

# Malays can be proud of progress: Yaacob

Minister credits community's pioneers for their efforts, and says unity is key to moving forward

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When Singapore was expelled from Malaysia on Aug 9, 1965, the Malays went overnight from being part of a majority in the federation to a minority community. Apprehensions about the future loomed large.

But 50 years on, the Malay/Muslim community has progressed in ways it never imagined, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim said last night.

Its people have contributed signif-

icantly to a vibrant, harmonious nation, and have done well for themselves, he added. "We are what we are today – with higher household incomes, high home ownership, talents in many fields, movers and leaders in our own right – not because of subsidies, but because we persevered and gave our best."

Dr Yaacob was speaking at an annual Hari Raya gathering attended by, among others, community and religious leaders as well as Cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The journey, however, was not all smooth sailing, he noted.

"We have had low points, such as under-achievement in education, the drug problem, families caught in the vicious circle of poverty and debt, and even distortion of the teachings of Islam," said Dr Yaacob.

Still, the community has not done too badly in these tests to its resolve

and spirit, said Dr Yaacob, who is also Minister of Communications and Information.

He credited the community's pioneers. Led by the late President Yusof Ishak, they backed the Government and rallied people to come together as one. "Their commitment helped shape an entirely new outlook for the community and defined who we are today."

Dr Yaacob cited examples to show the community has always been progressive in finding ways to move forward. These include creating wakaf or religious endowments of property, to benefit the community and setting up the Harmony Centre at An-Nahdhah Mosque to promote inter-faith understanding.

"We can definitely take pride in the strides that we have made," he said, while announcing that Istana Kampong Gelam, the historic residence of Malay royals that is now home to the Malay Heritage Centre, will be gazetted a national monument on Aug 6. But he warned against being complacent, saying: "New and more complex problems



Tourists taking pictures at the Istana Kampong Gelam, the historic residence of Malay royals that is now home to the Malay Heritage Centre. It will be gazetted as a national monument on Aug 6. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

will emerge as we move forward."

Growing affluence could place the community at risk of becoming stratified, and social media and globalisation bring diverse views, including varying interpretations of Islam, he noted.

Despite the challenges, Dr Yaacob is optimistic that his community will keep progressing. The key to this, he said, is to "stay united as a community, and to stay true to our faith and culture".

"Imagine what we can achieve in the next 50 years, given that today we have a more educated and competent community."

His confidence stems not just from statistics, but stories of Malays who exemplify the community's values. These include the courage of teacher Mohammad Ghazi Mohamed who died in the Sabah earthquake and the perseverance of former madrasah student Amalina Ridzuan, 22, who went on

to junior college, polytechnic and is now a medical student at the National University of Singapore.

They reflect the values and spirit that have brought the community to where it is today, said Dr Yaacob. "It is this spirit, faith and confidence that will see us through... to an even brighter future."

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