



KEMENTERIAN PERPADUAN NEGARA

SPEECH BY

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SERI NEGARA DIALOGUE 2026

**“NATIONHOOD, UNITY AND MALAYSIA’S SHARED
FUTURE”**

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2.30 PM

NATIONAL MUSUEM, KUALA LUMPUR

Salam Perpaduan and Salam Malaysia MADANI

SALUTATIONS

**Provided separately*

WELCOMING REMARKS

1. It is a great honour to join the Seri Negara Dialogue 2026, organised by Chevening Alumni Malaysia in collaboration with the British High Commission Malaysia. Our theme today **“Nationhood, Unity and Malaysia’s Shared Future”** is both timely and fundamental.
2. I would like to begin with one proposition: **a nation is not held together merely by geography, a flag or a passport. A nation is held together by a shared sense of belonging, shared institutions, shared values and a shared commitment to one another.** That is why our discussion today is not simply about unity. It is about **nationhood, unity and the shared future of Malaysia.**
3. Let us begin with **nationhood**. A *nation-state* is more than a state with defined territory, it is where people recognise a common national identity and accept common institutions, laws and responsibilities. **For Malaysia, nation-building cannot mean making every Malaysian identical. It means**

building a sufficiently strong Malaysian identity that allows our differences to coexist within a common national framework. Our nationhood is therefore not about erasing identity, but about **connecting identities**: Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau, Murut, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, Orang Asli and many others through a stronger identity as Malaysians.

4. Malaysia today is more connected, more urban, more digitally exposed and more socially complex than at any previous point in our history. **This is why I often say that Malaysia should not be understood as a melting pot, where differences disappear, but as a salad bowl, where different identities retain their character while contributing to one national whole.**
5. Our nationhood was built through milestones that we must never take for granted. **31 August 1957** gave us independence and sovereignty as the Federation of Malaya. **16 September 1963** gave birth to Malaysia through the formation of a wider federation involving Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak, with Singapore initially as a member. These dates tell us something profound: Malaysia was not created overnight. It was negotiated, constructed and sustained through constitutional arrangements, political agreements and

the willingness of different communities and territories to share a future.

6. Our nationhood therefore rests not only on history, but on an ongoing **social consensus, constitutional order and commitment to federation.**

7. At the heart of that nationhood stands the **Federal Constitution**. It is not merely a legal document for lawyers and constitutional scholars, it is the institutional framework within which Malaysians live together. Alongside it stands the **Rukun Negara**, proclaimed on 31 August 1970 following the events of 13 May 1969, with the fundamental objective of strengthening national unity. Its aspirations are equally important: closer unity, democratic life, justice, respect for cultural traditions and a progressive society. These are our **civic operating system.**

UNITY: HOW WE LIVE TOGETHER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The second part of our conversation is **unity**. Unity does not mean the absence of disagreement. **A mature nation must have room for different political views, religions, cultures, languages and social experiences.** The challenge is to ensure that disagreement does not become dehumanisation,

difference does not become division, and identity does not become a weapon against another Malaysian.

9. The National Unity Policy therefore places the **Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara at its core**, while pursuing national identity, patriotism, tolerance, mutual respect and responsibility. Its three broad pillars are **Patriotism and Democracy, National Identity, and the Unity Ecosystem**.
10. Malaysia has spent decades developing policies and institutions around this objective. From the post-1969 establishment of the Department of National Unity, to the creation of the Ministry of National Unity, to policies and programmes spanning education, socio-economic development, culture, community relations and national integration, the country has recognised that unity cannot be left to chance.
11. Today, the **National Unity Policy 2021–2030** and the **National Unity Blueprint 2021–2030** provide a structured framework, while the National Unity Action Plan translates those strategies into implementation across areas including the economy, education, social wellbeing, socio-culture, and science, technology and innovation.

12. But policies alone cannot create a nation. **People create nations. Relationships create trust. Everyday encounters create belonging.** This is why the Ministry of National Unity places emphasis on the principles of **faham, hormat, terima dan meraikan** — understand, respect, accept and celebrate.
13. This is also the evolution of our national unity narrative. We have spoken of “**Unity in Diversity**”, because Malaysia's diversity is a permanent feature of our nation. We have increasingly spoken of “**Harmony in Diversity**”, because diversity must be accompanied by trust, empathy and peaceful coexistence. And today, as we move towards **nation-building (pembinaan negara bangsa)**. We must ask a deeper question: *What kind of Malaysian nation are we building for the next generation?* The answer cannot simply be a Malaysia that lives peacefully side by side. It must be a Malaysia that **shares purpose, shares responsibility and shares opportunity.**
14. At the same time, we must have the courage to acknowledge our **social deficits**. The National Unity Index identifies issues including **ethnicity, religion, social class and education as areas requiring continuous management and constructive interaction.** These differences do not automatically produce conflict, conflict

emerges when differences are accompanied by mistrust, inequality, exclusion, misinformation or the absence of meaningful interaction. Therefore, **nation-building requires us to address not only visible conflict, but the underlying conditions that allow distrust to grow.**

15. Today, I see **three major challenges** that demand our attention: **polarisation, misinformation and the weaponisation of identity.** Polarisation can turn Malaysians into competing camps rather than fellow citizens. Misinformation can spread faster than verification, while algorithms can repeatedly show individuals content that confirms what they already believe. And when ethnicity, religion or regional identity is deliberately used to provoke anger, our differences cease to be simply differences, they become instruments of division. **In the digital age, one careless sentence can travel across the country within seconds, one false claim can reach millions before the truth has even left the starting line.**

16. This is why our response must be both **preventive and corrective.** Enforcement has its place, particularly where laws are breached, threats are made, violence is incited or hate speech causes genuine harm. But enforcement alone cannot build social cohesion. The Ministry of National Unity

has a different but complementary responsibility from agencies focused primarily on security, policing, communications regulation or criminal enforcement. Our task is also to **educate, mediate, facilitate dialogue, build trust, strengthen communities and create spaces where Malaysians can meet before they learn to fear one another.**

17. In this regard, the **Rukun Tetangga, community programmes, interfaith engagement, youth initiatives, cultural activities, dialogue platforms and grassroots partnerships** are not peripheral activities. They are national infrastructure.

18. We must also change how we think about the **economics of unity**. Social cohesion cannot survive indefinitely if communities feel that opportunities, dignity or development are distributed unfairly. Malaysia's population grew from **27.5 million in 2010 to 32.4 million in 2020**, while our demographic composition continues to evolve. Nation-building therefore must keep pace with demographic, economic and technological change. **Shared prosperity, fair access, quality education, mobility and regional development are not separate from unity, they are part of its foundation.**

MALAYSIA'S SHARED FUTURE: BUILDING THE NATION TOGETHER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. The same principle applies to **education and digital citizenship**. We cannot expect young Malaysians to understand one another if they grow up without meaningful opportunities to interact. We need education that develops not only knowledge, but also **civic literacy, constitutional understanding, historical awareness, critical thinking, media literacy and the ability to disagree respectfully**.

20. The objective is not to produce Malaysians who think alike. It is to produce Malaysians who can **think differently without treating one another as enemies**. Because the young Malaysians in our classrooms today will be the leaders, parents, professionals and nation-builders when Malaysia approaches its **centenary in 2063**.

21. And then there is **social media and the digital environment**. The Government recognises that digital platforms have transformed how Malaysians communicate, but they have also created challenges involving **hate speech, cyberbullying, incitement, misinformation, scams, manipulated content and other harmful material**. Our

response must combine platform responsibility, public awareness, digital literacy, community resilience and lawful enforcement.

22. Our commitment is clear: **freedom of expression must coexist with responsibility; technology must strengthen society, not fracture it.** We must teach Malaysians not only how to use technology, but how to use it responsibly because the digital habits we establish today will shape the social character of Malaysia tomorrow.

23. But let me emphasise this: **unity cannot be treated like a campaign, a celebration or a once-a-year ceremony. It must be treated as a daily civic discipline.** We cannot remember unity only during Merdeka and Malaysia Day. The real test of unity is not how we behave when we agree; **it is how we behave when we disagree.**

24. And we must ask ourselves a bigger question: **When Malaysia reaches 100 years in 2063, what kind of nation do we want to be?** Do we want to be merely a country that has survived a century, or a nation that has matured into a confident, cohesive and united society proud of its diversity, secure in its identity and respected for the way its people live together? That future will not be created in 2063. **It is being**

created by what we do today.

25. Let me close with this. **1957 gave us independence. 1963 gave us Malaysia. 1970 gave us the Rukun Negara as a renewed national compass. 2026 gives us a responsibility. And 2063 gives us a destination Malaysia at 100.** We have just over three decades to shape the Malaysia that our children and grandchildren will inherit. By then, our measure of success should not simply be how much our economy has grown, how advanced our technology has become or how developed our cities are. It must also be measured by **how strongly Malaysians feel that they belong to one nation.**

With that, I hereby officiate the **Seri Negara Dialogue 2026.** Thank You.