

29/09/2002

Sacrifices a part of life

Appa

DEAR Son,

I knew it. I was expecting such an answer from you. You don't have any hope of integration of the races until politicians and religious leaders change their mindset. Sometimes you are too much of a cynic. Do you really think politicians are a stumbling block to unity and integration?

You accuse them of making lovely speeches about the need for racial unity in front of a multi-racial crowd but away from the media and to their own party members, they preach parochialism. And you say many ministers are among the culprits.

You also think we have too many bigotted officials in important posts in the civil service to allow us hope of true racial unity in the near future. In fact, you feel, things might even get worse.

I wouldn't be as pessimistic as you. As I said in my earlier letter, if we look around us, we can surely see that we are much better off than many other countries. Even in the developed nations, there is still racial discrimination and disunity. A British Government report in December 2001 after riots broke out between Asians and whites in the northern English towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford concluded that Britain was overwhelmingly white and hostile. Of the 659 seats in Parliament, only about 12 MPs are non-white.

You have read reports about racial discrimination in the US and elsewhere. But before you jump at me, let me assure you that I don't think that is any excuse for racial discrimination in Malaysia. Although we have problems and there is discrimination, tolerance exists. And this will help pull us through, as will moderate leadership at the helm.

In his National Day message aired over radio and television, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysians would not continue to enjoy peace and harmony if small issues were exaggerated. I know, some of you younger people may ask why Dr Mahathir goes on and on about the need for racial and religious tolerance. The answer is simple: It is better to prevent a conflict than try to repair the damage done. Let us view the PM's reminders this way: he is trying to sell us prevention policies. There is a little price to pay, but it will go towards helping ensure a better future. That is why Dr Mahathir asked Malaysians, in the same message, to be prepared to offer a small sacrifice to ensure continued harmony.

Sacrifices are part of life.

Do you remember the five great daily sacrifices that every Hindu is enjoined to make? In case you have forgotten, let me refresh your memory. They are Deva Yaagam (sacrifice to God through prayer and good deeds); Rishi Yaagam (sacrifice to the rishis or sages by emulating them and making it a point to learn something useful everyday); Pitru Yaagam (sacrifice to our elders and ancestors through prayer and saying thanks for their guidance, advice and love); Manusya Yaagam (sacrifice to our fellow men through showing love, respect, understanding and kindness) and Bhoota Yaagam (sacrifice to all living beings by not hurting any living being and feeding insects, birds and animals).

These are known as the Pancha Maha Yaagam or Five Great Sacrifices. Unfortunately, only a handful perform the Pancha Maha Yaagam. Many don't even know about it.

Do you remember your grandmother telling you how her father would say a

silent prayer before eating a meal and then clasp a handful of the food and put it outside the house for the birds and insects to eat? This is an example of Bhoota Yaagam. I hope you are practising the Pancha Maha Yaagam. If not, please do so.

Coming back to the sacrifice that Dr Mahathir was talking about, we are each responsible for making this a safer country, one where harmony prevails. We don't have to sacrifice money or time. All we have to do is respect everyone as a human being. We are required to show understanding and be sensitive to other people's feelings. We must learn to respect, if not appreciate, other cultures and religions.

It is also our duty to elect conscientious, moderate and broad-minded leaders and support those who encourage feedback and even dissenting opinions. We have to nurture a culture of being informed about what happens around us: what politicians are up to; whether they say what they mean and do what they say.

God bless you,

Appa

Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue; and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath.

- Mary Wollstonecraft