

**Consult and compromise**  
**New Straits Times (Columns)**  
**31 Aug 2007**

"CONSULTATION, Compromise and Consensus" — the 3Cs that have underpinned all our national principles and social contracts since the end of Empire, deserve restatement on this our 50th anniversary as an independent nation.

With national unity now at the top of Malaysia's agenda, it bears repeating that without these 3Cs in a society like ours, nationhood could not have emerged even as a concept. This was the leadership-by-example shown by the founders of the Alliance in gaining Independence, and upheld to greater or lesser effect by every head of government since.

There have been times when the 3Cs were allowed to fall into abeyance; and just as many times when they brought us back from the brink of collapse.

Whether behind closed doors on the bridge of governance, or out on the open decks of the masses, the 3Cs form the keel of this ship of state; they are applicable everywhere.

This has been demonstrated again in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's conciliatory tone towards disgruntled taxi drivers threatening to strike over the Merdeka weekend. Their long-standing grievances over fares (the lowest in the world) and permits (the preserve of a monopolistic few) will be addressed.

It was left to Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin to address the militant pitch to which the cabbies' unhappiness had risen, with a flyer campaign instigating industrial action at the most damaging time.

If the taxi drivers, like petrol station owners before them, had wanted to attract attention to their cause, they've succeeded. That should be the limit of all threats like this. The onus now is on all protagonists to find a solution, utilising the 3Cs.

It's ironic that the Dewan Rakyat should be an exception to the rule. But it is in the nature of our democracy that parliament should be as much a repository of our lowest common denominators as our highest common ideals.

If political parties continue to present for election ill-mannered candidates lacking compassion and dignity, and if voters continue returning them to parliament, we will have to live with the invective and rudeness of certain parliamentarians.

For parliament to project our worst rather than our best would be a shame in more than one sense.

But it remains the construct of the electorate, even if its role is so debased as to remind us of the presence among us of those who would prefer that the 3Cs stand for contempt, confrontation and conflict.