

Only When We Are Malaysian First Then Can We Build A Future For Our Young And Our Young For The Future

MalaysianMirror.com

August 30, 2011

We have achieved some economic progress since our beloved first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, thundered the glorious word Merdeka seven times in Stadium Merdeka in 1957. But as much progress as we have made, one cannot help but think of the lost opportunities and the many areas where we have regressed.

The time has come for Malaysians to examine our own shortcomings objectively, abandon failed policies to adopt new ones that allow us to build the future for our young as well as build our young for the future. Much as we can build the necessary physical and digital infrastructure to world-class standards, we must also equip our young with the tools and skill sets to face the challenges of globalization.

We must impress on our young that there is no substitute for competence. Neither is there any alternative to innovation and creativity as the road-map towards high-income status. But first we must be comfortable as Malaysians. There must be a sense of Malaysian identity that what we are is more important than who we are; that the content of our character is more important than the colour of our skin and that how we connect with other Malaysians is more important than our past ancestry.

Independence gave us the power and the freedom to be the masters of our own destiny. It gave us the opportunity to create and shape a National Identity, of what it means to be Malaysian, regardless of ethnic and religious identity. The unique challenges faced by our Founding Fathers, which we still face today, was to show to us what it means to be Malaysian at the same as being a Malaysian Malay, Chinese, Indian, Dayak, Kadazandusun and the many other groups which are represented in our country. In other words, we needed (and still need) to know how to hold on to our important ethnic identities in conjunction with having a strong identification with a National Identity which unifies and bonds us together.

The hard earned freedom to be masters of our own destiny has been abused to create a sense of fear among Malaysians. The politics of fear tells us that somehow, our ethnic identity and rights will be taken away from us if a National Identity that emphasizes freedom, justice and equality were to emerge and take root. Even sadder still, this politics of fear has become common currency since the historic 2008 general elections, promoted by groups such as Perkasa and by irresponsible newspapers such as Utusan Malaysia. The constant identification and emphasis on 'bogeymen', be it certain opposition Political Parties, Communists or Christians is a clear demonstration that the goal of 1Malaysia still eludes us. In fact, to many, 1Malaysia sounds too much like an empty slogan devoid of substance.

My hope and prayer for the country is that we can once again find the moral courage and strength of character to chart a course towards the destination of what it means to be Malaysian. Whether it is through common activities such as reaching out to the poor and needy among us, or common causes such as promoting greater environmental awareness, or common concerns such as the education of our children, these expressions of togetherness and solidarity give us hope that we can overcome the initiatives which promote the politics of fear.

To achieve this, however, we require an environment where our basic freedoms are respected and protected. We have lost sight of our basic freedoms, one of the key foundations upon which this country's Independence was built on and recorded for posterity in our Proclamation of Independence which asserts the safeguarding of the 'fundamental rights and liberties of the people in a sovereign democratic and independent State founded upon the principle of liberty and justice.'

We saw a demonstration of how the push to protect our freedoms resulted in a clear demonstration of the spontaneous coming together of Malaysians from all ethnic groups and backgrounds during the July 9th, Bersih 2.0 marches in Kuala Lumpur. Here, the assertion of a basic right – the freedom to assemble – which was promised by Tuanku Abdul Rahman during his Merdeka remarks on 31 August 1957, was asserted together with a strong showing of solidarity among Malaysians. This is the kind of Malaysian

identity which needs to be inculcated in us, especially among the younger generation.
We must be Malaysian First always and Malays, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan, Iban second. Selamat Hari Merdeka to all Malaysians and to all Malaysians seeking our Malaysianness within.

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