

## **One people, one nation - Is it possible?**

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Let me begin by asking you a question:

Do you think that it is possible to have one people, one nation?

If I don't hear a resounding "Yes" then you are going to give (Minister in the Prime Minister's Department) Nazri (Abdul Aziz) an excuse to say that it is only a perception and not a reality.

He says a lot of foolish things. We don't want him to trivialise an important issue such as this.

Of course, it is possible to have one people, one nation. By one people we don't mean that everyone thinks alike. That is dangerous. When all men and women think alike, they are not thinking at all. That's something the BN government would want but that is something we don't want.

We want thinking people. We want caring people. We want people who can feel for another human being. We want people with compassion. We want people who can be outraged when an injustice is committed against another person.

We want people who will be revolted when corruption takes place. We want people who will be angry when our money is squandered. We want people who will stand up for truth and justice.

When we have people with these attributes, then we can have one people, one nation. When people have a healthy respect for universal values and virtues such as justice, truth, freedom, accountability, abhorrence for corruption and arrogance, then we transcend our religious and racial barriers and come together in unity as one people.

This is what we should strive for: an ideal that will make us a better people and a better nation.

Politicians keep us apart

Why is it that after 50 years of nationhood, we are not one people, one nation? Well, we have the politicians to thank for that. They made sure that there would not be a united Malaysian nation sharing a common destiny.

By deliberate design they keep us apart, segregated through policies that cause anger and enmity, through denial that deprives the deserving from the poorer segments of our society. They discriminate along racial and religious lines.

They reward one group and deprive some other group. By selective policies and unfair implementations, they have kept us divided for their own survival.

And sadly, too, it is the politicians who fan the flames of polarisation for their own political ends. They want to be seen as champions of their community and, for that, they have to constantly portray certain issues as being under threat and project themselves as the ones standing up for those rights.

It is these short-term and shortsighted policies that have become a serious hindrance to our unity. They will proclaim that others are out to grab their economic share of the cake.

They will kiss the keris while some mad guy demands to know when the keris is going to be used. He won't be reprimanded for the racial slurs hurled but he will stand out as the hero of his community.

But the sad fact is that the ordinary citizens don't benefit from the rhetoric of these politicians. Can you understand why 1,555 national schools in the rural areas are without toilet facilities and 794 schools are without electricity?

How come 39 per cent of the national schools are without toilet facilities and 29 per cent without electricity?

These are poor, deserving Malays and why are they being treated in such a cruel way? It is not that we don't have money. After Tan Siew Sin, every finance minister has been a Malay and an Umno member.

Every Education Minister has been a Malay and an Umno member. Why haven't they served their community when they hold the purse strings and the political power to dispense justice? It may be a ploy to keep them poor to serve their interests.

It can always be justified that these poor rural Malays are in this unfortunate situation because of others and therefore the ruling party must be supported.

This is how hatred is fed so that we cannot come together as one people and one nation. But when people come together on common issues that unite them irrespective of their ethnicity, that gathering is dispersed in the most brutal manner.

You remember the Bloody Sunday last year when Malaysians demonstrated as one people to condemn the hike in petrol price?

Truncheons were used to beat up peaceful people who had gathered to show their grievance and chemically laced water was used to disperse the crowd that also had women and children in their midst.

They will not allow unity to be forged on common grounds. This will be seen as a threat to their power base.

Cause for worry

Bersih called for a huge gathering to march to the palace grounds to demand free and fair elections.

It was meant as a peaceful democratic exercise to demand our legitimate rights. But the police gave warnings that this gathering did not have a permit and that people should not turn up or else they would be arrested.

But how is it that when thousands of vociferous and spirited Malaysians turn up to demonstrate against the United States of America or against Israel the police don't threaten them?

How is it that it is all right to demonstrate and march without a police permit when the anger is directed against someone else?

People are being manipulated so that they don't have a chance to come together on their own in friendship, in the spirit of goodwill and understanding as one people, one nation. Well-meaning Malaysians have cause to be worried. They have reason to worry where we are heading as a nation.

Our unity is so fragile that we wonder why after 50 years of nationhood we have failed to forge a nation that transcends race and religion.

These two emotive issues starkly expose our failed attempt in creating a Malaysian nation that reflects our unity in diversity, our tolerance for dissenting views, our compassion for the poor and the underprivileged irrespective of our ethnicity.

We have failed to create a society that is firmly anchored in the commonality of universal values. It is a shame that even today we are so polarised and blinkered in our views. The way things are heading, it is getting from bad to worse.

Unfortunately, it is getting from bad to worse through the apathy of the majority of Malaysians who, though they may want a better society for all of us, dare not make a public stand on issues that matter.

It is this apathy that has emboldened the extreme elements amongst us to push for an agenda that will have serious consequences for the majority of us who are accommodating, well-meaning, tolerant, peace-loving and friendly Malaysians.

You may recall that a survey conducted last year clearly confirmed that more than 70 percent of Muslims are clearly opposed to Malaysia becoming a theocratic Islamic state along the lines of Iran even though they may perceive Malaysia to be an Islamic country.

And yet, it is the vocal minority - the exponents of an Islamic country - who hold sway.

Unless the sober and sensible majority from the Muslim and non-Muslim divide speak up and state their preference openly, we stand to lose out by default.

It is tragic that we cannot even form an Inter-Faith Council to keep our harmony and preserve our peace. It reveals a lot as to how serious and disturbing this situation has become.

Even a closed-door forum to discuss our rights under the Federal Constitution was forced to be called-off by an unruly mob that threatened to barge into the conference hall last year.

We are no longer able to discuss certain issues rationally and openly. To make matters worse certain issues are even placed beyond the realm of discussion. How do we find common grounds for compromise when we are not allowed to sit down and discuss issues frankly?

Why is it that people get so emotive over race and religion but remain untouched by issues such as poverty, privatisation of public utilities, FTA negotiations, the ISA and other ongoing forms of repression in this country? 50 years of misery.

But this sad situation continues to raise a multitude of questions for all of us - what is the way forward in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country? Is there hope for one people, one nation?

We have given the BN government 50 years to rule the country and forge a nation from our diversity. They have failed us miserably.

If over half a century, they cannot bring about a nation that is firmly rooted in our spirituality and sharing a common destiny in the name of our humanity, should you place your trust and fate in this government? Do you want to give them another 50 years to make you miserable?

It is obvious that you cannot leave this important topic of unity to be achieved by this government. We have to forge this unity by ourselves and get rid of the obstacles and impediments that hinder unity.

What hinders this unity, you may ask? To put it simply and bluntly, it is the huge mandate given to the government. That mandate over 50 years has not seriously addressed the question of our unity as a nation.

On the contrary, that huge majority has eroded our rights and stripped us of our legitimate identity as ordinary citizens of Malaysia with equal rights. That huge majority has kept us apart.

That huge majority has not made them a caring government that addresses the needs of the people. Housing for the marginalised and displaced workers continues to be a serious problem. The entry of private interests into the health care and water sectors will have far-reaching effects for the poor.

We squander millions of ringgit through abuse and corruption without a care in the world. Under this government, the barriers of race, religion and culture that often divide the nation into various groups will be perpetuated for eternity.

This government will not get rid of the identification of race in all the official forms in the public and private sectors. The element of race has become an institutionalised form of racism being practised in some of the social institutions such as education and the media. Enough is enough!

This government is not capable of seriously inculcating universal values that will create a sense of belonging and togetherness among the various communities. We cannot allow this to go on. It's time to say. "Enough is enough!"

The majority of people who are rational, well-meaning and deeply concerned about our well-being as a nation must stand up for what is right and good for the nation.

Hopefully the impending general election will motivate the ordinary people to vote responsibly so that the BN will not be given another huge mandate that has made them arrogant, unaccountable and undemocratic.

The sooner we make that stand the better our chances. You will be promised all kinds of things in their impressive flyers; their manifesto will have glowing objectives to seduce you. Ignore all that and remember only this.

It is a saying from Eric Hoffer "No matter how noble the objectives of a government, if it blurs decency and kindness, cheapens human life and breeds ill will and suspicion - it is an evil government".