidarity** with all Malaysians, Bakri Musa (in Zaid Ibrahim, op. cit), states clearly that,

Malaysia's saving grace is its **significant non-Muslim minority**, an effective buffer and formidable bulwark against the intrusive reach of (these) political Islamists.

Further, Zaid (op cit. pp.14, 15) continues with regards the search for spiritual clarity by all Malaysians pointing out that,

Islamisation has created in many Malay-Muslims a false sense of superiority that is grounded in the idea that an **Islamic "panacea"** is needed for a new order in Malaysia. As an Islamic country, Malaysia is supposed to have an edge in terms of knowledge, law, economics and justice, but these are lofty dreams based on nothing that we can see. Islamisation in Malaysian public policy is an experiment that has failed miserably, but our policy-makers keep talking about the need for more Islamisation and are so confident about this path that they are prepared to rewrite history and re-interpret the Federal Constitution. They are willing to demolish our **democratic institutions**…The dilemma for Malaysia today is that the more Islamisation efforts progress, (**it further moves the nation) away from both the (core) teachings of the religion as well the mainstream values of the world**.

Thus, in this present global age, followers of all religions need to have a good grounding of spiritual clarity, that all religions teach its followers to be 'good', and the sense of understanding enabling the embrace of the **spirit of godliness and all humanity.**

In Malaysia, a **middle-path religious education** needs to be proactively enhanced for society and particularly the Generation Y- our youth. Stressing this issue, Farouk A. Peru (2016) in his discourse on Islam observes,

Religious education in schools must **reflect a multi-religious society.** Currently, in the form of highly didactic Islamic studies (which) is taught to Muslim students while non-Muslim students are given moral education (which is more **civic education** than an ethical investigation). In order **to build a cohesive society**, it is vital to teach students all **major religions and their commonalities… (This) will allow students to find common ground rather than (learn and adopt) fractious differences.**

In all probability, and as professed by the education ministry (Education Blueprint 2013-2025), the intentions of the framers of Islamic and Moral studies curriculum, can be good. The ultimate goal of education has been **the development of a loyal and responsible national citizenry.**

However, as the above scholars have alluded, there is little commitment and a well-defined trajectory to foster a sense of being Malaysian, to look at all human society as being situated on a common, horizontal and equal platform, as opposed to the vertical perspective outlook, and thereby to understand and **cherish the commonalities all mankind share**. Further, the genome project in the United States had clearly established that there is no race distinction among different, culturally oriented peoples (Syed Hussein Ali, 2008. p.197).

The issues discussed above underline the need to 'educate' the diverse Malaysian peoples and particularly the youth, towards a democratic, universal values-based outlook of life. The principles, Malay-Malaysian historicity, the legalities and the life norms aspired for a progressive Malaysian nationhood, can be translated into educational curriculum tenets in schools, and complementarily, into regular community programmes such as the RTS.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The National Unity Department in the nation's Prime Minister's Office has diligently prepared and implemented a number of programmes, one set of them coming under the national Rukun Tetangga policy. These programmes necessarily fall within the broad goals of the nation's national ideology, the Rukun Negara.

With rapid economic growth in the 1970s to the 1990s there was intense urbanization altering the social landscape of the nation. As a consequence of the ruling government's intentions, large numbers of the rural-agriculture-based sections of society began to look for 'better pastures' in the semi-urban and urban areas of the country. This was concomitantly encouraged with the development of the education sector. Tertiary, technical and skill-oriented educational poly-techniques, colleges and further education institutes were set up to provide the migrating population mainly, with the requisite technical skills to be employed in the expanding industrial sector.

It was also realized that, particularly after the 1969 tragic ethnic riots, the social relations among all Malaysian groups needed to be strengthened. There was an urgent need for committed nation-building programmes to be undertaken by the government as well as by the general populace.

As such, the Rukun Tetangga Scheme (RTS) was introduced with the enforcement of the Necessary Rules (Rukun Tetangga) 1975. This community programme was further developed and formalized by the Rukun Tetangga Act 2012, Act 751. The primary function of this programme came to be seen as, the implementation of activities involving the community members to enhance their sense of neighbourliness, unity, goodwill, harmony, peace, cooperation, safety, welfare, health, economic well-being and a higher quality of life for all residents in the housing schemes (Article 8, (a), (c), (d), (e) Act 751).

The activities discussed below are necessarily directed at the above goal of national integration of the diverse Malaysian peoples.

Strengthened by the above Article 8, Act 2012, these residential 'Rukun Tetangga' organisations are well-placed, as it were, provided the urgency is well internalized and the motivations for one's involvement are well nurtured, **then in small, evolving measures the trajectory towards national solidarity and the sense of oneness, can be said to be a marked certainty.**

The activities presently carried out in various parts of the nation generally are seen to be socially comprehensive. They involve the **communities' common areas of concerns and interests**– health, education, major cultural festivals, recreation and sports programmes, services to victims of natural disasters and those in need, religious programmes, arts and cultural activities, talks on subjects of general interests, and so on. From the above array of essential and socially interactive domains of human involvement, one can see that the community, particularly the youth, would find opportunities to constantly bond together strongly.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS.

As discussed above, the researcher will discuss the responses of the family adults prior to that of the youths in the three selected residential locations involved.

A. All male adults particularly, and most female resident-interviewees as well, in all the three RTS schemes studied, were singularly concerned that today with vast numbers of foreign workers in our midst, greater crime surveillance measures needed to be in place.

The respondents felt that together with the police force, the communities can do more in carrying out more crime checks and positively contribute through their life examples, in helping to build the Rukun Negara (the national ideology)-essenced nationhood values, in their resident youths and their broader society.

All families need to adopt a more considerate and caring attitude towards the welfare and needs of their neighbours. This can only come about, it was emphasized, by constant rational discourse via the national media and constant informal interactions.

Families can regularly take out their children to the common play grounds, and under their supervision and caretakers, allow their children to interact, 'share' and play together. All manner of race-based activities have to be necessarily ended. Activities can be voluntarily organized by the youth themselves on the basis of gender, or on a mixed gender basis with the supervision of adults helping to supervise such activities.

The local community RTS organisations can be given particular incentives and recognition to play a more active role in helping to oversee community activities.

The supervisory official organisations need to play a more open role in the community RTS schemes. They can well conduct informal, brief house visits and discuss with the residents the importance of healthy community relationships, and how they and the community activities will gradually help build a greater sense of national solidarity.

Further, the local community heads felt that the authorities, that is, the unity-community relations department, together with other public departments, need to **constantly attend** to the basic and essential needs of the residents, particularly, the younger generation. This can then lay the path for possible avenues for cultural and political disaffection to be well monitored and controlled.

Some senior adults articulately voiced their views that the official authorities need to be representative, generally, of the three main ethnic communities of the nation. Further, most RTS communities comprise of the nation's major ethnic groups, and as such, the official bodies need to reflect that they truly are working for the needs and wants of all demographic constituents.

As one community adult, a retired government service employee pointed out, the 1957 Merdeka Agreement was achieved by the efforts of all communities and Malayan (Malaysian) citizens. **The RTS as a ground-level community programme, can well portray the government's commitment to the principle of equal and 'balanced' representation of the nation's ethnic groups, as a foundational building block.** When this is seen to be practised often, the ordinary masses can then learn and imbed in their individual selves that all Malaysians have a responsible part and role in the above RTS nation-building ventures.

A senior retired government servant strongly opined that the everyday 'bread and butter' issues for the common people are inalienable rights. They need to be on a promising, controlled, and well-monitored platform. The confidence levels then of people in the national programmes for which their support and participation are solicited, towards national development and social cohesion as such, can be positively enhanced.

The Malaysian society, as another youth, teenage resident felt, are too often pampered and 'aided' with assistance and 'gifts'. A 'gifts-benefits' mentality has developed. People generally "do not want to work hard and earn". This, the above lamented, was because there is no clear concerted educational commitment and programmes at all levels of society, galvanizing and monitoring of the common everyday operating details, to 'evolve' a 'straightforward' sense of equality in the society. People are unhappy that some get more than they deserve. This then further frustrates and alienates some citizens and thus keeps them away from some undeniably well-meant national programmes, like the RTS.

Further, there needs to be well-planned, collaborative activities involving women and young girls. Forums and dialogue sessions can be held in which women can share their problems, ideas and experiences, whereby families can be further cohesively bonded. The social problems encountered today can be addressed possibly in a more comprehensive manner with more active involvement of all communities, bringing in their cultural, traditional perspectives and solutions which can all be shared. This can also lead to deeper appreciation of one another's cultures-the dos, taboos and the reasons involved, and thus greater mutuality of understanding, respect and acceptance for the different races can develop.

The daily manifestations and operationalisations of these community organisations can be made more immediate and its presence and 'existence' and relevance 'brought to life'. For instance, in some areas there are no communication linkages established for all residents, to the community organization officials, and even any clear network of intra and inter community communication.

People tend to 'mind their own businesses', with their doors quite firmly shut to other residents (Note: This social phenomenon has taken large, negative proportions in major cities in the nation, as often reported by the national media).

The youth, in this above atmosphere will naturally stand to lose out in the long run. They can tend to be very exclusive in and among people of their own ethnic, language and religious backgrounds. This, of course, runs counter to the spirit and essence of the Rukun Negara (1971), as discussed above in section 3, and can eventually, socially and psychologically damage the foundational roots that have been painstakingly laid by our founding fathers for a cohesive Malaysian nation.

The youth were generally 'subdued' and indifferent towards the subject of this study.

Nevertheless, some vocal views were put forward by the more articulate youth who were generally performing averagely well (from a general assessment of their school academic performance).

One youth felt that the RTS programme, in order for it to be justified in its existence, should not just 'be in name'. **People need its activities to be felt.**

When asked for suggestions, the youth concerned said the **authorities have first to be themselves accepting of all races**; secondly, the **public authorities should have a keen understanding of the basic and changing 'demands' of today's youth**; and thirdly, engaging and interesting sports and academic-tuition type of assistance for students can be organized in order to help students academically, and bring the different ethnic youth together.

Common concerns, such as drug addiction, civil service promotions and service, school bullying, learning of Bahasa Malaysia, English, and other languages, can further be addressed. This can contribute to better social stability as the varied interests of Malaysian society are then addressed.

C. There tended to be a pervasive attitude of non-involvement and non-commitment in participating in this study by the general population of residents. It can be pointed out that there can be a form of **'trust deficit'**, not only in the researcher trying to tap into the residents' thoughts and views, but also a casual and sometimes 'fearful' attitude (which was clearly gauged by the respondents' behaviours and 'calculated' responses), of avoidance in matters involving the official domain and authorities.

A positive outlook can be well concretised with the high public officials 'coming down to the ground' constantly and regularly. This needs to be on a sometimes formal, and very much on an informal, interactive approach. As a senior, non-majority community resident in one of the residential 'communes' interviewed by the researcher hesitantly said, "tak mahu campur …". This, being in the national language- Bahasa Malaysia, can be taken to mean that he did not want to be involved, and possibly felt, to become 'implicated' in matters involving the 'powers-that-be'. This was after four or so attempts made by the researcher to interview this resident. However, in the initial meeting, this above person had briefly and passingly commented that the RTS is a good programme.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The legal-constitutional, religious-Islamic, democratic-societal, and leadership perspectives on the state of the Malaysian nation today have been discussed above. These, not unexpectedly and often unintentionally, and sometimes inexplicably, can have some discordant strains on the social cohesiveness of the nation. The resolutions to these social strains may be direct, legalistic and simple, and quite often, complicated and seemingly unfathomable. Essentially then, it can well signify the **commitment towards a needed social restructuring and redevelopment** for the **common goo**d.

It was also established that the two national programmes- one, the national ideology, the Rukun Negara, which purportedly encompasses all aspects and dimensions of national life, and thus, embraces the community togetherness Rukun Tetangga programme, which was also launched, as with the former, to address the socio-political impact of the 1969 racial riots, have resulted in the prevailing social climate, *after nearly a half century now*, possibly characterised by long, dark shadows on the prospects of community oneness at the grassroots, micro level.

It then can be said that the *manner of implementation, with presently an ad hoc, generally piecemeal approach of implementing 'good' community togetherness programmes, as discussed above, does not*

appear to have taken hold of the social consciousness of the general society. This could also be because of the larger, national and sometimes, the geo-political macro influences impacting on a daily barrage, on the common man.

In a vivid display of apathy and possibly adopting an idealistically overcharged sense of national well-being as it were, most of the resident RTS officials, apart from the departmental authorities to some extent, did not give any importance to the central role of the Rukun Negara. This is noted as regards its credible short-term outcomes, commonly felt as a means of enhancing and forging good inter-personal and inter-communal relations, and importantly, the macro long-term impact of healthy understanding and acceptance of one another, thus cementing a cohesive bond amongst Malaysians. Was it a lack of commitment to the national ideology and its purposes and functions, or, a sense of apathy to "another official project", the behavioural indications by the respondents for the above perceptions, were often hesitatingly and quietly displayed.

It appears therefore, that a comprehensive revisiting of the principles, procedures and substance and content of national programmes, the Rukun Negara and in particular the RTS- an essential revamp and 'shake-up' as it were, is required.

The **domain of Education** can play a positive role. Starting in the schools and constantly supported in the national media, the citizens can be educated and socialized as to the significance and common benefits of this programme for all Malaysian society, towards a progressive and resilient Malaysian nation. This today needs clearly to be be given greater emphasis on a constant basis.

As the RTS is a long-standing, nation-wide, community programme, the social 'clients'-the community residents in the housing schemes, can become active 'actors and players' in the activities carried out. The ordinary residents can be further reached out to, so as to build upon, and enrich their **common stakes** and thus, their **commitment** for the RTS programmes. The RTS officials can employ a 'bottoms-up'-from the peoples upwards, rather than solely and mainly an instruction-directive oriented, top-down approach in determining the constructs and content of the RTS programmes. A mediated and a keenly participative approach, with all sections of the peoples' involvement and thereby, their acceptance of it, can be structured and agreed upon. This approach as such, can well help ameliorate the possible public disaffection and apathy with such programmes that tend to develop, and which can have vast, possibly socially destructive and debilitatingly embedding consequences in the long term.

Of crucial and urgent importance for nations and mankind today, is that progress, commonly, or the regression of a society can be irreversibly determined by the extent and quality of the management of the existent and 'invested' *SOCIAL CAPITAL,* as within the larger boundaries of the nation's demographics. As Robert Putnam (2000) has described social capital, it is the **sense of community that is cultivated among peoples, and (the) flowing from their shared values, links, goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse, constantly nurtured amongst one another**. **Marginalisation** of groups in the larger society must be addressed. The RTS is certainly, in its intended objectives for the very long term, directed towards the realization of a cohesive Malaysian nation. But, it stands to run off its mark, with the **Malaysian social capital becoming diminished, as society tends to become more atomistic by the day, that is, generally communally indifferent towards the 'other' and 'solitary',** as material-economic 'development' and urbanization proceed at a seemingly roller coaster pace.

The above discussion has attempted to point out how the RTS may be falling short of its deeper, long term goals, of affirming positive community links and cohesiveness for all Malaysians. This likelihood needs to be constantly and diligently monitored and 'reinvented', for the growing future generations and the *civil gains and progress of the national society.*

As various scholars and individuals involved in this study have sometimes cautiously indicated, the primary determinant and mover of all major social programmes has to be the government. It was pointed out that to achieve the goals of the RTS and most importantly, the cherished goal of national integration, there needs to be a 'real' effort seen by the powers that be and the masses, of the essence and spirit of Malaysian multiculturalism at all levels of society. This can be a self-generative and evolving process, enriching and strengthening the trajectory of national development and integration, moving forward.

The question often posed with regards the above position is that, do we have the required 'learned' leadership and public servants, and the 'deep', humanistic, well-thought-through value system and strategies, for national integration to become a 'true' reality. It is necessary, the researcher opines, that every public official and citizen be actively, ESSENTIALLY AND 'DISCIPLINEDLY', 'educated' to understand and internalize nationhood values. The problem of social dislocations and divisiveness needs to be addressed by the national, ruling authorities. The problems and issues discussed above must not be allowed to 'fallow', possibly egregiously leading to dire circumstances.

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INTERVIEWS

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Chairpersons and Officials of identified Rukun Tetangga Kuala Muda Organisations.

Multi-ethnic resident representatives of Rukun Tetangga Community Centres.