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Fighting tyranny over mind

THE subject of `Melayu Baru' is not new. However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad finds it necessary to re-ignite the need for a new breed of Malays for the simple yet compelling reason, encapsulated in his poem years ago, that perjuangan ini belum selesai lagi (the struggle of the Malays is not over yet).

It is not meant to cater to the Sultan Idris Education University's symposium on The Malay Identity in the 21st Century. It is relevant for the embittering reality is that the unfolding challenges of this century may put the Malays under a mental siege. The lack of an integrated sense of self, self-control and self-assertion in any race leads to collective hallucinatory and destructive dementia. Arguably, some say the concept is intellectually, culturally and spiritually bankrupt. But we would like to stress that the new breed of Malays must be seen as a cultural construct, not a political construct, to be operated as an educative conduit through which important social lessons are disseminated.

It is not a search for a new identity. It is a call to be true to history and tradition with the aim to fight off the suffocating embrace of mental abuse, ridicule and prejudice by the West. It means leaving the old bogeys behind and casting away the wearied baggage of bigotry. The traits mentioned by Dr Mahathir is best summed up in the Old West jargon, "the moral hard man". One whom by transcending society's restrictions and stereotypes could directly confront it and one whose strength, courage and ability to flout the rules and limitations imposed by colonial masters and new forms of colonialism such as American hegemony and the institutional discrimination of WTO, IMF and World Bank.

New does not mean rejection of all old. The Melayu Baru concept is in the interest of historical accuracy and integrity for it is seen as a means to smash the denial and diminishment of our forefathers' fight against the tyranny over the Malay mind, perpetrated by the colonialists. It embraces democratic themes of broadmindedness, tolerance and human dignity; capitalistic themes of hard work, enterprise and self-reliance; socialistic theme of equitable economic distribution; and spiritual themes of ethical intelligence and humanistic values.

Being a Melayu Baru requires the art of self-reflection for, as said by the Greeks, the unexamined life is not worth living. Yet, a life informed and enriched by an anthropocosmic vision is not enough but it must be in well-thought, not blind, resonance to the will of God.

Tertiary institutions should give a course on `Renewing Malay Civilisation', not an apologetic study on the past or a delve into culture, but a study on the relevance of being Malay - past, present and future. This can be one by a pool of resources such as culturalist Azah Aziz, educationists and thinkers such as Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh, Datuk Dr Ibrahim Bajunid, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad and others.

How might the Malays respond to the calling? The words of Zhengzi, Confucius' disciple, are apt: "(We must be) strong and resolute, for the burden is heavy and the journey is long. The burden is humanity: is this not heavy? The journey only ends with death: is this not long?" To fail this burden and this journey will place us in history as those Malays who leave future generations with a legacy of mental siege and hence, put us under a heavy moral debt.

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