KEMENTERIAN PERPADUAN NEGARA

SPEECH BY

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THINK BIG SUMMIT 2026

THE MALAYSIAN DILEMMA: KITA ANAK MALAYSIA

14 NOVEMBER 2026

9.00 AM

PAUM CLUBHOUSE KUALA LUMPUR

Salam Perpaduan and Salam Malaysia MADANI

SALUTATIONS
**Provided separately*

WELCOMING REMARKS

1. It is a great honour to join the **Think Big Summit 2026**, organised by the **Malaysian Philosophy Society in collaboration with the Ministry of National Unity**.

2. The theme, ***"The Malaysian Dilemma: Kita Anak Malaysia"*****,** invites us to reflect on a fundamental question: after more than six decades of nationhood, have we truly developed a shared Malaysian identity, or do we continue to define ourselves primarily through the communities to which we belong?

3. This is a question that goes beyond politics, ethnicity or religion. It concerns the very meaning of nationhood. What makes us Malaysian? Is it simply the citizenship we hold, the land on which we were born, or the Constitution that governs us? Or is it something deeper: a sense of belonging, shared responsibility and a willingness to stand together despite our differences?

4. **Being Malaysian is a matter of citizenship. Being Anak Malaysia, however, means recognising that we share more than a geographical space. We share a history, institutions, responsibilities and, most importantly, a common future.**

5. Our national emblem carries a powerful message: **"Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu."** Our strength grows when we stand together. The challenge is how we translate this principle into our everyday lives, institutions, and national consciousness. I would like to approach this subject through three perspectives: **the country we inherited, the identity we must confront, and the nation we must build**.

A HISTORY OF DIFFERENCES AND A SHARED DESTINY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. **Malaysia was never built upon uniformity**. Its history is one of migration, cultural exchange, trade and the meeting of different communities. For centuries, the Malay Peninsula and the wider Malay Archipelago served as important centres of trade and civilisation. The Melaka Sultanate, for example, attracted traders and communities from across Asia and beyond, creating a society shaped by cultural interaction and exchange.

7. However, **the colonial period, particularly under British administration, institutionalised divisions through economic activities, education and residential patterns**. Different communities were concentrated in different occupations and geographical areas. These arrangements shaped social relationships and created divisions that continued to influence the country after independence.

8. **The challenge inherited by our founding generation was immense. They had to build a nation from communities with different languages, religions, cultural practices and political aspirations.** Yet, our founding leaders understood that the future of this country depended on cooperation and compromise. The partnership involving Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tun V.T. Sambanthan demonstrated that leaders from different communities could work together towards a common national purpose.

9. The formation of Malaysia was more than a political arrangement. It was an undertaking to build a common future among territories and communities with different histories, cultures and aspirations. The Malaysia Agreement 1963 remains an important part of this national story and the

constitutional arrangements surrounding the formation of Malaysia.

10. Today, diversity remains one of Malaysia's defining characteristics. Our linguistic landscape is equally remarkable. **Malaysia is home to approximately 137 languages**. Our diversity is also reflected in the festivals and cultural practices that shape our national calendar, including Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Christmas, Gawai, Kaamatan and Wesak.

11. Music, food, arts and cultural traditions have also crossed community boundaries. Traditional songs, instruments, dance forms and festive foods have become part of Malaysia's shared cultural experience. **These everyday interactions help create a cultural landscape that is distinctly Malaysian**.

12. **Perhaps Malaysia is best understood as a *salad bowl* rather than a melting pot**. Each community retains its distinctive identity while contributing to a larger whole. This is an important distinction. Building a Malaysian identity does not require us to abandon our cultural, linguistic or identities. **We must distinguish between unity and uniformity.**

13. That is the country we inherited: a nation built through differences, compromise and a shared destiny. Our responsibility is to ensure that these differences remain a source of strength rather than division.

THE IDENTITY WE MUST CONFRONT

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. **Our Federal Constitution provides the foundation for national coexistence**. Our Constitution is not merely a legal document, it represents the foundations upon which our diverse society organises its national life.

15. Alongside the Constitution, the **Rukun Negara remains our national philosophy and guiding framework**. Introduced on 31 August 1970 following the events of 13 May 1969, it was established to strengthen national unity and provide common principles for the country. Its five aspirations and five principles call upon us to uphold national unity, democratic values, a just society, cultural traditions and a progressive society. The Rukun Negara must not remain a ceremonial pledge recited at official functions. It must become a philosophy that informs our conduct, decisions and relationships with fellow Malaysians.

16. The Ministry's approach is grounded in three important stages: **understanding, internalising and practising the Rukun Negara**. National principles must be translated into everyday behaviour.

17. **However, despite having a Constitution and a national philosophy to guide us, Malaysia continues to face challenges that test the strength of our unity. We must confront the ten social deficits identified through national unity research: ethnicity, religion, social class, education, language, generational differences, gender, federalism and politics, urban-rural disparities, and media.**

18. The challenge has become even more complex in the digital age. **Social media provides unprecedented opportunities for communication and public participation. However, it can also amplify misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, particularly when content touches on race, religion and royalty.** Deepfakes, artificial intelligence-generated content, coordinated bot networks and manipulated narratives can make false information appear credible. Algorithm-driven echo chambers and filter bubbles further reinforce existing prejudices by repeatedly exposing individuals

to information that confirms their beliefs.

19. **We are therefore facing more than an information problem. We are facing a challenge involving public perception, social trust and national stability**. The digital space has become an arena where narratives compete and perceptions are shaped. **This includes the growing threat of narrative and cognitive warfare, where information is deliberately used to influence public attitudes and weaken confidence in institutions**.

20. Every Malaysian must learn to question information, verify sources and understand the consequences of sharing content that may inflame tensions. We must not allow algorithms to determine the boundaries of our national identity, nor allow false narratives to define how one community sees another.

21. We must understand the histories and experiences of other communities, respect differences in culture, religion and language, accept that no single community has a monopoly over the Malaysian identity, and celebrate the diversity that makes our country distinctive.

22. Our founding father, Tunku Abdul Rahman reminded Malaysians that independence was a milestone, but only the beginning of a greater national endeavour. Nationhood cannot be sustained through political agreements and constitutional provisions alone. It must also be strengthened through the attitudes, values and everyday actions of our people.

THE NATION WE MUST BUILD: FROM COEXISTENCE TO NATIONHOOD

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. The question before us is not whether Malaysians should abandon their cultural identities. It is whether we can build a stronger national identity that unites us while respecting our differences.

24. **A shared Malaysian identity must be anchored in our Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara, national institutions, common history and collective aspirations**. It must also be supported by inclusive opportunities, social mobility and a sense that every Malaysian has a meaningful place in the country's future.

25. **This brings us to the bigger national agenda of Pembinaan Negara Bangsa.** Under the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan, RMK13 (2026–2030), the Government has placed renewed emphasis on strengthening the social system and building a sovereign and dignified nation founded on humanity, inclusion, national identity and a strong sense of patriotism.

26. In line with this direction, the Ministry of National Unity has elevated **Pembinaan Negara Bangsa as its key strategic focus**, with the theme *"Bersama Membina Negara Bangsa"*. This represents an important progression in the Ministry's role: from strengthening national unity towards shaping a stronger and more deeply rooted Malaysian national identity. So, what exactly do we mean by *Negara Bangsa*?

27. In the Malaysian context, it refers to **a sovereign nation whose citizens share a national identity and common values founded upon the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara**. It is not about creating a single race, imposing one culture or erasing the identities of different communities. Rather, it is about bringing our ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity together under one shared national identity — Bangsa Malaysia.

28. In essence, we may have different cultural roots, speak different languages and practise different religions, but we must share a common sense of belonging, loyalty and responsibility towards Malaysia. **Our diversity remains our strength, while our shared national identity becomes the foundation that binds us together.**

29. This is why the Ministry places importance on advancing the agenda of Negara Bangsa as a long-term national undertaking. It is about moving beyond peaceful coexistence towards a society that genuinely shares common values, understands its national history, upholds the Constitution, practises the Rukun Negara and takes collective ownership of the country's future.

30. Ultimately, the aspiration is to build a Malaysia that is peaceful, united, stable and harmonious. **A nation where every Malaysian, regardless of background, sees themselves as an equal part of one national destiny.**

31. The Malaysian dilemma is not that we are too different to become one nation. The real dilemma is whether we have the courage, maturity and commitment to turn our differences into a shared national strength.

32. **We cannot rewrite the history that brought us together, but we can decide what kind of future we want to build. Our national identity must be strong enough to accommodate diversity**. Our institutions must command the confidence of all communities. Our young generation must inherit a country where belonging is never questioned because of ethnicity, religion, language or background.

33. **Nation-building is never a completed project**. Every generation inherits a nation, but every generation also has a responsibility to strengthen it. The generation that fought for independence gave us a sovereign nation. The generation that formed Malaysia gave us a larger national vision. The generation today must ensure that the promise of Malaysia is fulfilled through stronger unity, shared prosperity and a common sense of belonging.

34. **Let us move beyond simply living together towards genuinely understanding one another**. Beyond tolerance towards respect and acceptance. And beyond sharing the same country towards a deeper commitment to sharing the same national destiny.

35. Our strength is not measured by how similar we are, but by how strongly we stand together despite our differences. We are not merely people living in Malaysia. We are citizens who share its history, uphold its Constitution, protect its future and contribute to its destiny.

With that, I hereby officiate the Thing Big Summit 2026.

Thank You.