

Making of the M'sian story

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Comment

by David C.E. Tneh

FIFTY years is a long time. And as the nationalistic spirit and euphoria slowly envelop Dataran Merdeka with the patriotic colours of red, blue, yellow, and white, the eagerness and anticipation of our nation's independence should be above and beyond the annual celebratory parade.

This is a special year for Malaysia and all Malaysians because being half a century old as a nation marks a critical aspect in our nationhood. It is a time where we contemplate, analyse, and re-evaluate our dreams, desires, achievements, failures, and objectives as an entity that is as diverse as it is uniquely whole. It is in our Malaysian story, a wholesome narrative with a tightly woven plot, spell-binding and intense in certain chapters but fragmented and bare in some, that we seek closure for some loose ends and amendments for some awful prose. Being 50 is a time when we benchmark ourselves with other nations to see whether ours is a success story worthy to be in the "best-sellers list". Are Malaysians free from the parochial baggage of the past? Or are we still imbibing ourselves in a

communal outlook reinforced through generations of racial stereotyping and bigotry?

The time is perhaps long overdue to move the entire nation from the slumber of indifference and apathy to an enlightened state of existence and mindfulness about our country. Dr Ooi Kee Beng has summed it up perfectly in the article "Pondering 50 Years of Nationhood", that younger generations of Malaysian's "...were left with limited knowledge about their own history. They know little about significant events in their past ... The result is a strategic disinterest among the young in the finer points of nation-building ..."

Change could come in many ways but perhaps the best transformation comes from within. What is needed is more than an emasculation of modern society's aggressive individualism, for Man cannot find happiness if he lives only for himself; it is a meaningless existence. Simply put, most Malaysian youths simply do not care about our country. Perhaps it is the lack of reflexive learning in our education, as highlighted by Dr Muhd Zaide Ismail in the article "Intellect Defines the Man", that is

reinforcing an "ignorance-is-bliss" phenomenon among our youths. Sadly, in almost all societies, youths are often taught that the Holy Grail of life's happiness lies in one's ability to amass hordes of treasure (wealth) in one's lifetime. Thus, the gods of materialism and individualism rule supreme in most young minds and this is further fuelled by the senseless culture of consumerism and decadence of the present. Shakespeare's saying that "Nothing is so

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common in life than the desire to be remarkable", should be taken to heart as our youths owe it to themselves to know the difference between holistic and purposeful living, and an anxiety-filled life devoted to the pursuit of all things material and temporal.

"Only by being inclusive and participative can the various sectors of our society be productively engaged. It follows that all forms of extremism, chauvinism, racism and isolationism must be guarded against. They must be soundly

sanctioned socially, politically and, if necessary, also legally." Spoken by Raja Nazrin Shah in his keynote address at the Young Malaysian's Roundtable Discussion on National Unity and Development in Malaysia, such words have never been timelier than the present. It is not through a rose-tinted vision that I say there is hope yet for our country. The Malaysian National Service Programme is a step in the right direction as more youths will learn and realise the importance of

belonging to the Malaysian landscape and mindscape. Charles Darwin has said that "There is grandeur in this world". We should take heart in

Darwin's words and ponder on the genesis and evolution of our country. As the Malaysian story continues and is ever-growing, let us all play a part in the weaving of this epic. Let us all not give up on the good fight, for Rome was not built in a single day, let alone 50 years. The Malaysian story is our story. It is worth fighting for.

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