

## **Managing Peace in Malaysia: a Case Study in Developing an Early Warning System for Ethnic Relations (KITA-MESRA®)**

Anis Y. Yusoff <sup>(1)</sup> and Shamsul A.B.<sup>(2)</sup>

*Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) Malaysia*

anis.yusoff@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This paper provides the background, historical perspective, structures of peace, conceptual framework and preliminary findings of a research project which monitor ethnic relations and creates an early warning system on the 'health' level of ethnic relations in Malaysia in order to manage peace. Existing monitoring projects on ethnic relations in the country tend to focus on the negative aspects of these relations such as ethnic-related grievances and the number of ethnic group conflicts taking place. This project uses a positive indicator based on good governance and quality of life indices as a way to understand the level or quality of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** ethnic relations, Malaysia, monitoring system, managing peace.

### **Background**

Malaysia is an independent nation state with a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and a federal government structure. It is located in the South East Asia region and is made up of thirteen states and three Federal Territories (Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya). The thirteen states and three Federal Territories stretch across two major geographical areas separated by the South China Sea. The first is known as Peninsular Malaysia, physically part of the mainland of Southeast Asia, also known popularly as West Malaysia. The second, is located on the island of Borneo, and also referred to popularly as East Malaysia. Malaysia is considered a medium-size country in terms of area and of population as can be seen in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1**

COUNTRY	AREA ('000 KM)	POPULATION ('000)
Indonesia	1,904	222,611
Vietnam	325	82,481
Philippines	300	81,408
Thailand	513	63,763
Myanmar	677	50,101
MALAYSIA	330	25,493
Cambodia	181	14,482
Lao PDR	231	5,787
Singapore	1	4,261
Brunei Darussalam	5	366

(Source of Data: ESCAP, 2004)

## Basic History

The evolution of Malaysia is best captured in a three-stage historical-structural analytical scheme, namely, pre-colonial (before 16<sup>th</sup> century), colonial (16<sup>th</sup>-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) and post-colonial (after 1957). Even though socio-politically Malaysia is characterized by a seemingly continuous system of governance called *kerajaan* (*raja*/royalty-centred polity, or often translated simply as 'kingdom'), the sociological underpinnings of the *kerajaan* during each of the three eras are rather different (Shamsul 2001).

According to Shamsul (2011) during the pre-colonial era, which is before the invention of the modern state, Malaysia was non-existent. What existed was the 'Malay world', physically consisting of the Malay-speaking archipelago that was made up of numerous small feudal polities, or *kerajaan*. A few were located in Mainland Southeast Asia, in countries known today as Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia, but mostly in Island Southeast Asia, where Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia and The Philippines are today. Each *kerajaan* was run by a Raja with the governance system based on the non-separation of 'church and state,' whether they were indigenous, Hindu or/and Buddhist Kingdoms. It was during this period, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that Islam came to the Malay world, hence Malaysia.

The 'new' *kerajaan* in the Malay archipelago in the colonial era experienced the separation of the church (read religion/Islam) and the state. The term *kerajaan* remained but the content divided and separated, namely, religion in the hands of the Sultans and the state under the control of the Europeans. It was during this era, that Malaysia was shaped politically, economically, socially and in the way religion became an ethnic marker. The colonial era is often called the 'divide-and-rule-era.' The historical-structural characteristics of the modern state that Malaysia is today, still known as *kerajaan*, was invented during the colonial era (Shamsul 2012).

The society, market and *kerajaan* of Malaysia in the post-colonial era remains modeled on the British colonial one. Modifications have been made to the model, especially with the introduction of democracy, mainly through the modern electoral system that has been implemented successfully until today, the structure remains similar to that of adopted during the British colonial period. It could be argued that, some elements that could be identified today as structures of peace have already been adopted or established in late colonial British Malaya, from 1945 until 1957, the defining decade of Malaysia's future.

It is in this context Malaysia's inter-ethnic negotiated existence has survived, in spite of being severely tested in the 1950s, in May 1969, and in March 2001. Not even the big defeat of the ruling party, that is, the National Front, in the March 2008 General Election has been able to bring about of Malaysia's demise as a country, written off by the many prophet of dooms as 'a failed state.'

On the contrary, the structures of peace have been consolidated and strengthened further within a positive situation of social cohesion. The history of Malaysia could be said as one which is built not only from conflicts and contestations but mostly from negotiations, compromises, consensus and cohesion. In short, it is a history characterized by a continuous tireless peace-making effort and, indeed, a huge amount of energy, visible and abstract have been invested by Malaysians from all walks of life in ensuring that social sustainability in the country persists.

## **Summary of ethnic diversity and demographics**

Malaysia's population rose from 10.4 million in 1970 to 22.1 million in 2000. In the most recent national census (2010) it was reported that the figure has increased to 27.6 million and close to 30 million if non-citizens are included. However if one were to look at the average annual population growth rates, one will see the rates were declining from decade to decade, though again if non-citizens are included in the figures, the deceleration of population growth becomes apparent in the 1990s. The average annual population growth rate (2000-2010) is at 2.17%.<sup>(3)</sup>

Population growth rates for the main ethnic groups have been substantially different over the entire period since 1970. The main ethnic groups are Bumiputera (includes Malay, *Orang Asli* (the Aboriginal people) and the native communities in Sabah and Sarawak), Chinese and Indian. The growth rate of the Bumiputera population has more than doubled that of the Chinese over the period of 1980-2010. The Bumiputera share of Malaysia's population has steadily increased from 56 percent in 1970 to 66.1 percent in 2010. Over the corresponding period, the Chinese and Indian shares fell respectively from 34 percent and 9 percent to 25 percent and 7.5 percent. Almost 80% of the total population is located in Peninsular Malaysia and just under 10% each in Sabah and Sarawak.

For a long time, the major ethnic groups not only lived in particular geo-physical areas from the others but also dominated particular economic activity, for example, Malays dominated the rural peasantry, Chinese the urban commercial activities, and majority of Indians, who are Tamils, worked in plantations. After the 1969 ethnic riot and the subsequent introduction of the NEP, there was a conscious abstract and practical effort to break down these ethnic barriers to allow them to converge as Malaysians both in physical and non-physical spaces.

The Department of National Unity and Integration, established in 1970, was given the critical role of consciously fostering unity and integration, adopting the top-down approach among the various ethnic groups with the ambition of creating that elusive national identity called 'Malaysian.' The Department implemented successfully a host of policies, from educational to neighbourhood watch campaigns, involving cooperation and participation of all ethnic groups. These activities have come to be deeply embedded in the society so much so that they have been perceived by many Malaysians as something 'natural' or 'given.'

Bottom-up, Malaysians at the grassroots have existed in what could be termed as 'negotiated existence' in which formal community-based organizations (CBOs) within each ethnic group as well as between ethnic groups have played a major role in providing the social and cultural bridges to sort out differences in opinions over many apparently mundane matters. More importantly, the CBOs have also played the 'social welfare' role especially on matters related to education, health and also employment.

Ethnic-based political party organizations, especially at the branches at the grassroots, have also played an important role in complementing the CBOs' efforts in playing the role of interlocutors between ethnic groups over contested matters related to, for example, whether a Hindu temple could be built in a Muslim majority area or an aboriginal group could be relocated to another place with full compensation.

Another important and critical macro-institutional framework that helps resolve many of the cultural and linguistic differences has been the plural legal system. The civil court, Islamic court and the Native court co-exist and function simultaneously to resolve not only legal matters but also cultural and religious ones in the last 100 years or so. Although the Islamic court and the Native court function to serve Muslims (native and non-native) and natives (Muslim and non-Muslims) in certain selected matters, the fact that these matters include religion, customs and traditional cultural practices is indeed providing a significant avenue to resolve differences in those matters.

## **Structures of Peace**

Malaysia has been very fortunate that since 1970 it has achieved a number of its development objectives. These achievements and the positive position Malaysia now occupies in economic, social and peace development owe a great deal to a centralized planning approach adopted since 1950, especially, with the ground breaking policies and strategies that were envisaged in the Outline Perspective Plans (1971-1990) and systematically implemented through Malaysia's national five-year plans (Yusoff 2013).

In 1970, Malaysia's future stability and economic growth were by no means certain. The country at that time had just recovered from an open ethnic conflict. However, Malaysia's advantages could be acknowledged in terms of its per capita income and physical and administrative structure. Clearly, the process of development could not be implemented by administrative measures alone, as each ethnic, religious and social group comprising Malaysian society needed to have a stake in the outcomes as well.

According to Anis Yusoff (2013), it was in recognition of these major challenges that the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated and launched in 1971. It has been argued that the NEP became the driving force of the structures of peace for Malaysia since then, admittedly, it has undergone, in the last 43 years, a metamorphosis of sorts due to economic and political circumstances generated internal and external to Malaysia. The two preliminary aims of the NEP were, firstly, to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities among all Malaysians, irrespective of race; and, secondly, to restructure Malaysian society to correct economic imbalances, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function.

The National Development Policy adopted for the following ten years (1991-2000), maintained the basic strategies of the NEP but introduced several significant shifts in specific policies to eradicate hard-core poverty, increase the participation of *Bumiputera* in the modern

sectors of the economy, place greater reliance on the private sector to generate economic growth and income, and emphasize human resource development as a primary instrument for achieving the objectives of growth and distribution (Yusoff 2013). Many of the essential elements of the structures of peace can be identified in these earlier policies.

Malaysia's future stability and economic growth were by no means assured, but its development strategy was continuously under intensive review, with the intention of ensuring that growth with equity, particularly equity between ethnic groups, would be achieved.

## **Maintaining a middle ground**

Everybody knows that Malaysia has many ethnic groups of various cultural backgrounds but Malaysians are always striving to survive in one peaceful nation. This is the most striking and positive feature of Malaysian society in the last 43 years or so. It is very clear that in Malaysia, violence is not an option.

Malaysians will no doubt continue in the future to discuss openly or in private about matters concerning their personal ethnic woes, intra- and inter-ethnic difficulties, in the search for a middle ground in order to safeguard their lifestyles and allow them to continue to enjoy the quality of life the country is blessed with.

Like citizens in many other countries that have embarked on the modernization project, Malaysians have to remind themselves of the fact that there are two major components in such an endeavour, namely, economic and political factors. Finding and maintaining a balance between them is both a necessity and also the greatest challenge.

To measure the success of the economic component is relatively easy. Growth figures help us to ascertain where we are heading in our industrialization push. GNP figures and the poverty line indicate the economic spread, even or uneven. The thriving shopping malls demonstrate the healthy expansion of our middle class and our love for the globalised consumerist lifestyle.

However, to achieve the political target of nation-building, by realizing national integration, to be conducted through the implementation of various national policies -- in the fields of education, language and culture -- is not an easy task. In fact, the exercise of nation-building, on the whole, is a nebulous one. The measurement of its success is equally an imprecise one. However, the case study in this paper is the beginning of an effort to establish in the near future set of 'national integration indicators' or 'unity index' in Malaysia.

In 1991, our former Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Mohamed, outlined the nine challenges in creating a united Malaysian nation, or *Bangsa Malaysia*, in his famous 'Vision 2020' statement. With this, he clearly implies that we are still building the nation, we will to work hard to achieve it. He hopes it could be accomplished by the year 2020.

When proposing his Vision 2020, he must have realized that we are still saddled with a number of historical-structural impediments in the nation-building process, be they in the education, socio-cultural and economic spheres as well as Malaysia's modern electoral system. Perhaps the only useful method for measuring our success in nation-building, obviously complemented by our economic achievements, is to compare our overall performance with that of other multi-ethnic countries which were once considered to be success stories, such as Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia.

That we have been perceived as a model of success by the developing countries, sufficient for them to have confidence in selecting to play the leading role as the Chair for NAM (Non-Aligned Movement which has 118 member countries), OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference which has 57 member countries) and ASEAN (Association Southeast Asian Nations which has 10 member countries), speaks volumes for our achievement.

Therefore, the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia cannot be evaluated solely based on subjective personal evaluations of the phenomenological kind by a few Malaysians, however famous and serious they are. We appreciate their concerns. We value their reminders. But we have to reject their rather simplistic and skin-deep comments.

It is important to remember that "unity is not uniformity." Total unity and absolute integration are but utopias. Crying for their absence could mislead others and would generate alienating, indeed, violent anomic consequences that must be avoided at all cost. We have to live with our differences. Indeed, we have been doing so for decades, even if the situation is not completely perfect. We are proud as Malaysians that we have done much better than other countries with similar multi-ethnic societies.

### **A need for an early warning system for ethnic relations (KITA-MESRA®)**

Understanding the issue as discussed above, the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) at the National University of Malaysia has developed a Monitoring System of Ethnic Relations (KITA-MESRA®). This project provides an early warning system on the 'health' level of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

Prevailing monitoring projects on ethnic relations in the country tend to focus on the negative aspects of these relations such as ethnic-related grievances and the number of ethnic group conflicts taking place. This project uses a positive indicator based on good governance and quality of life indices as a way to understand the level or quality of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

One would not deny the importance of sensitivity in a multi-ethnic society. Often it is not the failure to manage ethnic sensitivity that causes conflict, but it is the disregard to ensure justice, equality and inclusiveness of all citizens - irrespective of race, religion and socio-economic status. Thus in this monitoring project, the ability to understand the intersection of ethnicity and the quality of life index would be used as the basis to determine the health of ethnic relations or the level of social cohesion already enjoyed in the country.

The findings of this research project indicated that ethnic relations is fairly good. Each ethnic individual has a positive perception of the other ethnic groups and their concerns, irrespective of ethnic differences, are related to crime, quality of services by the local authority and the issue of inadequate household income. Paradoxically, such good ethnic relation patterns of findings are in contrast to the political discourse and media reporting being thrown onto the citizens. A system like KITA-MESRA becomes more crucial in a country like Malaysia, especially when the present government is putting all efforts to strengthen national unity and integration under the 1Malaysia programme.

## **Introduction to KITA-MESRA®**

Inter-ethnic relations have always been an area of interest particularly in multiracial and multicultural countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Inter-ethnic relations are studied particularly to understand if there exists racial tension between races which may lead to disharmony and destruction of a peaceful community. However, inter-ethnic relations are rarely quantified as it is a very subjective subject matter. Researchers may define inter-ethnic relations based on their own understanding and more often than not, thorough research has to be executed to determine the status of inter-ethnic relations at a certain area. Good inter-ethnic relations are crucial to ensure that racial tension can be avoided such that the political stability of the country can be preserved.

In Malaysia, as argued by Shamsul A.B. (2010), although the Malaysian plural society has been, generally, in a state of 'stable tension' meaning they have been surviving in a situation dominated by major societal contradictions but nonetheless, longitudinally, remains generally cohesive. In other words, there is some level of social cohesion within these societies,



but the journey has not been plain sailing. Often the social cohesion is punctuated by skirmishes which were able to be resolved quickly. These skirmishes are an indication of potential problems and a system is needed to ensure that racial tension can be detected earlier and attended to before the situation gets out of hand. There is so far, no research or system developed that looks at the root causes of the problem of inter-ethnic relations from a positive perspective. The Department of National Unity and Integration developed what they call the Societal Stress Management System (SSMS). The indicators used in this system are generally negative, such as number of riots, demonstrations, protests, attacks, quarrels and disputes on issues. These are all incidents that have already taken place.

A good early warning system must be people centered. People centered indicators are usually positive in nature. These positive indicators are needed to represent the quality of life enjoyed by the people which could give a very strong indication that the level of inter-ethnic relations that can be continuously monitored to enable appropriate governmental policies to be introduced to address particular issues before it escalates to become a racial issue and reaches a critical level. This argument is supported by a resolution adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005 where it makes clear references to the importance of early warning, and encouraged the development of an early warning systems that are people centered, in particular systems whose warnings are timely and understandable to those at risk.

With this background in mind, the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) at the National University of Malaysia started to develop a Monitoring System for Ethnic Relations (KITA-MESRA®) in 2009. The system proposes the measurement of the quality of life at different geographical areas representing the ethnic groups, thus monitoring the correlation between quality of life and racial tension. Racial tension that leads to dispute and violent brawls are typically initiated between ethnic groups that may be deprived of certain basic needs. For instance, poor quality of life such as low income and the lack of basic facilities such as education, health, water and electricity may heighten the stress level at a particular area.

A number of prior works have disclosed monitoring systems used for gathering data and analyzing them to produce intelligible and comprehensible information. An Event Monitoring and Correlation System for example, developed by N. Krishnamurthy for Computing Services Support Solutions, disclosed an event and correlation system for detecting occurrences of predetermined events from a monitored system and providing data in response to the occurrences and processing the data as a data relation in a database. The system involves gathering the events data and compiling them to recognise patterns of events using standard query language such as SQL. However, the system does not specifically involve demographic

data or the determination of the quality-of-life index to be incorporated with a map. The system merely gathers the data for monitoring purposes and has no facility to display the data graphically and geographically.

Another system disclosed an interface protocol configured for cultural profiling. The system stores the profile of the users based on attributes such as language, ethnic origin and country of origin. The system gathers the information as inputted by people from different parts of the world, but does not function to incorporate the profiles with geographical data. The attributes further do not contribute to the determination of a quality-of-life index.

The US patent publication 2004/0197751, disclosed an assessment tool and a method for evaluating a person's quality of life based on a plurality of personal attributes. The system establishes a score for each of the personal attributes and provides visual representation of the selected person's quality of life based on the personal attributes. This system however, involves only one user at a time and does not relate to the gathering of quality-of-life index of different ethnics at different areas of interest to be displayed on a map.

Therefore, there is a need for a system for collecting and analyzing demographical data to quantify quality of life of different ethnics at different areas and illustrating it geographically.

## **Objectives of KITA-MESRA™**

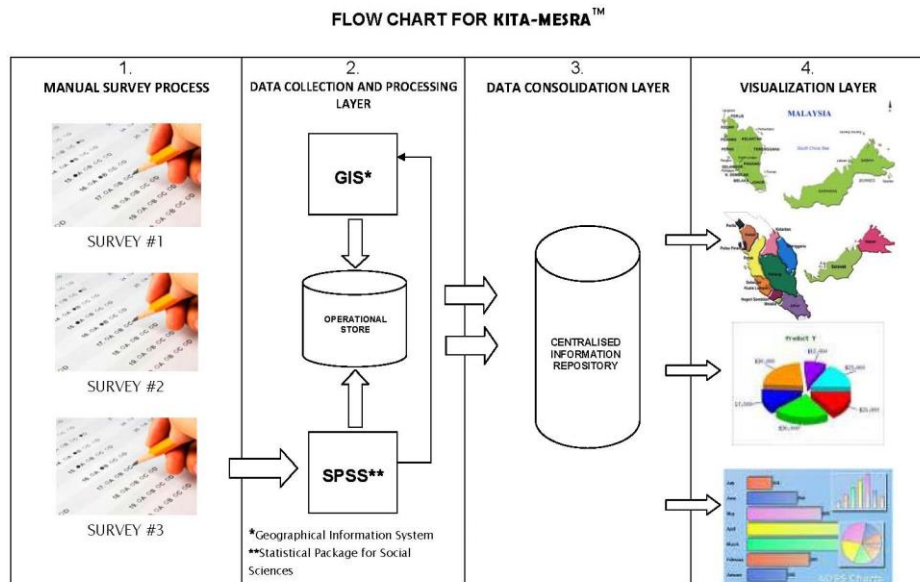
The primary objective of the study is to create a system and method for collecting and analysing demographical data to quantify quality of life of different ethnicities at different areas and illustrating it geographically.

The system comprises means of:

- 1) data collection,
- 2) data processing,
- 3) data storage or repository, and
- 4) visualization

The flow of raw data follows the sequence of the said components of the system. Data collection means to obtain raw data using a survey which is processed to form intelligible and comprehensible information. The information is combined with geographical data to display the information on a map. The combined information is stored and consolidated in the repository and is extractable from the repository by using the visualization means installed in a computer that is connected to the repository. See **Fig. 1** below for system flow chart.

**Figure 1**



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### Detailed description of KITA-MESRA®

KITA-MESRA® as shown in Fig. 1 on the previous page is used for collecting and analyzing demographical data to quantify the quality of life of different ethnicities at different geographical areas to determine if there exist economic and social disparities between people living in different parts of town or states in the country. In the context of this study, Parliamentary constituents are used as units of analysis.

Quality of life is represented by an index, and is conveniently referred to as a quality-of-life index. The quality-of-life index is determined by coalescing and analyzing essential and fundamental aspects of life. These aspects, otherwise known as the quality of life factors may include, but are not limited to:

- i) Health
- ii) Family life
- iii) Community life

- iv) Material well being
- v) Political stability and security
- vi) Climate and geography
- vii) Job security
- viii) Political freedom
- ix) Gender equality

KITA-MESRA® utilizes the quality-of-life index developed originally by the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia. KITA-MESRA® is applicable to any country, but in the particular case of Malaysia, the factors comprise these components:

- i) Income and distribution
- ii) Transport and Communications
- iii) Health
- iv) Education
- v) Housing
- vi) Environment
- vii) Social Participation
- viii) Public Safety

As mentioned earlier, KITA-MESRA® essentially processes and analyses data collected from people at various geographical areas and the data is arranged such that each geographical area can be segmented to represent the quality of life of different ethnicities at a certain segment.

Preferably, as described earlier the system utilizes each Parliamentary constituent as a unit of analysis. For example, with Malaysia having 222 elected parliamentary constituents, each constituent represents a certain coverage area in which a quality-of-life index is assigned upon analysis by the processing means. The unit of analysis of the Parliamentary constituent may be broken down to a number of cells, depending on the total number of state seats available in the Parliamentary constituents in which these cells will continuously be monitored via the system.

The data collecting means of KITA-MESRA® may further comprise an extracting means or a surveying means or both. The extracting means may be utilized for extracting publicly available information or information from government's database either through the Internet or Intranet. If permissible, the extracting means may obtain access to information stored in another server and extract the information which may be a Quality-of-Life Index as previously tabulated by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU). Other demographics and psychographics

information pertaining to a certain geographical area that may be relevant to the analysis may also be extracted when necessary.

Alternatively, the raw data are obtained via a surveying means which at the moment is a paper-based survey using predetermined questions to obtain feedback from people of different ethnicities in different geographical area. The survey comprises questions that relate to the parameters of the Quality-of-Life Index and additional questions that may not be obtained by the extracting means. The survey questions are constructed such that psychographic and demographic information may be obtained from the subjects. The surveys are questionnaire based and use a stratified random sample selection. The sample population are based on the registration of current electoral vote.

Still referring to Fig. 1, the raw data obtained from the data collecting means are processed by the processing means using the Standard Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to form intelligible and comprehensible information. This information is then analysed and the means to provide geographical data are temporarily stored in an operational storage means.

The data analysis means is utilized to determine the relationship between the quality of life and the ethnicity of a certain population. By determining the quality of life of different ethnic groups in a certain geographical area, the economic pattern and the people's political reaction towards their living condition can be analyzed. Therefore, potential racial tension may be evaluated at different geographical areas. Such concern of racial tension allows early precaution to be taken.

To represent the comprehensible information geographically, the means to provide geographical data is utilized. The means to provide geographical data is done using the Geographical Information System (GIS). The information as analyzed by the data analysis means is combined with the geographical data to preferably display the information on a map.

The information, now analyzed and combined with the maps will be stored in the centralized information repository. The repository further consolidates the information to allow extraction of the information when required. The repository is preferably a server, with a capacity to store large amount of information obtained from all geographical areas from different parts of the country.

Finally, the visualizing means extracts information from the repository to be displayed for presentation purposes. As shown in Fig. 1, the information may be represented geographically or commonly represented by a pie chart or a bar chart. Other options may also be made available such as illustrations, diagrams and other type of charts as chosen by the user.

## Findings

Based on the initial findings of this research, it gives the indication that ethnic relations on the ground is fairly good although there is some unhappiness with regard to selected quality of life indicators. Nevertheless, each ethnic individual has a positive perception of the other ethnic groups.

As highlighted in the paper, their major concern, irrespective of ethnic differences, are related to crime, lack of services by the local authority and in the issue of inadequate household income. These three problematic areas give us an indication of some problems faced by the community. To ignore these problems would invite other unnecessary problems. The idea of KITA-MESRA® as an early warning system is to be able to detect at an early stage any problems faced by the community and to make the appropriate recommendations accordingly.

A system like KITA-MESRA® is essential to ensure that the social cohesion already enjoyed by Malaysians is not easily destroyed by people who place their personal agenda over the community. As proven, such good ethnic relation patterns of findings from this study are in contrast to the political discourse and media reporting being thrown onto the citizens. A system like KITA-MESRA® becomes more crucial in a country like Malaysia, especially when the present government is putting all efforts to strengthen national unity and integration under the 1 Malaysia programme and the setting up of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC).

## Lessons learnt

However, to maintain ethnic harmony at any cost is not an easy task. To ignore this is to invite unfathomable difficulties and dire consequences, such as we have witnessed in the black events of May 13, 1969. Perhaps it is against such a background that the government has recently made the effort to introduce “Ethnic Relations” as a subject to be offered to our students at institutions of higher learning. This program may not create national integration and ethnic unity overnight but it is a starting point that we all need to have access to, not only in relation to our cultural history, but concerning matters much more far reaching, such as economic equality and equity, and building a strong democratic tradition.

Malaysia will remain one of the few nations in the world today whose experience and track record in dealing with many ethnicities and many cultures is a useful one. It is not a perfect one. It is not easily replicated but it is a useful for other states to study closely and perhaps gaining some useful insights from it.

We wish to end this case study on Malaysia with a quotation from Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize Winner for Economics in 2001, about Malaysia and how it had handled the massive Asian economic crises of 1997-1998 that, if not managed sensitively and successfully, could have led to grave and violent consequences for the state of stable tension in Malaysia's ethnic relations. He said:

*"I had the opportunity to talk to Malaysia's prime minister after the riots in Indonesia. His country has also experienced ethnic riots in the past. Malaysia has done a lot to prevent their recurrence, including putting in a program to promote employment for ethnic Malays. Mahathir knew that all gains in building a multiracial society could be lost, had he let the IMF dictate its policies to him and his country and then riots had broken out. For him, preventing a severe recession was not just a matter of economics, it was a matter of the survival of the nation" (Stiglitz 2002: 120).*

The good management and balance of economic growth and distribution is necessary to any nation, but more so it seems in a multi-ethnic society. But the case of Malaysia proves the fact that economic development and prosperity alone is not sufficient to maintain political stability. We have to turn to the realm of non-economic factors in the end. In this context, the message is very clear.

In dealing with the non-economic factors there is a huge contribution made by knowledge generated within the social sciences and humanities. Sadly, these are usually neglected in developing economies like Malaysia because we are often overwhelmed by the pursuit of science and technology to bring about much needed economic development and prosperity. This neglect has to be urgently addressed.

## **Conclusion**

The above narrative and analysis has woven and embedded the structures of peace in Malaysia into a complex whole which is meant to capture the actively evolving dynamics of the social, political, economic, and cultural processes involved in maintaining an overall social sustainability in Malaysia.

The New Economic Policy (1971-1990) is identified as the single most important element in the structures of peace in Malaysia. Indeed, it is economic, political, social and cultural all at once. The underpinning concept of NEP is based on the spirit of and a number of relevant provisions found in the negotiated Federal Constitution, symbolically also known as a 'social contract', namely, between the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. This concept informs the orientation of the subsequent five-year development plans after the NEP ended, that is, from 1991 onwards until at present. In short, for the last 43 years, the NEP, and its variants, has been then central structural pillar of peace in Malaysia.

In terms of governance, Malaysia has a well-functioning government that has continued to conduct fair and peaceful general elections in the last 43 years even with results not necessarily in favour of the ruling party. Indeed, opposition parties have been controlling some of the state/provincial legislative assemblies. The General Elections in 2008 and 2013 demonstrated that in spite of losing its two-third majority control of the federal parliamentary seats, the supporters of the ruling party remained calm and the public was mature enough to accept the decision without creating any dissension.

Corruption is still a major issue in Malaysia. However, it has been openly admitted by the government that it is so and successfully established institutional structures to address and solve the problem in the short- and long-term. With the passing of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009 on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2009, the MACC is now an independent Commission with several structural changes and added prosecutorial powers to further enhance its capability and effectiveness to make Malaysia corrupt free (Yusal et al. 2013).

According to Yusoff et al (2013), internationally, Malaysia through MACC has also taken various initiatives to ratify the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2008 to promote, facilitate and support international cooperation and technical assistance in the prevention and fight against corruption including recovery of assets or illicit proceeds.

One significant element in the structures of peace in the Malaysian context is its education system. Malaysia's ability to democratize the education system, allowing the public institutions and private sector enterprises to operate hand-in-hand in the process of building quality human capital has been highly successful. The relatively low level of unemployment enhanced the fruit of this success, to an extent that Malaysia has now become the hub of private education for the region attracting students from the Asia-Pacific region. With 90% literacy rate amongst its population the awareness within the populace regarding the role of education and national unity also contributes to the maturing of the society in dealing with inter-ethnic issue.



With the recent expansion of the new media, a relatively high educated society and an ever expanding middle class, most Malaysians have the opportunity to access information from anywhere at any time. The so-called globalisation of the Malaysian mind has allowed them to appreciate what peace could bring for them, not only in the economic sphere but also in the political and social spheres. Indeed, the peace and socio-political stability that they have enjoyed has been the very result of both their maturity and the maturity of the social system. With this in mind, KITA-MESRA® becomes an essential and critical tool in helping to monitor, manage and maintain peace and stability in Malaysia.

## Endnotes

- (1) Anis Y. Yusoff is Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies, the National University of Malaysia.
- (2) Shamsul A.B. is Distinguished Professor and Founder Director of the Institute of Ethnic Studies, the National University of Malaysia.
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