

# **RSOG SEMINAR**

## **Patriotism and the Youth in Malaysia**

with

**Dr. Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad**

**When** : 12 January 2016  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Dr. Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad

### **About the Seminar**

Youth (18 to 25 years old) is estimated to form about forty percent of the population in Malaysia – noticeably higher than Asia Pacific’s estimates of about twenty percent. Such huge composition is naturally a plus point to any country in terms of workforce, consumerism, ideas, or even in embracing changes and diversity. Be that as it may, how does Malaysia turn this advantage to benefit the country as a whole? As accurately pointed by a statesman over a century ago, “almost everything that is great has been done by youth”. To date, youth’s contributions to this country are well documented especially in sports and culture. More sombrely, many of the young countrymen have fallen in defence of the country. Conversely for the policymakers, huge budget allocation earmarked for education, a dedicated ministry for youth, national youth policy, and the Program Khidmat Negara are some of the commitments translated to see Malaysian youth flourishing for the nation. What more does Malaysia need to do to ensure that the youth do great things for this country? Is it fair to shoulder the burden of national growth and development solely to the youth? This seminar aims to explore the possibilities for youth in nation building and development, comparisons with other developed Asian countries, and the value of patriotism in youth of Malaysia

### **Summary**

According to the Malaysian National Youth Development Policy of 1997, and as pointed out by Dr. Noor Sulastry during her presentation entitled “Patriotism and the Youth in Malaysia”, between 15 – 40 years old assume the status of youth. However, much of the activities and programmes for local youth development are focused on the 18 – 25 year old range.

Being patriotic is about being brave enough to voice discontent with what is wrong, wanting change if necessary, and loving the country by wanting the best for it. This is how the speaker revealed that demonstrations and protests with a clear purpose and objective can also be a form of patriotism, just like what our forefathers and past leaders strived to do to gain independence.

Subsequently, she began to highlight the importance of nurturing the youth, as they will eventually become the next generation of leaders. This can be tackled in various ways, such as involving group activities among all races which promotes respect and unity irrespective of different cultures and beliefs. Through political maturity and political participation, the youths will indisputably drive national development through enterprise, government, and civil society.

In her final point, Dr. Noor Sulastry gave the participants a rundown on her recent research findings regarding nationalism and democracy in South Korean youths. The politics of South Korea takes place in the framework of a 'presidential representative democratic republic', whereby the President is the Head of State elected by direct popular vote for a five-year term. The President appoints the Prime Minister based on the approval of the National Assembly (i.e. Parliament). It was noted that South Korean youths are given the platform to openly engage in political matters and discussions since they were eligible to vote as early as 19 years old (later raised to 20 years old during the presidential election in 2007), so that they get the chance to know that their sacrifices and time are significant in helping the continuity of democracy. Moreover, South Korean youths embrace ethnic nationalism in two dimensions: (1) assertive nationalism towards the outside world, especially the United States and (2) inter-Korean nationalism with the Korean people. The younger Koreans prefer peaceful coexistence with North Korea due to less fear with the communist North and no memory of the previous wars. In contrast, the older generation of Koreans disagree as they experienced hardship through colonial rule, post-independence, and the Korean War. Based on her conclusion, South Korean youths today only seek two things from the government, which is to increase the general employment rate and reducing tuition fees in education.

Patriotism implies feelings of solidarity and mutual responsibility among people of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds. A multi-racial and multi-religious nation like Malaysia needs to find commonalities due to the differences that exist among the various groups. Through the spirit of patriotism and love for the nation, these differences can be transcended, thus allowing a strong basis for consensus among the citizens. Moreover, Malaysians generally show their love of country by turning out to vote during the General Elections. They tend to come out in record numbers because of their love for Malaysia, their hope for a better country. Love of country means fighting injustice, racism, poverty, corruption and doing everything possible to preserve this blessed country for future generations. Patriotism is best fostered when every Malaysian is made to feel that they are valued in the country.

## Issues raised

- There is an evident ideological generation gap between the younger and older generation. The younger generation tend to see nationalism and patriotism reflected by voter turnout during general elections, thus having lower political awareness on the bigger picture. It is reminded that patriotism is reflected by the individual's love for the country, not by the love for the government administration. In Malaysia's case, we can see that patriotism is seen through political participation.
- South Korean youths are not too worried on local issues and politics, but are concerned on the employment rate and ever rising educational tuition fees. The youth are content and thankful for the previous military regime's efforts during the annexation of North & South Korea, hence do not rebel much against the system. In addition, due to the amendment to the Nationality Act 2011, South Korea for the first time recognized permanent dual citizenship by birth (e.g. child born to South Korean parents in the United States). However, the youth do engage in peaceful demonstrations and protests to voice their concerns, such as the government's handling of the Sewol Ferry Disaster in 2014, as they believe that this method is one way to develop democracy.
- In Malaysia's case, there is a need to engage all youths in order to develop their interests, skills, and abilities. Several initiatives has been established such as the Perdana Fellows Programme and Youth Parliament to kick-start and get the youth more active and engaged within the community. Youths do not seem to favour long term policies which takes time to implement, instead they look for short-term gains and immediate results.

## About the Speaker

Dr. Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. She specialises in comparative politics and is highly interested in political science in local and South Korea politics. She holds a Doctorate degree in Comparative Politics from National University of Malaysia (UKM); and has been appointed as scholar/laureate of Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (2011-2012). She has been working actively as a columnist in local newspapers and magazines, such as Utusan Malaysia, Harian Metro and Dewan Masyarakat. Currently, she is a Visiting Lecturer at Razak School of Government, a member of Politics, International Relations and Security Cluster, Majlis Profesor Negara.

## Contact

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