

06/09/1997

Unity in adversity

UNITED we stand, divided we fall. This is the general tenor of both the speeches of the Prime Minister and his Deputy at this year's Umno General Assembly, messages meant to reach beyond merely the delegates and the party. The enemy, they remind us, is from without and not within.

According to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim the country's current economic crisis is the result of envy, the desire to break the growth in the nation's and the region's competitive strength. And, the Prime Minister believes, a wish to recolonise by powers used to throwing their weight around. How else do we explain a weakening currency and a fast decapitalising stock market when the economic fundamentals are strong? Not only is this true of Malaysia but also of economies as far afield as Hong Kong, an economy indisputably doing very well.

Yes, there is an apparent contradiction. Problems are not normally the outcome of a healthy economy.

No, we cannot sit idly by and wait for the storm to blow over because robust though the economy is we could find ourselves having to start over. Not something any of us will relish after having put immense effort and sacrifices to arrive at where we are today. A drastic recapitalisation exercise is but a short term measure. More pertinent is the need for the country to speak with a single voice.

Hence the need to end all recriminations, not just regarding the present difficulties but also all other areas of contention and possible conflict that plague Malaysians. The nation must come together.

This coming together can happen, as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad says, only when nationalism is constructive and faith profound; when Malays no longer cling to notions of Bahasa Malaysia as the sole expression of patriotism and live by interpretations of Islam that have become irrelevant; when Muslims do not fault one another and deny some the right to find the peace of a faith that reason cannot fault.

They must instead shake off the blinkers of narrow nationalism and seek that knowledge, no matter where, that will make them truly deserving of their inheritance and lend them the security that fosters magnanimity. They should, as the Prime Minister argues, master not only Bahasa Malaysia but also that language which will allow for the articulation of thought leading to innovation and the breaking of new frontiers. Then, and only then will they be masters of their own fate and that of those whom they lead.

The nation must cease to act in ways that would unwittingly or otherwise take us into the trap of either a new colonialism or neo-colonialism. No matter how seductive the lure of Western political, economic and social culture may be surely the preference is for self-determination. What use is a freedom that is more imagined than real; of modernity that destroys our identity and crushes our spirit? The liberty that we all desire can be ours even while our heads are held high.

In this time of economic adversity the determination that has guaranteed us the internationally lauded growth thus far comes into its own and the now world famous tolerance of our multi-ethnic, multi-religious society will be sorely tested. Malaysians must close ranks behind their leaders. To allow cracks to surface now is to admit to the kind of defeatism that could ultimately end in the disintegration of this, our hard won success.

(END)

