

10/03/2003

Let's teach the young goodwill and harmony

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FEB 8 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Malaysia's founding father, the late Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra.

It was indeed a fitting occasion to remember, especially for the post-Merdeka younger generation.

As acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi aptly put it: "I would like all Malaysians to remember the one man who planted the seeds of unity and harmony among us, which have blossomed into the unity that brings us together as one family."

Indeed, the most important legacy left by Tengku Abdul Rahman to the country was his fight for racial harmony and his determination to maintain it.

New Straits Times Press group editor-in-chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad has recognised that the Tengku had fought hard for racial harmony and unity, which was a condition imposed by the British for granting Malaya independence.

Despite his efforts, the May 13 tragedy caused by racial riots occurred, and it left a big wound in the heart of Bapa Malaysia.

But this should not negate his contribution and sacrifices as Bapa Malaysia. And there is no better way for Malaysians to show their appreciation of the contribution of the Tengku than by striving to achieve his wish of seeing a united, developed and prosperous Malaysia.

Malaysia's success and survival hinges much on the ability of its multi-racial community to live and work together as envisaged by the Tengku and other leaders of the past.

Paying tribute to Tengku Abdul Rahman on his 100th anniversary is all the more relevant because his platform in fostering unity became the bedrock for nation-building.

Malaysians are fortunate to have had leaders like the Tengku, who moulded an infant nation based on goodwill, understanding, tolerance and unity.

We must never take our unity for granted.

On the contrary, we should always be conscious of our duty and be sensitive to issues concerning harmony and unity.

In this connection, one cannot be unconcerned over the frank comments of both Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah on the issue of racial polarisation, which has begun to rear its ugly head.

It is undeniable that our society has become increasingly racially polarised in recent years and nowhere is it more evident than in our national education system.

These days, national schools are overwhelmingly Malay with a mere sprinkling of Chinese and Indians. Even if all the three races are in national schools, they do not interact much with one another. The same situation also exists in our public universities.

It is a daunting task to check polarisation in national schools but it has to be done in the interest of national unity.

The Government's decision to set up a committee headed by the Prime Minister to restructure the national school system to make it more attractive to all races is a step in the right direction.

The schools should teach Chinese and Tamil to encourage more Chinese and Indian parents to send their children to national schools.

Meanwhile, Abdullah's suggestion that vernacular and national schools

should hold joint sports and social activities to foster unity and racial harmony is sound and needs to be implemented.

The state of racial polarisation among the younger generation is serious.

Unless we address the problem speedily, it may become intractable in years to come.