

After 50 years, time to fix gaps

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I MAY not exactly remember the jubilations of Merdeka in 1957 as I was only five years old but I do know that we celebrated this auspicious day without fail every year at home. We were given small flags of Malaya and would wave at people passing by our house yelling "Merdeka!" and they would reciprocate.

In the evening we would be dressed smartly to be taken to the Esplanade, in Penang, to watch a fireworks display that commenced at night.

It may be fifty years this year but I still eagerly wait to relive the historic day and in my own way will raise a Malaysian flag at my home and stick a little one on the roof of my car.

After 49 years I have been privileged to observe many developments. Leaders come and go, and new faces appear as the years go by.

Politically Malaysia has always been clean and somewhat democratic since the government has always been elected. I have been involved in seven general elections. In 1969 I was not directly involved but was excited and anxious since the scenario in Penang then was tense and Parti Gerakan Rakyat was making waves and washed away the Alliance. But after it won in Penang and took over the administration of the state, the party joined the Barisan Nasional (BN). The then Pan Malaysia Islamic Party (PMIP) won the state of Kelantan and it too joined the BN later, only to be thrown out of the coalition a few years later. The Alliance, which became the BN, then was steered by Tun Abdul Razak and after he died by Tun Hussein Onn. It was during Hussein's time that PMIP (which became PAS) was sacked from the BN.

Today if we are to see how mature the people of Malaysia are in politics we would not believe that some folk think that all money spent on development is derived from political party coffers. Visit kampungs and ask those who are still illiterate and they would say that opposition parties do not have money, so how would they govern. There are still people who do not know that a country is governed with money taken from them through the taxes collected. Nobody wants to tell them that. And that wakil rakyat are their servants and not their masters.

Let us also take a look at some politicians in this millennium. To date they do not understand the meaning of "opposition". I

have noticed how some of them portray members of opposition parties and their supporters as traitors to the nation or enemies of the state. They do not understand that being on the other side means just a healthy sign of what a democratic country should be. Just that people from either side see things differently.

We should not also forget that the political situation in Malaysia today is very much "controlled". Various laws hindering civil liberties still exist. We do not have a free flow of information but we have "protective Acts" to restrict information or to curb our activities.

We have the Parliament as the esteemed law-making body of the nation. There are elected members who make a mockery of the august house but who want to be known as "Yang Berhormat" like those who passed sexist remarks during a parliamentary sitting. The whip system

Malaysia of yesteryears was once the number one rubber, oil palm and tin producing country. In later years, God was kind and we had oil and gold. Kedah was the "rice bowl of Malaysia". What happened? Where have all these gone? Then came the agricultural era under the late Tun Abdul Razak with the Green Book Plan. As years went by we were taken on an industrialisation drive and then entered the world of information technology. But what are the achievements? Who benefited?

We had our dollars and cents changed to ringgit and sen. Our ringgit was strong against the Singapore dollar many years ago but now we trail them by a long way. Why? The markets say a weak ringgit is good for investors and a strong ringgit keeps them away. Those are foreign investors but what about the people of Malaysia and their spending power? If a strong ringgit means low pay then

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has made these members of parliament redundant and has given them a lot of time to fool around because at the end of the day they only need to raise their hands in support of a bill.

Maybe the current premier should allow "people's representatives" to vote according to their conscience. Then at least they will have to seriously think what they may want to say and save parliament the blushes. Maybe the premier should also show some displeasure to ministers who make the feminine gender a laughing stock just to justify their supposed response to the leaks at the parliament house.

The people are mature enough to observe live telecasts of parliament sittings. I also would like to suggest that if a member of parliament uses sexist remarks or utters vulgar words and brings disrepute to the house then the member should be immediately removed from the house and suspended for an unspecified period. Time need not be wasted to refer the member to any committee.

Economically, the

how do we purchase the necessities? If a weak ringgit means more pay but high prices then what is to become of the rakyat? Who is benefitting from our economic cake? We build the nation too but why are we not the beneficiaries?

Education is another area that is being toyed around with. Policies change each time a new minister is appointed. Why? In my opinion education should have one everlasting policy. Only then can teachers, parents and school-going children have one vision and there is no need for anybody to blame anybody for failures or to claim credit for success by students. Education is a basic necessity and a basic right for all.

The nation has achieved much in many other sectors like in agriculture and land development. Skyscrapers, satellite towns, Multimedia Super Corridor and modern technologies help to put Malaysia on the world map. The good work done so far needs to be built upon.

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