

Towards an egalitari

As the nation gears for celebration on Thursday, we all should come under fire for not being 'Malaysian enough' after 43 years

IT'S celebration time on Thursday our 43rd Merdeka anniversary which will be an occasion to reaffirm our faith in our nation. It makes every Malaysian feels good.

Intense conflict between Dr Mahathir-led Government and Anwar Ibrahim-backed Opposition parties culminated in the nation's 10th general election after Independence.

Last November's general election was to some people a watershed poll and it was almost a referendum against some ruling politicians, especially a chance for the long-suffering Terengganu voters to throw out the increasingly hateful government of Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad which began in 1974 and for the Kelantanese to reaffirm their faith in the Pas government. Elsewhere, they voted against the Government to send a strong message to the ruling Umno and its component parties in Barisan Nasional (BN).

In more crucial ways, the 1999 general election was momentous because Pas (which made electoral gains) and DAP (which suffered losses) rose above their long-time prejudices to band together along with Keadilan (which performed very well but won only five parliamentary seats four of which riding on Pas' back) and Parti Rakyat (which has never won a seat in Parliament on its own. In 1959, its

president Ahmad Boestaman won a seat on a Socialist Front ticket) into a Barisan Alternatif (BA).

Though BA can by no means be written off — no matter how much its opponents wish it's not looking like a winner. But if I am proven wrong, the fault will lie in the main with the ruling Barisan Nasional, disappointing in many ways and yet so full of unity and tolerance in its tropes but lacking them in its behaviour.

In the four decades and three years, we have achieved much prosperity, progress, development and even harmony. Though I am now sixty-three years old, my memory has not dimmed much. I recall the good times in the past, nothing like what we are experiencing now. We are still a melting pot, unity in diversity. As Lee Kuan Yew rightly says, we cannot get nationhood out of diversity in 35 years (in Singapore's case) and us in 43 years. Then as now, we are still Bumiputeras, Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indians and Eurasians. Perhaps, a feeling of oneness (being Malaysian) has increased. To some people, it is on the contrary — it depends with whom you talk.

For sure, there are many things that have happened and are occurring which I would have liked to have been done differently. Many changes I had hoped for have not taken place, but I will persevere and I hope I will have the opportunity to help carry them out one day.

Despite the proliferation of titles bestowed or "purchased" Malaysian society is becoming more democra-

On Politics

By ABDULLAH AHMAD

Malaysian elites should be fighting for much more than their personal agendas and interests. Instead, even against odds, they should be the catalyst that will spur millions of others to fight for an even better future . . .

tised, fast becoming fairer, unsnobbish and even casual. Even the Malay society — especially after the New Economic Policy, though it did not fully succeed, has become less and less a top-down society. If you go to Bangsar and even Kok Lanas, you would know what I mean.

The non-Malays are apprehensive of Malay nationalism, which is actually diminishing, but wait until they come face to face with the increasingly and aggressively powerful conservative Islam which is being subtly introduced to the non-Muslim milieu courtesy of BA in the name of democratisation and ultimately of capturing Putrajaya. Then it would be too late to talk about transparency, tolerance, pluralism, democracy and good governance. The **ulama** or **mullah** would have been entrenched.

The Malays and Bumiputeras not only want to survive but to lead. Umno wants to remain as the sole party of

the natives and it will do what it takes to recapture the soul of the restive and divided natives. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his crown prince, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, understand strong pressures are being applied to replace government and Umno leaders and policies. Their efforts will continue to be pursued more vigorously.

The nation, despite falling commodity prices, economic slowdown, recessions, regional financial crisis, the AlMaunah, the disgraceful Grik heist and bloody incident in Sauk, and crude attempts to fish in racial-troubled sungai remains peaceful, a remarkable measure of the ability and character of all Malaysians to put national interests above communal advancement. We will overcome all problems, not excluding the chauvinistic demands and counter-demands, if we abandon the tiresome and long-settled old battles. It was non-contentious until an unwise and indiscreet remark about what was being debated in a secret chamber was made public via a foreign publication, which has not been known to be fond of Malaysia and even less of its majority people.

The millennium is an exciting time to be in Malaysia. I sense a political and cultural change will soon take place which will either see the regeneration of leadership or retrogression.

The people want to see a fresh political and cultural vitality, and this cannot happen unless there is an upsurge in national pride accompanied by the desire for the creation of Bangsa Malaysia that is proud-to-claim its Malaysianness. We all should have come under fire for not being "Malaysian enough" after 43 years.

Blaming English colonialism and its divide-and-rule policy has always been a good excuse and even a good way of emphasising our difficulty

society