

# 9MP can bring us some joy

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IN my last column on Dec 17, 2006, I said that my New Year's wish was for "all of us to carry on the momentum towards building a Bangsa Malaysia".

One of the necessary lynchpins to achieve this, I said, is "to care for each other irrespective of race."

Thus, I must thank Cik Rozita Mat Aris of Kajang for sharing with us in her letter to a local paper on Jan 10 the experiences of her flood-stricken Kota Tinggi relatives. They were starving but the abundant food being prepared in a neighbourhood hall was only for visiting VIPs.

However, "help came when you least expect it," she wrote.

At Taman Kota Jaya, most flood victims like her relatives were Malays.

"Chinese neighbours drove around to hand out bread, biscuits, drinking water and blankets." The local temple "organised help; no distinction of race was made. When the waters started to recede, Chinese doctors made free house calls. These people will always be remembered for giving help from the heart, no reporters trailing them, no TV cameras to record their deeds," she added.

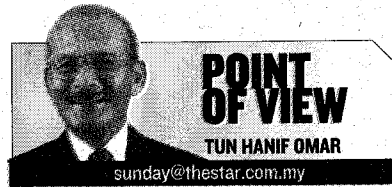
I must join Cik Rozita in expressing my boundless thanks to these selfless, race and religion-blind good Samaritans and to all others like them for their truly Malaysian spirit. This is the stuff Bangsa Malaysia is made of!

Rozita and others like her who take the trouble to highlight such cases, and to express support and gratitude for them, equally contribute to facilitate the climate for nation building. Syabas, one and all!

The floods hit Johor the day I was winging my way to the UK. The following night I received a text message from Datuk Zuraida Atan, my young Buckingham Uni senior, imploring all and sundry to help the flood victims with biscuits, bottled water, blankets and mattresses.

She named the collection points and I immediately contacted my daughter and the companies I worked for to help as best they could.

If the Government and its delivery system can get the 9MP off to a flying start, we may see an economically better year to bring us some cheer.



My daughter responded by loading a hired van with all the cream-cracker and condensed milk boxes and mattresses that could be fitted in, and drove it to the Kontena Nasional collection-point.

That was the least I could do from afar; and stories like those recounted by Cik Rozita surely must give us immense pleasure and greater confidence in our fellow Malaysians.

## Economic potential

2007, my friends, is a very important year. If our government and its delivery system – the government servants – and those fortunate enough to be awarded contracts under the 9MP can get their act together, we may see an economically better year to bring us some cheer.

These past several years have given us the feeling of being left in the doldrums. Our disappointment has been that much greater because of the enhanced expectations aroused by a newly elected, hugely popular, and self-proclaimed reformist new government.

Apart from the great feeling brought about by Pak Lah's continued support for greater openness and freedom of expression, the euphoria over his new government has greatly dissipated because of the economic lethargy, the unfulfilled reforms and the feeling of drift brought about in large part by the perception that Pak Lah has not been really hands-on and has

spent more time on international conferences and visits.

Pak Lah must really get this 9MP off to a flying start; its projects must be given out in a transparent way – the way that the electorates now expect of Pak Lah – for some of the original confidence in him to return.

This is also Visit Malaysia Year. So many programmes are laid out through 2007 to welcome tourists. One tourist has already extolled the "attractiveness" of the new public toilet in Bukit Bintang. This I must see. Maybe this is the toilet that all our local councillors should see! But can we sustain it?

If you read the comments of the eight tourists whose boat capsized in huge waves 4km off the Sabah coast, you will find that it is our social and natural diversity that they have found to be attractive. Because of this, they are coming again in spite of their ordeal.

That is why we must care for our social unity, diversity, environment, flora and fauna. Those who try to destroy them must be crazy, for herein lies our true wealth and advantage if we care to preserve, enhance and promote them.

We can improve a great deal more. We should learn to breathe life into our past and present by proper captioning in the museums, against buildings and structures.

And how about our trees, plants and rocks? Twice before, DBKL and its predecessor named the trees and plants in Taman Perdana by both their local and scientific names. But we have not sustained our efforts. Where is our head park-keeper; what is he doing?

In some foreign botanic parks, they go one step further: their captions tell you the natural habitat of the trees and plants,

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ROZITA.MAT ARIS OF KAJANG

how many species were available in the country and globally. Sometimes they give the history of a particular plant brought by a particular person from abroad. They give recognition to those who contribute. They are not afraid of their own shadows!

We are also going to celebrate 50 years of independence on Aug 31. We were "colonised" by the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch and the British. For 446 years, the native peoples of the Malay Archipelago had their traditional mercantile acumen and networks systematically destroyed. That was how long it was.

As Treggoning said in his history of Malaya, the Malays who were never peasant farmers were forced by British policies to become poor padi farmers. Even large-scale rubber planting was denied them by policy.

That's why Merdeka is so important to me. That's why I am so grateful to Tunku Abdul Rahman and all his friends, colleagues and collaborators, and all those who made things possible for them, for freeing us from the colonial yoke.

Now that we are physically free, can you and I be resolute in freeing ourselves from colonial mental captivity? Can we ensure that our parliamentary representatives take their jobs seriously? We owe that to our freedom fighters and to our children.