

## **Who's responsible for our sorry racial ties?**

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YOURSAY 'There can never be true unity or good race relations when one can't even sit down at a table for a meal together.'

The trouble with our race relations

Loyal Malaysian: "The day when the Chinese and the Malays feel they are real friends will still be a long time coming" - as I read this, I wish I can say in all honesty that Kee Thuan Chye is wrong.

But the fact is that when we look at society as a whole, Kee is saying it as it is.

And I am afraid if independent political analysts are to be believed, the Umnoputras will retain control of Putrajaya. So, any hope of that day will come soon seems unlikely.

Yet, I continue to hope and pray. 308 (March 8, 2008) was an impossibility before the event, yet it happened.

Pemerhati: Kee Thuan Chye said, "The government has done such an excellent job over the last few decades of polarising the races and sowing suspicion between them."

While this is true to a large extent, the present multi-school system is also partly responsible for this.

After independence, we had a good secular education system at the primary, secondary and tertiary level where the majority of children of all ethnicities studied in government-run English-medium schools, which were manned by teachers and headmasters of all ethnicities who were selected on merit.

There were also some Malay, Chinese and Tamil medium schools but they were not as popular. However, as the Umno-lead government lowered the standards of these institutions by using race as the main criteria for recruitment and brought Islam into the schools, a lot of parents started looking for alternative schools.

To foster real unity, we have to educate all Malaysians in a single education system which is acceptable to the vast majority.

ONG: Perhaps many of the non-Malays who don't blame Malays for their second-class status either have no relevant personal experience or they could have strong enough BN connections to savour first-class status benefits.

I was in the civil service for many years and I know that majority of Malay colleagues actually felt that the service belongs to Malays and that top civil service posts are reserved for them. The Malays I refer to included highly-educated ones.

I left the civil service but still have dealings with the government. And what did I discover about Malays of the private sector, businessmen and professionals, and including those highly educated?

Many have the same mentality as the Malay civil servants. They believe that government contracts are meant for bumiputera Malays. Many even lobby unashamedly for contracts on the basis of their bumiputera status.

Jiminy Qrikert: ONG, a parallel to your experience is my own some eons ago. It was at the time of the emerging Melayu Baru, that era where TDM (Mahathir) gave Malays good reasons to hold their heads high with pride (of course, before he rubbished them as weak-minded, incompetent and incapable of

success without the crutches.)

But just like your well-educated senior civil servants, I engaged with one well-educated senior corporate officer in an MNC (multinational company) which owned a popular tea brand.

At that time, consumer contests were very popular and one was run for this tea brand. Prior to announcing the results, my colleague and I were summoned to his office to decide on the parameters for judging the winners. What he said shocked us completely.

He instructed us in no uncertain terms that the first three top-rung winners were all to be Malays. And he left us to sort the details out. My friend and I could not believe he was as blatant as that but even as early as then, we recognised this as a new phenomena of 'ketuanan Melayu.'

While Melayu Baru was discovering and actively pursuing a whole new race relations equation fuelled by Mahathir with his idea of ketuanan Melayu, the non-Malays were quite frankly pretty much shell-shocked by this.

Here was a new generation of Malays who were made to believe they were world-beaters (which is great for any community) but who expressed their new-found selves by pounding the non-Malays to the ground (figuratively, as that was the era of the rise of 'Malay first' in much more pervasive ways than just the mouthing of it, DPM Muhyiddin Yassin-style.)

So, as would happen with any shell-shocked person, one slinks away to hide and tend to one's wounds, be they physical or emotional.

As a very pragmatic community, the Chinese wave of sending their children to private schools and overseas emerged, the total rejection of working in the public service set in and the resolve to face this new challenge and overcome it really took roots.

CHKS: This is precisely the doings of BN over the last five decades, particularly since Dr Mahathir Mohamad era.

I tend to think Mahathir is a deeply insecure person. Perhaps being one of the earliest Malay doctors, he had spun such an entangled web to segregate races and created such a hegemonic mentality, especially among many educated Malays.

Why are the educated Malays more susceptible to this lie? It is because they are following the footsteps of their so-called "successful" leaders.

The Umno cronies are their main (perhaps, only) role models of what a successful Malay means. I don't know, but I think if we keep sowing seeds of dissension, we are actually falling into the BN trap.

Solaris: It's laughable that an analysis on the trouble with our race relations here in multiracial Malaysia is all about Chinese and Malay race relations with no mention of any other race, without whom Malaysia would not be Malaysia.

Kee Thuan Chye seems to think that race relations between these two ethnic groups are of supreme importance in the grand scheme of things and that no other ethnic group is even worth mentioning, much less considering in the context of Malaysian multi-ethnicity.

The closest he gets to mentioning other races is when he writes about "dismantling race-based political parties" and "programmes to foster goodwill among the various races," as if other races have only a minor role to play in the issue of racial integration that will define the future of the country.

Raikonen: There can never be true unity or good race relations when one can't even sit down at a table for a meal together. Look at the coffee shops - Chinese in your local corner lot kopitiam, Malays at their roadside mamak stalls - how to foster relationships?

Religious extremism has played a role in dividing the various races.

Onyourtoes: The fact is the majority of the people who benefitted from BN-Umno's largesse are Malays, some deservingly and many undeservingly.

How then to convince the Malays to vote against the government that have provided them benefits, whether deservingly or undeservingly.

Who cares as a result of lopsided and poor implementation of NEP the country as a whole has not been able to be as rich and as competitive as it should be?

Let me illustrate with a specific example to bring up a point. Malaysia has always prided itself as a country with a labour shortage, leading to millions of foreign workers now working and earning a living here.

But at the same time, have you seen the size of civil service, the army, the police, and Rela (People's Volunteer Corps)? Has it ever occurred to us that perhaps many Malays have nowhere else to go but the civil service to earn a livelihood?

Queenie: If you distill things further, you'll find the residue to be a pseudo-Malay who started it all. He'll say: "I don't remember."

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