

Candlelight dispels the darkness of May 13

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By Susan Loone

Some 50 Penangites joined hands in cross-cultural friendship at a candlelight vigil at the Esplanade last night to reject racism and declare May 13 a day of friendship.

Organised by human rights NGO Suaram, the event drew activists, students and politicians, who shared their personal experiences related to racism, while calling for an end to this.

The low-key affair saw participants light candles at Speakers Square, while some carried anti-racism placards and a banner that read 'Apa Kita Mao? Bersih la...' (What do we want? Clean la...).

The banner was a response to an offensive headline, 'Apa lagi Cina mahu?', in Malay-language daily Utusan Malaysia on May 7, which questioned why the community had ditched BN for Pakatan Rakyat in the 13th general election concluded on May 5.

Instead of mourning the bloody racial clashes of 1969, the group turned the vigil into a night of camaraderie.

It was also a show of force to reject the comment by BN head Najib Abdul Razak that a "Chinese tsunami" had led to erosion of support for BN parties and, consequently, the rise of popular backing for Pakatan Rakyat.

Joining the activists were state assemblypersons Phee Boon Poh (Sungai Puyu), Yap Soo Huey (Pulau Tikus), Kumaresan Arumugam, who is staff to Bayan Baru MP Sim Tze Tzin and Dr Afif Bahardin (Seberang Jaya).

The two-hour session ended with the singing of the national anthem by all, including several special branch officers who were earlier busy recording the speeches on video.

Suaram coordinator Sean Ho said May 13 is no longer a black mark in history because "the people are united".

"We do not feel that political parties need to play up racial issues. Let's all unite to reject racism at all levels. Let's free Malaysia from racism," he said.

This is what some of the participants had to say.

Norazrizal Aswad Abdul Rahman, university student

Those who manipulate race issues to serve their own agenda are (being childish). This is a game which should not be played by adults. This divide-and-rule game was started by the colonial (powers) way back before Independence, but it seems that it has now gone beyond that.

Sometimes we stay away from others or decide not to accept their ideas because we have certain stereotypes about certain communities and that keeps us from learning from one another.

Such stereotypes keep us from mixing with other races. It happens in primary school, as well as in universities. Sometimes we reach out only when we need help.

If such ideas of racism arise in you, ask yourself first, should you condemn someone just because of your stereotype? Racism does not benefit anyone except certain cronies.

Zolkifly Md Lazim, anti-toll activist

If people are aware of the date, they would learn from it and not repeat such incidents. Malaysians should feel safe in their own country especially those with blue MyKad.

We hope there will be no more betrayal from certain quarters (a reference to revelations at the royal commission of inquiry into illegal immigrants in Sabah).

Malaysians must use the latest Internet technology available to them to spread the word about unity, so that all communities can work hand in hand to build a new Malaysia.

Zainulfaqr Yaacob, a photojournalist with PenangInsight.com

NONEGod calls on all human beings to get to know each other. In Islam, those who are most revered are those who are good with other human beings, and those who live a holy life. Today, let's all offer each other a hand in friendship. Racial politics will destroy everyone.

If Malay rights group Perkasa or Umno see these lighted candles, they would say this is a religious events but the use of candles is part of some communities'

culture.

The issue today is no longer about racism, but about oppressors and being oppressed. Uphold friendship and reject racism because it destroys the world.

Khairil Ishak, DAP supporter from Bukit Mertajam

People of all races must come together to reject those who wish to stir up racial sentiments. Such sentiments are being hotly played up by those from BN and Umno.

In Penang, nobody is oppressing anybody. The Chinese are not oppressing the Malays, the Malays are not oppressing the Chinese, the Chinese and Malays are not oppressing the Indians and the Indians are not oppressing anyone.

Ong Jing Cheng, former Suaram coordinator

NONEI became aware that racism was useless in 1998, during the days of reformasi. I was brought up in a Chinese village and read only Chinese newspapers and was exposed to issues of racism but I changed after going to secondary school and during reformasi..

I still remember reading in Sin Chew Daily that reformasi was only for the Malays and that Chinese should not get involve or chaos would happen. But then I asked myself: Why did a Chinese like Tian Chua take part in reformasi if it were only an issue for the Malays?'

It opened my mind as I explored the issue and begin to learn that all races are subjected to the same oppression, abuse of power by the police, judiciary or the government. I begin to realise that many issues affecting my community affected others, too, like poor education and poverty. These cut across all races.

Phee Boon Poh, DAP's Sungai Puyu assemblyperson

phee boon poh 140708I grew up in a Malay village where unity between the races was widely felt by all in the past.

However, due to the recent political climate, this feeling can sometimes be lost.

But I have a dream that harmony will return if we all spread love and not hatred.

"I believe there is a place for everyone.

As a state exco (for welfare, caring society and the environment), I am going to prove this by inviting Umno members into my council.

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