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MALAYSIANS AT A CROSSROADS

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FORMER top policeman Tan Sri Rahim Noor is a righteous man. To be precise, he is a true Malaysian patriot, unlike many politicians who make such self-proclamations but with no record to prove it.

Last week, the ex-Inspector General of Police made a bold statement: he said that if he were to be reborn, he would want to be a "complete Malaysian".

In short, he would not want to be identified by his race.

All he wants is that his identity card merely state that he is a Bangsa Malaysia, nothing more. He has even gone one step further: he feels there is no need for his religion to be stated on such documents, as that is strictly a matter between him and God.

"I am not being emotional but only want to be a Malaysian," said the man who has been through Malaysia's darkest moments, including fighting communist insurgents and seeing the end of the struggle against the Communist Party of Malaya.

Rahim, who served for over 30 years in the force, including as Special Branch director, said he was also concerned that certain people had exploited religion to the extreme.

These are surely powerful words that would make many of us sit up. He may have his flaws, but how we wish more of our leaders would pay attention to and, more importantly, take in what Rahim has said.

After 50 years as a nation, why should Malaysians be made to feel guilty when we talk about forging Bangsa Malaysia, Rakyat Malaysia or, for that matter, anak bangsa Malaysia?

We can call it by any other name for political correctness but the point is that it is the common aspiration and hope of any right thinking Malaysian to feel that they are one - one country, one nationality and one destiny.

No one should be made to think that the hopes and aspirations that our founding fathers had fought for have been whittled away because of racism, chauvinism and intolerance.

Like Rahim, many Malaysians are worried, rightly or wrongly, that what has divided the people has become more defined than what unites us. Only the ignorant would claim there are no signs of polarisation along ethnic and religious lines.

There are good reasons why we are concerned because it is the unity and tolerance among the three major races that have brought the country its independence and glued this nation together for the last 50 years.

After 50 years as a nation, Malaysians should not be made to feel guilty when we talk about forging Bangsa Malaysia, Rakyat Malaysia or, for that matter, anak bangsa Malaysia.



If our countrymen, on the eve of independence in 1957, were overcome with mixed emotions of optimism, uncertainty and doubts, there are plenty of good reasons why we are also in a similar mood.

In the minds of many Malaysians, we are at a crossroad and the road that we take would determine our destination in the next 50 years.

In the words of Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, it would be whether we take the Prime Minister's *Jalan Adil* (Road to Fairness for all Malaysians) or the *Jalan Ketuanan* (Road to Dominance) that some chauvinists want to pursue.

The two other choices are *Jalan Tidak Apa* (Indifference), which comprises Malaysians who accept any trends or developments because of the perception that there is nothing they can do; and *Jalan Keluar*, where fearful and unsure Malaysians talk of migrating because they have lost hope in their country.

We are at a transition. If Rahim, a man who has fought every form of the country's traitors, can talk about a Bangsa Malaysia, let no one threaten us to stop talking about this Malaysian hope.

No one can stop change. The Malaysian media still talk about a group of ageing politicians who stormed into a police station to lodge a police report against a particular blogger but the group reportedly did not know how to surf the Internet and a reporter had to be roped in to search for the website in question.

Then there is another leader who is talking about taking action against *Youtube*, the video sharing portal, presumably not knowing that there are no Malaysian laws against portals and websites registered overseas.

Yet another politician compared bloggers to communists and leftists, political terms which have become meaningless to the younger generation.

It is a little scary because the statements

of these leaders have given the impression of how cut off they are from Generation Y. With their Ipods, MTV and Google, Generation Y is not tuned in to these leaders.

Think about these facts and statistics: Malaysians who are 30 years old next month were just born when *Saturday Night Fever* was shown; and around this time, the TV remote control was introduced. Yet, they seemed not too long ago.

If many Malaysians are worried that some leaders are lost in the digital divide, they are equally concerned that bright political wannabes, some with impressive British and American academic credentials, are not introducing fresh ideas to politics but have latched on to the tired formula of race to climb the party ladder.

Communal politics, like the political ideologies during the Cold War, would eventually disappear. The demography of Malaysia has changed so fast, much more than what the people have noticed.

Fifty years ago, the Alliance had only three major parties but today the Barisan Nasional has 14 component parties. Among the opposition, there are other alternatives besides DAP and PAS.

In a country of 25 million people, there are over two million foreigners, the legal ones that is. In short, as the Chinese population dwindles, there are now more Indonesians, Bangladeshis, Nepalese and Myanmar than the two million Indians.

The political landscape is set to change over the next 50 years, whether we like it or not. There may no longer be enough boxes for just Malays, Chinese, Indians *dan lain-lain* (others) when we fill our forms because, as much we want foreigners to only work here, many would also stay back. That is the history of immigrants anywhere in the world and Malaysia is no exception.

Tan Sri Rahim, you have our highest respect for speaking up for most Malaysians who share the belief that we just want to be known as Bangsa or Rakyat Malaysia - nothing more and nothing less.

Being known as Malaysian does not dilute one's ethnic, religious and cultural identity. After 50 years, there should be no more such fears. We hope we don't need to wait for another 50 years to see this become a reality.