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Imperative for all to co-exist in unity

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THE subject of unity in a multi-racial nation is undoubtedly the focus of attention in the wake of various comments made recently by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other eminent personalities on the significance of unity.

When addressing a people's get-together in Johor, Dr Mahathir aptly described unity as a priceless gift that must be preserved by all Malaysians in our multi-racial country. Unity, he added, should be cherished and treasured by all.

Abdullah urged Malaysians not to give up on the dream of a Bangsa Malaysia (the Malaysian race) when declaring open a National Unity Convention. They should work towards that objective with a sense of commitment and a willingness to make sacrifices.

The Malaysian Human Rights Commission chairman Tan Sri Musa Hitam called for a national-level consultative council to deliberate on issues and problems pertaining to national unity when chairing the Women's Institute of Management's national unity round-table recently.

Musa's proposal was shared by veteran politician Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie who said such a consultative body, similar to that formed after the 1969 racial riots, would address the issue of unity in a practical way. Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik proposed a race relations tribunal.

All of these pronouncements indicate that this is a question high on the minds of the movers and shakers.

During his speech, Musa pointed out that views and proposals from all strata of society should be represented, heard, argued or deliberated behind closed doors on issues pertaining to unity.

I am glad to note so much interest in the subject. This is as it should be. There is no subject more important to the success of our multi-racial nation and it is good to see so many eminent personalities showing their concern.

At a time when communal strife besets other multi-racial countries, it is imperative that all Malaysians co-exist in harmony and unity.

The events in Afghanistan, for example, serve as a constant reminder to all Malaysians to uphold moderation, tolerance and mutual respect.

The destruction of pre-Islamic Buddha statues by the Taliban regime, and the more recent directive that all non-Muslims wear tags stating their religion are but two examples of a destructive divisiveness.

Such acts imply a basic intolerance and disrespect for others.

Unity is indeed an invaluable gift but it must not be taken for granted. It has to be zealously guarded and protected.

Every Malaysian should be fully committed to harmony and unity and work relentlessly to promote peace, harmony and unity. These are commodities much needed in every part of the world and Malaysia is no exception.

But to ensure it we need more inter- and intra-racial activities to promote greater interaction at the grass roots level.

Much was said at the recent two-day national unity convention but at the end of the day much remains to be done. It is a continuous process needing the highest priority.

The work should begin in schools, starting from kindergarten, and on to primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of learning.

The Education Ministry should expand the scope of the "moral" subjects to incorporate lessons on unity and racial harmony.

The call by Abdullah to all Malaysians to work and build a united Malaysian race is something worth pursuing although it is not going to be easy. What is important is for Malaysians to put aside fear, distrust and prejudices for the common good of all.

It is a question of attitude. Unity comes from within oneself and from the heart. It cannot be achieved by force or through legislation.

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