

**Rising racism, 53 years on
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This year, I became a senior citizen. I can now withdraw my EPF savings and I qualify for some discounts for travel and surprisingly even for some buffet meals at some eateries.

But as I ponder upon 'retirement', it is sad to see the Malaysia that I know and live in, grows increasingly uncertain, diffident and bogged down in self-made crises, one after another.

Our previously phenomenal economic growth has now trickled down in a dizzying spiral of middle-income trap - not helped by the 2008 global financial crisis.

Our foreign direct investments have dwindled as our competitiveness, our productivity, perhaps our systemic corruption and wastage, have now been exposed and called into question.

Even our inborn entrepreneurs are investing overseas because of the uncertain future and shifting policies, which have made us face the truth of our competitiveness and value as a nation.

Instead of maturing gracefully, we appear to have become trapped in a petulant phase of angry adolescence breaking out senselessly to attack convenient bogeymen -race and religion appear to have become the easy targets, which breed even more political and economic uncertainty.

As a fourth generation Malaysian, I was born two and a half years before our fateful Merdeka. I am still wondering whether we are truly 'liberated' as befits the meaning of 'Merdeka', so gloriously proclaimed by our Bapa Merdeka, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, in 1957.

That Merdeka was to have ushered in the birth of what some would have called 'an unlikely nation', one that appeared cobbled together in a slapdash manner, juxtaposing a disparate if hodgepodge peoples - predominantly Malays, Chinese and Indians- and akin to mixing oil in water. Yet again, does any one in such serendipitous circumstance have that conscious sense of history and historicity of these singular moments?

To be fair, even then, no one dared to dream that the idea of Malaya and later Malaysia could succeed. But truth be told, we did do very well for so many years, becoming one of the rising 'Asian tigers'. It's just these recent years that we have foundered and perhaps lost a little faith in ourselves.

So many other post-colonial new nations had self-destructed in interethnic, religious or tribalistic clashes and conflagrations. We nearly did in May of 1969.

But good sense and firm actions created a novel social re-engineering feat (the NEP) in its wake, to bring about some semblance of order, reasonable interethnic tolerance and suppressed racial tensions.

For the next four decades, we have lived a reasonably harmonious if distinct existence, although seething fault-lines appear now and again to threaten the veneer of our touted 'Truly Asian' unity among our unique pastiche of colourful normalcy.

Forty years hence, ratcheted-up rhetoric is beginning to sunder this extraordinary relationship. Polarised insistence on continued affirmative action in stylised if arbitrary terms, remains a bone of contention, which powerfully fans the embers of resurgent ethnic fears and pride.

Sadly, as we celebrate this auspicious anniversary, we seemed mired in increasingly rabid and insulting racism, which greatly threatens our flimsy unity and contrasting diversity.

Extremist leaders continue to spew so much hurtful invectives that these would have shamed the most neo-Nazi right-wingers, the world over. Most modern societies would have punished such hate-mongers if not for their senseless racial baiting but then for their ad hominem attacks on just about anyone who dares to challenge their warped if narrow worldview.

Perhaps the media can play their roles better by downplaying these media hounds, whose purposes are so sickening and depraved.

Racist rhetoric

It appears that more and more politicians are flogging the twisted if populist concept of ethnic supremacy and extraordinary rights (of ethnic ketuanan) once again, as if to bolster their public images as racial champions. The loudest and the most strident appear to be those who are now commanding the greatest publicity and arguably some perverse following.

Our authorities appear timorous in not wanting to directly confront these vociferous bullies, for fear of some unintended backlash. But in so doing, the government loses even more credibility. The government of the people must serve as a fearless just arbiter of a firm and respected Leviathan, and not be held ransom by some mindless minority.

There cannot be distorted applications of the rule of law, where any one can flaunt and challenge the wisdom of the law, at wanton will. There seems to be no more respect for anyone else except for the self-righteous bully pulpit arrogance of voluble tyrants disgorging more and more hatred and painfully shrill racist ideologies to the hilt.

Freedom of speech implies rational discourse and debate, not threatening and insulting rantings. It certainly does not absolve anyone of despicable spewing and inciting of ethnic or religious intimidation or hatred.

But who really is to blame for the recent rise in racist rhetoric?

btn forum 241209 crowdIt appears that some components of the government are still pushing the propaganda machine to perpetuate the concept of racial supremacy and denigrating all other ethnic groups.

The Biro Tata Negara (BTN, National Civics Bureau) instead of instilling national civic consciousness, appears to relish in inculcating and indoctrinating any civil servant or would be scholarship holder, in a time-warped belief system that only the Malays are true patriots and truly deserving of their Malaysianness.

This is still happening 50-odd years following Merdeka, and one wonders why non-bumiputeras don't sometimes feel any greater sense of belonging to this nation of ours.

Surprisingly such BTN programmes appear to have been a 'recent' phenomenon. My sister and brother-in-law who are senior government servants in the Ministries of Education and Higher Education respectively claimed never to have been subject to such gross demeaning indoctrination or abuse - perhaps, they too have been too polite, too programmed, to acknowledge. It did not take place when I was a clinical lecturer for seven years at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in the 1980s and early 1990s.

But as MMA president, I have received some angry verbal complaints (many are traumatised, frightened and do not want to be quoted for fear of reprisals) that even non-bumiputera junior medical specialists and house officers, who aspire to join the service or to be confirmed, are currently subject to physical and mental abuse. Mind you, these are not students of impressionable age, but grown men and women in their twenties and thirties.

Some have been made to squat and huddle together in front of other bumiputera peers, rudely woken at early mornings, shouted at, called pendatang, usurpers of scholarships and positions, depriving the true bumiputeras of their places and rights, told in uncertain terms that they are here only at the behest and kindly generosity of the bumiputeras, and that they can always 'go home' or balik kampung which means China or India.

Groups have been bullied into subordinating to and acknowledging the official 'dogma', or risk having the entire group not 'passing the course'. Do these utterances ring a bell?

Less than a year and a half ago, one young returning teacher broke down from such radical abuse and hazing, that her family decided to pull her out, repaying the loan in full - enough is enough! So can we not see how this will perpetuate the cycle of blatant racial baiting and hatred when these 'officers' return to their respective services, after such provocative BTN courses?

Mustn't such propaganda stop? Is the government truly sincere in wishing to stem such state-endorsed racism? Is this government truly espousing the 1Malaysia concept for whatever it is worth?

Last year, Minister in the PM's Dbar council debate on judicial commission 250407 nazri abd azizepartment Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz acknowledged that the BTN must be overhauled. He had revealed that courses by the BTN were racially divisive and used to promote certain government leaders. While Nazri was bold enough to expose this, he was nearly alone in defending the need to overhaul the BTN courses.

Most of the ruling elite, including the deputy premier had sided with those who refused to acknowledge Nazri's contention that the BTN was a mockery of the 1Malaysia concept. Of course, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad joined in and insisted there was no need to revamp the BTN courses, which led Nazri to call the former PM a "bloody racist", even conferring on Dr M the title "the father of all racists".

So are we surprised that Perkasa, school teachers and principals, public officers, resort to such 'ingrained' behaviour, notwithstanding the so-called 'provocation' from their charges, their students, who must surely be so 'insensitive' as to other's religious practices?

Pursue the perpetrators

Yet, when called upon to investigate such racist behaviours, the authorities appear to be

dragging their feet, and instead concentrate with such efficiency to question and charge a rapper (NameWee) who merely was bold and foolhardy enough to serve as a conduit to expose these wrongdoings.

Can the policenamewee new album 270807e and authorities not see the biasness of their actions, by pursuing the messenger and not the perpetrator of possible crimes?

Can the authorities not understand why thinking Malaysians and non-bumiputeas are beginning to feel persecuted and discriminated against, more and more, despite utterances to the contrary by our political leaders?

Can the authorities not understand why more and more disgruntled non-bumiputeas are making a beeline to emigrate whenever and wherever they can - hardship, uprooting displacement and starting over, notwithstanding? This has got nothing to do with patriotism, when one is constantly told that he or she is unequal as a citizen, and that they are unwanted.

Can every Malaysian non-bumiputera truly feel that he or she has a fair and reasonable share of this piece of earth called Malaysia? Do our authorities truly appreciate talent, merit or worth of any non-bumiputera at all, or is this mere lip service? Can they not see the hollowness and insincerity of their pronouncements - when we can hardly see the 'walk' from the 'talk'?

Such crescendos of racist ravings seriously undermine the carefully constructed dream of a true Malaysian nation, shattering the much-banded 'unity' slogan already so tattered among our terribly troubled diversity.

Hurtful cries to demonise and belittle other races as unequal, pendatang and lesser than themselves cannot but help demoralise every peace-loving non-bumiputera Malaysian who aspires for a better tomorrow, a better Malaysia.

We fully recognise the special position of the bumiputeras, but as non-bumiputeras we also increasingly demand our rightful place in this nation of ours. Lest it is forgotten, our position is also enshrined in the constitution. This is not arrogance, but a statement of fact as a human right of any citizen.

We do have a long way to go. We have many mindsets to change, to engage, to dialogue with in sincerity and humility, so that race and religion cannot be made a bogeyman for every travail or challenge that the country is facing.

We have our work cut out for us, but as rational Malaysians, we must all try even harder to persuade the government to be one for all Malaysians and not for mere sloganeering alone or for any one racial group.

We must flush out all closet racists. We must instead cultivate greater rational discourse and dialogue without preconditions of threats and top-down dictates. We need to work on closer cross-ethnic cooperation, tolerance and acceptance so that together we are truly more than the sum of our rich individual strength and heritage.

perkasa first agm 270310 kerisWe must nurture greater cohesiveness by lowering the tempo and temperature of racial baiting and shrill cries and rhetoric of ethnic pride and irrational fear-mongering. We must work towards greater confidence of sharing and building and not engage in divisive dismantling bigotry based on artificial barriers of so-called ethnic

or religious sensitivities.

This government must be seen to act without fear or favour, by espousing fair and just policies, by directly confronting and stemming the tide of racism and racial-baiting. Divisive ravings drive uncertainty and suppress confidence. We need to reverse such negative rhetoric if we wish to improve the climate for economic buoyancy in this country.

By staying the course of inept inattention, we stand to lose our global competitiveness even more, as we Malaysians lose confidence in ourselves and our grip on the future.

We must do this right and soon, or risk losing everything! 53 years hence, and Merdeka then would have been in vain.

"We came into the world like brother and brother, And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another." - William Shakespeare, in the closing couplet of 'The Comedy of Errors' [V.i.425-26]

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