

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL X LEPAK CONVERSATIONS
SUARA KITA: INCREASING MALAY/MUSLIM YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN
NATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS
SESSION NOTES
6 FEBRUARY 2026, 5.45PM – 9.00PM
THE FOUNDRY

On 6 February 2026, 30 youths from the Malay/Muslim community gathered to participate in discussions on how to increase Malay/Muslim (MM) Youth participation in National Engagements.

The session was organised by the National Youth Council (NYC), in partnership with the Malay/Muslim Youth Taskforce, and involved the following panellists and moderator:

- Madam Rahayu Mahzam, Minister of State, Ministry of Digital Development and Information & Ministry of Health
- Mr Hafiz Salleh, Founder, SkateSG
- Shazza, Singer-Songwriter
- (Moderator) Ms Yulianna Frederika, Co-Founder and Head of Lepak Conversations

The session began with small group discussions that allowed the participants to share their experiences in previous dialogues, followed by a panel dialogue and podcast recording by Lepak Conversations.

Key Insights from the Small Group Discussions

Theme: Inclusion and Relevance in Civic Participation

Discussion question: Think about national programmes like National Youth Council initiatives, community dialogues organised by Malay/Muslim organisations, or government consultations you've heard about. Do they make you want to participate, and are they designed for someone like you?

- Participants said that they appreciated the exposure and access to policymakers, and chance to voice their concerns at dialogues and consultations. However, they said that their participation felt symbolic or seen as a “mouthpiece” due to most engagements having very few MM attendees. Participants said they were concerned about being pigeonholed into topics specific to their ethnic representation and sentiments, which caused them not to be able to speak honestly or deeply.
- Participants said that they observed that engagements were less attended by youths from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and many would be unaware of how to access these platforms or feel that such spaces were not meant for them.
- Participants said that dialogues tended to focus on long-term or abstract policy issues, which led to younger MM youths feeling disconnected and unable to see any tangible outcome.

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Theme: Conditions for Meaningful Participation

Discussion topic: What would need to change about how national programmes are designed, promoted, or run for you to feel genuinely welcomed and see value in participating?

- Participants called for broader representation across age, education paths (ITE, Madrasah) and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Participants suggested that rather than expecting youths to come to formal dialogue spaces, engagement could happen in community settings and everyday touchpoints (bazaars, sports events, arts spaces) where conversations could feel more organic and less intimidating. They said that topics should reflect youth interests and concerns such as arts, sports and cost of living.
- Participants said that media presence could suggest that engagements were performativeness would discourage openness. They suggested having smaller closed-door safe spaces where difficult questions and differing perspectives were welcomed. They said they hoped to see clear feedback loops, to have the confidence that their participation was meaningful.

Key Insights from Panel Dialogue

Theme: Level of Malay/Muslim Youth Participation

The moderator asked the panellists what they felt about the current level of Malay/Muslim youth participation in national programmes, and if initiatives felt intentionally designed for them.

- MOS Rahayu said that national programmes often catered to the majority community in mind, not out of malice but habit. She said that as a result, outcomes tended to reflect majority perspectives unless MM youths were intentionally included early in the process.
- MOS Rahayu said that meaningful inclusion required sustained participation and without MM youths involved in the process, their perspectives would be harder to surface and shape outcomes.
- MOS Rahayu said that youth dialogues were intended to address issues relevant to all youths, but convincing MM youths to participate remained challenging due to discomfort in participating and low appeal of traditional dialogue even when issues were relevant.
- MOS Rahayu acknowledged that organisers should be more targeted and intentional, such as through outreach, modalities, and creating safe environments that lower barriers.

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The moderator asked Hafiz and Shazza how MM youths could see themselves as essential stakeholders rather than just participants in Singapore's development.

- Hafiz said empowering MM youths by equipping them with transferable skills and trades was important so that they could be economically mobile, self-sufficient, and confident contributors to society.
- Hafiz said that by engaging youths through skateboarding, a space often seen as “raw or rebellious”, he demonstrated how non-traditional platforms could draw those who feel excluded, creating ripple effects that strengthen both individuals and the wider community.
- Shazza said that representation in arts and culture could help MM youths imagine themselves as contributors, not outsiders.
- Shazza said youths could turn what they loved into avenues of meaningful contribution, and personal passion could result in collective impact.

The moderator asked what existing programmes or platforms MM youths could tap on.

- MOS Rahayu said while resources and programmes existed across agencies, many MM youths still felt disconnected or helpless due to mismatches in communication, outreach methods, and awareness of available opportunities.
- MOS Rahayu said youth voices mattered to inform how initiatives are designed and improved.
- Hafiz said he started by using social media to build the skateboarding community and later tapped on grants from agencies like NYC and SportSG, showing that informal passions and viable ideas could evolve into impactful platforms.
- Shazza said resources such as National Arts Council grants and MENDAKI bursaries were available but remained largely unknown among MM youths in the arts scene. Shazza said that access to resources was critical for creative work to flourish, and hoped that more youths would use the arts as a platform to express concerns and contribute to national conversations.

Theme: Creating Change

The moderator asked MOS Rahayu if MM youths had sufficient access to mentors or trusted advisors who could help them seize opportunities.

- MOS Rahayu said that while there were mentors available, such as through MENDAKI's professional networks and other informal groups, the effectiveness depended on bridging interests, understanding, and relevance between mentor and mentee.

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- MOS Rahayu said that availability of mentors had increased due to the rise in accomplished individuals within the MM community. However, she said that beyond mentorship, youths also needed to make the most of these relationships and opportunities.

The moderator asked what actionable steps MM youths could take to make a difference in issues they cared about.

- MOS Rahayu said it was important to “dare to dream”, and she recognised the effort, discipline, and integrity required to turn ideas into action.
- MOS Rahayu encouraged youth initiatives to come with a clear offer, commitment and realistic expectations to get buy-in from policymakers. Hafiz said that youths could find like-minded people and share knowledge to scale impact.
- Shazza suggested identifying something to care about and share it openly with others to attract support and amplify one’s impact.

Q&A Segment

An onsite participant asked what were some other ways the government could engage youths as dialogue sessions lacked appeal to youths.

- MOS Rahayu said that the government continued to explore more fun and relatable engagement modalities to connect with youths in an inclusive manner, and she encouraged them to share their feedback.
- MOS Rahayu said that youths could also approach their MPs with their concerns, and cases were actively followed up with.

Participants asked (via Slido) why the MM community was underrepresented in foreign affairs and defense sectors.

- MOS Rahayu said that lesser MM representation in certain sectors was due to numerical minority. She said that for some, stepping into leadership, especially as a “first”, could feel daunting due to the expectation of carrying responsibilities and perceived representation.
- MOS Rahayu said that across sectors, representation should not be pursued for its own sake, and encouraged efforts to focus on nurturing capability, providing mentorship, and strategically opening pathways to ensure meaningful and sustainable inclusion.

Closing Remarks

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- MOS Rahayu said she envisioned MM youths navigating future challenges with resilience and sincerity, and a sense of duty (*amanah*). She encouraged youths to embrace a wide range of possibilities while remaining grounded in responsibility and integrity.
- Hafiz said that each generation would chart their own path, and hoped that youths would be adaptable and able to make collective progress to ensure no one is left behind.
- Shazza said she was optimistic about the future and MM youths were in an exciting period of growth where they could bloom and move forward together amid expanding possibilities.

Notes recorded by the NYC Youth Leadership and Engagement team.