

Patriotism can lead to extremism
Malaysiakini.com
November 15, 2010

The statement by defence minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi on patriotism, although quite daft, came quite at an opportune moment in the midst of the national debate on the teaching of history to our young children.

Malaysians have now become such experts in knee-jerk reactions, thanks to this IT age where quick, rash and myopic ideas and opinions are translated onto the laptop, i-pad and i-phone in double quick time and uploaded onto the cyberspace.

Since the world has now become a global village, patriotism, and for that matter, nationalism, have become so relative.

In their narrowest sense, nationalism and patriotism mean being a fully-qualified citizen of a country, you will only think and act to protect the interest of your motherland. In other words you are willing to die for it.

But before you can consider yourself a true citizen of that motherland, you must first identify yourself with it in every sense of the word.

It is not patriotism if you only pay (under-declared) income tax, but in your own small way you never tried your level best to help and train your fellow citizens in terms of providing jobs, procurements, outsourcing, etc.

Even in times of trouble, like during the Emergency, did the Chinese and some Malays, join the Communists out of patriotism or simply due to extreme hatred for the Japanese for what they did in China.

Or was it Chin Peng's patriotism for this adopted country of his to set up a communist state (obviously) to be led by the Chinese and aligned with communist China, that will never be accepted by the Malays.

Some semblance of patriotism can only be inculcated in a wholly homogeneous nation, even that the so-called patriotism is being bandied about by the ruling class to manipulate the poor.

Patriotism too can only flourish if the nation retains the codes and values that are strongly believed by all its citizens, but the problem is, these codes and values change all the time.

For instance, when one was 30 years old, one was a first class patriot because one's country was socialist in its general philosophy i.e. big businesses are handled by the government, single education system, single national language, tight control or even rejection of the Western popular culture.

But one may not be so patriotic anymore when one sees that the new leaders have thrown this country to the so-called market economy where one's children are being fed this Western popular culture (food, clothing and music) which will only make these children even less patriotic.

Patriotism in its extreme sense can also culminate in racism because this ideal will never be

able to compromise on the basic demographics of a nation, and that is why in the US today foreign-born Americans (who may be much more patriotic than the original Americans) are barred from becoming the president.

Closer to home, an example of an artificially-manufactured patriotism is the Singaporean identity.

Children of all citizens must do national service and later they become reservists.

Even this contains a big anomaly because, in this national service, some areas in the armed forces are 'no-go' for children of Singapore Malays and this would definitely affect their (Malays) patriotism.

That is not all. Since the Singapore government started to import new citizens from China, even these Singapore children doing national service are questioning the validity of their national service.

Anyway in so far as joining the army or the police is concerned, it has always been a job for children of the poor, even in the United States. Even those soldiers in the China's People's Army or those in India's, have dreams to migrate to the Big Mac country.

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