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Maintain the status quo

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THE Malay special status and accompanying benefits or otherwise are nothing new - they were there before and during British colonial rule - so it is really nothing to get excited about.

The futile British attempt to abolish it via the much-hated London-imposed Malayan Union in 1946 was vehemently opposed by what seemed to be a docile race. The Malays may even now seem compliant, but that doesn't mean that they are tractable.

Not only have the special privileges been entrenched in the Constitution and become a sensitive issue, but the constitutional provisions have been extended to the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, the descendants of the Portuguese in Malacca and the "native Thais" in the northern states.

Just imagine what could have happened if there had been no Malay special privileges.

Despite the many disadvantages, our melting pot has, and is undergoing rapid political change, development and modernisation.

The sea-change prompted Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew to visit us last week. What he said publicly is well-reported. What he said in private, incisive or otherwise, remains private and is much more vital for good KL-Singapore relations.

Lee Kuan Yew has said nothing, not even given a hint, that to move forward we should change the vital ground rules for Malaysian politics. He knows what will happen if any one group tries to gel a nation out of diversity in 43 years instead of 300 years.

What seems of great interest to him and Singapore is the resulting portrayal of the political mobilisation and who will lead the nation's anchor component, and about the emergence of new bumiputera leaders in their early thirties on either side of the Malay divide who are credible, clean of money politics, the ideas men and women rather than business people. They must not only be credible and clean but perceived to be so.

None of the basic factors that made Malaysia what it is today has changed nor can it be discarded. Indeed, it has even made discussion on the subject deadly dangerous as a result of tactless remarks and the passing of resolutions which can never be implemented anyway.

I agree with moderate voices on all sides that the special rights and privileges of the Malay-bumiputeras and the Chinese mother tongue and other fundamental rights are entrenched in the Constitution for political realism: no lasting harmony, and hence prosperity, can exist and be sustained in a nation where the definitive race is disadvantaged.

And for those who cannot understand this truism, I quote an editorial in The Sun on Sunday, "... May 13 (1969) remains a searing lesson in the practical value of ensuring social justice. It was no surprise then that remarks by a businessman and the 17-point reform demands of certain Chinese groups provoked a strident response from 13 Malay-based organisations."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has calmed the restive Malays by reiterating for the hundredth time that the Government (and he, personally) will not step backward. Translation: the Social Contract stays. The Contract has sustained peace, given prosperity and enriched both Malay-bumiputeras and other Malaysians, the Chinese in particular. Further callous remarks will only make things worse. The matter of Malay privileges and Chinese language are already set in stone.

So, I ask those who keep harping on these settled and entrenched issues to cease forthwith or in future from tempting trouble. As The Sun says - Let's cool it, please before things become untenable.

I appeal to the Malay-bumiputeras to be less emotional. Equip yourselves for k-economy and prepare to meet the harsh realities of globalisation. If you do not want to be constantly belittled "in their own land", the cure is very simple: consolidate your political power, otherwise you are destined to be "a little and an irritant race". Unless you are strong in every sense (like the Singaporean majority), a particular group of people will make their demands based on their terms as they have already dictated the terms in commerce and industry.

The Star says, "The youthful and new Menteri Besar-designate of Selangor Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo, (35) who will be sworn into office on Thursday, answered sensitive questions like a professional." Good for him.

He told the media that Umno and he would defend the Malay special status "even if it means having to make great sacrifices". And he represents not by any means the old guard, rather the contemporary young Malay-bumiputeras. He has, if anyone doubts, reflected the feeling of his contemporaries. Translation: Discontinuity is out and will be resisted.

In this one area, I do not believe that either horizontal or vertical change will take place, given the increasingly complex realities of our politics and what's happening in neighbouring countries.

Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo should do well in Selangor politics though he is no Lee Kuan Yew or Tun Razak. If he can outperform his contemporaries now at the helm of the state government, Dr Khir is the man to watch, and there is good reason he will be somebody big in Malaysian politics on condition that he scrupulously follows the advice of Dr Mahathir - that he remains amanah, bersih dan cekap.

Malaysia will continue to prosper as long as we continue to discourage the development of group or racial consciousness in individuals within our melting pot.

It only intensifies the cleavage and may, in the long term, promote disharmony.

We have been able to curb this danger even though we are very much a fragmented society in which primordial sentiments remain strong.

No one important or influential is courageous enough, beyond a point, to help tear down this wall of division. Will David Chua (the man who sparked the row) have enough faith to tell the likes of him that there is something more important than to question - no matter how well-intended - a settled issue via a foreign journal?

Some people obviously have not learned how explosive race relations can become when confidential discussions in Mapen are leaked out. What is the need for racial posturing?

Other Malaysians need to remember that the posturing on meritocracy at this juncture is unjustified, unwarranted and callous. The Malay-bumiputeras have rightly shown, even when they are weak and vulnerable, they can respond quickly. Enough is enough. All sides must stop jingoistic posturing.

I am a senior member of Mapen II (having served in the original Mapen) representing the ruling Umno. I did not reveal to a foreign magazine sensitive discussions because to do so would have breached the confidentiality of sensitive matters. Each group has its side of the story to tell. I am glad that Indians - who had more reasons to be unhappy than the other group - have kept their cool.

They are supportive of what the Government is striving to do and I am sure each will get what each needs which may not be all what it cherishes. Not even Malay-bumiputeras get everything they ask for. The Government has

got it about right when all sides are complaining.

As Malaysia develops, the bumiputeras will master what is crucial for a modern race to survive, otherwise they are as good as finished. But before that happens, there would always be some friction and discomfort, a small price to pay for peace and prosperity and progress.

Meanwhile, I ask all Malaysians to accept the present political arrangements unreservedly. Let's make no mistake, this was what the high priest of racial harmony and the founding father of this nation, Tunku Abdul Rahman, bequeathed to us. So stop whining.

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