

Bersih rally and the real 1Malaysia
Malaysiakini.com
July 11, 2011

Which Malaysia is PM Najib referring to in his catchy phrase 1Malaysia? The Malaysia I see him representing is one of tense tolerance always holding a precarious balance in check. A coalition of three main parties divided along racial lines.

Each takes care of its own community, each fights for the same pie for its community. On all sides of the racial divide in Najib's 1Malaysia there are routine threats, name-calling and extremists who insist on ketuanan Melayu.

The other side of Malaysia who came out in the tens of thousands this weekend during the Bersih 2.0 rally represented all segments of Malaysian society.

All races, all generations, all beliefs and religion walked together; all who believed in a more democratic Malaysia. It wasn't that the Chinese walked on one side of the street while the Malays walked on the other or that the Indians walked behind while the Malays walked in front.

We were all in one group singing our national anthem proudly. This was a dream come true that I had once learned in my siviks class in school at the age of 10.

Growing up in the Mahathir era, I never saw it in evidence, and in fact saw more segregation and suspicion and animosity amongst the races.

On Saturday, however, I saw the different races caring for one another. While sharing fresh water from a hose at Puduraya bus station, hosing one another down, a Malay brother shared some salt with me.

We put a pinch of salt each in our mouths, and smiled at each other through our eyes watering from the tear gas, and ran out again to confront the 'other side'. Had we not been pursued by the cops, and in different circumstances, we would have bersalam and hugged and sat down together for kopi tarik.

I even met many Chinese business owners, traditionally well-known for their kiasu-ness (play-safe attitude), last Saturday. Those who had supported change silently in 2008. Enough, they were saying now, braving the police; they too made their point in the march.

We have to reclaim Malaysia from those who are determined to oppress us to stay in power. I am sure that our Malaysia won the approval of our dear Bapa Malaysia and other Malay warriors of the past. He would have smiled approvingly and would have supported us that day.