

## **Integration with integrity: The identity crisis (Pt 5)**

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What does it mean that we are all Malaysians; from a country that is 50 years old? Is it therefore mere happenstance that the passport we carry declares that we are from this land 'of milk and honey'? Does not such a passport-defined identity establish all essential characteristics about us; about who we are, and what we uphold in this world of dramatic change? Are we also not Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan and Iban, or even better Orang Asal; as the Orang Asli now call themselves? What about our different cultures and social traditions?

Are we not Malaysia, truly Asia? Do they not define us; or alternatively are we maybe even expected to give them up for our positive nationality? Or, do we really even have to? Does nationality and ethnicity have to be contradictory? What about our faith systems; whether Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Sikh or even animists? Are we then Muslims first and Malays second, or Christians first and Malaysians second? Does our faith equally have to deny cultural roots and preferences?

Are not all these issues very real even more today as we move towards 50 years of the founding of the Federation of Malaya and 44 years of the formation of Malaysia? In fact, all of the above, to my mind, are core identity-related issues which Dr Mahathir Mohamad, our former prime minister, fully implied via his 1991 Visionary 2020 speech as 'the Bangsa Malaysia Challenge'.

In fact, his challenge did pre-define and premise the entire nine other challenges of 'creating a developed nation in our own mould' on the one challenge. Therefore, can our multiracial Malaysia ever rise to this Bangsa Malaysia challenge of nationality given the traditional and primordial pull towards our ethnic and religious foundations; which also define our mix of culture and social traditions? I call this the real challenge of our identity crisis - 'the integration with integrity challenge of nation-building'.

Raja Nazrin called it the challenge of 'Malaysians of all races, religions and geographic locations needing to believe beyond a shadow of doubt that they have a place under the Malaysian sun'. For Raja Nazrin, the complete answer for the challenge was that 'the integrity of the federal constitution must be defended and promoted'.

The Perak Regent is absolutely right - only the Malaysian constitution gives, protects and preserves the fundamental rights of all and every Malaysian regardless of ethnicity and religious upbringing. There can be no Malaysian nationalism without the federal constitution and without the original social and legal contracts of federalism already enshrined in our constitution. The history of the federal constitution is embedded in the Social Contract negotiations of both 1955 and 1963.

One is for the foundation of the Federation of Malaya and the other for the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. It is therefore only the Malaysians who are celebrating 50 years of independence from our colonial status; not the other half of our brothers and sisters - the Malaysians of Sabah and Sarawak. They have only seen 44 years of independence from the same colonial master to join us as their older sibling. Nonetheless, they have also bought into a newer vision of a newer national identity called Malaysia wherein they were in fact equally promised a place under the new nation's sun.

## **'Persona non grata'**

That, too, spells and promises integration with integrity. The Bangsa Malaysia Challenge therefore equally depends on whether Sabahans and Sarawakians feel 'the same equality of opportunities' under the Malaysian sun? That, too, is a question of defining our new identity under the Malaysian sun.

Is it then any surprise that the honourable Bernard Dompok has resigned over the illegal and unconstitutional identity card issue? It is a completely and totally an issue of integration with integrity and a defense of the federal constitution and for the sovereignty of Sabah and Sarawak. In fact, it is a very core issue of their very Malaysian identity. Furthermore, in the specific case of Sabah and Sarawak, our federalism was somewhat qualified over this issue of immigration.

That is why, even today, they reserve the right to reject Malaysians from entry into their states, for reasons of their own territorial sovereignty. Their State List allows this. That is their constitutional right. The fact is they can issue a 'persona non grata' to any Malaysian for reasons of their own (which I do not think we can even challenge in the courts, if I am not wrong). It is a matter of their sovereignty.

Therefore, I hope that we do not make light the minister's resignation over the Sabah illegal identity card issue. In fact, personally, regardless of what we say publicly on the matter, let us be mindful of our language and insinuations. I believe to the average Sabahan, this issue is a matter of the life and death of their culture and their heritage as they know it today. It would be the most unfortunate form of opportunistic neo-colonialism to ignore any wrong-doing, if any, upon this very serious matter.

Therefore, rather than glibly turn this topic of his resignation into another Umno versus DAP political hegemonic battle between the Malaysian parties; I believe it would be wise and prudent for all of us to read the writing on the wall. His is a sincere and total protest against the direction our politics and where we seem to be heading. To me, as a recent follower of constitutional politics, the signal given by this singular representative of Sabah is more meaningful than all the noisy voices of all the Umno parliamentarians on this issue.

Please remember and take note that this was the same man who did not compromise and withdraw the memorandum on the Moorthy case which was the first time in Malaysian history that the non-Muslim ministers in the cabinet agreed on one issue with one voice and submitted a single integrated memorandum. Please remember that he is not - and has never been - an outspoken politician but instead a soft-spoken and thoughtful person; regardless of the issues.

He is not your empty vessel or a noisy gong who allows some words to flow out of his mouth thoughtlessly. He has always been collected and measured with his words. Please let us not misread him but rather try to really find out what he means that he is unable to 'do a good job' as chairperson if he also a cabinet minister.

Have we pondered what he is really saying? Have we bothered to find out his real reasons, instead of imputing our own silly reasons? May I suggest that we all try to find out the real reasons for his resignation? I believe his message is that 'still water that runs deep'. But we cannot and will not hear if we are simply noisy and not listening well.

## **No human indispensable**

The past Sunday, as mentioned in my last column , May 13, a closed-door group of us got together to discuss this very issue and the national challenge of integration with integrity. How can our very successful Malaysia continue to be faithful with our God-given resources and opportunities? Our globalised environment and the challenges of modernity driven by technology and change have put a great premium on one's self interest and often at the expense of the rest of the world.

The modernistic tendency is, too often, to focus only on self-survival at the expense of all else. How or why else could the World Bank President fight to stay on in office when he simply violated basic rules of nepotism and moral corruption which he himself has always argued against and stood for? And why should he stand with impunity over the same matter claiming to be 'innocent' and that his services as 'a savior' are needed for leadership?

No human is indispensable. Integrity always means honesty and uprightness. Uprightness among humans always involves the core issue of one's personal conscience. We cannot go against our own conscience or we lose sleep. That is primarily what it means that we are human beings. Animals and plants have no conscience.

Therefore, when a person in a public leadership role falls - or becomes suspect of integrity - that person has to leave. To continue blindly claiming one's own innocence is the height of arrogance and ignorance - very modern! You cannot fool the whole world all the time; maybe some people, some of the time. Therefore, Wolfowitz will go by the end of June.

But, is this lesson only for the World Bank or merely for the UK or for the Republicans in America? Is not this message of integrity one for the whole world? In the world of self-interested politicians, will there not be some individuals who will not sacrifice principles for the sake of expediency? Is that not what real leadership is all about? How else could one 'expedient American president' destroy a whole nation based on false premises and promises!

Now, even ex-US President Carter has effectively labeled him a liar, ' ... we now have endorsed the concept of pre-emptive war where we go to war with another nation militarily, even though our own security is not directly threatened'. Their military action was the only real 'weapons of massive destruction' and, in such a short span of time so much destruction of a historic civilisation has happened, and all in the name of democracy.

Likewise in Malaysia, daily we are doing untold damage based upon our equally expedient political model of development wherein short-term motivated zealotry is guiding decisions at great expense to all and sundry, without principles and uprightness. How and why else would Maybank Berhad, today the biggest bank in Malaysia, make a decision which lacks any integrity and especially their lack of comprehension about the nature of the modern world of competitiveness?

### **A simple analogy**

What to me is most troubling is that the policy must have received the sanction and support of the board of directors! Is the Project M in really Sabah any different? Why does the National Registration Department defy a democratic Parliament? Were actions of the male chauvinist MPs abusing their sister MP in Parliament also really any different? Are such issues of constitutional illegitimacy of integrity only for the cabinet to direct the minister of women's affairs or simply for the so-called proxy law minister to make a stupid analysis?

Should not they become the substance and content of the entire cabinet meeting, dedicated to asking and answering the questions about how we can continue towards integration without integrity? Maybe if the cabinet does not take this as a serious enough issue, the Council of Malay Rulers must step in - as did the royalty in Thailand.

Such operational policies do not promote integration with integrity nor do they uphold the integrity of the federal constitution, as the Perak Regent has so well argued. Banking, although still protected in Malaysia by Bank Negara rules and guidelines, is today a wide-open economic activity of global proportions. It is much like the Formula 1 race. Of course, the racers first need the special license but after that, it is merely and purely merit-based and other technological factors which define one's winning strategy.

No owner of the team could ever say that at least one driver must be a woman; even if they have convictions based on gender bias reasons! I cannot therefore think of a more competitive race in the world today. Banking is going to be no different. The color of money remains green and it will flow where it is respected and rewarded - not insulted and ridiculed by outdated policies.

In fact, my very good friend has a simple analogy which tells the truth of such matters. When you need a cardio-surgeon for life-saving heart surgery, would you insist on a surgeon with a particular colour of skin? It is the abuse of such proportions and the ordinary people of Malaysia must not tolerate such nonsense and must speak up.

I am planning to do just that, even with my bank account. We therefore need a much stronger opposition after the next election especially to defend and protect our historic and only federal constitution. I have come to a newer conclusion on this matter - that if I do not fight for the defence of the federal constitution, I cannot depend on others to do so. God bless Malaysia.

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