

12 SEP 2003

Focus-Yuppies

MERDEKA SPIRIT SETS YUPPIES TO EYE HIGHER GOALS

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KUALA LUMPUR: This year's National Day has been a memorable one for many Malaysians who seem to suddenly realise what 46 years of independence mean to the country they call "Home".

Be it because of the tagline "KeranaMu Malaysia" (Because of You Malaysia) or the fact that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is stepping down soon, the people, old and young, had turned up in huge numbers to join in the merry-making either participating in the National Day performances or being spectators.

Celebrations aside, many are now beginning to feel the meaning of independence through the developments and changes over the last two decades.

In particular, this year's Merdeka Day had quite an impact on a group of young Malay professionals, so much so that they organised a special pre-Merdeka night with Dr Mahathir as a "thank you" gesture for his vast contributions to the country. Malaysia has, under his leadership, evolved from an obscure nation to a rapidly developing country.

"The National Day slogan simply makes us more aware of our roles and purpose," says 29-year old Wan Azrain Wan Adnan, chairman of Young Malays Secretariat (YMS), an informal group aimed at promoting better interaction and cooperation among young people and leaders of the country as well as enhancing the political awareness of its "members".

The Aug 23 dinner in commemoration of the National Day, had been one of the group's efforts in stirring up enthusiasm among the young about their own professions, hence building a strong sense of patriotism along the way.

CREATING AWARENESS

"Young professionals do not really know what they want in life," reveals the 29-year-old accounting-cum-financial analyst, adding that by attending the dinner his friends got to hear personally "reminders" from Dr Mahathir, thus leading them to think seriously about doing something for the interests of others besides their own.

Stressing that such revelation is his own personal opinion, Wan Azrain feels that for young Malaysians to have a better direction in life, they need to change their present mindset, particularly in politics.

"I'm not saying that they should get seriously involved in politics but at least they should know and understand why certain moves or policies are being adopted or implemented by the government," he points out.

Wan Azrain says YMS, comprising Malay professionals under the age of 35, has held gatherings since early last year to keep abreast with the current issues. Their programmes include dialogue sessions with ministers and other leaders.

Azrudin Badruddin and Harrison Hassan, also pioneers of YMS, say the group's activities received such a good response that YMS now has close to 2,000 young Malay professionals who are actively networking among themselves.

What the group hopes to do now is to impart the knowledge they have gathered to their peers, not only on matters pertaining to politics and the struggles of the Malays but also other areas of concern to the young.

FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

"Many young professionals refuse to discuss political issues, for

instance, simply because they are not interested in politics and because they have the notion that the subject is best left to the politicians or left to those who want positions. It is wrong to just let matters in politics pass without attempting to know it," says Azrudin.

Politics do have an effect on the young, Azrudin adds, as an unstable political situation may indirectly affect the careers or professions of the young Malaysians.

Echoing Wan Azrain's sentiment over the need for the young to air their grouses through the right channel instead of staging demonstrations or pickets, Azrudin says they have formed this informal group to provide a forum for such purposes.

Harrison, who is also with Umno Youth, says the dialogue sessions have provided the young Malay professionals the chance to be heard.

"Through this programme, we have had the chance to air views, opinions, even criticism besides hearing first-hand the 'correct versions' of reasons behind certain government policies," he says.

CONTINUING STRUGGLES

Among the constant reminders from Dr Mahathir to young Malaysians today is the importance for the latter to prepare themselves through education, knowledge, skills, patience and the right values.

Dr Mahathir has said that after Malaysia gained independence in 1957, a lot more work needed to be done as aptly put forth in a poem he famously rendered, "Perjuangan Yang Belum Selesai" (A Struggle Yet To Be Completed).

While the YMS pledges to continue the struggles of the Malays, another group of young professionals known as PROMUDA hopes to organise more educational activities, not only for its members but for those even younger than members of the group.

PROMUDA's chairman Don Rahim says while young people under the age of 35 form more than half of all working adults in Malaysia today (a statistic the group derived from recent official statistics compiled by government agencies), there is no single collective organisation or forum that caters to the young professionals.

Contrary to the Malay-based YMS, PROMUDA members comprised multi-racial young professionals who also seek to see changes in the mindset of young Malaysians today.

WORLD-CLASS PROFESSIONALS

"Through our activities, we hope to create world-class Malaysian professionals who are skilled and psychologically liberated, with faith and confidence in themselves, and dedicated to the core values," Don once says.

Starting off in 1999 with a handful of individuals, PROMUDA has grown into an entity with about 5,000 members and subscribers who network among themselves via e-mail.

Through its "Embassy Series" PROMUDA, now a registered group, hopes to develop the leadership and diplomacy skills of young professionals.

"The Embassy Series provide opportunities for members to develop international awareness through first-hand interaction and constructive engagements with prominent representatives from the participating embassies," explains Don.

It is to complement the Lecture series it has organised, where topics include Realising Vision 2020, Nation Building and Globalisation. Among the speakers for this particular programme are the PM, ministers and presidents or chief executive officers (CEO) of corporate organisations.

PROMUDA's other prominent activities include Career Roadshow and it plans to launch soon a Career Guide series on TV, where speakers will be industry practitioners and perhaps government officers.

"One of the good things that has come out of these activities, is the fact that not only are other people learning something from us, we are learning something from them, too. Education is certainly vital to overcome the problems we face today and tomorrow," Don adds.

Will the nation be in the safe hands when these young professionals take over the helm? While both YMS and PROMUDA insist that they are not affiliated to any political group, they have set a higher goal for themselves and hopefully the nation.

As Wan Azrain aptly concludes, patriotism is not just about having the willingness to die for the country but also a willingness to protect the environment and take good care of the properties or amenities provided. --
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