

53 years and still grappling with race relations

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As we are poised to celebrate the 53rd anniversary of our nation's independence, a number of thoughts flash across my mind and may be the minds of millions of fellow Malaysians. Most dictionaries describe independence as consisting of two aspects.

Firstly it is the freedom from being governed or ruled by another country and secondly it is the ability to live one's life without being helped or influenced by other people.

Both these criteria are equally important and every nation that obtains independence undergoes these processes. The first part, to obtain independence is not easy as many nations experience violence and bloodshed to achieve that.

Ultimately they do get what they want because the people are usually exceptionally united to fight the foreign power that rules them. The unity of the people created by patriotism and nationalism generates so much energy that no foreign power can suppress for long.

The second phase when the people have to govern their nation all by themselves without outside help looks easy part but unfortunately this phase of Independence is not as plain sailing as one would expect. In fact it becomes the most difficult part as it puts to severe test the unity that was created during the first phase of fighting the foreign power.

We were no exception to this rule. Malaysians or rather Malayans of all races united unconditionally to fight the British and they succeeded 53 years ago. The people then did not see the differences in appearance, colour, culture and religion but put all these aside and fought with one aim to get rid of foreign rule.

The British were far more powerful than us but their military might alone was not enough to quell the tremendous energy generated by the united determination of the masses.

Today we are 53 years into self-rule and the greatest threat to us is not from outside but from within – the deteriorating race relations. The unity that we had after defeating the colonial master is fast eluding us. Not a day passes without some untoward racial incident being reported in the media.

It is sad that there are those who stoke racial sentiments for personal political gain which the authorities must put a stop to at all costs. They must show that they have zero tolerance for racial provocation regardless of who perpetrates it.

Our forefathers could have come from foreign lands and may have differed in colour, culture and faith but after 53 years of living together we have acquired a lot in common as Malaysians, of which we must be proud. It is extremely disturbing that instead of emphasising our commonness that we have acquired over the years we are constantly being reminded of our differences.

The 'cow-head' and Allah issues, attacks on places of worship, racist remarks by those in power, the purported fight for the rights of a particular community are some of these provocative actions that are meant to divide us.

Do we need to be repeatedly reminded of May 13, our immigration status, our rights as citizens and the different ways we go about with our worship and cultural practices? We are

all aware of our differences, so why the need to harp on them?

Wouldn't it be more fruitful to stress on the common ways we celebrate our festivals together, the common cuisine that we enjoy, the common national language that we use to communicate with the ordinary man on the street and the common aims for which we work for to build a progressive nation where all of us can live together harmoniously as Malaysians?

Despite the tremendous pressure by certain parties to ignite distrust and hate among the races, Malaysia, in general, remains quite peaceful as the vast majority of people from all races are not hoodwinked by the racist agenda of those out to gain political mileage. This is primarily due to the maturity and wisdom of the people of all races who long for peaceful coexistence.

This maturity and wisdom of the people which was demonstrated at the 12 general election has largely been underestimated and ignored. However, that maturity and wisdom is unprecedented and has become the greatest asset for racial and religious harmony today.

At a time when things look gloomy, it is this maturity and wisdom of the people that gives us some hope. Like the unity of the people that helped to defeat the might of the colonialists, this time, it is the maturity and wisdom of the people that will save the nation from its enemies from within.

To the older generation, Merdeka brings sweet and satisfying memories of their successful fight for freedom from the British. To the younger generation, that Merdeka does not mean very much as they are more interested to create a nation that provides a peaceful and comfortable life where all citizens can live in harmony despite all their differences.

The real Merdeka for the people now is to free the nation from the clutches of those who want to destroy it from within by inciting one community to hate another. The destiny of the nation to be counted as a respected nation among the elite in the world depends on each and every one of us, the citizens must rise up and show our strong disapproval for race politics.

Selamat Hari Merdeka.

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