

# SIRI KERTAS KERJA

## ***WORKING PAPER SERIES***

**FEA Working Paper No. 2008-3**

### **Counting and Integration: The Experience of Malaysia**

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*with*

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January 2008

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**Counting and Integration:  
The Experience of Malaysia**

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Paper presented at the International Conference

Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity:

Should we count, how should we count and why?

International conference organized jointly by the

Quebec Inter-University Centre for Social Statistics (QICSS, Montréal) and the

Institut national d'études démographiques (INED, Paris)

Montréal, December 6-8, 2007

October 2007

## ***Introduction***

Malaysia has long been concerned with the ethnic dimension in its society. Today, this concern pervades all debate whether on education or politics. Indeed, it dominates coffee room discussions on any area that relates to achievement of human potential, whether in the area of human capital, physical capital, financial capital, entrepreneurship, politics or government.

The diversity evident in the ethnic fabric of Malaysians is officially acknowledged and celebrated in Tourism Malaysia's slogan "Malaysia, Truly Asia". More importantly, it is a critical and powerful driver in the design and implementation of many public policies. With the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious composition of the populace, national unity remains the main stated objective of economic, social and national development. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1971 in response to the ethnic disturbances of 1969. Its primary objectives were reduction of poverty irrespective of race, and restructuring of Malaysian society to eliminate identification of race with economic function to reduce inequalities in income distribution between races and to reduce the identification of race with economic activities. More than three decades later, the ethnic dimensions of public policy remain important, for instance as reflected in 2007 under the National Vision Policy.<sup>1</sup>

Data on ethnicity is therefore very important for monitoring and strengthening public policies that seek to address ethnic imbalances. It is not surprising then that measuring ethnicity in Malaysia extends beyond the decennial census and is an important element in the production of official statistics. Today, it seems like information on ethnicity is collected by almost every institution, whether public or private. The question is, given the difficulty in measuring ethnicity, whether the meaning and measurement of ethnicity is the same in the different surveys and documents, and over time. If there are differences in measurement, are these large enough to affect the outcome of public policies that target specific ethnic groups?

This paper examines the changes in the definition of ethnicity across time and across different official documents. The next section provides an introduction to the diversity in the ethnic fabric of Malaysia. The third section reviews how ethnicity is,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1991, aspects of the policy changed and were implemented as the National Development Policy (1991-2000), with a further change in thrust under the National Vision Policy (2001-2010). In the rest of this paper, we use 'NEP' to refer to these three set of policies.

and has been, measured by different agencies. The fourth section deals with the possible impacts of measurement on outcomes of ethnicity based policies. It considers the debate as to whether the counting of ethnicity at all levels of officialdom may, in the process of supporting public policies, have led instead to greater divisiveness in society. The final section concludes the paper.

### ***Ethnic Diversity in Malaysia***

The concept of ethnicity is somewhat multidimensional as it includes aspects such as race, origin or ancestry, identity, language and religion. As Yinger (1986) remarks, in practice ethnicity has come to refer to anything from a sub-societal group that clearly shares a common descent and cultural background (*e.g.* the Kosovar Albanians) to persons who share a former citizenship although diverse culturally (Indonesians in the Netherlands), to pan-cultural groups of persons of widely different cultural and societal backgrounds who, however, can be identified as "similar" on the basis of language, race or religion mixed with broadly similar statuses (Hispanics in the United States) (as cited in Yeoh (2001)).

Table 1 shows the population distribution by ethnic groups in Malaysia for year 2000. These categories are as different as Yinger notes, referring to groups that share a common descent and cultural background (*e.g.* the Chinese), persons whose parents share a former citizenship although diverse culturally (*e.g.* the Indians) to pan-cultural groups from different cultural and societal backgrounds broadly considered "similar" (*e.g.* the Malays).

Some of the 18 groups listed here are categories summarizing the population of smaller groups. The degree of ethnic diversity in Malaysia is apparent when we examine the Ethnic Fractionalization Index (EFI), an index that measures the racial (phenotypical), linguistic and religious cleavages in society (see Yeoh, 2001). This index is based on the probability that a randomly selected pair of individuals in a society will belong to different groups (Rae and Taylor, 1970:22-3). Table 2 below shows the values of the EFI for selected countries. The index for Malaysia is not as high as say, India, about the same as Canada and much greater than, say, the U. K.

**Table 1: Malaysia, Population by Ethnic Group, 2000**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Number (thousand)</b>	<b>Percentage distribution</b>
Total Population	22198.2	100
<i>Malaysian Citizens</i>		
Malays	11164.95	51.0
Kadazan Dusun	456.9641	2.1
Bajau	329.9529	1.5
Murut	80.07225	0.4
Iban	578.3544	2.6
Bidayuh	159.5528	0.7
Melanau	108.275	0.5
Other <i>Bumiputera</i>	695.7017	3.2
Chinese	5291.277	24.2
Indians	1571.664	7.2
Other Malaysian Citizens	243.3723	1.1
<i>Non-Malaysian Citizens</i>		
Singapore	16.66528	0.1
Indonesia	704.9711	3.2
Philippines	197.9126	0.9
Thailand	33.33057	0.2
India	28.10418	0.1
Bangladesh	64.09725	0.3
Other Foreign Citizens	164.582	0.8

Source: Based on Tables 2.10 and 2.11, DASM (2005)

**Table 2: Ethnic Fractionalization Index (EFI), Selected Countries**

<b>Country</b>	<b>EFI</b>
Republic of India	0.876
Republic of the Philippines	0.838
Republic of Indonesia	0.754
Canada	0.714
Malaysia	0.694
Kingdom of Thailand	0.535
United States of America	0.395
United Kingdom of Great Britain & N. Ireland	0.325
Solomon Islands	0.133

Source: Table 1, Yeoh (2001)

One reason for great variety of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in Malaysia can be traced to its geographical location. The region that is now Malaysia comprises Peninsular Malaysia, a peninsula jutting out from the Asian continent and East Malaysia, comprising Sabah and Sarawak, two regions in the island of Borneo (see Figure 1). Peninsular Malaysia lies at the crossroads of maritime trade between the West (India, Arabia) and the East (China). The seas between North Borneo (now Sabah) and the Sulu islands have been an important trading route between Australia and China. There have thus been far-reaching movements of peoples between the West and the East and within Southeast Asia itself (Andaya and Andaya, 1982).

**Figure 1. Geographical Location of Malaysia**



The richness of the ethnic heritage can be seen in the census categories used for ethnicity in the census in 1891 of the then Straits Settlements (comprising Penang, Singapore and Malacca) shown in the first column of Table 3. The list indicates that the Straits Settlements were home at least for some length of time to many different groups. These groupings indicate that there were people from different continents (Europeans and Americans), religions ('Parsees', 'Hindoos') and from neighbouring regions ('Javanese', 'Manilamen'). However, these categories were, as Hirschman (1987a) observes, made up based on 'experience and common knowledge' and not necessarily on size of group in the society. Indeed, as Table 4 shows, the large number of categories for 'Europeans and Americans' was in direct contrast to their small proportion in the population of the time.

The inflow of immigrant workers from certain countries in somewhat large numbers also helped to define the ethnic fabric of the country. The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in British Malaya saw the successful policy of bringing in migrant labour to work on rubber estates (workers from India) and tin mines (workers from China), when these primary products grew in economic importance. The increase in the relative size of these two groups could be seen as early as 1891 (Table 4). The British also tried to encourage immigration into North Borneo in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to work in the estates there.

Since the 1970s, Malaysia has seen an increasing presence of migrant workers as the need for estate workers, and more recently, factory workers, maids, restaurant workers and security guards has increased. These have been mostly from Indonesia, and but also from Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Different from earlier British policy, these migrants are required to return home after a fixed period. However, economic opportunities have also made Malaysia a magnet for illegal economic migrants from neighbouring countries. Since Peninsular Malaysia shares a border with Thailand and is just across the Straits of Malacca from Indonesian Sumatra, while Sabah and Sarawak share a border with Indonesian Kalimantan, the erection of political boundaries even with Peninsular Malaysia's Independence from the British (1957) or the formation of Malaysia (comprising Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah (previously North Borneo) and Sarawak) has not been effective in reducing the diversity in the population. Thus, there continues to be considerable movement of people across Borneo, Indonesia and the Philippines.

**Table 3: Ethnic Classifications, Selected Censuses and Regions**

1871 Straits Settlements	1957 Federation of Malaya	1960 North Borneo	1960 Sarawak
Europeans and Americans (18 sub-categories)	Malaysians	European (2 sub-categories)	European (2 sub-categories)
Armenians	Malays	Dusun	Malay
Jews	Indonesian	Murut	Melanau
Eurasians	All Aborigines	Bajau (2 sub-categories)	Sea Dayak
Abyssinians	Negrito	Brunei	Land Dayak
Achinese	Semai	Kedayan	Other Indigenous
Africans	Jakun	Orang Sungei	Bisayah
Andamanese	Other	Bisaya	Okedayan
Arabs	Aborigines	Sulu	Kayan
Bengalees and Other	Chinese	Tidong	Kenyah
Natives of India not particularized	Hokkien	Sino-Native	Kelabit
Boyonese	Tiechiu	Chinese	Murut
Bugis	Khek (Hakka)	Hakka	Punan
Burmese	Cantonese	Hokkien	Other Indigenous
Chinese	Hainanese	Teochew	Chinese
Cochin-Chinese	Hokchia	Hailam (Hainanese)	Cantonese
Dyaks	Hokchiu	Other Chinese	Foochow
Hindoos	Kwongsai	Others	Hakka
Japanese	Henghwa	Natives of Sarawak	Henghua
Javanese	Other Chinese	Malay	Hokkien
Jaweepekans	Indians	Cocos Islander	Hylam/ Hainese
Klings	Indian Tamil	Indonesian	Teochew
Malays	Telegu	Indian, Pakistani,	Other Chinese
Manilamen	Malayali	Ceylonese	Others
Mantras	Other Indian	Native of	Indian, Pakistani,
Parsees	Others	Philippines	Ceylonese
Persians	Eurasian	Others	Indonesian
Siamese	Ceylon Tamil		Others
Singhalese	Other Ceylonese		
	Pakistani		
	Thai (Siamese)		
	Other Asian		
	British		
	Other European		
	Others (not European or Asian)		

Source: First two columns, Hirschman (1987a); Last two columns, Jones (1961); Jones (1962).

**Table 4. Proportion of Population by Nationality, Straits Settlements, 1881 and 1891**

Nationality	1881	1891
Europeans and Americans	0.0082	0.0129
Eurasians	0.0163	0.0138
Chinese	0.4118	0.4450
Malays and other natives of the Archipelago	0.4503	0.4159
Tamils and Other Natives	0.0975	0.1052
Other Nationalities	0.0069	0.0072
Total Population	423,384	512,905

Source: Merewether (1892)

These historical patterns have led to differences in ethnic composition – as well as ethnic categories measured - in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The first region is concerned with three main ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians, that is, historically non-migrant versus historically migrant classifications, whereas Sabah and Sarawak are concerned with the historically migrant as well as the many indigenous groups in their society. This can be observed in the census categories for ethnicity for 1957 (Federation of Malaya) and North Borneo and Sarawak (1960) shown in Table 3.

### ***The Measurement of Ethnicity***

The most important enumeration of ethnicity in the population occurs every ten years or so with the taking of the census. Ethnicity information is regularly obtained in other censuses (such as ethnic profile of employees in the Economic Censuses), surveys (such as in the Labour Force Survey) and as a by-product of administrative procedures (such as birth registration). We first examine the measurement of ethnicity in the census, and then briefly discuss measurement in other areas.

UNSD (2003) in reviewing the measurement of ethnicity in censuses contend that “ethnic data is useful for the elaboration of policies to improve access to employment, education and training, social security and health, transportation and communications, etc. It is important for taking measures to preserving the identity and survival of distinct ethnic groups.” Yet, 1 in 3 of the 147 countries surveyed which had done a census in year 2000 had not included a question on national and/ or ethnic group (UNSD, 2003: Table 3). While these countries may have included such a question in previous, or plan to include one in future, surveys, clearly it is not a question that regularly appears in their censuses.

In contrast, Malaysia’s experience in measuring national/ race/ ethnic group in a regular decennial census can be traced back to the late 1800s. Regular censuses, other than during war years, have been carried out despite the difficulties of taking a census in a population “with so many races speaking different tongues” (Hare, 1902: 4) or the need to have census questionnaires prepared in several languages as well as enumerators who can speak the language of the respondents. Furthermore, in the timing of release of census information, ethnicity data has always been considered a priority (Chander, 1972: 22) and may even be released along with other essential

demographic data well before the general report on the census (compare for example, DASM (2001a) with DASM(2005)).

Hirschman (1987a) has explored the meaning and measurement of ethnicity in Malaysia in his analysis of the census classifications until 1980. He notes that the first modern census was carried out in 1871 for the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) which were parts of what is now Peninsular Malaysia then under British rule. In 1891, separate censuses were conducted for the Straits Settlements and for each of the four states known as the Federated Malay States that were under British protection. The 1901 and 1911 censuses were unified censuses covering these two areas. In 1911, the taking of a census was extended to some of the Unfederated Malay States. In 1921 a unified census was conducted in the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States. This practice continued for the 1931 and 1947 censuses. The 1957 census, the year of Independence from the British, excluded Singapore (which by then was a Crown Colony). North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak became British protectorates in 1888. North Borneo conducted its first census in 1891, and then in 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and then in 1951 and 1960. The first census for Sarawak was done carried out in 1947, and then in 1960. In 1963, Malaysia was formed comprising Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore<sup>2</sup>, Sabah and Sarawak. From 1970, the decennial censuses have covered this geographical area. While these regions were all separate politically until 1963, they each had some form of linkage to the British. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that a reading of the various census reports indicate experiences from censuses were shared.

Appendix 1 contrasts two related aspects of the various censuses, the measurement of ethnicity and number of categories. The measurement of ethnicity in the early years used the term 'nationality'. There were obviously difficulties in using this term<sup>3</sup> to capture the various groups in the population, and E. M. Merewether, the Superintendent of the 1891 Census, in acknowledging the objections raised, proposed the word 'race' be used in subsequent censuses (Merewether, 1982: 8). G. T Hare, the Superintendent of the 1901 Census of the Federated Malay States preferred the word 'race' as it is "a wider and more exhaustive expression than 'nationality' and gives rise to no such ambiguous question in classifying people" (as cited in Hirschman,

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<sup>2</sup> Singapore seceded in 1965 to form its own nation.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'nationality' can be used to refer to a group with a common heritage, or established, among others, by place of birth, bloodline, place of residence or citizenship.  
<http://www.answers.com/nationality&r=67>[Accessed 1 October, 2007]

1987a: 561). By 1911 the term had been changed to 'race' for the Straits Settlements as well, but 'nationality' continued to be used in North Borneo up till the 1931 census. L. W. Jones, the Superintendent of the 1951 Census of North Borneo reported that the term 'nationality' was dropped as "enumerators could not distinguish between nationality and race." This issue did not arise in Sarawak as the first census in 1947 itself used the term 'race'. There was recognition (Noakes, 1948: 29) of the many indigenous groups that regarded "Sarawak as their homeland" and who were "regarded as natives by their fellowmen."

Although enumerators were told to use the term 'race' as "understood by the man in the street and not physical features as used by ethnologists" (Fell, 1960:12), there was still dissatisfaction with the measurement. The 1947 census for Malaya and the 1970 census for Malaysia used the term 'community'. Chander (1972: 22) justifies the return to the practice of earlier Malayan censuses noting that "the term race has not been used as it attempts to cover a complex set of ideas which in a strict and scientific sense represent only a small element of what the Census taker is attempting to define." The term 'community' was used to identify a group "bound by a common language/ dialect, religion and customs."

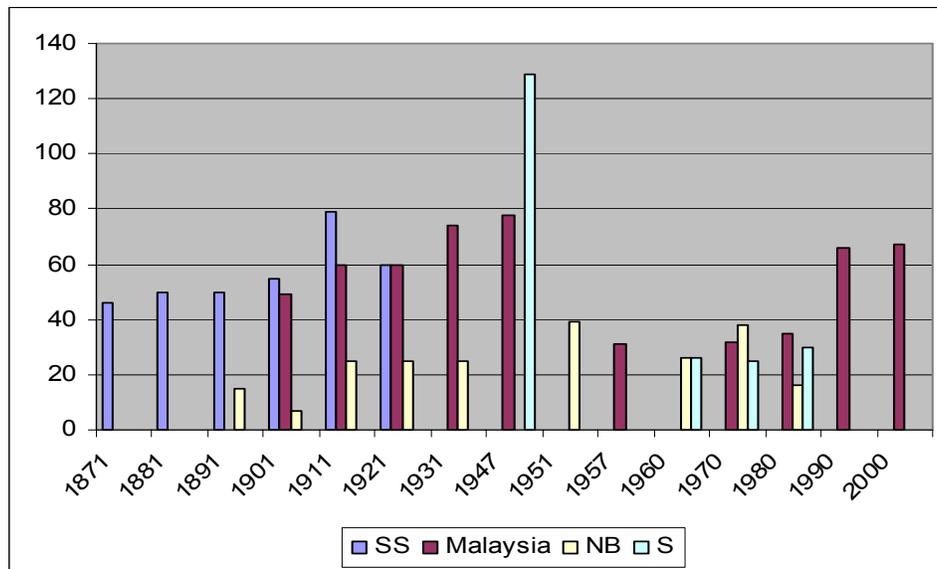
There were further refinements and from the 1980 census, the term 'ethnic / dialectic/ community group' has been used, although its description is the same as that used for 'community' (Khoo, 1981: 289). Although the word 'dialect' was introduced formally only in 1980, enumerators have long been instructed to note the dialect when enumerating the Chinese community. Hare (1902: 6) recommended that in the next census that language be added in a separate column as "if a person now writes 'Chinese' it is hard to say to which race of Chinese he belongs."

The second aspect of the measurement of ethnicity relate to the categories. The discussion here focuses on what has been presented or published, although it is possible that enumerators obtained more detail that was subsequently coded. Figure 2 shows a summary of the number of categories used in the various censuses. The column for Malaysia includes the information for the Federated Malay States and British Malaya since Hirschman (1987a) finds that the unified census from 1921 adopted basically the pattern for the Federated Malay States. A steady increase is observed in the early years of the censuses for the Straits Settlements, presumably reflecting the recognition of the different groups in the society. A similar pattern is observed for the Federated Malay States, and then British Malaya. The categories

reduce for the early years of the Federation of Malaya. In contrast, Sarawak began in 1947 with 129 categories, reflecting the attempt – with the aid of Tom Harrison, Curator of the Sarawak Museum and Government Ethnologist - to document the many indigenous groups in its society, and then reduced the number when group size was ascertained. North Borneo did not have as many categories, showing an increase only in the 1951 census.

A major criterion for the inclusion of a group as a category would be its size in the population. Tom Harrison, in assisting in determining the categories for the Census, observes that (Noakes, 1948: 271), “classification should be as scientifically accurate as possible, the groups must be reasonably balanced in size, and it should be in sufficient detail to provide a sound basis for future scientific investigations.” For example, the aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia are not a homogenous group<sup>4</sup> (Nicholas, undated). Some of these are very small, like the 18 tribes of indigenous Proto Malays (estimated to number 147,412 in 2003) the smallest of these 18 tribes being an estimated 87 Kanaq people in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 2. Number of Categories Measuring Ethnicity, Various Censuses**



Notes: Based on Table A2. SS - Straits Settlements; Malaysia - Federated Malay States until 1911, British Malaya until 1947; NB - North Borneo; S - Sarawak

<sup>4</sup> Colin Nicholas, *The Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia: A Brief Introduction*.

[http://www.coac.org.my/codenavia/portals/coacv1/code/main/main\\_art.php?parentID=11497609537883&artID=11509699100857](http://www.coac.org.my/codenavia/portals/coacv1/code/main/main_art.php?parentID=11497609537883&artID=11509699100857). [Accessed October 1, 2007]

<sup>5</sup> <http://damak.jheoa.gov.my/intranet/index.php?mid=1&vid=2>.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/4/16/southeast/17200389&sec=southeast>. [Accessed October 1, 2007].

One of the greatest problems has been the identification of people native to the region. Harrison ( in Noakes, 1948: 271) observes that “certain cultural groups have become obscured and many complicating migrations have occurred....all this is inevitable, and largely it should be...[but] .in planning a Census it introduces certain complications...[since] the exact definitions of groups must partly depend on their past.” The use of a definition like “living naturally in a country, not immigrant or imported, native” requires determination of origin. For example, the enumeration of indigenous groups in Sarawak is problematic as many of these groups “know themselves by the name of a place or river or mountain or even a local chief” (Harrison in Noakes, 1948: 272).

Further, there can be confusion when religion comes into play, particularly in respect of who is a Malay. As Table 2 shows, the populace has included not just Malays but also many different groups that today would be regarded as originating from Indonesia. Among the terms used to refer to this group have been ‘Malays and natives of the archipelago’ and ‘Malaysians’. In the 1956 census, Boyanese and Javanese were coded as Malays. Fell (1957: 12) observes that counting such groups can be difficult. Saw (1968: 10) comments that with the formation of Malaysia and the use of Malaysian to refer to a citizen of this nation, “The best solution is to use the term ‘Malays’ to include Indonesians as well.” He argues that this is justified as most immigrants from the Indonesian Archipelago now have been absorbed into the community. The issue also extends to indigenous groups. As Noakes (1948) highlights, there has “always been difficulty in measuring the size of the Melanau population as Islamic Melanau frequently refer to themselves as Malays.”

The importance of a group especially for public policy would be a second criterion for their inclusion as a category. Jones (1961) observes that the category ‘Cocos Islanders’ was included because this group was introduced into the population, and so their progress would be of interest. The most dramatic example of the impact of public policy on census classification arises from the affirmative policy introduced by the NEP (1971) which provides for special benefits to Malays and indigenous groups. The term *Bumiputera* (‘son of the soil’) is used to refer to all those eligible for special benefits. The definition of ethnic groups eligible for these benefits is provided for in the Federal Constitution (see Appendix 2). These include Malays, Aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia and indigenous tribes of East Malaysia, the latter two groups sometimes referred to as *pribumi* or ‘natives of the land’.

Some of these groups have been measured in the 1970 and 1980 census for Malaysia, but it was clear that the categories needed to be re-examined, and in particular, to identify and enumerate clearly the *Bumiputera* population. Furthermore, with growing interest in the increasing presence of foreigners, there was also the need to clarify groups in the population who could be separately identified by nationality, say Indonesian Malaysians versus Indonesian Indonesians. In 1991, there was a major rationalization of ethnic categories and presentation of ethnicity information since then has included information on citizenship.

The census classifications for the 2000 census (which are only slightly different from the 1990 classifications) are shown in Table 5. It is interesting to note that the detailed listing of groups in East Malaysia now resembles more the detailed classifications in the pre-Malaysia censuses of North Borneo and Sarawak. The greater diversity in the Sabah and Sarawak, which together have only about 20 per cent of Malaysia's population, has been captured as can be seen from Table 6, which shows the regional EFI computed for ethnic and religious groups measured in the 2000 census.<sup>6</sup>

The role of politics in determining census classifications cannot be discounted. When Datuk Harris Salleh won the elections in Sabah in 1981, he wanted to foster more rapid integration with Peninsular Malaysia and allowed only for the measurement of three categories, *Bumiputera*, Chinese and Others, in the 1980 census (Andaya and Andaya, 1982: 297). With a change in his political fortunes, the 1991 census reverted back to the measurement and presentation of information on the indigenous groups in Sabah.

Politics has also influenced the categorization of the Kadazan-Dusun group in Sabah. The Dusun and Kadazan share the same language (albeit different dialects) and culture. Traditionally the Kadazan have resided in the valleys, and the Dusun in the hills. In 1989, with the formation of the Kadazan-Dusun Cultural Association, the term Kadazan-Dusun was coined. Up to the 1960 census of North Borneo, only the category 'Dusun' was used. For the 1970 and 1980 census, the category 'Kadazan' was used. Since the 1991 census, both categories have been used, although in the presentation of information, both categories are combined as 'Kadazan-Dusun'.

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<sup>6</sup> This also highlights the measurement issue in measuring ethnic diversity using the EFI. If a population is diverse but the groups are not measured then the index will show more homogeneity than it should.

**Table 5. Ethnic Classification, 2000 Census, Malaysia**

Malaysian Citizens	Malaysian Citizens	Non-Malaysian Citizens
Bumiputera	Chinese	Singapore
Malays	Hokkien	Indonesia
Other Bumiputera	Khek (Hakka)	Philippines
Negrito	Cantinese	Brunei Darussalam
Senoi	Teochew	India
Proto Malay	Hainanese	Bangladesh
Dusun	Kwongsai	Other foreign countries
Kadazan	Foochow/ Hokchiu	Unknown
Kwijau	Henghua	
Bajau	Hokchia	
Iranun	Other Chinese	
Murut (Sabah)	Indians	
Rang Sungei	Indian Tamil	
Sulu/ Suluk	Malayali	
Bisaya (Sabah/ Sarawak)	Sikh/ Punjabi	
Rungus	Telegu	
Sino-native	Sri Lankan Tamil	
Kadayan (Sabah/ Sarawak)	Singalese	
Tidong	Bangladeshi	
Tambanuo	Pakistani	
Idahan	Other Indian	
Dumpas	Others	
Mangkaak	Indonesian	
Minokok	Thai	
Maragang	Filipino	
Paitan	Myanmar	
Rumanau	Japanese	
Lotud	Korean	
Cocos Islander	Other Asian	
Other Bumiputera (Sabah)	Eurasian	
Iban/ Dayak Laut	European	
Bidayuh/ Dayak Darat	Others	
Melanau		
Kenyah		
Lun Bawang/ Murut (Sarawak)		
Penan		
Kajang		
Kelabit		
Other Bumiputera (Sabah)		

Source: DASM (2001a)

**Table 6: Ethnic Fractionalization Index, Malaysia, 2000**

Region	EFI	Percentage of Total Population
Sabah	0.889	11.2
Sarawak	0.874	8.9
Peninsular Malaysia	0.655	79.9
All Malaysia	0.701	100

Computed from data in Tables 4.1, 4.11 and 4.12, DASM (2001a)  
only for religious and ethnic groups

One important issue is how ethnicity is measured in the censuses. This has always been by self-identification, and applies to the question on citizenship as well. Jones (1962: 44) articulates the reason clearly: ‘An individual’s answer to the question on race should be accepted without question, for there would be many persons descended from at least two of the tribes listed who would claim one as their own for their own private reasons and with whom it would be quite improper to discuss or dispute these reasons.’ For persons of mixed parentage, the 1970 census, which used the definition of ‘community’, sought to identify the ethnic group to which the person felt he or she belonged (Chander, 1977: 289) failing which father’s community was used.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion has so far focused on the measurement of ethnicity in population censuses. Ethnic data is also important is in the collection of information of other information on population. Registration of births and deaths, which is used to produce vital statistics data, comes under the purview of the National Registration Department. The identification of ethnicity on the Birth Certificate would be that entered by the person filling up the form. This would be the parent usually, but there may be circumstances where the information is entered by a third person (say, a policeman in the interior). Births and deaths data was up till the end of the 1990s coded by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia. This function has now been taken on by the National Registration Department. It is nevertheless likely that with the close cooperation between these two government departments the coding for ethnicity will be as detailed as provided for in the census. The Department of Statistics, Malaysia also has close ties with other government departments like the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) [previously the National Family Planning Board]. Information on fertility, family planning and contraceptive use has been collected by the NPFDB since the late 1960s. The early surveys used the then Census term ‘race’ to capture ethnicity, but from the 1970s, the NPFDB adopted the term ‘community’ and then from 1989, the term ‘ethnic group’ has been used.

Ethnicity is also measured by many institutions, whether for targeting public policy in general or in line with the need to identify target groups and monitor their progress with regard to the NEP. As Appendix 3 shows, Article 153 in the

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<sup>7</sup> This would suggest a serious undercounting of mixed marriages if census data are used. While the extent of mixed marriages can be determined (see, for example, Tan (1986)), it would not be possible to identify offspring from such marriages.

Constitution specifies that special privileges may be provided in education, scholarships and training, employment in public service and business licenses. Besides that, the NEP aims to reduce the identification of race with occupation and to achieve increased *Bumiputera* participation in the economy. Thus, ethnicity information is collected by government, by banks, by licensing agencies and other institutions that need to maintain the necessary information for policy monitoring.

Since the size of some of the smaller ethnic groups in some sub-populations may be small, categories of ethnicity may be limited to the (perceived or otherwise) major groups in the sub-population. For example, ethnicity is captured both for ownership and employment in Economic Censuses conducted by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Table 7 shows the categories captured for employment.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that among the *Bumiputera* groups, ‘Kadazan’ has been captured but not ‘Dusun’; that is, the original group name used in the pre-Malaysia censuses has been dropped altogether. Since these forms are filled by the firms, it is possible that some Dusun employees may have been categorized under ‘Other *Bumiputera*’.

**Table 7. Economic Census, Manufacturing, 2006,**

**Ethnic Classifications for Employment**

<b>Malaysians</b>	<b>Non-Malaysians</b>
Bumiputera	Indonesians
Malays	Filipinos
Ibans	Bangladeshi
Bidayuhs	Others
Bajaus	
Kadazans	
Other Bumiputera	
Chinese	
Indians	
Others	

Source: [http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset\\_download.php?file=form](http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset_download.php?file=form)  
[Accessed October 1, 2007]

<sup>8</sup> Ownership has similar categories for the category ‘Malaysians’, but there is no distinction among Non-Malaysians.

On the other hand, the number of pre-coded ethnic groups can be an issue especially when a database is expected to reach everyone in the population. For example, the ethnic categories initially used in the Educational Management Information System<sup>9</sup> were based on the composition of the population in Peninsular Malaysia, and were thus too broad to identify the proportion of children from a specific indigenous group in school. These codes were subsequently expanded as needed.<sup>10</sup> The more important classification for educational outcomes is that of *Bumiputera*. The monitoring of ethnic outcomes of entry into public tertiary institutions is based on parents' ethnicity and reads thus<sup>11</sup>:

Peninsular Malaysia: "If one of the parent are Muslim Malay or Orang Asli as stated in Article 160 (2) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus the child is considered as a Bumiputra"

Sabah: "If a father is a Muslim Malay or indigenous native of Sabah as stated in Article 160A (6)(a) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus his child is considered as a Bumiputra"

Sarawak: "If both of the parent are indigenous native of Sarawak as stated in Article 160A (6)(b) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus their child is considered as a Bumiputra"

Other institutions also collect information on ethnicity. For example, Maybank, the largest bank in Malaysia with over 334 domestic branches all over the country and over 34 international branches, obtains from the applicant for a new account, information on 'race', coded in five categories: 'Malay', 'Native', 'Chinese', 'Indians', and 'Others'.<sup>12</sup> In other cases, it is unclear what coding is applied by the collecting institution. For example, the application form for the Practising

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<sup>9</sup> Education is essentially a federal matter with a common syllabi and examinations (Nik Aziz Nik Pa, 2003). The UNESCO website notes that the Educational Management Information System was "originally designed to be a management tool but is gradually being perceived as an indispensable tool and support system for the formulation of education policies, their management, and their evaluation" ([http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=10202&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=10202&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), Accessed October 10, 2007)

<sup>10</sup> Report on 'The Workshop on Optimizing the Use of Official Statistics for Socioeconomic Research and Planning', 22 November, 2006, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya. Unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> *Buku Panduan Kemasukan ke Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam, Program Pengajian Lepas SPM/Setaraf Sesi Akademik 2007/2008*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bumiputra> (Accessed October 1, 2007)

<sup>12</sup> Online application form. [https://www.maybank2u.com.my/maybank\\_group/application\\_forms/banking/new\\_maybankacc.html](https://www.maybank2u.com.my/maybank_group/application_forms/banking/new_maybankacc.html). [Accessed 10 October, 2007]

Certificate,<sup>13</sup> an annual requirement for a practicing lawyer, calls for the applicant to enter his or her ‘ethnicity’. Yet other institutions use terms that are unclear. For example, the application for a contract post as a medical specialist with the Ministry of Health<sup>14</sup> asks for ‘nationality’, which could be referring to ethnic group or citizenship. Nevertheless, the form for the annual practising certificate for doctors does not request information on ethnicity.

Ethnic data are also obtained routinely as a part of administrative and monitoring procedures for areas that are not within the purview of the NEP. For example, the Ministry of Health (MOH) provides information on the utilisation of public health care services (mainly referring to MOH services) by major ethnic groups, including indigenous groups, for Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak (see Table 8 below). The information on ethnicity is entered on admission/ attendance forms by admission clerks who commonly base their input on the patients’ names and physical appearance, supplemented with verbal clarification only when in doubt. Patients in the Peninsular are usually classified as Malays, Chinese, Indians, Others or Non-citizens. Other indigenous groups, e.g. Senoi, tend to be recorded under ‘Others’. In Sabah and Sarawak, because of heightened awareness of the diversity in the population, the clerk would generally obtain information on the actual aboriginal group. Thus, for these two states it is possible to generate data for smaller ethnic group breakdown if necessary.

Finally, it is of interest to note that there is official documentation of a person’s ethnic group. The National Registration Department is responsible for the issuance of the MyKad (previously Identification Card) to all Malaysian citizens and permanent residents 12 years and above. Carrying an embedded microchip, it has at a minimum, the Identification Card number, name, ethnic group, date of birth, religion, photo and fingerprint and has to be carried by all persons when leaving home.<sup>15</sup> Although this card could possibly be used to “verify” ethnicity, particularly where special privileges are concerned, the information is only accessible via appropriate card-readers and its use limited by legislation.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bardocs/membership/sijil\\_guaman.pdf](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bardocs/membership/sijil_guaman.pdf). [Accessed October 1, 2007]

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.moh.gov.my/MohPortal/DownloadServlet?id=312&type=1> [Accessed October 1, 2007]

<sup>15</sup> The information is based on the Birth Certificate. More recently, the Birth Certificate has replaced by a chip embedded MyKid.

**Table 8. Ethnic Classifications for Utilisation of Public Health Care Services, 2005**

<b>Peninsular Malaysia</b>	<b>Sabah</b>	<b>Sarawak</b>
Malays	Malays	Malays
Chinese	Bajaus	Melanaus
Indians	Kadazans	Iban
Peninsular indigenous	Murut	Bidayu
Other Malaysians	Other Sabahan indigenous	Other Sarawak indigenous
Non-citizens	Chinese	Chinese
	Indians	Indians
	Other Malaysians	Other Malaysians
	Non-citizens	Non-citizens

Source: 2005 Annual Report on Medical Sub-system, Health Management Information System, Information and Documentation System, Ministry of health, Malaysia

This discussion has reviewed the measurement of ethnicity in data collection by selected institutions in both the public and private sectors. The identification of ethnicity is based on self-identification in censuses, but in other cases may be entered by a third party. The censuses of population have historically sought to document the diversity in the population. Over time, there have been refinements in the categories; sometimes sub-groups have been collapsed to form broader ones. Since 1991, however, the measurement has been fairly detailed in respect of indigenous groups. Ethnicity is also captured in other censuses and surveys, as well as in administrative databases. In these cases, the degree of fineness of ethnic categories captured is based on purpose and need. The terms used also vary.

While the identification of an ethnic group can be only as good as its measurement, the discussion above shows that Malaysia's experience with the measurement of ethnicity in censuses is underscored by the careful efforts by the various Superintendents of Census to define a diverse population. The first census in 1871 in the Straits Settlements may have used ethnic categories that were subjectively defined but each subsequent census has seen changes in line with size of group or its importance to public policy. There has also been considerable sharing of experiences across the three regions even under British rule or protection that has made possible a fairly detailed ethnic classification especially in the recent censuses. These have shown the great diversity in the country, and more so across regions. Over the years, as noted above, the specific form of the question measuring ethnicity has been modified to capture ethnic/ dialect groups. The term used has changed from 'nationality' to 'race' to 'ethnicity/ community/ dialect'. The categorization of groups

has also changed to accommodate changes in society. It is pertinent to note that categories have been updated as required<sup>16</sup> or revised as necessary.<sup>17</sup>

UNSD (2003) concludes that based on the current wording of the ethnicity question in the census, which includes dialect group in the definition, language is the principal criteria for measuring ethnicity in Malaysia. The discussion above shows that this is not entirely correct. The group being captured is one that shares common interests such as language, religion and customs. Furthermore, ethnicity as measured in Malaysian censuses captures basically whatever the respondent answers to the question, that is, what he or she perceives ethnicity to be. Essentially, it measures identity, which as Statistics Canada (2006) notes<sup>18</sup>, has “a certain appeal because it attempts to measure how people perceive themselves rather than their ancestors.”

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that despite all these years of experience in counting, there can still be confusion about concepts such as race (example, Chinese), dialect group (example, Hokkien or Cantonese), language group (example, Tamil, Telegu), nationality (Indian vs Sri Lankan) or even ethnicity itself. However, Malaysians are generally used to providing information on their ethnicity even if different terms are used to capture this information. In particular, the need to monitor the NEP has focused attention on whether a citizen is a *Bumiputera* or not. In this respect, the discussion indicates that this group is probably identified reasonably well, although the identification of the exact group that fits within its ambit may be less clear.

### ***Measurement and Integration***

A major aim of the NEP and the subsequent related policies has been national unity. It remains a serious concern even today, more than three decades after the NEP was developed for that very purpose. Where the penultimate objective of national development is concerned, senior citizens berate the lack of unity among the races

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<sup>16</sup> This includes adjustment to new political entities or new names: India, Pakistan, 1947; Indonesia, 1949; Sri Lanka, 1948; Siam to Thailand by official proclamation, 1949, Brunei, 1984; Burma to Myanmar – 1989.

<sup>17</sup> The category ‘Kwijau’ was dropped in 1960 census of North Borneo due to small numbers but was reintroduced in 1970 census for Malaysia.

<sup>18</sup> Identity is as Statistics Canada (2003) notes, one of three ways of measuring ethnicity. The other two are “origin or ancestry and race. Origin or ancestry attempts to determine the roots or ethnic background of a person. Race is based primarily upon physical attributes fixed at birth among which skin colour is a dominant, but not the sole, attribute.”

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/definitions/ethnicity.htm>. [Accessed October 1, 2007]

today, something they argue could be observed during their youth. Many young people, on the other hand, do not think that integration is an important issue. In this section, we briefly consider the conflated issues of ethnicity, identity and integration.

Given the historical diversity of ethnic groups in the country, it is likely that many Malaysians can trace ancestry from more than one ethnic group. For example, Nagata (1974: 339-342) describes three primary “pressures involved in the selection of reference groups” for Malaysian Muslims (Malays, Indians, Arabs, etc.). We have also referred to Jones’ (1962) comment regarding the mixtures of ethnic groups in Sarawak. These issues continue to be pertinent today is clear. Dina Zaman, the well-know writer, reports receiving an email from a young woman<sup>19</sup>, “My father’s Chinese-Muslim and my mother’s of Arab descent. Why should he tick ‘Malay’ and consider himself ‘Malay’ when he is Chinese and Muslim, and is proud of his culture and heritage? We have a richer and longer tradition of Islam.” Beverly Chong’s essay (see Appendix 4) also documents the dilemma of young persons of mixed parentage who when forced to pick an ethnicity tick off their father’s. It is not an issue of the number of mixed marriages in society but one of feeling comfortable about choosing one’s identity. As Sawyer (1997) notes in his discussion on the changes in measurement of ethnicity in the US Census, the decision to allow respondents to identify with more than one race represents a balance between the ‘compelling human need for self-identity’ and the need for “consistency, comparability, and continuity of data” in “accommodating a population that is changing with time.”

The introduction of the term *Bumiputera* has not lessened the dilemma. As Kessler (1992) describes, the *Bumiputera* could be Malays who are Muslim, Malays who are not Muslim (e.g., certain aboriginal groups), Muslims who are not Malay (e.g., the Melanau of Sarawak), or persons who are neither Muslim nor Malay (e.g., ethnic Thai Buddhists and some indigenous groups in East Malaysia). On the other hand, the non-*Bumiputera* populace includes Muslim Malays (e.g., Acehnese immigrants), Malays who are not Muslim (e.g., Javanese and Batak Christian immigrants), and Muslims who are not Malay (e.g., Indians, Chinese, etc.). Kessler further observes that the labels "Chinese" and "Indian" mask equally broad categories,

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<sup>19</sup> “A need to keep Islam above politics”, *The Star*, September 13, 2007.

encompassing people who speak distinct languages, profess diverse religions, and many of whose ancestors came to Malaysia for different reasons at divergent points in history from disparate parts of their home subcontinents. Some - like the Baba (Peranakan or Straits-born Chinese), Chitty Melaka (Straits-born Indian) and Portugese Eurasian communities - have resided in Malaysia for so long that their language, dress, food, and many other customs are effectively Malay but they are not Muslim and are not considered *Bumiputera*. However, the latter two groups have been granted certain benefits (like preferential shares) reserved only for the *Bumiputera* community (Sarkissian, 1997).

Zainal Aznam Yusof, adviser to the National Implementation Task Force, laments in an opinion article on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the country's Independence that<sup>20</sup> "ethnicity still appears to be . . . a widespread criterion of identity" and believes that "Malaysia is moving away from rather than towards national integration." Lee (2003), a young academic, observes that the young people of the nation have grown up "bred under the NEP...in a stable [Malaysia]...perceivably more integrated...highly conscious of their ethnicity...more Islamised...more polarised." These views refer really to integration in Peninsular Malaysia where the issue of race relations between the Malays, Chinese and Indians has been much discussed and debated. East Malaysia is a society of far greater diversity. Indeed, in her essay, Beverly Chong notes that young East Malaysians find society in Peninsular Malaysia somewhat more racist.

It is perhaps not that surprising. School is a very important part of people's lives. Hirschman (1987b), evaluating national integration and education between 1957-1987, finds that the education policy has led to fluency in *Bahasa Malaysia*, but that the expansion of education has not brought about an integrated schooling experience for Malaysians. Children can be schooled in public national schools (medium of instruction: *Bahasa Malaysia*), public Chinese schools (medium of instruction: Mandarin) or public Tamil schools (medium of instruction: Tamil), albeit with common syllabi for the various subjects, or in private schools. Selected *Bumiputera* (and today a few selected non-*Bumiputera*) go to special schools. The education system thus promotes segregation by ethnicity, stark in Peninsular Malaysia. The dichotomy is further ingrained in school where children are separated

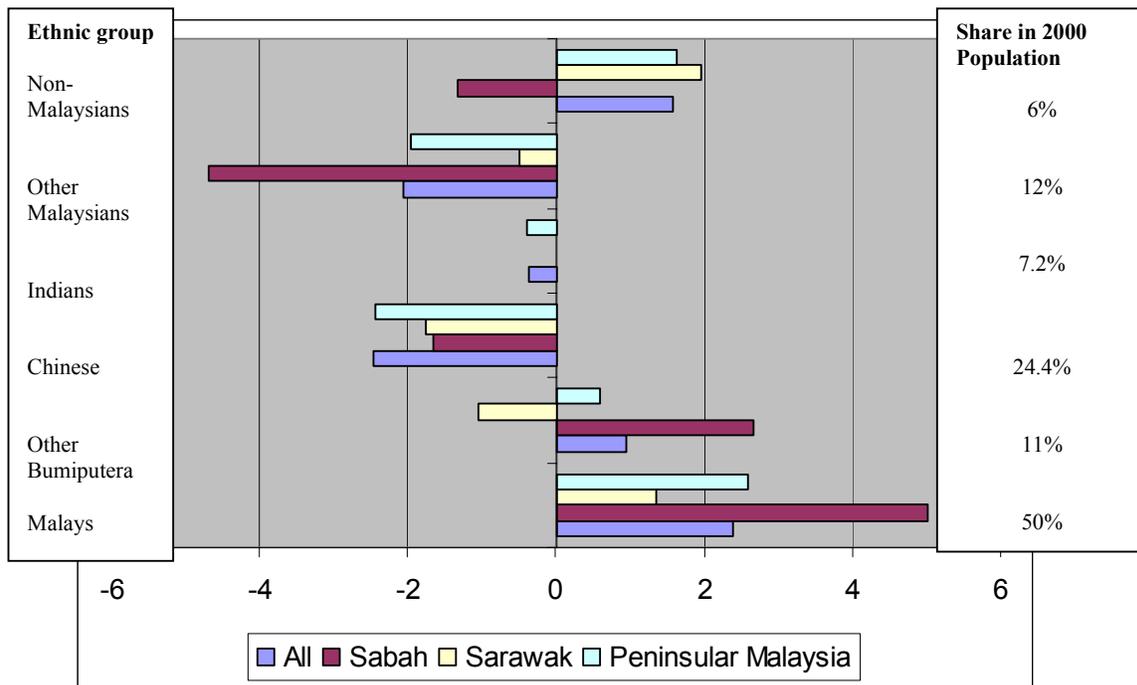
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<sup>20</sup> Zainal Aznam Yusof, Opinion: The measurement of national unity. *New Straits Times*, 17 July 2007

for religious instruction provided only to the largely Malay Muslims (the non-Muslims receive lessons in ‘Moral’). Young Malaysians have learnt to accept this as a norm, that is, Muslims are different from non-Muslims: they have grown up in a society where, with the growing presence of the Malay group, there are visible differences in marriage, divorce, inheritance, clothing, food and cultural practices.

The measurement by self-identification, the definition of Malay and the difficulty of separating race and religion suggest that there will be great difficulty in measuring certain groups of the population. Indeed, in explaining why the Chief Minister of Sabah said that half of the state’s population is Malay, the Chief Minister of Malacca is reported to have said that ‘it is easy to become a Malay... a person who is a Muslim, converses in Malay and follows the Malay traditions is considered a Malay’.<sup>21</sup> A comparison of population figures by major ethnic categories for 1991 and 2000 shown in Figure 3 suggests that indeed the identification of *Bumiputera* groups is problematic. The share of ‘Malays’ and ‘Other *Bumiputera*’ have risen greatly while the share of ‘Other Malaysians’ has declined.

**Figure 3. Change in Share in Population, 1991-2000, Major Groups**



Source: Computed from data in DASM (2001a)

<sup>21</sup> <http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2007/06/11/it-is-easy-to-become-a-malay/>. [Accessed October 1, 2007]. This is in line with the definition of Malay shown in Appendix 2. Andaya and Andaya (1982: 302) note that the definition of ‘Malay’ in the Constitution just formalized colonial practice. In fact the definition is that used by the British to define ‘Malay reservation’ land.

The increase cannot possibly come from a greater fertility rate. For example, the implied average annual growth rate for Malays is 3.2 per cent per year which is much greater than the average annual growth rate based on demographic data in 1998 of 2.6 per cent (DASM, 2001b: Table A1.4). The implementation of the NEP in 1970s and 1980s witnessed mass exodus of Chinese accompanied by capital flight. Between 1970 and 1980 the Chinese had experienced a migration deficit of close to 200,000 persons and this accelerated to close to 400,000 in the following decade (Chan and Tey, 2000). While the exodus of the Chinese had come to a halt in the 1990s, the slower rate of natural increase of the Chinese and Indians as compared to the Malays and other *Bumiputera* would result in further changes in the ethnic composition of the country. The Chinese and Indians in Malaysia have dipped below replacement level fertility by the turn of the 21 century, but the total fertility rate of the Malays remains well above replacement level, at about 3 per woman.

The seemingly easy shifts between ‘Malays’, ‘Other *Bumiputera*’ and ‘Other Malaysians’ reflect in part the commonalities in origin of a considerable part of the populace from the neighbouring regions that are now politically different, that is, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. As discussed above, the movement of such peoples across the region in search of economic prosperity is not new, and continues to occur. Political boundaries that straddle cultural similarities continue to cause friction, as for example, the current row over whether Malaysia can use the popular ditty *Rasa Sayang* which some Indonesian legislators consider is part of Indonesia’s heritage, in its Truly Asia campaign.<sup>22</sup> One implication of the shifting groups between ‘Malays’, Other *Bumiputera* and ‘Other Malaysians’ categories suggests an underlying similarity, at the very minimum, recognition of the *Bumiputera* as a group both in the official and economic realms.

Has this now entered the social realm so that we can consider the ‘*Bumiputera*’ community as an ethnic group? It would appear so, both in terms of Yinger’s (1986) description discussed previously as well Statistics Canada’s measurement of ethnicity, since the *Bumiputera* can be distinguished as a group which has a wide range of cultural, linguistic, religious and national characteristics. It also meets Sawyer (1998) three criteria for establishing an ethnic category for

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<sup>22</sup> Rasa Sayang 'ours too... we have right to sing it'. *New Straits Times*, October 15, 2007.

statistical purposes: consistency and comparability of data over time as well a category that is widely understood, so that meaningful comparisons can be made to evaluate social progress. If the term *Bumiputera* connotes a major ethnic group, then in this context, one could argue that there is integration among the diverse cultures and communities that comprise the *Bumiputera* group. In particular, for those from diverse cultures who practice Malay culture and Islam, there has been greater integration of different groups into the majority Malay grouping.

Young Malaysians have also grown up in a society with dichotomous access (*Bumiputera* versus non-*Bumiputera*) to finance, scholarships, licenses, housing and ownership of capital. If the design, implementation and monitoring of policy targets in this respect is based on the measurement of a group which is growing not just from natural increase, then it is likely that policy measures to achieve that target will fail to address growing intra-ethnic inequalities as observed in the case of income.<sup>23</sup> Intra-ethnic inequalities can arise from the inadequate measurement of ethnic groups within the *Bumiputera* category to receive special benefits. For example, Nicholas (2005) argues that the ‘Other *Bumiputera*’ perceive themselves as the “lesser *Bumiputera*” at least in so far as special benefits are concerned.

This raises questions on how ethnic data have been used and the policies that have been designed on the basis of the data gathered and examined. Although ethnic information - however imperfect – is collected and maintained by public producers of data, it is rarely available to the public, including researchers, as confidentiality is seen as a rein on ethnic sensitivities.<sup>24</sup> Thus it is not surprising that there are starkly different analyses<sup>25</sup> about the achievement of NEP targets. More than thirty years after the NEP, while there have been some improvements at least on the surface, inter-ethnic inequalities remain in educational achievement and occupational attainment, and in capital ownership as well as entrepreneurial spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Ragayah Haji Mat Zin, Explaining The Trend in Malaysian Income Distribution <http://www.eadn.org/reports/iwebfiles/i06.pdf>. [Accessed October 1, 2007]

<sup>24</sup> There are exceptions. For example, detailed information on ethnic composition in a parliamentary constituency. Ethnicity is also an important factor in social science research, including public health. The issue of the relevance of ethnicity and its measurement in the medical is addressed in several papers in PLoS Medicine, Vol 4(9), 2007. <http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-toc&ct=1>

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the government-ASLI quarrel on the measurement of *Bumiputera* equity. [http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006\\_10\\_05\\_MT\\_BI\\_archive.htm](http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006_10_05_MT_BI_archive.htm)  
<http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006/10/asli-backs-down-over-nep-data.htm>

Is it possible that the NEP targets, particularly that of national unity, cannot be met as the target *Bumiputera* group is a shifting one and the distinction (or the lack thereof) between its peoples gives rise to greater grounds for diversity than unity? Is it possible that the majority has been reached but the smaller groups which have not are so behind that they have contributed to the overall lack of achievement? Or is it because a target such as the elimination of occupation with ethnicity or reducing ethnic inequalities would require a detailed breakdown of ethnicity as possible so as to minimize intra-category inequalities?

Perhaps it is time the focus shifts away from identifying major ethnic groups in order to design more effectively policies that reach the needy in the disadvantaged groups. One suggestion would be to allow respondents to select more than one ethnic group. However such a move, would as Sawyer (1997) emphasizes, requires that there are clear and meaningful, and we would add transparent, guidelines on how federal agencies should tabulate, publish, and use the data once it is collected.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Malaysia has long been concerned with its many ethnic groups, be it in the political, economic or social arena. The discussion above raises important questions on how ethnic groups should be defined, the purpose for which such data is gathered, how the data is gathered and how they are then used in policy-making. The counting of its major and minor groups through self-identification has been an important function of the (usually) decennial census. Information on ethnicity is also collected in almost all areas where documentation is involved whether in the public or private sector. In these non-census contexts, counting has been simple and local, perhaps satisfying the minimal needs of the policymaker. The selection of categories may or may not have been well thought through, and the data collected may or may not reflect self-identification of ethnicity.

The paper has highlighted the difficulties in collecting ethnic data and has shown how creative the data collection agencies have been over the years in defining and redefining ethnicity as Malaysian society and needs evolve. Statisticians have demonstrated their abilities in collecting census data from people of “many tongues”, even against the odds of collecting data in the remotest parts of Sabah and Sarawak, doing so on a relatively regular interval. The data collected permits then analyses—often only by (or with the support of) the public sector since most data on ethnicity

are officially classified confidential – on outcomes of policies contrasting the achievements of the *Bumiputera* group usually against the Chinese and Indian groups, now increasingly a minority. The reality is that the former, especially the ‘Malays’, is an increasingly heterogeneous group whose population is growing faster than that of the Non-*Bumiputera*, which may explain the observed decreasing variation among Chinese and increased variation among Malays in certain studies (see, for example, Nagaraj and Lee, 2003).

Has the capturing of ethnic data been more useful or has it been more damaging to the nation? If we consider the narrower NEP goals, then for effective policy, both in the case of the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inter-ethnic inequalities, we would need as detailed a breakdown of ethnicity as possible because broad categories, as has been noted in the paper, conceal intra-category inequalities. However, the heterogeneity of the *Bumiputera* population that is not often taken into account suggests that outcomes of ethnic-based policies such as the NEP goals may be affected not just by public policy issues but also by the measurement of ethnicity used to plan and monitor such policies.

In the larger context of national unity, if integration can be considered as being part of a group with strong ties and a common constitutional definition, then one could consider that the *Bumiputera* in general and the ‘Malays’ in particular are now integrated. However, this classification conceals the differences and diversity among, say, Malays, Kadazans, Muruts, Ibans and other groups that make up this category. The differences and diversity themselves are not bad *per se*. In fact, they can be a good thing because they contribute to a vibrant society in which our young can grow up knowing, appreciating and enjoying the diversity and differences among people. What is important is that we do not think that unity can only be achieved by making different groups the same for it may conceal disunity among the *Bumiputera* groups. Furthermore, measurement that seeks to separate *Bumiputera* from Non-*Bumiputera*, one that constantly reminds us of the difference that leads to different national benefits may have contributed to the apparently increasing lack of integration across certain ethnic groups.

Should we then continue to collect ethnic data? The experience of census measurement of ethnicity in Malaysia lends credibility to Thomas Sawyer’s assertion of the ‘compelling human need for self-identity’. The nation, its Census Superintendents, its various institutions and its researchers have attempted to

document the diversity in, and its effect on, society. So the answer is a resounding yes, we need to collect ethnic data, but do not just collect them. Collect them to meet the needs of sound policies that seek to build national unity, policies that utilize our diversity to our national advantage. The experience of Malaysia has also shown that not only does measurement of ethnic data support policy but that policy can also drive ethnic measurement in data. We can have unity in diversity and that is what nature itself teaches us. The problem is not the data themselves but how they are used to formulate, implement and monitor policies.

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**Appendix 1: Characteristics of Ethnic Classifications in Various Censuses, Malaysia**

<b>Census</b>	<b>Word(s) used to capture ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Number of Groups Identified</b>	<b>Sub groupings</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1871 Straits Settlements	Nationality	46	'Europeans and Americas', 18 sub-groupings	Categories a mix of communal (eg Achinese), religious (eg., Jews), nationality (eg. Persians); and continental (eg. African) groupings. Many categories not in use today (eg. Jaweepekans); Europeans and Eurasians specific and important categories.
1871 Straits Settlements	Nationality	50	'Europeans and Americans', 19 sub-groupings, also divided by status in country (eg. 'pensioner'); 'Chinese', 7 dialect sub-groupings	Small changes from 1871 census; 'Aborigines' included as a category
1891 Straits Settlements	Nationality	50	Identification of 6 major categories. Four additional primary sub-groupings to previous census: 'Malays and other natives of the Archipelago' 9 sub-groupings; 'Tamils and other natives of India', 4 sub-groupings; 'Other Nationalities', 10 sub-groupings	Aborigines, Filipinos ('Manilamen') and Indonesians (eg. 'Javanese') categorized under "Malays and Other Natives"; Burmese categorized as 'Indians' Sinhalese and Jews categorized as 'Others'
Borneo		15	7 major groups, 'European', 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 'Other Indigenous', 'Chinese', 'Others'	
1901 Straits Settlements Federated Malay States	Nationality  Race	55 (Straits Settlements) 49 (Federated Malay States)	Major sub groupings (6) as for 1891 census	Some differences in the sub groupings between the two censuses, but otherwise essentially similar to that of 1891
Borneo	Nationality	7		

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total Number of Groups Identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1911 Straits Settlements Federated Malay States	Race	79 (Straits Settlements) 60 (Federated Malay States)	For Straits Settlements, no sub groupings except for 'European and Allied Races', 31 sub groups and 'Malays and Allied Races, 22 sub groups  For Federated Malay States, 6 sub groupings are 'European Pop. by Race', 17 groups; 'Malay Pop. by Race', 11 groups; 'Chinese Pop. by Tribe', 10 groups; 'Indian Pop. by Race', 11 groups; and 'Other Pop. by Race', 10 groups  7 major groups, 'European', 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 'Other Indigenous', 'Chinese', 'Others'	Major groupings introduced in 1891 census dropped: Groupings removed in Straits Settlements list; Groupings renamed in Federated Malay States list where 'Aborigines' replaced by derogatory 'Sakai'
Borneo	Nationality	25		
1921 British Malaya	Race	60	Sub groupings as for 1911 Federated Malay States census	First unified census for British Malaya covering Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements Groupings as for 1911 for the Federated Malay States
Borneo	Nationality	25	7 major groups	
1931 British Malaya	Race	74	Sub groupings as for 1921 census	'The Malay Pop. by Race' grouping replaced by 'Malaysians by Race'. Confusion between ethnicity and nationality still present: now 'Nepal' is listed under 'Indians by Race'
Borneo	Nationality	25	7 major groups	

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total Number of Groups Identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1947 British Malaya	Community	78	Still 6 sub groupings but the 'Malaysians' now further categorized into 'Malays', 2 groups and 'Other Malaysians', 15 groups. 'Malays' include 'Aborigines' which is further subdivided into 3 subgroups.	'by Race' replaced by 'by Specific Community' 'Aborigines' replaces 'Sakai' 'Ceylon Tamils' a new category under 'Others' and 'Other Ceylonese' replaces 'Sinhalese'
Sarawak	Race	129	8 major groups. 'Indigenous' including Malays and Dayaks, 100 categories; 'Non-Indigenous', 129 sub-groupings, including Europeans and other Asians.	
1951 Borneo	Race	39	7 major groups. 'European', 10 sub-groupings; 'Dusun', 2 sub-groupings; 'Murut', 'Bajau', 2 sub-groupings; 'Other Indigenous', 6 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 6 sub-groupings; 'Others', 12 sub-groupings	
1957 Federation of Malaya	Race	31	4 broad categories: 'Malaysians' comprise 'Malays', 'Indonesian' and 'All Aborigines', 6 subgroups; 'Chinese', 10 subgroups, 'Indians', 4 subgroups; 'Others', 9 subgroups	Category 'Indonesian' under 'Malay'. 'Chinese by Tribe' replaced by 'Chinese'. 'Eurasians' now under 'Others' New category 'Pakistani' under 'Others'

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total Number of Groups Identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1960 Borneo	Race	26	7 major groups. 'European', 2 sub-groupings; 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 2 sub-groupings; 'Other Indigenous', 7 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 5 sub-groupings; 'Others', 7 sub-groupings	
Sarawak		26	7 major groups. 'European', 2 sub-groupings; 'Malay', 'Melanau', 'Land Dayak', 'Sea Dayak'; 'Other Indigenous', 6 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 7 sub-groupings; 'Others', 5 sub-groupings	
1970 Malaysia	Community		4 broad categories as for 1957 census	Subgroups differ across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak to reflect the different groupings in these three areas
Peninsular Malaysia		32		'Malaysians' replaced by 'Malay'. 'Indian' now includes 'Pakistani', 'Ceylon Tamil' and 'Other Ceylonese'
Sabah		38		
Sarawak		25		
1980 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect		4 broad categories as for 1957 census	Subgroups differ across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak to reflect the different groupings in these three areas
Peninsular Malaysia		35		'Indian' now includes 'Bangladeshi'. 'Ceylon' replaced by 'Sri Lankan'
Sabah		16		
Sarawak		30		

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total Number of Groups Identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1991 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect; Combined with information on citizenship	66	Two broad categories: Malaysian citizens, Non-Malaysian Citizens Under Malaysian Citizens, 4 categories, 'Bumiputera', 'Chinese', 10 subgroups, 'Indian', 9 subgroups, 'Others', 9 subgroups. 'Bumiputera' further divided into 'Malay' and 'Other Bumiputera'. Latter provides for aboriginal groups as well as the many communities in Sabah and Sarawak	Ethnic group classifications standardized to produce a common set at the national level Two new classifications: citizenship and <i>Bumiputera</i> status
2000 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect; Combined with information on citizenship	67		'Malaysian Citizens Others' now includes 'Myanmar' Other bumi (sabah) and other bumi (Sarawak); <i>De jure</i> (usual place of residence) approach to compilation as opposed to <i>de facto</i> (place of residence on Census Night) approach of earlier censuses

Sources: Hirschman (1987a), Chander (1972), Fell (1960), Hare (1902), Jones (1953, 1961, 1962), Noakes (1948), Merewether (1892)

## Appendix 2

### Constitution of Malaysia:

#### Definitions of Ethnicity

#### Article 160

(2) In this Constitution, unless the context otherwise requires, the following expressions have the meanings hereby respectively assigned to them, that is to say -

"Aborigine" means an aborigine of the Malay Peninsula;

"Malay" means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and -

(a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or

(b) is the issue of such a person;

#### Article 161

(6) In this Article "native" means-

(a) in relation to Sarawak, a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause (7) as indigenous to the State or is of mixed blood deriving exclusively from those races; and

(b) in relation to Sabah, a person who is a citizen, is the child or grandchild of a person of a race indigenous to Sabah, and was born (whether on or after Malaysia Day or not) either in Sabah or to a father domiciled in Sabah at the time of the birth.

(7) The races to be treated for the purposes of the definition of "native" in Clause (6) as indigenous to Sarawak are the Bukitans, Bisayahs, Dusuns, Sea Dayaks, Land Dayaks, Kadayans, Kalabit, Kayans, Kenyags (Including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs dan Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Malays, Melanos, Muruts, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns and Ukits.

Selected from <http://www.helplinelaw.com/law/constitution/malaysia/malaysia01.php>

## **Appendix 3**

### **Areas in which special privileges may be provided**

#### **Article 153 of the Constitution**

(1) It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, but subject to the provisions of Article 40 and of this Article, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special provision of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or licence for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licences.

(4) In exercising his functions under this Constitution and federal law in accordance with Clauses (1) to (3) the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall not deprive any person of any public office held by him or of the continuance of any scholarship, exhibition or other educational or training privileges or special facilities enjoyed by him.

## Appendix 4

### MALAYSIANS OF MIXED PARENTAGE: THE VIEWS OF A MALAYSIAN

Beverly Chong.

The demographics of Malaysia are diverse, with the Malays, combined with the indigenous people of Malaysia, who are mostly concentrated in Sabah and Sarawak making the majority of the population. They are denoted “Bumiputera”. The second largest ethnic group is the Chinese, followed by Indians and other Malaysians of other descent. Mix marriages among Malaysians have increased in the past decade, thus resulting in the increase of Malaysians of mixed parentage.

There is no general consensus to describe or profile Malaysians of mixed parentage. Most would identify themselves according to paternal ethnicity, mainly because Malaysians see it as a legal obligation, even though they may not feel that that category of race describes them accurately. In many cases, they feel that they belong more in the “Others” category. In cases of Malays and other Bumiputeras, due to the legal definition of “Bumiputera”, most Malaysians of mixed parentage would choose to identify themselves with either being Malay or Bumiputera as long as either parent is of that race.

There is a growing usage of terms to describe Malaysians of mixed parentage in society nowadays. Chinese-Indians are called Chindians or Indinese. In East Malaysia, where mix marriages are rather common, the Chinese-Ibans are called Chibans, Lumbawang-Chinese are known as BawangCina, Chinese-Kadazans are known as SinoKadazans and the list just goes on and on. These categories of races are not recognized legally, of course. It is just how society categorizes them.

Race is a big issue in Malaysia as Malaysians seem to be obsessed with the issue of race, it is ingrained deep into us that we connect it to everything we see. This is one of reasons Malaysians of mixed parentage feel that they do not belong at times. Many Malaysians with rigid mindsets prefer to be confined to a category, as many seek comfort and security in their own ethnic community. The truth of the matter is that Malaysians are not as united as travel brochures promote our racial harmony to be. In fact, Malaysians are still very much separated by the issue of race and racial polarization is still an issue of concern in our country. Due to this situation, people still tend to see someone and perhaps even stereotype according to skin color. In many cases, Malaysians of mixed parentage sometimes do not feel accepted by the racial community of their parents’.

There is quite a distinction of perceptions of Malaysians of mixed parentage from West Malaysia and East Malaysia. Perhaps there is such a variety of races in East Malaysia, East Malaysians are more accustomed to having someone mixed in the community as mixed marriages are getting more and more common in East Malaysia. East Malaysians of mixed parentage who are currently living in West Malaysia particularly are a little bit more sensitive towards the difference in treatment which they receive from the community in West Malaysia, citing that they feel more accepted back in East Malaysia. Grace Miriam Purait and Dyg Hazwani Abg Ishak shared their experience on this matter. Grace is a Lumbawang-Chinese while Dyg Hazwani is a Malay-Chinese and they are both East Malaysians and understand some Chinese. They were on the LRT in Kuala Lumpur and a Chinese woman, who assumed they were Chinese sat with them, and she made racist comments about not

wanting to sit with people of other races. But when she realized they were not Chinese, after 2 girls who were sitting nearby pointed out to her that they were not Chinese, she got up straight away and sat elsewhere. Samantha Joseph, also an East Malaysian who is Melanau-Indian is facing a rather difficult time in university in West Malaysia. In university, there is such a strong affiliation with your ethnic community but she is not accepted by the Indians because she does not speak Tamil and she is a Catholic. However, she feels she does not fit in with any group either because she looks more Indian than any other race. They have had many experiences like this, as students living in West Malaysia and they are constantly questioned about their race. They did not experience situations such as these back in East Malaysia. So, they automatically feel less accepted in West Malaysia. West Malaysians of mixed parentage however are less sensitive to the situations of not being accepted all the time, perhaps because they are already accustomed to this as they were brought up here.

On another note, there are also cases of Malaysians of mixed parentage being elevated to a higher on the social ladder due to their status. For example, the communities of indigenous races tend to feel inferior to those who are half indigenous and half, Chinese, for example. For example, those who are Iban-Chinese in Sarawak will automatically not have Iban as their first language because one parent happens to be Chinese. They tend to speak English as it is probably their parents' medium of communication with each other. Most Ibans would normally have Iban or Bahasa Melayu as their first language and they feel inferior to half Ibans who speak English. Another reason would be because of skin color. Many Malaysians and Asians in general, seem to equate fairer skin as something better. Perhaps it is ingrained in many of us that fairer skin is better to darker skin and thus, people tend to associate fairer skin as being better looking as well. So, those who are half Chinese, tend to be fairer than those who are purely Bumiputeras or Indians. This situation is similar for those who are half European and so on.

Its people, whether of mixed parentage or not, make Malaysia truly beautiful although there are imperfections in terms of our relations. Malaysians of mixed parentage may be affected by these imperfections a little bit more than those of us who are only associated with one race. Malaysians still do not necessarily feel like Malaysians, as they still identify themselves more with their race as being Malay or Chinese or Indian or mixed, rather than being Malaysian. Although, we should stress on the most important thing we have in common, which is, we have Malaysia as our home. Racism and ignorance are the issues behind the difficulties in what Malaysians of mixed parentage are going through in society. So, a step into stripping down racism and altering the mentality of some Malaysians to would be definitely be something positive and long called for.

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