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Open hearts and minds

MALAYSIA'S development has progressed by leaps and bounds in the decades since it achieved independence, yet one thing that has endured the test of time amid the changes is Malaysians' love of peace and harmony. It was the spirit of muhibbah that drew the different communities together then, on the understanding of all for one and one for all, and the spirit to build a nation that prevailed then has been nurtured through the years.

The pulse of such a tacit understanding and tolerance is reflected in the individual open house festive celebrations of different faiths, a long-standing practice which has fostered social integration and respect for one another. Tradition dies hard, even in the midst of progress and changing lifestyles. And it is back to basics for us as we continue in our efforts to build a united Malaysia and to foster greater understanding and co-operation.

The national open house celebrations of the six major religious and cultural festivals in the country is a laudable move to bring together people from all walks of life - both Malaysians and foreign tourists - to interact under one roof. Such a celebration, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the launch of the national-level Chinese New Year open house in Penang on Sunday, is proof of the prevailing spirit of unity among all Malaysians.

In opening our doors to friends, we open our hearts and minds as well. We accept them with open arms, in the knowledge that they respect our culture and customs in setting foot in our house. There are bound to be differences in viewpoints among individuals and communities at one time or another but if we make an effort to understand one another better and uphold the spirit of unity, the occasional cracks in the bond of friendship can always be cemented.

Good sense will ultimately prevail among those who believe in cultivating a love for kin and mankind. And it is in adopting an open attitude and outlook that we can continue to nurture greater affinity and close relationships. As we sow the seeds of friendship, so too should we be mindful that differing faiths and cultural make-up are no barrier to unity.

Malaysia's multi-ethnic background makes it unique, for the simple reason that its people have lived in peace and prosperity for years, cognisant of the need for stability and harmony. The fact that the festive celebrations of the major communities are gazetted public holidays is proof of the administration's recognition of the importance of each and every Malaysian to nation-building, irrespective of race or creed.

As we strive to achieve the nation's aspirations within the shortest time possible, building upon the cohesive fabric of tolerance and camaraderie, we have to bear in mind that our dreams cannot materialise if we do not possess the farsightedness and down-to-earth rationale to shape them into reality.

We can only partake of the fruits of our labour if we stand united. We must be willing to set aside differences that can strain the bond we have created to knit us all as one nation. Destiny is but a matter of choice.

In a multi-ethnic nation, moderation is the trapeze act that is hard to balance and yet, not so difficult if we tell ourselves that moderation is the silken string running through the chain of all virtues. As Malaysians revel in the fun and festive gaiety quintessential to all festivals, let

us not forget that the hand that gives, gathers.  
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