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Diversity our best partner

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I WAS a baby when Malaya became a self-governing sovereign nation, thanks to Tengku (as he will be fondly remembered) and his colleagues. Life went on smoothly and primary school was fun.

I even enjoyed the war drills, although I did not fully understand why it was part of school. The school bell was expertly struck in such a way that its ringing alarm produced panic and an immediate urge to leave the classroom in hurried silence towards a monsoon drain, where we hid quietly. I used to hear the elders share grim memories of the Japanese occupation.

After the defeat of the Japanese Imperial Army and the surrender of Japan, Tengku and his colleagues from various ethnic groups braced themselves to gain independence for Malaya. A uniquely interwoven society of multicultural diversity built over many centuries became a sovereign nation.

It was a nation born of co-operation and friendship between its people and its leaders, and Tengku brought forth a "democracy to be enjoyed by all people of the nation".

There must be an effort to create a pictorial document that depicts their struggle for independence with the appropriate text wherever it is available, including Tengku's speeches and the subsequent efforts to preserve democracy.

Naturally, as a boy, I did not understand what democracy was or how it would govern a nation.

Of course, democracy as seen through a man's eyes is different from democracy as seen through a kampung boy's eyes. Today, I see democracy as the nurtured ambience for national prosperity. It is a crucible in which all Malaysians must work together in peace and genuine partnership to assert our nationhood.

It is the only nest that provides comfort and human dignity. It is an ideal that must be protected, preserved and celebrated and it must be celebrated at the slightest excuse.

Jan 31 was a defining moment for Malaysia when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that "Malaysians should be proud of their country for being recognised for its multicultural and multireligious diversity" and that "tolerance had made multicultural Malaysia a more interesting and culturally-dynamic country", and "Malaysians should protect and preserve their country's unique multicultural identity and tolerant culture".

Try walking through a bamboo forest or a sandalwood forest. The homogeneous vegetation and limited fauna can be boring compared to the diverse flora and fauna of an equatorial rain forest. It's the same with "homogeneity" in human culture. Our diversity is, in fact, interesting. Enjoy it and love it and use it to power our enterprise and creativity in