

02/09/2000

The true spirit of patriotism

IT is significant that the 43rd National Day celebrations see a new and higher level of maturity among Malaysians from all walks of life that acknowledges not only social and political paradox but transcends political affiliations.

This is as it should be. Such show of national pride is, arguably, symbolic. But symbols do matter and should be seen in good faith.

Indeed, good faith is absolutely indispensable in a multi-racial country like Malaysia. It would be disastrous for our national unity if every word and phrase uttered, every deed done and every engagement with a national event and cause to be prejudiced by bad faith, cynicism and distrust.

Keragaman Malaysia sums it all up. Its emotive content strikes a chord in all of us but it is not a political ploy. Patriotism and love for the motherland must prevail above everything else, including racial, religious and political divide. The ideology of pragmatism, as reflected in the Rukun Negara, and our unity should not be violated by the demons of racial and religious bigotry.

The political realism and pragmatism that contributed to the constitutional framework for our national political life must be recognised and adhered to. The demands made by Suqoi is one example where such realism and pragmatism were momentarily forgotten. The tensions briefly created reinforce the fact that any political stance and demand must be guided by internally consistent principles, as found in the Constitution, and not on the expediency of the moment.

Gusts and tempests are around us, ready to turn the country into a turbulent sea and thus, each and every Malaysian must display moral restraints and inner resistance so that we will not succumb to extremists who indulge in politics of hate, making inflammatory statements and stirring racial sentiments. As said by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, inciting hatred against others in order to gain support for oneself is like playing with fire.

Lest such statement be regarded as a form of political repression, as is the tendency of foreign political analysts, it must be borne in mind that dissent, as long as it is within the orbit of legality, has always been allowed in this country. The crux of Dr Mahathir's message is simple - he favours politics as practical morality, as a service to the truth and as means for the realisation of a higher and total form of Malaysia's development and civilization.

That competing political parties with different ideologies could be together on one platform to celebrate National Day speaks for the prevailing spirit of patriotism and the country's consensual tradition on the common good. Those possessed with mother-of-all cynicism may regard such show of unity as a mere act or sandiwara.

But we trust this is not the case. The Opposition's stand on certain issues has oscillated between delinquency and plain cussedness but at the end of the day they, too, realised that they have a stake in ensuring that patriotism is manifested in word and in deed and kept alive as the guiding force in the on-going process of nation-building.

This is no time for Machiavellian manoeuvres. It is time for reconciliation to Rukun Negara principles and constitutional dictates, for statesmanship and conscientious action and, above all, for political sobriety and wisdom.

(END)