

## **Don't politicise the Merdeka celebrations**

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These days every activity in the country seems to be politicised. Official government functions, sporting events, national festival open houses and even religious occasions and places of worship are now being politicised to gain votes.

Even a national event like the Merdeka celebrations has not been spared.

This can be attributed to the most crucial and keenly contested 13<sup>th</sup> general elections to be held anytime soon.

As Malaysians from all walks of life unite to mark the independence of their nation 55 years ago, it is deeply disturbing that the celebrations of our independence, is being so politicised that it seems to mar the significance and importance of this auspicious day.

It is regrettable that political parties have total disregard for the national day which should be above politics.

The choice of the Merdeka theme and the logo created so much controversy that is yet to be amicably settled. We now have one theme and logo by the ruling party and another for the opposition, which is totally absurd.

To add to the controversies is the decision by certain quarters who want people to join in the annual Merdeka Eve countdown at Dataran Merdeka, wearing yellow T-shirts, the colour of Bersih, the movement calling for clean and clean elections.

This has been objected to by the government which warned them not to do so as they do not have a permit to gather. It doesn't make sense asking a group of citizens to obtain a permit to gather and celebrate their national day.

There is even talk that only selected people are allowed to join in the celebration in the Bukit Jalil Stadium on the night of Aug 31.

These have created a scenario where there are two sets of celebrations, one for the ruling party and another for the opposition.

Such divisive politics was never witnessed before when Malaysians of all ethnicity and walks of life, regardless of their political ideologies, were free to participate in the celebrations as they wished.

As long as they gathered in peace, there were no restrictions on the way they celebrated or the colour of the attire they wore.

No police permit was needed. All that mattered was that they were all citizens and that was enough to unite them in sharing their pride and joy of their independent nation.

The Merdeka celebrations are not only for political parties. It is for all Malaysians regardless of their political affiliation, ethnicity or creed.

It is a day to recall and be grateful to the many who put behind their differences, united and sacrificed so much to regain the sovereignty of the nation. It would be a tragedy if we allow it to be hijacked by political parties for their own gains.

We long for a day when our leaders from across the political divide can come together to celebrate Merdeka with the masses whom they claim to serve unconditionally.

That will be the greatest lesson on unity that they can demonstrate to the people.

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