



Living Together

This National Day, we should take stock and reflect on what we have achieved in terms of racial harmony.

WHAT have we achieved after 48 years of independence?

A lot, if you ask the average Malaysian. We have attained great economic progress, a higher standard of living and international recognition. In fact, many developing countries want to emulate our economic success.

This year, as we celebrate 48 years of independence from the British, it would be good if we could focus on one important non-materialistic aspect of our lives - racial harmony.

Since our independence, we have, from time to time, been having cases of tension, friction or arguments related to race or religion. Even now, it is happening.

Such incidents only threaten to dismantle all the harmony that took decades to nurture. Who is to blame? Some selfish bigots. And the sad part is, they are mostly politicians.

Understandably, politicians like to champion matters close to their heart. Nothing wrong with that. But to do so at the expense of upsetting the peace and harmony in the country is totally irresponsible, to say the least.

We are seeing plenty of that of late, all in the name of winning votes or gaining popularity. Have some politicians become so bankrupt of ideas that they have to resort to narrow racial or religious issues to win support?

Nothing seems to be taboo - be it the issue of language, schools or the rights of others - as long as it serves their purpose.

And often adding to the controversy are certain segments of the Press which further fuel the racial and religious tension by playing up these issues. Interestingly, all this is done in the name of freedom of the Press.

But it's not politicians alone who are guilty of

threatening the peace. Criminals are also at it.

Look at the recent Ayah Pin episode. We will not go into the facts of the case lest it be deemed *sub judice*.

But the main issue here is respect for the law. Whether we agree or disagree with someone else's view or belief, we have no right to take the law into our own hands.

In this case, the perpetrators attempted to burn down Ayah Pin's commune. Luckily, no lives were lost. It can set a dangerous precedent. What next? Burn down temples, churches or mosques just because you dislike them?

The swift police action in detaining some suspects is laudable. This crime is not about religion. It is about bringing to book undesirable elements in our society.

Of course, this is not to say that we Malaysians cannot speak out on these 'sensitive issues'. There are avenues to discuss matters in a rational and responsible manner.

As a nation progresses, so does the level of maturity and responsibility of its people.

Surely, in a multi-racial or multi-religious society, we must be mature and responsible enough to engage in open debate without provoking or insulting one another? After 48 years as an independent nation, we must be able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong.

And there is no real need for 'sensitive' issues to be always politicised by irresponsible politicians. They should remember that they fought tooth and nail to win the elections just to be able to serve the *rakyat*.

Today, Malaysia has become the envy of others due to the ability of different races to live together in peace and harmony. It is something to be cherished. No one can take that away from us.

National Day is a good time to take stock and reflect on this. **mb**

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