

Let's continue to do it the Tunku's way

IT is a speech very few would remember, not even our historians. But as we celebrate our National Day next week, it is essential that we take a step back and reflect on how the nation was formed.

National Day is not just about flying the *Jalur Gemilang*, which we seem to have focused our attention on. Nor is it about holding yet another grand parade, and neither is it about converting illegal bikers into patriots.

Our National Day is a testimony of how three main races came together for a common cause. It is about achieving independence without shedding a drop of blood, unlike in other countries.

On Feb 9, 1957, Tunku Abdul Rahman spoke over Radio Malaya to appeal for funds. He wanted RM1mil for the celebration, a grand sum then, because the occasion needed to be celebrated fittingly.

The money, he said, would not only be used to upgrade roads, buildings and to entertain foreign guests but also to feed the poor at mosques, churches, temples and at the homes of the old and destitute.

He made it a point to mention the places of worship of all three religions. That is the mark of a true Malaysian leader. One may even say that it is a rarity these days for some of our politicians to even see beyond their own faith and ethnicity.

For the Tunku, Malaysia was a celebration of all races. He never forgot that and he made it a point to always remind the people that this was a country for all of us. That is what a great Malaysian leader should be.

The Tunku was not the smartest of Malaysian politicians and he made it known that he had to struggle to pass his Bar exams in London. But he never succumbed to the temptation of playing the racial card to be popular with the Malays.

In that radio address, the Tunku told his listeners that independence was won by "the spontaneous support of all communities in this country - Malays, Chinese, Indians and others who regard Malaya as their home". And certainly he never questioned the loyalty of non-Malays or to even remotely suggest that they were immigrant races.

This is what our National Day is all about - a reminder to Malaysians, especially the younger ones, that a nation was born because the three main ethnic groups could work together.

The doomsayers did not give us much of a chance then, predicting that our country would break up when



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On The Beat

By WONG CHUN WAI

natives fight each other once the British leave. But we will turn 49 years Old next week.

We have absolutely every reason to feel proud. We should never be distracted, even if we are sometimes hurt by the remarks of one or two politicians who want to climb the political hierarchy by creating imaginary racial enemies.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Aziz Shamsuddin, for example, aptly reminded Malaysians that all of us should refrain from making remarks that can hurt others. It is a sensible piece of advice from a senior politician.

Seasoned politicians will realise that to win an election, a candidate needs the support of all races. Even in a constituency with a predominant race, it is the minority that would swing the victory.

In short, a politician must not make the silly mistake of seeing himself as the hero of a community. He has to represent the aspirations of all races. As Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said, even if he is a Malay leader, he is also a Malaysian leader.

Making others out to be the bogeyman is an outdated political tactic. In the past, the opposition used race

and religion to incite hatred to gain votes but even these parties have realised that voters are not so easily duped, even if the nation still needs to work harder on race relations.

Barisan Nasional, and previously the Alliance, has a time-tested record of working together. Certainly, no one party has taken advantage of the other.

They have given each other support, even at the expense of losing political support, because the three parties believed in long-term relations. They have stood against many challenges and they continue to do so.

But that is not all. Greater efforts must be made to instil the Malaysian consciousness. The realisation of the sacred positions of Islam and the Malay language is imperative, just as there is a need to appreciate the positive implications of a multi-racial society. Certainly, multiculturalism is not a dirty word.

Given the communal-based structure of our political system, we hope our community leaders will bridge this gap and work towards Malaysian consciousness if

we want to see true national unity.

We can never run away from the fact that in a plural society, there will always be differences. But in a competitive, borderless world, our politicians need to change their mindset of still seeing the economy through coloured lens.

The world outside is our competitors. Our rivals are in Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, China and India. Certainly, it is not Ahmad, Ah Chong and Muthu who should work together as the Malaysian team.

Why are our politicians still talking along racial lines, even as they realise that banks need to be merged to face stiff outside competition and that trading rules will eventually change?

How should we position ourselves to make Malaysia more attractive to investors when there are plenty of options for foreign funds in this region?

If we are serious about ethnic relations, we certainly must never forget that Merdeka is a celebration of all races working together. When was the last time we

heard this line from our leaders?

On the eve of the first National Day, at the Alliance rally in Kuala Lumpur, the Tunku told the crowd: "To the members of my party, the Alliance, Umno, MCA and MIC, I say thank you one and all for having gone through together all the difficult stages of our journey.

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And certainly, for all Malaysians irrespective of their race, religion and culture, we will continue to travel the road together. This is our country; there is no other country.

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