

# Madani Foundation Dialogue

## Post-Dialogue Update



At our first Dialogue, "Can We Build the Future Together," held on 13 December 2025 at The Foundry, about 40 participants gathered to explore what the future could look like. Tay Kheng Soon introduced his architectural-philosophical matrix as a way to think about civilisational renewal. Yusmadi Yusoff spoke powerfully about the region's potential for collaboration even in the midst of conflict. Dawn Fung highlighted that if Madani University is to help its beneficiaries truly thrive, we must reconsider how children grow up and learn. Who are the ASEAN youth, special needs adults, and intergenerational learners we hope to serve, and what new questions must we ask to reach them?





### **MADANI, Civilisation, and the Birth of a New Modern Asian Civilisation**

Speech by Yusmadi Yusoff (Dec 13 2025, Singapore)  
*Images from his LinkedIn and slides*

Good afternoon, and thank you for the invitation. It is a pleasure to be here in Singapore. For me, coming to Singapore is never simply crossing a border. It feels more like moving within the same civilisational space – a shared history, shared anxieties, and increasingly, shared questions about the future. Today, I would like to speak about MADANI, not as a slogan or a policy label, but as a civilisational idea – and why it matters for ASEAN, for education, and for the kind of Asia we are becoming.

#### **The Missing Question**

ASEAN is often described in transactional terms: a fast-growing market, a competitive regional bloc, a hub for talent and investment. All of this is true. But it is incomplete. What is often missing is a deeper question – one that Asia has asked before at pivotal moments in its history: What kind of civilisation are we becoming? This question lies at the heart of MADANI.

#### **What Is MADANI?**

When I speak about MADANI, I am not referring to a political slogan, and not to a religious doctrine. I am referring to a civilisational framework – a way of thinking about how modern societies live together ethically in an age of speed, technology, and constant pressure. MADANI asks a very practical question: In a fast, competitive, technologically advanced world, how do we remain humane, cohesive, and trustworthy? I explain MADANI using a simple civilisational SCRIPT.

#### **S – Sustainability**

Development that does not exhaust the environment, institutions, or human beings.

#### **C – Care and Compassion**

Ensuring that efficiency does not come at the expense of dignity, especially for the vulnerable.

#### **R – Respect**

Respect across race, religion, culture, and nationality – not as tolerance, but as a daily civic habit.

#### **I – Innovation**

Embracing technology and creativity, while asking what they are for and whom they serve.

#### **P – Prosperity**

Prosperity understood as sejahtera – well-being, not merely GDP.

#### **T – Trust**

Trust as the invisible infrastructure of society.

Without trust, no system – however efficient – can last.

In many ways, societies like Singapore already practise parts of MADANI very well. The question MADANI raises is how we protect conscience, reflection, and humanity as we move even faster.

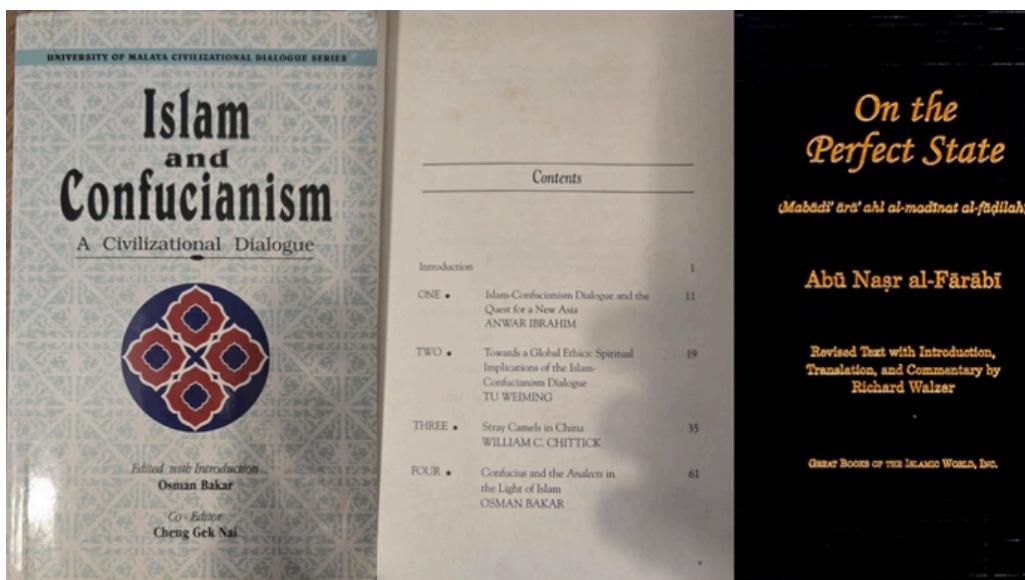


### ASEAN as One Campus

If ASEAN is to move from brand competition to civilisational confidence, we must begin to see ourselves not merely as a collection of markets, but as one shared intellectual and moral space. I like to think of ASEAN as one campus. In this campus: courts become classrooms, villages become laboratories, cities become spaces of ethical experimentation. Cross-border mentorships – between Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and beyond – are as important as student exchanges. Education here is not only about credentials. It is about forming leaders capable of cooperation amid diversity. In this sense, ASEAN is not merely a regional organisation. It is – potentially – a school of civilisation.

### A Birthplace of a New Modern Asian Civilisation

Malaysia and Singapore occupy a unique civilisational position. Few places in the world see Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, and Western traditions interacting daily – not at the margins, but at the mainstream of law, economics, politics, and education. The result is not simply multicultural coexistence. It is a civilisational synthesis – modern, ethical, diverse, and pragmatic. This interaction has produced an idea of development and modernity that Asia can offer the world. In this sense, our region represents a birthplace of a New Modern Asian Civilisation.



### Universities and the Moral Heart of Civilisation

More than a thousand years ago, around 942 CE, the philosopher Al-Fārābī – known in the West as Alpharabius, “The Second Teacher” after Aristotle – wrote about the Virtuous City (*al-Madīnah al-Fāqīlah*). He argued that a civilisation flourishes not through wealth or force, but through the ethical and intellectual formation of its people. In his vision, education is the moral heart of civilisation, and knowledge exists to guide society toward *sa'ādah* – human flourishing and happiness. Applied today, this challenges modern universities. A MADANI university must go beyond producing degrees. It must be embedded in society – sharing space with farms, clinics, courts, places of worship, and libraries. Teachers become mentors. Knowledge serves justice and human flourishing.

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The genesis of higher education in colonial Malaya - Articles... ehm.my



The inauguration of the University of Malaya, 1949.  
Source: National Archives Malaysia 20090029258g1

The Carr-Saunders Commission proposed that the university be moved to Johore Bahru.<sup>28</sup> The first Malayan university, the commission emphasised its location 'in a scenery typical of Malaya' and that the 'river estuary, undulating plain with rubber and coconut and the distant, jungle-clad hills' of the site adjacent to Bukit Serene would boost its reputation as a residential university.<sup>29</sup> Despite reservations from the Association of the College of Medicine that the university should remain in Singapore,<sup>30</sup> the commission insisted that Singapore 'cannot be regarded' as 'typical of Malaya'. It concluded that given their proximity,

### A Forgotten Moment in Our History

This is not the first time our region has stood at such a crossroads. In 1947, the Carr-Saunders Committee produced a report on higher education in Malaya, largely shaped by colonial administrative needs. A young lawyer and scholar – trained at Raffles College and serving as a Municipal Councillor in Singapore – was asked for his views. Instead of submitting a memorandum, Ahmad Ibrahim responded with a book, written in Jawi and published in 1949, titled *Universiti di Malaya*. He argued that a university must not merely supply manpower, but cultivate a moral intelligentsia rooted in the civilisation of the land. That same year, the University of Malaya was established. Today, ASEAN stands at a similar trajectory – under different realities, but confronting the same essential question: What kind of university does our civilisation now require?

### Dialogue, Not Clash

In 1995, at the University of Malaya, scholars including Samuel P. Huntington, Tu Wei-Ming, William Chittick, and Wang Gungwu gathered under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim and Professor Osman Bakar for an Islam–Confucian dialogue. This was a deliberate response to the pessimism of the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis. The message remains relevant today: Civilisations are not destined to collide. They can converse and co-create. Given that Islam and Confucian-influenced cultures together shape a large part of humanity, this dialogue is not merely philosophical. It is civilisational – social, cultural, political, and economic.

### A Choice for ASEAN

ASEAN now faces a choice. We can continue to optimise for speed, branding, and rankings. Or we can consciously shape a civilisation that integrates technology with ethics, diversity with trust, and progress with humility. The birth of a New Modern Asian Civilisation is not guaranteed. But the ingredients already exist – in history, philosophy, and the lived experience of our region. The future of Asia will not be determined only by how fast it grows, but by the kind of civilisation it chooses to become.

Thank you.



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### Takeaways

"Firstly, I am very happy with.. public dialogue on the idea of a New Asia University to be located in Johor. Several key concerns emerged.

1. That education is actually induction. It is less about bringing out latent potentials and more about putting in ideas and concepts.
2. That humanisation in this age of AI must counter the mechanisation of humanity.
3. That new education starts from early childhood all the way up to higher education and onwards.
4. That there must be second chances for people to catch up.
5. That there should be more cross-cultural exchange among neighbours in South East Asia."

*Tay Kheng Soon, founder of Madani Foundation*

"Hi Prof and Choong Onn, Thank you for hosting the first dialogue. The conversation was meaningful and engaging. It was a wonderful start to what I believe will be an important series. Overall, it was a very successful and enjoyable session!"

*Alice Cheah, Board Secretary of the Mercer Island Chinese Association (MICA) in Washington, USA*

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Meeting with Vice Chancellor Tan Chai Puan of Southern University College in Johor introduced by George...



# CAN WE BUILD THE FUTURE TOGETHER?

**Date: 13 Dec 2025, Saturday**

**Time: 3pm - 6pm**

**Location: The Refinery @ The Foundry  
11 Prinsep Link, Singapore 187949**

**Registration: [madanifoundation.org](http://madanifoundation.org)**

**Email [connect@madanifoundation.org](mailto:connect@madanifoundation.org) for queries**

This groundbreaking dialogue asks an urgent question: what kind of future are we building for ASEAN's youth?

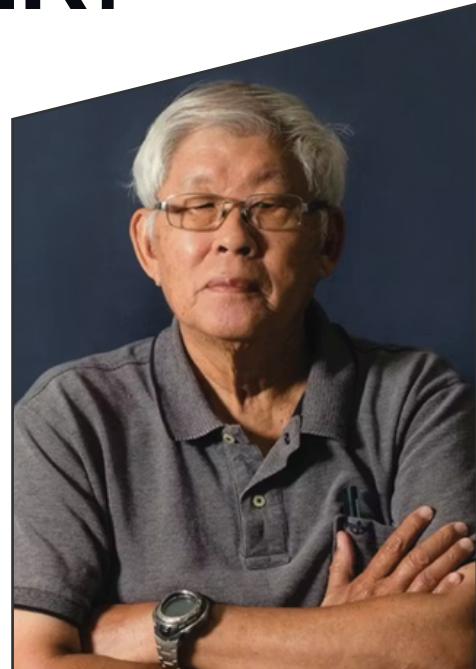
In an age of relentless technological and social change, the movement argues for a human-centred model of progress that protects empathy and genuine connection.

The Madani Foundation Dialogue seeks to renew a humane regional identity – and to explore how ASEAN can pursue growth without sacrificing compassion under the pressure cooker of today's systems.

### Panel of Speakers

#### **Tay Kheng Soon**

Singapore pioneering architect and public intellectual advocating humane, tropical design; former Singapore Institute of Architects president and NUS adjunct professor focused on community-centred urban futures, who will speak on how education and dignity intersects.



#### **Yusmadi Yusoff**

Malaysian lawyer and former MP/Senator; and founder of the RIGHTS Foundation. He will articulate commitment to cross-border ASEAN friendship and dialogue between Islamic and Confucian traditions, to address the civilisational foundations of progress.

#### **Dawn Fung**

Singapore educator and author of *Homeschooling in Singapore: An Education*; CEO of Little U. Her work on alternative education spotlights human-centred community education beyond conventional systems.

## Dialog Madani

Moderated by Stella Stan Lee



# BOLEHKAH KITA MEMBINA MASA DEPAN BERSAMA ?

**TARIKH : 13 Disember 2025, SABTU**

**Masa : 3pm - 6pm**

**Lokasi : The Refinery @ The Foundry**

**11 Prinsep Link, Singapore 187949**

**Pendaftaran: [madanifoundation.org](http://madanifoundation.org)**

**Email [connect@madanifoundation.org](mailto:connect@madanifoundation.org) untuk pertanyaan**

Dialog inovatif ini menumpu kepada soalan mendesak : Apakah masa depan yang kita bina untuk belia ASEAN?

Dalam era perubahan teknologi dan sosial yang tidak henti-henti, pergerakan ini berhujah untuk membina model pembangunan kemanusiaan yang menumpu ke arah budaya yang melindungi "Empati" dan "Hubungan tulen".

Projek Universiti MADANI berusaha untuk memperbaharui identiti serantau yang berperikemanusiaan dan untuk meneroka bagaimana ASEAN boleh meneruskan pertumbuhan tanpa mengorbankan belas kasihan di bawah sistem yang penuh dengan tekanan tinggi.

### Panel Penceramah

#### **Tay Kheng Soon**

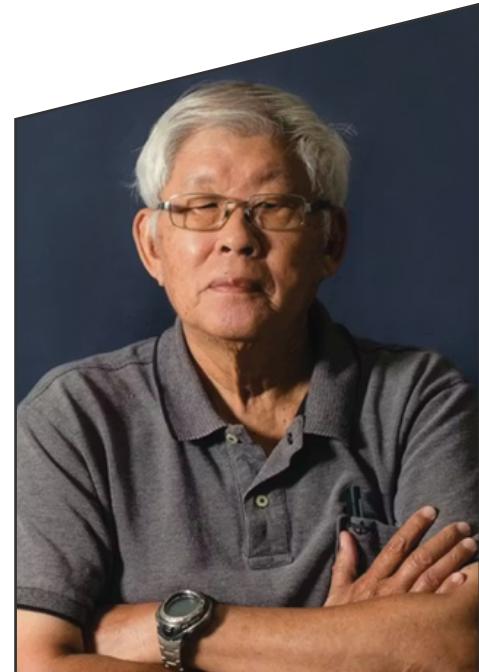
Arkitek perintis Singapura dan intelektual awam yang menyokong reka bentuk tropika yang berperikemanusiaan; bekas Presiden Insitut Arkitek Singapura dan Profesor Adjunct NUS memberi tumpuan kepada masa depan bandar berpusatkan komuniti, yang akan berhujah bagaimana Pendidikan dan Maruah mampu bertemu.

#### **Yusmadi Yusoff**

Peguam Malaysia dan bekas Ahli Parlimen/Senator, dan pengasas Yayasan RIGHTS. Beliau akan menyatakan komitmen untuk merentasi sempadan persahabatan ASEAN dan dialog antara tradisi Islam dan Konfusianisme, untuk menangani asas kemajuan tamadun.

#### **Dawn Fung**

Pendidik Singapura dan pengarang "Homeschooling in Singapore: An Education"; Ketua Eksekutif Little U. Kerjayanya mengenai Pendidikan alternatif menonjolkan Pendidikan komuniti berpaksikan manusia di luar sistem konvensional.





# 我们能否携手共创未来?

日期: 2025年12月13日, 星期六

时间: 下午3点至6点

地点: The Refinery @ The Foundry, 新加坡普林西普连路11号, 邮编187949

登记: [madanifoundation.org](http://madanifoundation.org)

Email [connect@madanifoundation.org](mailto:connect@madanifoundation.org) 如有任何疑问

这场开创性的对话提出了一个紧迫的问题: 我们正在为东盟青年构建怎样的未来?

在科技和社会变革日新月异的时代, 该运动倡导以人为本的进步模式、以维护同理心和真诚的联结。

马达尼东盟大学项目旨在重塑人道的区域认同, 并探索东盟如何在当今体制的压力下追求增长而不牺牲人文关爱。

演讲嘉宾:

## Tay Kheng Soon

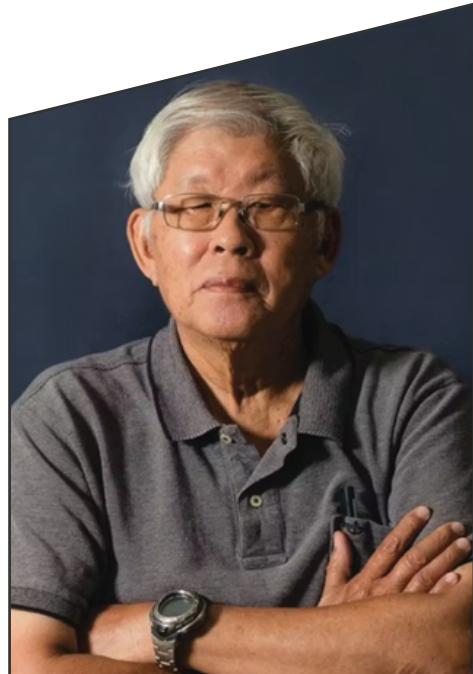
新加坡先锋建筑师和公共知识分子, 倡导以人为本的热带设计; 新加坡建筑师协会前主席、新加坡国立大学兼任教授, 专注于以社区为中心的未来城市, 他将探讨教育与尊严的交汇点。

## Yusmadi Yusoff

马来西亚律师、前国会议员/参议员, 以及“权利基金会(RIGHTS Foundation)创始人。他将阐述致力于促进东盟跨境友谊以及伊斯兰教和儒家传统之间的对话, 以探讨文明进步的根基。

## Dawn Fung

新加坡教育家, 《新加坡在家教育: 一种教育》一书的作者; Little U首席执行官。她致力于另类教育, 强调超越传统体系的以人为本的社区教育。



About the program

## Madani Foundation Dialogue



**Madani Foundation** aspires to build the Madani University, a ground-up initiative led by progressive educators, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders across ASEAN countries, with the Dialogue as its inaugural event. Featuring distinguished thinkers and practitioners, it aims to inspire the next generation of leaders.

The hallmark of the first dialogue on December 13th 2025 is its focus on establishing a shared civilizational and regional vision for ASEAN through inclusive dialogue and collaboration. We seek to gather diverse stakeholders - thinkers, policymakers, artists, and community leaders - to explore shared values, cultural heritage, and regional priorities. This dialogue serves as a foundational moment to generate commitment, foster relationships, and mobilize resources for the long-term development of the Madani University and associated initiatives, aligning with the broader goal of regional coherence and civilizational renewal.

The **Madani Foundation Dialogue** invites you to co-create the university's vision and roadmap as an intergenerational community.

"In 2017, I had the privilege of hosting a series of public lectures and conversations on Singapore's future convened by Tay Kheng Soon in The Agora, the space I managed. He assembled an impressive group of thinkers to address a wide range of issues: the future of Singapore's education system; a Dialogue of Civilisations as a new educational paradigm; public finance; Singapore's economic growth model; reflections on the Committee for the Future Economy; the rise of China and its implications for Singapore; water and energy security—including thorium-based nuclear energy; the CMIO framework and identity; eliminating absolute poverty in Singapore; the longevity of the PAP; and Islam in Singapore.

Across more than 20 sessions, the series became the architecture of my own understanding of the structural challenges confronting Singapore."

TAN TEE SENG

# About the program

## Madani Foundation Dialogue



The Madani Foundation Dialogue invites all generations to co-create the Madani university's vision and help map its launch journey for 2027. Each session features leaders, breakout groups, and expert-proposed themes guiding direction and curriculum. Proposals on renewal, cooperation, heritage, technology, social justice, and sustainability are welcome. Email [connect@madanifoundation.org](mailto:connect@madanifoundation.org) to join or contribute.

#	Focus	Activities / Goals	Expected Outcomes	Title
1	Introduction & Vision Setting	Introduce Madani vision, establish trust, align stakeholders	Shared understanding, initial commitments	Can we build the future together?
2	Cultural & Civilizational Foundations	Share ASEAN cultural heritage, storytelling, dialogue on identity	Increased cultural pride and mutual respect	
3	Education & Skill Building	Discuss future skills, education models, inclusion	Roadmap for youth empowerment programs	
4	Research & Innovation	Explore research priorities and collaborations	Defined research agenda, partnerships	
5	Regional Cooperation & Partnerships	Engage governments, NGOs, academia	Formalize partnerships, funding ideas	
6	Youth & Community Engagement	Empower youth leaders, community projects	Youth-led initiatives, confidence building	
7	Funding & Resource Mobilization	Identify funding sources, donor engagement	Funding commitments, sponsorship plans	
8	Implementation & Roadmap Development	Draft detailed action plans	Clear timelines, roles, and milestones	
9	Review & Feedback	Gather broad feedback, revise plans	Consensus and commitment to next steps	
10	Closure & Launch Planning for 1st cohort of Madani ASEAN University	Finalize plans, launch strategies	Launch event, ongoing dialogue networks	