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One collective will for unity

WE need to forget our differences and emphasise what we have in common, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the unity gathering at the Bukit Jalil stadium over the weekend.

Unfortunately, we often forget to erase our differences. Our silent thoughts about the "otherness" of the Other based on colour, creed, class and even gender divide us. These invisible barriers we dismantle only too briefly at work, school and public places. How many of us have forgotten we are one? Yet how could we deny our oneness as a Bangsa Malaysia. It is futile to understand Malaysian art, culture, music, literature, food and politics without seeing the extensive interactions across barriers of race, culture and religion.

Unity is the responsibility of all - this is the oft-repeated message of our national leaders. If we tire of listening to it, chances are we have taken our unity for granted. A complacency that makes us blind to the fact that a fragile social cohesion makes it difficult for the Government and the people to develop the nation. We need to free ourselves from the horrendously mistaken perception that no further efforts are necessary to strengthen unity.

There must be a national resolve to preserve unity. The task of preserving unity is not only the duty of the Barisan Nasional-led Government but also the Opposition, the intellectual community, the mass media and the public. However, this will not happen without civic consciousness, proper discussion and a free but responsible flow of information. If perverted facts become the basis of debate, as is the case in many opposition fora, only the wrong conclusions will be arrived at. Although Pas seems to distance itself from the militant Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, the fact remains these zealots shared Pas' goal of theocracy and therein lies the lesson: a misguided pack of followers cannot be properly led.

This is the moment for shedding the legendary Malaysian tidak-apa attitude. Since the malignant ideology of militancy wears the garb of religiosity, many people do not speak up against it. This must change. Or we will soon be swamped by an exclusivist and anti-pluralist ideology in which reason, tolerance and respect for differences can have no place.

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