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Vital ground rules of politics will be preserved

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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 bilateral relations.

As I discern it, Lee Kuan Yew has said nothing, not even a hint, that to move forward we should change the vital ground rules of Malaysian politics. He knows what could happen had any one group tried 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 man and woman rather than business persons. 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 a certain 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 fundamentals 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 yesterday's Sun, "... May 13 (1969) remains a searing lesson in the practical value of ensuring social justice. It was no surprise then that remarks by businessmen and the 17-point reform demands of certain Chinese groups provoked a strident response from 13 Malay-based organisations."

The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has calmed the restive Malays by reiterating for the hundredth time that the Government (nor 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 above discussion as they are already set in stone.

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

I do not claim even to have the pretensions of futurologists. However, I can say this: that what was said last week is not good for inter-racial and inter-religious harmony. Even the real "dangerous man" - Haji Hadi Awang - has come out in support of the Malay special status and privileges. The lessons of yesteryears should reinforce everyone's commitment to status quo or risk everything.

Let us preserve the generally tolerant Malaysian leadership. One last word. The Malay special status remains "inviolable" says an editorial in The New Sunday Times.

To the Malay-Bumiputeras I appeal to them to be less emotional. Equip

yourselves with k-economy and prepare to meet harsh realities of globalisation. If you do not want to be constantly belittled "in your own land", the cure is very simple: consolidate your political power, otherwise you are destined to be "a little and an irritant race". Unless they 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. For my appraisal of the young chief executive officer (CEO) of Selangor Inc, please read yesterday's *Mingguan Malaysia*.

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 guards, rather the contemporary young Malay-Bumiputera. 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 governments, Dr K is the man to watch, and there is good reason he will be somebody big in Malaysian politics if he scrupulously follows the advice of Dr Mahathir - that he remains "amanah, bersih dan cekap".

Malaysia will continue to prosper if the development of group or racial consciousness in individuals within our melting pot is discouraged because it means building an impediment for the birth of bangsa Malaysia.

It only intensifies the cleavage within the melting pot and may, in the long term, promote racial 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, maybe up to 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 in life 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 the National Economic Consultative Council (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, even when they are weak and vulnerable, responded quickly. Enough is enough. All sides must stop jingoistic posturing and restore harmony by leaving things as they are.

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. I am glad that the 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 are 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, prosperity and progress.

Meanwhile, I call on 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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