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Let's come together as one

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A COUPLE of years from now, youths will be taking over the reins of this country. When that happens, we want you to hand over a Malaysia that is still safe, both economically and politically stable and where the rakyat live in peace and harmony.

Our aim would be to make this country better in every sense. But for us to do this, we need to start laying the groundwork now, to ensure that Malaysians are one, in spirit, heart and soul.

To commemorate the country's resilience and success over the past 45 years, tomorrow, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, we will celebrate the "One Nation, We Care" event at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur.

This event is expected to see a congregation of more than 100,000 people. A strong show of numbers indeed.

But really, what is our understanding of One Nation? Have we achieved it or are we still far from realising this status? If so, what should we do? Several youths comment.

THE real meaning of "One Nation" is where every citizen is proud to say she or he is Malaysian rather than just Chinese, Indian or Malay. But until today, I see my friends gather in groups of their own races.

We are tolerant of each other. But things have to go deeper than this if we want to maintain harmony and stability. For instance, in religion, we must make an effort to understand each other's faith.

We must also be able to talk freely about the problems we are facing without fearing any repercussions. Of course, all this has to be done in a diplomatic, peaceful way.

For instance, the issue of meritocracy. It was a very sensitive subject before, but now, it's being discussed openly. This is a positive step towards One-Nationness. It may take some time, but gradually, we'll get there.

And it's good that the political and economic situation here is strong and that allows for these changes. - Low Yew Wai, 21, accountancy student

I DO not think that we have truly achieved this "One Nation" status yet because racial integration could be improved. Schools should not only teach students to be respectful of each other's race but also explain WHY they should respect each other's faiths.

This is a good way to mould a great nation that will think and move as one. Education is the way to go. - Jihan Yahya, 19, advertising and multimedia student

BEING a Malay, I personally feel that we have been spoilt with all kinds of special rights. From cheaper houses (Bumis get to enjoy a 10 per cent) to easier university access, we have been spoonfed all the way.

These special rights should be gradually taken away so that we can become more competitive and contribute to the development of this country.

My idea of "One Nation" is where everybody lives competitively, with an equal chance at success. - Fara Dina, 18, civil engineering student

THE "One Nation, We Care" celebration could not have come at a better time. I feel that we need to be reminded of the success Malaysia has enjoyed over the past 45 years.

Sometimes, people like me, the so-called younger generation, seem to take everything for granted.

I know that the comfortable living my family enjoys now is a result of the opportunities the Government has created for the rakyat.

However, the level of religious tolerance and racial understanding we experience today can be improved.

The Kampung Medan incident not too long ago, where there were clashes between the Malays and Indians, indicate that tolerance only exists at certain levels of society.

It is an indication that things might not be all bright and cheery after all. And while we have overcome that immediate problem, shouldn't there be other precautionary measures taken to ensure that a similar incident would never occur again?

Sometimes, it is the standard of living that affects a certain race. Indians are some of the poorest people here. Sometimes, it is because of complacency. They need to strive harder and come up in life. - Tina Kabitha Das, 18, American degree programme

I GET annoyed when I see a job advertisement that reads "Chinese only," or even "Chinese-speaking clerk wanted". And I have come across many such ads in departmental stores and complexes, business firms, even banks and clinics!

Why can't the notice just read. 'Clerk wanted?'

Do you know that in Canada for instance, it's wrong even to put up a job ad that reads "Female only"? Both are forms of discrimination.

As for the issue of wanting only Chinese-speaking staff, if you're implying that it's because you need a person who's proficient in Mandarin or Cantonese and that you have many Chinese clients, don't you think both the management and customer should know at least conversational Bahasa Melayu?

How long have we been living in Malaysia for God's sake?

I also feel that the distribution of wealth is still very uneven, which was why the New Economic Policy was set up in the first place ~~to~~ to rectify this problem.

Obviously, the Chinese are still a lot more economically well off than any other race in Malaysia.

On the other side of the coin, the NEP has made a lot of non-Bumiputeras unhappy. Actually, we also have Bumiputeras who are unhappy with this development.

Some say the NEP has helped the wrong set of Bumis - the well off - to get richer, and the ones who really need help have been sidelined.

Can you imagine how a Chinese or Indian student feels when he or she obtains better results but a Malay with poor results secures a place at the university instead.

Then the Chinese and Indian would have to apply to study in Form Six which is more difficult or privately, which would be extremely expensive.

Of course there would be a measure of bitterness here. And do you think this feeling would go away so easily?

It's really not easy to manage a multiracial, plural society like ours. Our leaders may mean well when they try to manage this country but inevitably one group will feel left out of this equation.

Sadly, the NEP has accentuated this. But at the same time, we also know that the Chinese economy in this country is the most successful.

We must recognise the good intentions of the Government and that it can't please everyone. Also, I guess, each group has a right to quibble about something that they feel is unjust.

Maybe, the only way to remedy this is for all Malaysians to become more tolerant of each other, and respect one another. - Farhana Noor Abdul Hamid, 21, a bio-medical science student.

Malays should start bucking up and not just take things for granted or

rely on the Government's assistance all the time.

I think most Chinese are naturally hardworking and because of the current situation and quotas, they have become even more hardworking. Good for them!

As for the Malays? They just need to work harder. Spoon-feeding is no good for anyone.

To truly be called One Nation, we need to resolve all these problems. It won't harm the Malays to also learn Mandarin and Tamil. We live in a multiracial society. Why should only the Chinese and Indians be made to learn Bahasa Melayu? Malays should also learn their languages.

It may be difficult initially but it would only work to our advantage if we knew more languages. It would help us forge closer ties with each other.

Also, look at the Chinese in China, many are now importing English lecturers and teachers to learn the language. China is expected to become the new biggest world economy in a few years' time, replacing the US.

Shouldn't all Malaysians be ready for this?

Also, I have never believed in national-type schools. I think they encourage segregation behind closed doors. The same goes for boarding schools with mostly Malays. How will they interact well with the other races when they go out into the world? Of course they will move around with their own kind! - Faaiz Mohd Pauzi, 22, self employed.

"MY understanding of "One Nation" is that every Malaysian is treated equally, has equal rights and enjoys a similar lifestyle. One nation means you will not be judged by your colour, race or religion.

This will then lead to an equal platform for everybody to stand on, a platform where wealth and knowledge can be divided equally. - Nicholas Kok, 20, mass communications student

HOW do we get to achieve One Nation status? Firstly, Malaysians need to start being nicer to one another. I hate it when I see people being extra nice to foreigners but are extremely rude to locals.

We need to be genuinely nice to each other. And I believe in the "Malaysia Boleh" tagline. Just look at the way we survived the financial crisis when the rest of Asia crumbled. That was the true Malaysian spirit. - Tan Zin Hoe, 18, American degree programme

THE "One Nation" I believe in is when there is an equal standard for all Malaysians, a graft-free administration and a really stable political scenario. We have to develop in every sense, not just with mega projects and major highways but also individually. - Rishi Menon, 18, American degree programme

MALAYSIA, today, is like a large roll of popiah. It's all nicely rolled-up and packaged but you only know the real taste once you tried the thing. What I am getting at is, on the surface everything seems fine and dandy but on the inside, something else may be brewing.

People in this country seem to love to talk. The only problem is nothing is done openly, so there is dissatisfaction. - Andrew Lee, 18, American degree programme

* The One Nation, We Care celebration will be held tomorrow at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium at 6pm. Entrance is free. Top local artistes will be performing live and there will also be a grand lucky draw, where prizes include a Perdana V6 and a condominium.