

Dr M's Antarctic vision

SUN 17 FEB 2002

Twenty years ago, Mahathir spearheaded a campaign to make it a world heritage

AFTER THOUGHT

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The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, sent his Chinese New Year greetings last week from the Antarctica. This was the rare occasion that the Prime Minister missed the Chinese New Year. He will also not be around to celebrate Hari Raya Haji on Feb 23.

In his message from the frozen continent, the Prime Minister urged Malaysians to use the occasion to strengthen ties.

Dr Mahathir's visit to the Antarctica sealed his two-decade old campaign to make the continent the heritage of mankind.

It is pardonable if not many people are aware of this. In fact, when he made the call at the UN General Assembly in September 1982, many people thought he was off his rocker and wondered what interest and what rights a small tropical nation like Malaysia had in the Antarctica. Very few people took notice of his call, including a wide cross-section of the Malaysian media.

I remember the then Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie complaining about the Malaysian journalists covering the address in New York for missing an important point.

enough people are involved in cross-cultural activities, starting with social visits during festive occasions like Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali.

Most Malaysians are still confined to their cultural and ethnic groups. To them, the Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali holidays are occasions to "*balik*

made possible by the twice monthly extended weekends.

The exodus from Kuala Lumpur during last week's long holiday was so nearly complete that those mindless enough to stay back had the entire city to themselves, barring the traffic lights of course.

It is common these days for

a distinct feeling that, despite the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and the promise of an exciting performance by a Beijing Shaolin troupe, some key MCA leaders were missing from the open house. Maybe they were holding their own open houses elsewhere.

munication skills, resulting in our young people being unable to engage easily in cross-cultural activities.

ON the raging issue of illegal immigrants, it is unfortunate that instead of concentrating our efforts on overcoming it, we seem to be blaming each other.

Instead of helping the authorities in their efforts to screen, detain and deport the wayward immigrants, some segments of the local media are highlighting the accusations of Indonesian officials against our law enforcement agencies.

Instead of standing united in overcoming the problem, we appear to be allowing the issue to tear us apart. Clearly the way we handled the issue in the past is coming back to haunt us.

A poorly managed immigration process and the employment of foreign workers had caused problems to so many countries in the past. We should learn from their experiences.

I share the view of reader S.C. Chan of Sawarak who, in his e-mail, wrote: "There are basically two issues. The first is although we all want Malaysia to become an industrialised nation, we must not be over-dependent on foreign workers.

"The second is we must put a

Dr Mahathir was barely two years in office and Ghazali, despite his fierce rivalry with the Prime Minister for the top job, stayed on as his Foreign Minister.

Speaking on the subject of the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea and Antarctica, the Prime Minister urged that all the unclaimed wealth of this earth, more so of the Antarctica, be regarded as the common heritage of all nations.

Of course fewer still realised that the call was part and parcel of Dr Mahathir's formative foreign policy doctrine spearheaded by his shocking Buy British Last and Look East Policies, and his boycott of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Melbourne.

Many things had happened since then. Nations which are signatories to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty had, in 1991, signed an additional instrument called the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic.

AS for the Prime Minister's call for Malaysians to use the Chinese New Year celebration to strengthen ties, I often wonder if

kampung" or to go on a vacation.

Thanks to the explosion of motor vehicle ownership and the improvement in the public transportation services, *balik kampung* has become a wholesale exodus from towns and cities.

Gone are the days when neighbours were indeed neighbourly

So much so that neighbours do not even spare time to wish each other or to exchange *ketupat* and *kuih bakul*. Gone are the days when neighbours were indeed neighbourly.

It would seem that *balik kampung* is undermining our efforts to bring Malaysians together. Instead it appears to be tearing them apart.

This is being made worse by the festival holidays getting longer and longer - a situation

faulty services like dead traffic lights, leaking pipes and overflowing sewers to be left unattended during the extended weekends and public holidays.

Even the talking computer at the Kuala Lumpur City Hall, on occasion, refused to respond to callers reporting faulty traffic lights.

It would seem that in addition to crusading against potholes, the new Kuala Lumpur mayor must pay greater attention to other ordinary things that make the City a better place to live, like the traffic lights, broken mains, uncollected garbage and old vehicles abandoned by the roadside.

WHETHER they are Hari Raya, Chinese New Year or Deepavali open houses, you tend to meet the same people. Only those of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers tend to attract a more varied crowd.

Still I am pleased to note that the MCA's and Gerakan's Chinese New Year open houses in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday were well attended by Malaysians of various races and walks of life.

I daren't say for sure, but I have

It is highly commendable that the Government, via the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism and the various state governments, is organising large-scale open houses to celebrate the various festive

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occasions.

Still, getting together for a big *makan*, song and dance will not amount to much if Malaysians of various races insist on keeping to their communal groups instead of mixing freely.

Something must be fundamentally wrong with our multi-racial society when even school children and university students seem not to be mixing freely in and out of school or campus.

Perhaps we stress so much on academic performance that not enough attention is given to com-

cap on the number of foreign workers, say no more than 5% of our population - unless there is a political aim on the part of some people to achieve numerical superiority by race. But this could backfire.

"Recent events have shown that when it comes to the crunch, Indonesians will always be Indonesians, as the Filipinos will always be Filipinos, Thais will be Thais and Singaporeans, Singaporeans.

"When it comes to matters of protecting our sovereignty and integrity, ultimately we can only be dependent on our own people - the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Dayak, Kadazandusun, etc who share the same nationality and live and work together every day."

As for the recent Negri Sembilan incident, I was told by a senior police officer that the unruly behaviour of foreign workers employed by the Nilai-based Taiwanese company was not new.

It seems that they had, for years, been showing signs of belligerence towards law enforcement officers. Their hostels were "out of bounds" to these officers.

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