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Marginalised across the Causeway

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I REFER to Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's statement on Singapore Malays (NST, Jan 24).

It is reassuring to note the tremendous strides, backed by statistics, made by the Malays in the island state. The figures shown were from 1990, about the time Goh became Prime Minister. It seems Singapore Malays have much to thank him for.

In this case, however, facts and figures need to be analysed, explained and put into broader perspective, to give them a human face, if you like. Without them, statistics tend to be equivocal. Further, other relevant matters were missing. Perhaps, in the circumstances, Goh did not have the time to elaborate.

For instance, it was stated that last year 23 per cent of Singapore Malay workers held administrative, managerial, professional, technical and related jobs, while the figure for Malaysian Malays was 16 per cent in 1998.

I'm not sure if Goh was referring to the private sector in both countries. In the public sector, the percentage in Malaysia is definitely more than 16 per cent, perhaps even more than 60 per cent. I should know, I was a government officer for 20 years.

If I am right, perhaps Goh or anyone else could tell us the percentage of Singapore Malays at the higher level, in the public sector, including those in the armed forces, the police and diplomatic service.

I wonder how many Malays there are in the Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Oh yes, he has conspicuously left out the statistics or percentage of Malays in the security forces and the police, (excluding airport and harbour board police).

Not many perhaps. Maybe there are not qualified, in spite of, "one out of four Singapore Malay workers possessed upper secondary or higher qualifications last year".

I am not clear when he said, "The percentage entering university has increased by almost 1.5 times from 2.9 per cent to 4.2 per cent. The total number of Malay university graduates has increased by more than 3.5 times".

Does the percentage relate to total university intake or total Malay population of about 400,000? If the former, it is not a big deal. Out of 100 students taken into university only about four are Malays. If the latter, namely 16 students, it is still not worth mentioning. It merely tallies with the total Singapore Malay population of about 15 per cent.

Even if the facts and figures were given in proper perspective, just what is the definition of a "Malay" in Singapore?

I have met Singaporeans who are similar to but not quite Malay, with Christian names and who could not speak a word of Malay. Instead they spoke pidgin English, which made me think at first they were from the Philippines. Just what is this idea of the Malay hybrid culture in Singapore? This is worse than being marginalised.

We in Malaysia associate Malays with Islam and the Malay language, the lingua franca of the Malay Archipelago. I can accept a Malay who is Christian. There are many of them in Indonesia. They speak Bahasa Indonesia, which is Malay based.

But a Malay Christian who cannot speak Malay but only pidgin English is

quite another matter. They simply unnerve me.

By commission or omission, the Singapore authority appears to be encouraging the creation of this cross-Frankenstein race. Are we then to understand the statistics quoted by Goh to include this type of adherents, who are considered Malays for statistical purposes and perhaps quite accommodating to the powers that be?

I believe this is the unkindest cut of all. It destroys the essence of the Malay identity, balance and harmony. Most likely, this is the spectre that is haunting the Malays in Malaysia.

Imagine, in Singapore, where the Utusan Melayu was founded, the Asas 50 inaugurated and the land of the Babas and Nyonyas, Malay is no longer spoken even by the Malays. What a mockery. And for heavens sake, please speak and write proper English, not some pidgin roadside sing-song.

During the British colonial era, religion or specifically Islam was left to the Islamic authority. Marriages between Muslims and subsequent registration were carried out by the then religious department.

In Islam, the akad, that is, the offer and acceptance, duly witnessed and conducted by a religious official is vital. Without it there is no marriage. The registration is secondary.

Currently, in Singapore what matters is the civil registration, which accords recognition to the marriage. The akad need not necessarily follow the registration.

Hence, there are many Muslims who are not married in the eyes of Islam living together and having children. Marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims too are quite liberal. If that is not marginalisation of the Malays I don't know what is.

Indeed, some time ago the Malays in Singapore and, perhaps indirectly, the Malays in Malaysia, were the butt of silly jokes on the Internet. By the time the Singapore authorities stopped them, the harm was done. It merely goes to reflect the deep, dark, in-built, psyche of Singaporeans against the Malays in general.

Thus, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad clobbered CLOB with a maestro's touch, a Singaporean questioned whether this was an IQ problem on the part of Malaysia. It was an IQ problem. The Singaporean IQ, obviously.

There is a lesson in all this for the Malays in Malaysia, if not those in Singapore. Weakness, either in numbers, economy, politics or plain disunity will be thoroughly and meticulously exploited by our enemies, and our friends. That is the order of life, the rule anywhere, at any given time in history.

The Malays are not an exception, with or without the National Development Policy. Affirmative action can only assist us along the way, not all the way.

We have to play our part in the bargain, to resolve that we succeed in every endeavour undertaken. Justification is strictly by results, not merely to satisfy others, but foremost to satisfy ourselves.

Indeed in this respect we should be thankful to Goh for reminding us Malays once again what might or could have been if ever we become disunited and weak in spirit and resolution. God forbid.