



Moderator and Workers' Party youth wing vice-president Tan Kong Soon (left) with Mr Tan (centre) and Mr Nizam. Both speakers also called for a review of other policies, such as the GRCs' ethnicity requirement. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Race-based academic data rapped at forum

Speakers at WP event say such statistics perpetuate stereotypes

By GOH CHIN LIAN

THE release of annual data on ethnic groups' academic performance shows Malays lagging behind others and perpetuates stereotypes, speakers at a Workers' Party (WP) forum argued yesterday.

Breaking statistics down in this way and having race-based self-help groups like Mendaki encourage a "cultural deficiency fallacy", civil society activist Nizam Ismail said.

"An educational problem within a Malay family is not just an educational problem," he told the forum, adding that such issues are complex and socio-economic in nature.

In such cases, parents struggle to make ends meet, and their children drop out of school or have run-ins with the law, said Mr Nizam.

The former chairman of the Association of Muslim Professionals, along with his co-speaker, lawyer Terence Tan, called for help to be given on a national, Sin-

gaporean level.

This would go beyond tuition classes to also cover financial management and motivating students.

The issue of whether releasing educational performance data by race would lead to racial stereotyping was also raised in Parliament last November by Nominated MP Eugene Tan.

Then, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education Hawazi Daipi said self-help groups and community leaders welcome the data as it helps them to assess their programmes and come up with new activities.

Yesterday, both speakers at the WP YouthQuake forum, which focused on whether race matters to young Singaporeans, also criticised other policies.

These included listing someone's race on his or her identity card, the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) system that requires minority candidates to stand in each ward and the ethnic quota for public housing.

They called for a review of these policies, in keeping with an

increasingly cosmopolitan society and to promote a Singaporean identity.

They also wanted specific laws on discriminatory behaviour to be enacted.

More than 30 people attended the event at the WP headquarters in Syed Alwi Road and gave mixed reactions to the proposals.

University lecturer Walid Jumblatt, 28, raised the danger of removing the GRCs' ethnicity requirement, noting that even in advanced democracies, people vote along ethnic lines.

He feared a "tyranny of the majority" with an "all-Chinese" Cabinet in charge.

Mr Nizam and Mr Tan, however, felt that Singaporeans were mature enough to vote based on the issues candidates stood for.

Another participant, lawyer Koh Jie Kai, 28, asked if the racial stereotyping in government policies could lead Singaporeans to stereotype foreigners in their midst.

Agreeing, Mr Tan said foreigners become an easy target for Singaporeans' unhappiness with population policies.

"Don't blame the foreigner. Blame the policy," he urged.

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