

LETTER | At the age of 64, M'sia seems to be going nowhere

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LETTER | Another year has passed and Malaysia has just celebrated another Independence Day. A person born in 1957 would be close to retirement. Have the intervening years taught us any lessons?

Instead of celebration, Independence Day should be a day of reflection and soul-searching. We are one year older, are we one year wiser, though?

Close to the Independence Day, the media is always inundated by messages about celebrating the diversity and unity of all races. But are we united, though?

Successive Malaysian governments always harped on promoting "unity", but their actions on the ground often contradicted their words.

How can we have true unity if some people are more equal than others? When the minorities demanded equality, they are always admonished or threatened to

know their place.

The spectre of May 13 is always dangled over their heads like the sword of Damocles. Lest we think that only the government is guilty of perpetuating this mentality, the opposition is no better.

What is the point of gaining independence if we simply replace one ketuanan (British) with another (Malay)? What is the point of throwing away one yoke only to put on another?

What is the point of gaining freedom if we willingly ape foreign cultures, including religions? What is the point of taking back control of the country and then selling real estate properties to foreigners on the cheap?

Is being pious the most important measure of a leader, or for that matter, a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer?

Is being ruled by your own people, however incompetent and corrupt they are, more preferable than being ruled by someone competent and accountable to you but from a different background?

If the answer is “yes” for most Malaysians, then Malaysia deserves to be a failed

state.

History books always blame the colonial masters for dividing the nation along racial lines. The British preferred to employ educated Malays in public services.

But successive governments since independence have continued that practice and entrenched racial polarisation in the public sector.

So, what is the point of gaining independence, if we just replace the British, but do the same thing?

Now the government employs Malays whether they are educated or qualified or not. We had a health minister who mistook Spanish fly for Spanish flu. An education minister concerned with the colour of shoes of schoolchildren.

The résumé of the current prime minister consists of not a string of successes but failures and controversies.

The National Economic Policy (NEP) was a bitter pill designed to uplift the disadvantaged so that they may someday be able to compete and stand on their own feet.

But the bitter pill turns out to be a permanent medical intervention, like dialysis. Two generations have passed since the introduction of NEP. It continues to be a drag on Malaysia.

Over several decades, the accumulated wealth gap due to the difference in competitiveness between Singapore and Malaysia continues to grow.

This is despite the fact that Singapore is completely devoid of natural resources while Malaysia has plenty of land and rainfall for agriculture, abundant minerals and timber resources, and coastlines for fisheries.

Unscrupulous politicians

During colonial times, we blamed the British for exploiting the natural resources of Malaya. After more than six decades of independence, we have no one but ourselves to blame.

What promises does independence hold? How do we ensure that promises do not turn out to be a dystopia?

The freedom to choose is a very precious right. But as a comic character once said: with power comes great responsibility.

The wisdom to choose wisely is just as important, if not more so than the right to choose.

Unfortunately, the voters are often deceived by unscrupulous politicians or religious leaders who appeal to their basest instinct like fear, greed, pride, sloth, prejudice, biases, and tribalism.

Malaysia is now 64. If at age 64, we are still governed by such petty sentiments, then all the decades we have lived have been in vain.

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