

1Malaysia - Concept and Values

By

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Abstracts

Upon ascending to Malaysia's highest public office on April 2009, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak has made waves to all corners of the nation with the introduction of 1Malaysia concept. The concept evolves around culture of excellence, perseverance, acceptance, education, integrity, meritocracy, humility and loyalty. It also encompasses NKRA's on six major issues.

Since independent, national unity has been made top priority – unity in education, culture, socio-economy, political, regional, etc. 1Malaysia seeks to improve the relations of all Malaysians, regardless of racial, religious or cultural backgrounds. There are certain major concerns that need to be addressed in order to seriously engage in 1Malaysia concept. Without correcting them, all efforts will be in vain.

1Malaysia concept caters the needs of all sector of the plural society and to ensure equal distribution of wealth between racial groups, between states and federal. Integrity on the part of the government and the public sector is one matter. The introduction of NKRA's and KPI's is a laudable move. The managing of all spectrums of unity (not just racial) is to be given proper thinking.

In order to move Malaysia towards a better society, identity and future hence unity and integration should promote co-operation between race, beliefs and region as one Malaysia, not as Sarawakian or Sabahan. The trust and aspiration of the people that 1Malaysia will bring about a greater nation must not be hampered. Therefore, the government will have to deliver on all its promises. The concept unveiled is a guiding principle to build a united and progressive nation, and to inculcate the spirit and values of togetherness and sense of belongings, regardless of race, religion and creed.

1Malaysia is not to abrogate affirmative action and Bumiputera privileges rather to improve its implementation in a fair manner and to keep intact the spirit of 1955-1957 which has been agreed upon by our forefathers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1Malaysia has been the 'it' buzzword of Malaysia ever since it was launched and mooted by the Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak. However, the policy has yet to be fully understood by the public.

In a poll¹ conducted by the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research pertaining to the Prime Minister's 100 days in office, 76% of the public surveyed were aware of the 1 Malaysia concepts. 23% agrees in saying that "it promotes unity between the various races" and some other 18% saying it "is about fairness and equality among the races". Based on this Research, it shows that Malaysian generally is not very clear about the 1Malaysia concept and it could be likened to proverb "Five blind men and an elephant" as shown on Figure 1.

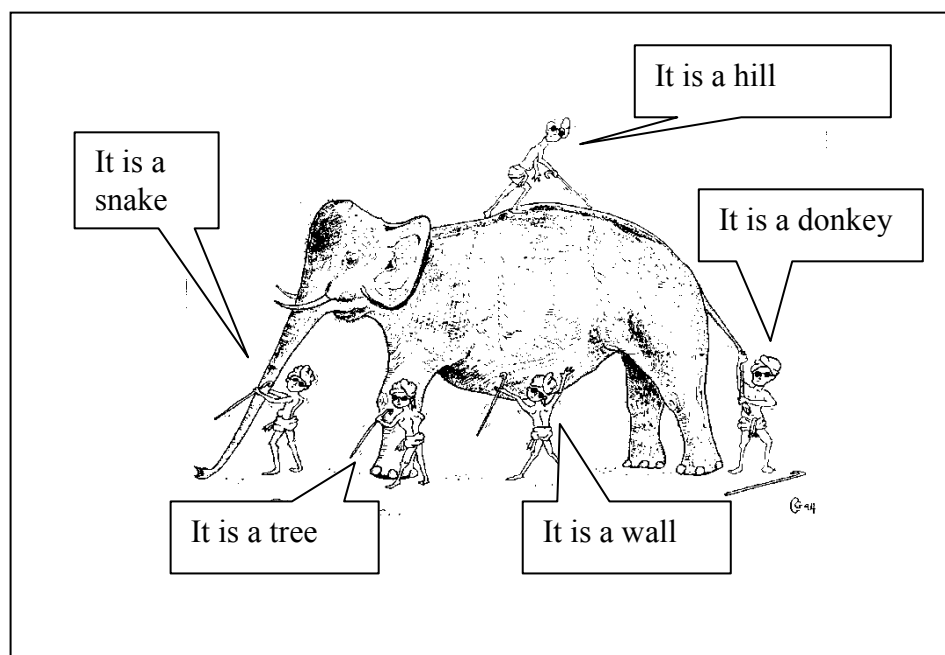


Figure 1 Five Blind Men and an Elephant

1Malaysia may carry a plethora of meanings to different quarters of the society as shown in Figure 2.

¹ As published in the news release dated July 8th 2009.

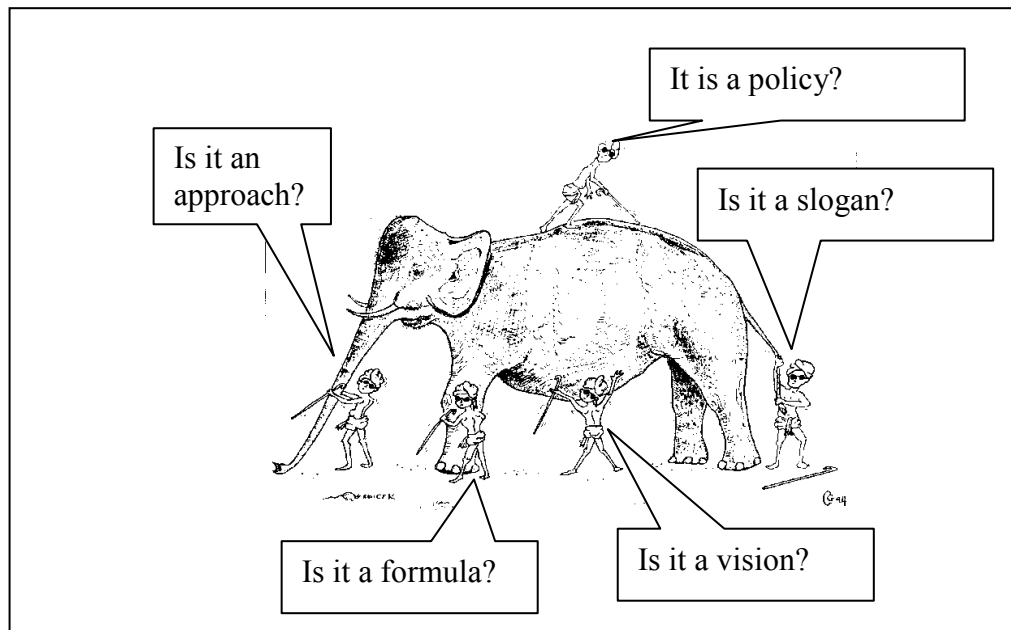


Figure 2: 1Malaysia Elephant

To certain quarters, this is probably just an alternate version of the ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ concept. And to some others, 1Malaysia is merely synonymous with national unity or kindred spirit amongst Malaysia’s diverse population, otherwise known as ‘semangat muhibbah’. The latter definition would suffice for a brief understanding of the concept, but definitely not extensive enough to be fathomable in its entirety.

The earlier mentioned poll also showed that 39% of respondents still did not understand the concept. So what is 1Malaysia truly all about? To allay fears and understanding 1Malaysia concept must be properly explained to the people as it involves governance,” (Dr Thock Ker Pong)²

The concepts of 1Malaysia unveiled is a guiding principle to build a united and progressive nation in the 21st Century. The paramount cardinal principals underlie in one 1Malaysia concept is to inculcate the spirit and values of togetherness and sense of belongings, regardless of race, religion and creed.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1970s, Malays were deemed rural in lifestyle as well as livelihood. The Chinese were seen as the tycoons, pillaging away the rich bounty of the land. The Indians were restricted to thrive between the shades of rubber trees.

² <http://www.bernama.com>

Needless to say, this segregations and economic disparity was a recipe for doom. In 1969, the infamous bloody riot of May 13 occurred. This was the ultimate display of intolerance and was sadly and eternally recorded in the annals of our history.

The tragic event of May 13 had made the government of the day realised that the matter of racial harmony ought to be the numero uno of all priorities. And rightfully so, certain measures were drawn up as to find the equilibrium which works for everyone.

For instance, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced as a mean to tackle the great economic disparity between the races in Malaysia and to eradicate poverty regardless of race. Money, and general wealth by extension, was indeed a sore point. Affirmative action, in which what NEP is all about, was seen as a mechanism to counter such problem. It however, came under fire as growing discontent among certain groups that the fruits of development are enjoyed by certain groups only. The redistribution of wealth was deemed as a Robin Hood-like manoeuvre which would hamper the nation's growth. Unfazed by critics, the NEP continued on and managed to bring Malaysia out of the hostile era of the late 1960s into a more peaceful and developing days of the 1980s.

And now, many years later, the issue of achieving racial harmony is still top priority. This is where 1Malaysia fits into our local social context. According to the Prime Minister's personal website³, 1Malaysia is described as being intended to

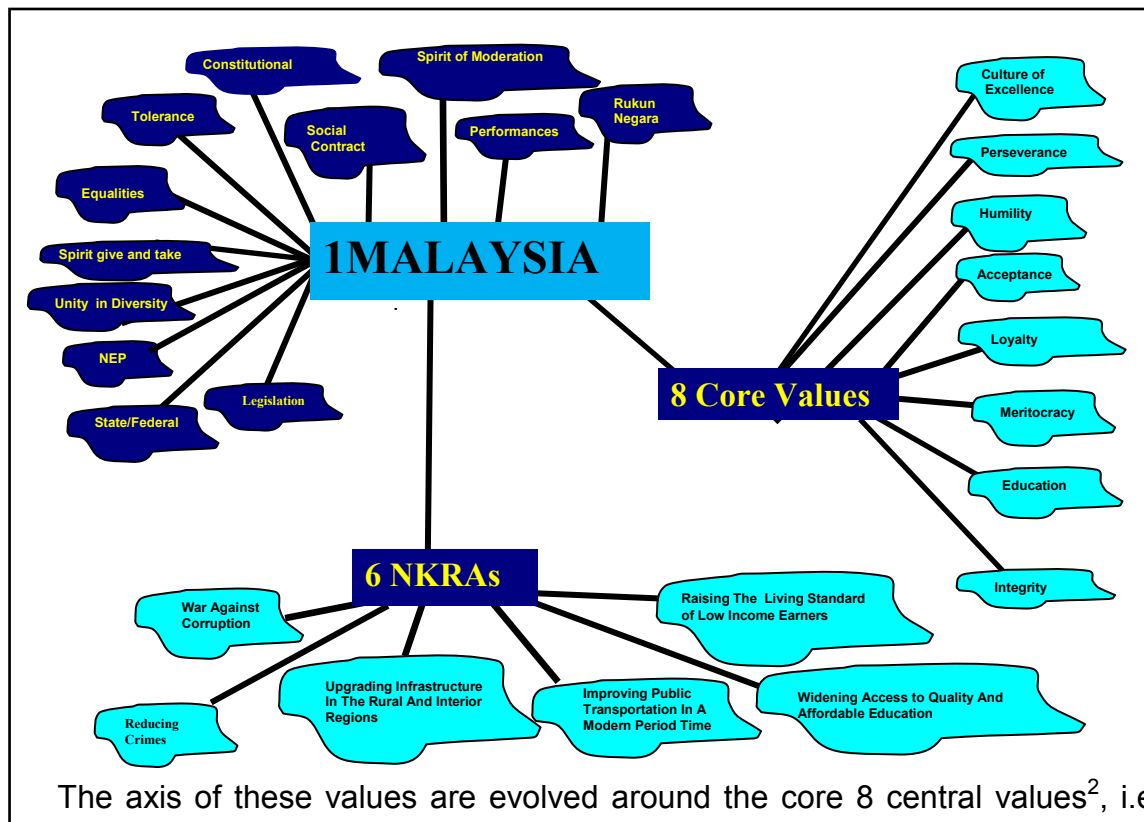
“...provide a free and open forum to discuss the things that matter deeply to us as a Nation. It provides a chance to express and explore the many perspectives of our fellow citizens. What makes Malaysia unique is the diversity of our peoples. 1Malaysia's goal is to preserve and enhance this unity in diversity which has always been our strength and remains our best hope for the future. I hope this Website will initiate an open and vital dialogue exploring our Malaysian identity, purpose, and direction. I encourage each of you to join me in defining our Malaysia and the role we must play in its future. Each of us — despite our differences — shares a

³ www.1malaysia.com.my

desire for a better tomorrow. Each of us wants opportunity, respect, friendship, and understanding.”

3.0 ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

The concept of 1Malaysia as we can look at it can be made up of various issues or values as mapped out in Figure 3.



The axis of these values are evolved around the core 8 central values², i.e. culture of excellence, perseverance, acceptance, education, integrity, meritocracy, humility and loyalty.
 Figure 3 :1Malaysia - Key Issues

Furthermore, it is made clear that 1Malaysia distinguishes itself from ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ on a critical point. Where the former focuses on working with current mechanism of affirmative action, the latter wishes to forego it. The key principle of 1Malaysia is not to abrogate affirmative action and Bumiputera privileges as stipulated in the Federal Constitution of 1957, rather to improve on its implementation in a just and fair manner. The fragile social contract as has been agreed upon by our forefathers shall then be kept intact.

Clearly, the underlying key to this concept is the catchphrase ‘unity in diversity’. It is not a government sponsored programme in which to dilute our beautiful background of variations and create a singular hegemonic society, but

rather to appreciate the plurality that is Malaysia and work together as one nation towards a better future.

There are several key values of 1Malaysia as summarised in Figure 3, which ought to be addressed and read further into in order to not just realise but to turn this concept into a grand success. However for this paper there are three issues to be analysed namely the NKRA and two of the eight central values i.e. integrity and education.

3.1 Integrity

The 8 values of 1Malaysia are most certainly idealistic. By mere face-value understanding of those values would already depict a central importance on hard work and all round virtues. But one value, i.e. integrity stands tall above the rest, in which without it, the rest will be mere rhetoric. The core of any project or task undertaken is the integrity of the parties involved. Should the moral compass of one side be skewed to fit whatever interests there may be, success would remain elusive.

Integrity as described by the Prime Minister is all about government relations with the people. The government is expected to perform honourably and be honest to the people. In turn, the people are also to reciprocate it with trust and confidence that the government will act in the best interest of the people as a whole. In this respect, the government's integrity is studied on its task and the carrying out of the role as the trustee of the citizen's rights and well-being.

Human rights and equality before the law, another great concern of the people must also be respected. The people need assurance that nothing is beyond reproach or above the law. They must be granted with the laws that respects and protects their rights. Only then they may accord the government similar courtesy and respect.

The aforementioned description of how integrity plays a role in 1Malaysia, there are rather expansive room for improving that definition.

It should be added that integrity is not just between the government in power with the people who puts them in power, but also between the government sector and that of the private enterprises. This is, as a matter of fact, the cornerstone of 'Malaysia Incorporated' as was proposed and executed by the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad in 1983.⁴

⁴ Economic Planning Unit 2008

The relations between the two sectors ought to be strengthened as the 'business' of our nation demands the attention and hard work of all related parties. National development would fail should there be a breakdown in the relations.

In relations to 1Malaysia, let's the deregulating of bureaucratic rules and regulations can improve the delivery system of the government.

3.1.1 Contract - Procurement

Bureaucratic red-tape is not just an issue of cumbersome process of getting things done, but also encompasses the possibility of corruption and other ill-doings. In pursuing development all over the country, the government needs to deal and award contracts to the private sectors. The matter of integrity (and meritocracy – another of the 8 values of 1Malaysia – by extension) takes centre stage at this very juncture.

The distribution of government contracts (or any other services for that matter) must be based on merits held by the corporations. It should not take priority over personal and political relations and shall practise transparency and openness.

In addition, the policy set by the government may not be implemented as desired due to overzealous attitude by certain government servant, take for example, requirement of 100% Bumiputera's owned company instead of Bumiputera status company to participate or be awarded a contract. This action will discourage the forming of company with different ethics shareholders and also denial changes of the non-Bumiputera citizen to participate in the government contracts, it will create unnecessary misunderstanding towards government policy. To overcome this problem, a policy which encourages the multi-racial company in terms of shareholders and workforces shall be formulated in awarding the contracts.

Integrity and meritocracy are also expected in other non-trading realms. In education for instance, there is a need for local universities to be more transparent and using established parameter on its intake procedures and open up ample placements for all races.

3.1.2 Public Service Delivery System

When it comes to improving the public service delivery system, customer care is a major factor to be addressed. Business or otherwise, catering to the needs of the customers or clients is vital. This is where the government sector ought to make necessary improvements. It is applauded that certain public service department, e.g. Immigration Department had achieved vast improvement on the delivery system, but there are still a lot of public services been condemned due to mediocrity and inefficiency. If 1Malaysia is to promote a better and improved Malaysian identity, the government ought to up the ante in providing the best delivery system. To achieve this, the government shall set the benchmark on the delivery system against the standards adopted in the developed countries, and adopt Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to measure performance of the public service delivery system. Usage of electronic system in the public services delivery system, which is proven to be effective in reducing time to accomplish the task shall also be speed up.

3.2 National Key Results Area

The Prime Minister himself, in realising his 1Malaysia concept, has introduced certain steps the likes of National Key Results Area (NKRA) and KPI. The NKRA is the government's target in six major issues. For each one area, KPI has been set as to gauge the progress of the proposed changes. Six lead ministers have been appointed to head each of the NKRA's. Not only has that, KPIs also been set for all the other ministries (to include the ministers as well). Their performances and progress will be checked every six months by the Prime Minister himself.

The NKRA's are hoped to create a better guideline for the government to adhere to. It also serves as a benchmark or a yardstick in which the government could compare and improve itself. Together with the KPIs, it is hoped that all bureaucratic procedures will be streamlined and all resources will be fully utilised in the public sector as to focus all efforts on achieving the targeted results in an acceptable time frame. It must also be noted that whatever the outcome of the KPIs may show, the government must be honest, transparent and not attempt to 'beautify' it.

The 6 NKRA's are⁵ :

- i. Reducing crimes.

⁵News Strait Times, dated 28th July 2009.

- ii. War against corruption.
- iii. Widening the access to affordable and quality of education.
- iv. Raising living standard of the low income earners.
- v. Upgrading infrastructure in the rural areas and the interior region.
- vi. Improving public transportation in a moderate period of time.

The NKRA's are indeed good measures. There is no need to read in further details that it is meant for the greater good of Malaysia and its people. However, some things are just easier said than done. Government mechanisms ought to be improved prior to any serious effort being undertaken for the implementation of the NKRA's and 1Malaysia concept.

The duty to the people on the government's part does not merely entails doing what is deemed in the best interest but also to be held accountable for its decisions. It is for this very reason that the concept of 1Malaysia must take to encompass matters like corruption, most especially in the government sector. As a measure to reduce the corruption, the government shall make it mandatory for all government servants to declare the assets owned by them and their immediate families on regular basis.

Therefore, for the whole NKRA's to be taken seriously, vital and significant changes that run the mechanisms of the government must first be corrected.

Both these concepts are hoped to create a better guideline for the government to adhere to. It also serves as a benchmark or a yardstick in which the government could compare and improve itself.

3.3 Education

On the topic of education, other than better arrangements for the placement of students from all races in public universities, there are also other measures that can be taken in order to guarantee the success of 1Malaysia.

The Razak Report of 1956 outlined a proposal for a "national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the

country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country.”⁶

Such a nationalistic focus in Malaysian education system must take precedence. From primary school up to tertiary education, there are still areas to be improved.

Perhaps certain subjects like Tatanegara could be returned to the national school’s syllabus. This subject, in former incarnations, has been a helpful tool in teaching the young impressionable pupils with civic duties and the need to maintain racial harmony. It is after all, the very instrument to instruct and educate the younger generation and hopefully would be the first step in the betterment of our future.

Other than that, there is a need for local universities to improve as well. Local public universities ought to provide for better arrangements in terms of the placement of students from all races in public universities. The Ministry of Education and the administrators of those universities must act in a more transparent manner, most especially on its intake procedures and open up ample placements for all races.

4.0 UNITY AND INTEGRATION

When speaking of unity, in Malaysian context, almost instantly the first thing that comes to mind is all races living together hand-in-hand in harmony. As picture perfect as that may be, it is only a portion of what unity is truly all about. The spirit of brethren amongst the many races is merely one speck of the larger spectrum of unity. Unity comes in many other forms the likes of unity in education, cultural appreciation, socio-economy, political, regional, etc.

The need for all those sort of unity is true in Malaysia’s current situation. Malaysia is not only made up of the Malays, Chinese and Indians. It is also made up of the Peninsular and East Malaysia, the rich and the poor, the government and the opposition, the educated and those who are not, the white collars and the blue collars, the young and the old, the urban dwellers and the village folks; and so on and so forth. With that in mind, the 1Malaysia policy must cater to the needs of all sectors of the society and not just focussing on racial relations.

Malaysia being a federation of 13 states and 3 federal territories, the development so far has been rather lopsided with most of the wealth centred on the

⁶ Report of the Education Committee 1956 (otherwise known as the ‘Razak Report’).

Klang Valley conurbation. Many other states register significant number of its population as still living under the poverty line.

Although the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) 2006-2010 has already committed to reducing the overall poverty line to below 2.8 percent (from the 2004 estimate of 5.7 percent) and to eradicate hardcore poverty by 2010, this effort must be proportionately distributed to all states including Sabah and Sarawak. In future Malaysia Plans more provision shall be made to states like Sabah, Kelantan and Terengganu; all of which records significant number of poverty rate.

To achieve a better distribution of national wealth, the relationship between state and federal governments must also improve. Political differences between the state and federal governments should not hinder the best interests of the people. Issues like oil royalty should not be politicised. Other aids or funding from federal government should not be disrupted just because the state level government has changed.

Geographical factor is another factor to consider in achieving national unity as proposed under 1Malaysia. We should not be thinking as Sarawakians or Kelantanese or KLites, instead, we should be thinking and moving forward as Malaysians. The policy should promote greater co-operation between the two regions and improve on the integration of the people.

Arts and other cultural aspects of Malaysia should also be enriched by the amalgamation of the myriads of cultures available in Malaysia. Thus far, this kind of togetherness could mostly be seen only during festive (especially the Independence Day celebration) seasons. This should not be the case. Fashion, performance arts, music, etc.; must be able to portray the essence of unity 1Malaysia tries to achieve.

The gap between the more affluent urbanites and the seemingly impecunious rural folks also needs attention. The disparity between the two categories of people could be redressed by means of certain revamps in areas of education and economy. The teaching of English for instance, must be more thorough and progressive in rural areas as to allow the students a better footing in competing with urban students. Economic opportunities in villages and other rural areas should also be increased as it will help to raise the living standards of villagers without having to move to the city.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Federal Constitution has provided that Bahasa Melayu shall be the language of the federation. If the mastery of the language by all races in Malaysia could be improved, other policies and efforts to improve unity and integration will follow suit.

The Rukun Negara is another mechanism that could be used to achieve the goals of 1Malaysia and the NKRAs. The 5 tenets promote faith, loyalty, respect for the law of the land and wholesome proper conduct. Those qualities are needed to move towards a better Malaysian society and identity.

Furthermore, the governance of the nation must be placed in the hands of the most capable and virtuous leaders. After all, leadership by example is pivotal in attaining paradigm shift amongst the masses.

The earlier mentioned survey by Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research also found that 46% of respondents were confident that 1Malaysia would be able to achieve its goals. And in a related question, the survey found that 60% of respondents were confident that the Prime Minister would be able to improve race relations in Malaysia.

With such high hopes and confidence placed on the Prime Minister, 1Malaysia and the government; it would be a great letdown should all the songs and advertisements be nothing more than mere political gimmicks. Racial polarisation shall be reversed through politic, economic, social and education. Government has to show results otherwise the people may be unforgiving in their verdict of the government performance and the effort to instil public confidence will fail. This is a pledge that must be live up for "1Malaysia, People first, Performance Now". In summary, 1Malaysia concept distinguishes itself the followings:

- i. Concept not to abrogate affirmative action or privileges of certain group rather to improve its implementation to keep intact the spirit agreed upon by our forefathers.
- ii. Unity in diversity in plural society to work together as one nation.

- iii. Unity not based on geographical factor or racial groups but focussing on all sector of society.
- iv. To reciprocate trust and confidence – between government and people, among racial groups, between private and public sectors, different income groups, between State and Federal and political differences.
- v. Merits taking priority over personal and political relations.
- vi. Integrity and meritocracy include non trading e.g. education, etc
- vii. To inculcate the spirit and values of togetherness and sense of belongings, regardless of race, religion and creed.
- viii. To allays fears through understandings, awareness and acceptance.
- ix. Arts , fashion, music etc to portray the essence of unity; and
- x. Rukun Negara a mechanism towards better society and identity.

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