

Bangsa Malaysia gets a push with Obama's win
Malaysiakini.com
NOV 7, 2008
Siti Ismail

On Tuesday night Malaysian time, live on Awani Astro, a forum was held to discuss the implication of the outcome of the American presidential election for Malaysia. It was striking to see two young and first-time Malaysian members of Parliament (MP) from the opposite sides of the House sitting side-by-side discussing the issue.

So, would Barack Obama's election really have an impact on Malaysia? I would say 'yes'. The prominence of Obama's win for Malaysia is great simply for the fact that both the US and Malaysia have one major thing in common. We are both without a doubt a melting pot of cultures whose dynamism and strength lies in our people.

The US - a land of immigrants - has developed rapidly into one of the most powerful nations of the world and Malaysia, in 51 years, is on her road to being a fully developed nation. This would not be possible without the full participation of our people regardless of race and creed.

We know for a fact that 40 percent of Malaysians are descended from immigrants from other lands. Even among the 60 percent of so called natives, many are descendants from Indonesia, India and the Arab world and they still have strong ties to these countries.

Examples of this can be seen in the number of associations based on ethnicity such as the Persatuan Bengkulu Malaysia, Persatuan Minang Malaysia, Ikatan Kebajikan Mendailing Malaysia etc while there also prominent personalities of mixed origins such as Syed Hamid Albar who is of Hadrami descent, Dr Mahathir Mohammed, Rais Yatim and many more.

Our nation-building policies have stressed our differences even among the bumiputera let alone other races. Perhaps this is the reason why the definition of Melayu is so misleading. Alright, so the constitution defines what is a native/bumiputera is as it also defines the position of Islam in Malaysia and we have a 'social contract'.

I have no problems with that but that does not erase our social-demographic reality and this is where the Obama effect comes in. Americans, in voting for Obama, threw away racial prejudice and saw their country as a whole - not as white, black, yellow or red people but as Americans and that is their crowning glory.

Obama, even though only half-black, represents a race which for centuries was seen as inferior. From descendants of slaves to citizens of failed nations, blacks have always been portrayed as a hopeless race. This is the ugly truth. But today the US - the most powerful country in the world which until 50 years ago still practised segregation and until less than 150 years ago still upheld slavery - has a black man as her head of state.

This gives hope that anything is possible even in Malaysia. Descendants of bumis and non-bumis alike could one day be equal as citizens or even the prime minister of Malaysia. While our own general election last March and the subsequent events brought the issue of race relations to a whole new level in Malaysia, the Obama win will spur it on further until Ketuanan Melayu becomes obsolete.

The demand for a Bangsa Malaysia will only intensify in the years to come and we,

regardless of our race or ethnicity, better start jumping on this bandwagon now if we want what is best for our future.

It was Tuan Guru Nik Aziz who summed up Obama's win perfectly by stating that it tears down the myth of racial superiority. I was hoping for either Khairy Jamaluddin or Yusmadi Yusof to say it instead since they represent my generation.

Being young and first time MPs who are highly educated and well-travelled, I was hoping that they would have analysed the US election from a different angle especially in relation to race relations here in Malaysia.

But alas, Tuan Guru beat them to it.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/92660>