

# Perak prince has hit the nail on the head

COMING from Penang, I feel a little weird around royalty. We are just not used to them, you see. In fact, there is a family legend on my Mom's side that illustrates this.

My great granddad was from Penang and he moved to Kedah to take up a teaching post. While working in his garden, a group of men came up on horseback. The ensuing conversation went something like this:

"Hello," said my ancestor.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked the lead horseman imperiously.

"Nope."

"I am your Sultan!"

"Oops."

Or something like that.

I must confess that great-grandpa's temporary cluelessness has been passed down to me. So at functions with royalty, I stand when others stand, sit when they sit and generally try to be inconspicuous. I don't pay much attention to their speeches either because the



"beta's" and "tiah's" confuse me.

Raja Nazrin of Perak's speech two days ago at a Bar Council do was a bit different though. For one thing, he wasn't using royal language. For another, he was speaking about a pressing issue in the country, in a manner that was, for a royal address, detailed and pointed.

The topic was about nation building and the first point he made was that at the core of the nation-building process was the need to have a citizenry that actually felt that they were a part of that nation.

I am glad the prince said this because it can't be stressed enough that this is a major

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problem in Malaysia as more and more people are feeling disillusioned with the way they perceive themselves to be treated. There is a loss of a sense of belonging and an isolation of spirit that comes from being seen as the other.

It is one thing to have policies that favour one group over all others; it is another thing to make the other groups feel totally left out and uncared for.

When affirmative action becomes oppressive and when respect for one group is not matched with equal respect for another, what we will have is an atmosphere of cynicism and anger. This is not conducive to the well-being of the nation, be it economically, politically or socially.

His Highness (see, I'm learning the proper terms as I write) went on to say that in order to continue to grow as a united country, we must reject extremism and bigotry with dialogue and civil action. Tolerance and forward thinking ought to be the order of the day and

inclusive participation as opposed to enforced solutions, the method of overcoming problems.

Underlying all this is a need for the total respect and protection of the Federal Constitution.

This call to look unto the Constitution as the guiding light this nation needs to adhere to is not new or revolutionary, but coming from Raja Nazrin, it takes on a certain resonance.

To the royalists out there, it is a call for the adherence to the law from a ruler. To me, it is an indication that things have reached a point where the direction this country is taking is a matter of concern of such importance that it affects not only the man on the street but also a man who could not be further away from it.

If now is not the time to make sure our country reaches for the ideals of fairness and justice, so that together we can grow as a nation, then I have no idea when is.