

Raja Nazrin: This country belongs to all Malaysians

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia belongs to all Malaysians equally, and all have an equal right and responsibility to take ownership of their country and its future, the Raja Muda of Perak said here yesterday.

Raja Nazrin Shah said Malaysians needed to realise they all had a vital role in building a strong nation.

The first of seven steps he defined towards this end was a sense of belonging and a common destiny, binding Malaysians of all races, religions and origins together in a common purpose.

"Only when each citizen believes that he or she has a common home and is working towards a common destiny will he or she make the sacrifices needed for the long haul," Raja Nazrin said yesterday, in a keynote address on "Prospects and Challenges for Nation-building" at the Young Malaysians' Roundtable Discussion on National Unity and Development in Malaysia.

The event was organised by the Bar Council and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli).

Raja Nazrin said the Federal Constitution, the Rukunegara and Vision 2020 encapsulated the rights, hopes and aspirations of the population in a way that no other documents could.

"The integrity of these documents must be defended and promoted, especially the first (the Federal Constitution)," he said.

Step Two: Don't just wish away problems, as nation-building is premised on the fact that there are differences



Raja Muda of Perak Raja Nazrin Shah addressing the Young Malaysians' Roundtable Discussion on National Unity and Development in Malaysia.

in society.

"If we all walked, talked and thought the same, it would probably not be needed. There will, unfortunately, be chauvinistic groups here, just as there are in others.

"They will fight the idea of national unity, block social change and try to be politically dominant. The existence of these groups, however, does not mean that nation-building is a futile exercise."

What it meant, rather, was that Malaysians needed to be prepared to negotiate their way through and around these differences.

Raja Nazrin suggested the creation of social movements to enlighten the people and deny popular support to chauvinists who impeded national unity.

Step Three: Nation-building required accommodation and compromise.

"In our haste to be prescriptive, we should not be so idealistic that we are incapable of also being practical. We should not allow perfection to be the enemy of the good.

"Yes, we should seek the best solutions and expect the highest standards of performance, but we should also be

prepared to sacrifice some part of our positions for the good of the whole."

Raja Nazrin said individuals ended up worse off when they acted out of self-interest and not in their collective group interest.

Step Four: Avoid enforced solutions, as coercion or threats of violence would nullify nation-building.

He emphasised that might was not equal to right.

Solutions, he said, had to be found within the political and social structures, as the alternative could lead to a strong temptation to resort to illegitimate ways and means.

Nation-building required society to be open, tolerant and forward-looking, he added.

"So important are these values that they are embedded in Vision 2020's nine strategic challenges, as are those of a mature democracy, a caring society and innovation."

Step Five: Inclusiveness, to enable the various sectors of society to be productively engaged.

Malaysians need to guard against all forms of extremism, chauvinism, racism and isolationism. In this respect, there should also be social, political and legal sanctions, he added.

"Nation-building is a process rather than an outcome. When Malaysia started off 50 years ago, there were no examples to study. There were no manuals to follow.

"While a sense of impatience is perhaps fully understandable, nation-building

takes place over a period of time and only with persistence."

Raja Nazrin said trust had to be built where there was none, and co-operation established where it was absent.

"Building on layers of foundation is the only way to ensure that the process is solid and sustainable," he said.

Step Six: Political, social and economic incentives should exist to reward good behaviour and penalise bad.

"I know this statement is self-evident, but it is a fact that many countries are as likely to punish good behaviour as to reward it," he said.

"After all, if there are benefits for corruption, then there is a real cost to being honest."

The incentives for building a nation must be greater and more compelling than breaking it down, he said.

The Raja Muda said the price of racial and cultural intolerance should be made prohibitively high.

Step Seven: The greatest challenge to nation-building was balancing the need for change with that of continuity, particularly in facing globalisation.

Globalisation, Raja Nazrin said, had unleashed sweeping economic, political, social and cultural transformations that had weakened national institutions, values and norms.

On leaders of the future, Raja Nazrin said that able young people needed to be mentored. "The young should be allowed to make mistakes along the way as part of the overall learning process."