

## The 'Social Contract' issue: Scholars' stand

Written by straits-mongrel

Wednesday, 27 October 2010 19:54 - Last Updated Wednesday, 27 October 2010 20:13

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**Press statement by group of concerned scholars on the 'social contract' issue**

WE would like to provide some feedback to the speech made by Prime Minister Najib Razak on 21 October 2010 to the Umno general assembly in which he gave the impression that there is a 'social contract' whose terms are set in stone. He also told the delegates that no Malaysian should question it.

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It is necessary to note that there is a range of views amongst us on the social contract issue and on how to respond to the Prime Minister's advice.

One colleague has argued that it is not yet time for an "organized effort" of civil society to make such a statement as it may provoke negative reactions that may be harmful to our common pursuit of a fair and united nation.

Another has expressed concern that we must not play into the hands of politicians who will mobilize Malay support by trying to show that the non-Malays have reneged on their so-called promise to accept Malay political superiority in exchange for citizenship.

A third colleague has noted that there is really no need to contest what is 'written' in the social contract. Rather, we should question where a copy of the social contract is to be found so we can verify and discuss its contents and meaning.

Despite our different points of view, we are in agreement on three key points.

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- It is important for Malaysians not to be gagged into silence on what is perhaps the most contentious issue standing in the way of better inter-communal relations in the country. The quicker we can reach consensus on what the social contract means - not only in terms of what was agreed by the nation's early leaders in the past but also, more importantly, on how this agreement should be understood by Malaysians today - the less divided and more hopeful will be our future.

- For us to reach this consensus, it is important to have the facts on what took place during that critical period of our history fully disclosed and available for public discussion. In particular, we will need to have the relevant reports of the Reid Commission so that Malaysians have the opportunity to read and understand the logic and wisdom of our early leaders and do not have to depend on politically skewed interpretations of what is supposed to comprise any agreement or social contract for that period.

- At the same time it is necessary for constitutional and legal experts, historians and other scholars to lend their expertise to the public understanding. Professional organizations such as the Bar Council, the Malaysian Social Science Association, and other bodies should organize talks, seminars and forums to ensure that the best minds on the subject can have their opinions disseminated to the public.

We believe that the Malaysian public has reached a level of political maturity so that we can have a rational and public debate on the way forward in terms of any inter-communal accord or understanding arrived at, and on what needs to be honoured and respected. For that reason, we are opposed to the position of Umno and MCA which is tantamount to decreeing a ban on public discussion of the issue.

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The danger is that in not debating the issue openly - which is what the two main BN parties seem to be driving at - there is a real danger not only of driving that debate underground but also of reinforcing or entrenching ethnocentric interpretations that do not reflect the true intent of the constitutional agreement reached more than 50 years ago.

### Signatories:

*Dr Lim Teck Ghee*

*Dr Mavis Puthucheary*

*Dr Azmi Sharom*

*Dr Toh Kin Woon*

*Dr Wan Zawawi Ibrahim*

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