

**I say it again: Put ego aside, learn from Sarawak**  
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I RECEIVED a rather nasty email from a reader in response to my article 'Stop bringing up the ugliness of May 13, please' published in The Borneo Post column on Aug 21.

In that article, I declared with much pride that there is no racial issue in Sarawak and that those in Peninsular Malaysia should learn from us about nurturing racial harmony and tolerance. I also wrote that the May 13 racial riot in Kuala Lumpur was a West Malaysian problem and that the people of East Malaysia were not responsible for the mayhem and violence which led to many senseless deaths in 1969. None of us in Sarawak or Sabah were involved in any way in the May 13 incident.

It's not that hate mail is uncommon. I have been on the receiving end of so many of them and I used to accept them in my stride and with a chuckle. But the recent one that came in was particularly personal. Its gist was, "You Sarawakians have no right to teach politics to us, West Malaysians." I will not go into details.

sarawak-natives I think that was rather egoistical. Was I wrong to ask them to take a leaf from the positive traits of Sarawakians about never going down the racist road? Why can't some people swallow their pride, admit their faults and weaknesses and learn what is good from their fellow Malaysians? It's only human to err and if we believe in God, neither is it a sin. The One above is merciful and He will forgive us if we repent ... truly repent, that is.

Not much to celebrate

Sadly, things in the country are not exactly what it should be in recent times. We have just celebrated our National Day but really, Malaysians do not feel much pride and neither was there much to celebrate. It's amazing how some unbalanced Malaysians with the racist streak, who are so cooked up with all things racial, are able to exert so much influence on the rest of us with their dangerous rhetoric.

At times, I wonder how these people manage to find their way into the media. Perhaps some editors, in wanting to expose these racists, don't realise that it would be more sensible at times to just ignore such statements of a racial nature. After all, they're only a minority.

Yes, the situation in the country today is far from being ideal. Just hear the lamentations from these prominent personalities.

In her column in a national daily this week, Marina Mahathir wrote: "It's very strange, but as we enter our 54th year of independence, what I least feel is independent. Indeed, in the month of Ramadan — the month of reflection and restraint — we find instead more toxicity in the air at home than ever.

"From school principals who spout racist nastiness to politicians and media who insist on poisoning what is already a poisoned well. Instead of the serenity one hopes to feel at this time, in order to feel closer to God, all I can feel is the disturbance in the heart and mind that comes from living in an environment of hate.

"When I open the newspaper or switch on the TV, there is nothing but anger and sadness.

How can we call ourselves independent when we are so caught up by hate, none of which seems to have any real foundation at all?" Marina added.

Race and religion

Then, Dr David KL Quek, president of the Malaysian Medical Association, had this to share: "This year, I became a senior citizen. 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.

"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.

"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 hatemongers 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 world view.

"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.

Sarawak\_cultural\_dancers"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 anyone 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."

Admit mistakes, make amends

These are pertinent statements from two very concerned Malaysians. Well, if the reader who wrote the angry letter to me refused to listen to me, a Sarawakian, then he should perhaps take a cue from his fellow West Malaysians. That is how they felt about recent happenings in the country.

I can only conclude here by warning that racism leaves a trail of devastation, encouraging prejudice and bias and creates a backward society.

Therefore, I would urge my fellow Malaysians over in the peninsula to make amends and openly admit mistakes for it is grossly unfair to maintain and harbour the old system of

governance based on race. Race-based politics must never be supported. What we must work on now is a credible action plan to resolve the woes brought about by racism.

We must let go of our egos and learn from people like Marina Mahathir and Dr David Quek. I'm sure they will be more than willing to learn from the people of Sarawak too about how to maintain and nurture racial bliss and tolerance.

Let me say this again. There may be so many things wrong in Sarawak today but we have been continuously blessed with racial harmony and religious tolerance and this is something which we should never take for granted.

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