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Of unity and nationhood

TO borrow Dickens' immortal lines, "These are the worst of times and the best of times." Just as there are blessings to rejoice in and victory to celebrate, there are momentous events in our national life that test the cohesiveness of our social fabric and nationhood.

The blessings and events vary - the economic crisis, the sweet success of the 16th Commonwealth Games, the bounty of Nature that brought prices of vegetables down, the lowering of interest rates which brought much cheer to the dispirited business community, the impending tempestuous La Nina, the shock and relief of the country's economic revival measures and more recently, the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The yin and the yang. Thus, all of us flit between bouts of introspection and speculation as we are, sometimes simultaneously and intermittently, gripped by anxieties and elation, despair and hope. Some find ourselves groping to know the full sense and meaning of these trying times and some, particularly those raised in the shadows of colonialism, summon the instructive experience of the past and regard them as the travails of our pilgrimage from a shackled nation to a greater destiny or as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir expressed it in a poem some time ago, "...perjuangan kita belum selesai (our struggle is far from over)..."

But one commonality weaving the events, good or bad, in these trying times is the unity of the people. The resounding cry of Malaysia Boleh in many national endeavours from the Mt Everest climbing expedition to the Commonwealth Games stemmed from the belief that as long as we are united we can stand tall and achieve anything. When this rallying cry was first uttered by Dr Mahathir, it stirred the national soul and it roused the latent spark in each of us which blaze as part of the patriotic flame. The success of the recent Games reflects the depth of our unity - one which evolves as a result of shared joys and sorrows through generations.

It is a unity that refuses to be dismantled by the pressures brought about by the currency crisis and the subsequent economic downturn. In a world where fund managers become judge and jury of governments' economic and financial policies, we refuse to succumb to their unfair demands and compromise on our independence - even though it means enduring a litany of economic woes or being condemned as a pariah nation.

The underlying lesson is instructive. Turbulent times means temporary ailment but we are willing to make sacrifices for the national good. A nation lives in the consciousness of the people. Our nationhood, the shared and collective sum of experiences and hopes of the rakyat, depends on how we respond to the events in good and bad times. Such unity should not be taken for granted.

We should not allow ourselves to be beguiled by one man's quest for self-glory and seduced by sycophants. It is only from within, among ourselves, that factions will be stirred and stability endangered. The noble cause for common good can be drowned by the fervent cries of those, among us, whose feverish desires for personal advancements threaten to tear asunder the unity of the people.

We are fortunate that our Government has not demonised the poor, divided the races or worshiped the market at the expense of social justice. There is no reason to doubt the Government's motives. Purity of political motives is judged by the degree to which leaders will, in all actions, put

the best interest of the nation and its people above everything else. The common good has always been the unifying principle in our national life.

Yet there are still people out there who want to make trouble. They must ask themselves: In flouting the law and order, how do they serve national interest and the common good? In inciting unrest, how do they advance the common good? Surely, sour vengeance should not replace keen judgement and sanity.

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