

Syed: This roundtable is about looking forward, especially after the recent Umno general assembly, where there were sensitive speeches that caused uneasiness among the people. But instead of looking back at other black marks, we should look forward to the future. There's a great deal of suspicion among Malaysians, despite the fact that we are going to celebrate the nation's 50th anniversary next year. The recently concluded (Umno general) assembly and what came out of it was an example. Why is this so?

Dr Rozaidah: Meetings that are race-inclined should not be telecast live as everyone is bound to talk about it. Every party that is race-based must champion the issues concerning that community. There has been dissatisfaction in terms of achievements and wealth distribution and this contributed to the suspicion.

Kulasegaran: The suspicion and uneasiness is nothing unusual. It has been like this for the last 49 years. These are matters that have not been addressed. (They have been caused) ...by race-based parties which I think is wrong. It is the result of political parties like Umno that champion the Malay agenda. What more when you do so openly.

Dr Rahman: Firstly, I think there are some considerations here. No matter what you talk about, the Malays feel they are still behind when it comes to the economy. Secondly, whether you like it or not, more Chinese are sending their children to Chinese schools and more Indians are sending their children to Tamil schools. So, the (Malay) community becomes suspicious. Thirdly, the suspicion becomes greater when some community leaders start questioning the social contract and this is when the speeches become fiery. If you ask me, these are the roots of our suspicion.

Syed: Dr Wee, how do you see it?

Dr Wee: After listening to the three YBs, I have a strong feeling that it comes down to the social contract. You have your version, I have mine. But what is important is that we find unity in diversity. What is important also is to see the content of the social contract. I want to ask for something that can benefit my race. It does not mean I am questioning the rights of the Malays. Sometimes, as in the case of the Indians who want to increase their share of equity to three per cent, it is only fair that they want to upgrade their position in life. But some will interpret this as they wanting more. I think we have to base everything on the Federal Constitution. What does the social contract mean to specific communities?

To a Malay, it may mean Malay special rights. To a Chinese, it may mean the right to study his mother tongue. I think the emphasis varies from race to race. That is the problem we are facing. Secondly, we have not established the foundation for national unity. The issue of Chinese sending their children to Chinese schools is not the problem. The problem is the deteriorating state of social integration at national secondary schools or *sekolah menengah kebangsaan*. Umno members must realise that what they said at the general assembly was being heard by other races and the international community.

Take the incident involving the *keris* (Umno Youth chief and Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein waved the *keris* at the assembly). Kissing it, and using it are two different things. I feel the situation has deteriorated because of things like this.

Syed: Is it possible then that the other communities are not knowledgeable enough about Malay culture?

Kulasegaran: No. I think you must take it within the context of the Umno assembly... (when people spoke about) running amok, bloodbath and all that. When you take all that into consideration, then the *keris* becomes an offensive thing.

What's wrong with unity?

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For the non-Malay, these are very sensitive issues. Their views have to be taken into consideration as much as there needs to be respect for the *keris*.

Dr Rahman: Let's be rational. Do you think it is possible for us to run amok?

Kulasegaran: Why not?

Dr Rahman: We are bound by human rights and are under the scrutiny of the international community. I don't think it is possible. We are living in a globalised world. We must look at this maturely.

Dr Rozaidah: I don't think it is possible (running amok). Even if we talk about Malay rights, we are not saying the other races like Chinese and Indians are taking it away from us. What we are saying is that we want our party to champion our issue, to reach the level or number that we have targeted all this while. As long as the target is not reached, we will harp on the issue. Every party wants to enrich and empower its own race. What we are saying is that the people in Malay organisations are not doing enough to help the Malays.

Syed: There are differences of opinion on this. We can discuss this till the cows come home and still not get it resolved. After 49 years of independence, we have been through a lot of trials and tribulations. If we continue to look back at

the negative things, it is not going to do us any good. What about the positive aspects of Malaysians? Do you think we can ride on the positive elements?

Dr Rozaidah: I think we can start with the Ninth Malaysia Plan. It is a national mission. It is all there. It wants to empower people from every walk of life. That is what the prime minister has been saying. It is a good place to begin.

Kulasegaran: I think of all the races. The Bumiputeras in Sabah and Sarawak have a lot of positive things to contribute to nation-building. I think maturity and proper integration in schools are the answer. This is what is lacking.

Dr Rahman: As I said, Umno can play a major role in leading Malaysia to greater heights. We have to increase our tolerance. (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) Pak Lah has spoken on this in his winding-up speech. On the issue of integrity, the thing is that when a Malay is given a contract, he gives it away. There is no integrity here. These people want to take things easy. Of course, if the things that are mentioned are looked into, we will see improvement. Then, there is the social contract. When it was drafted, it was done by the leaders of the Chinese and the Indians. It was agreed to by the leaders. We have to respect that.

Dr Wee: I strongly believe we have to adopt the

blue ocean strategy when we talk about racial integration. I don't like to hear the word *toleransi kaum*. It should be *integrasi kaum* that should be upgraded to a higher level to include appreciation or *penghayatan*. I do not see this. Actually, we try to tolerate each other up to a level. Sometimes, we can't tolerate each other (beyond that level). We have to encourage more integration as well as appreciation. We have been talking about Sino-Malay co-operation for years, but why can't we encourage it? If the Chinese and Malays can work together in business, we can succeed. But we do not encourage this. The market is not Malaysia alone. If I want to do business, if I go to Arab countries, of course, I want Malay partners.

Syed: What do you think about specific policies or programmes that the government of the day has done or should do to strengthen our resolve to get us forward? In the face of globalisation, do you think there is need for a re-think or re-look at some of these things?

Dr Rozaidah: I think the relationship between the races in the pursuit of the global market is lacking. But that is from the business level. The government has done quite a lot in other areas.

Dr Wee: How we promote relations among the races should also be looked at. The Ethnic Relations guidebook for public university undergraduates this year created quite a bit of misunderstanding. It was not right. It was negative. If I am a Malay, I will be angry. If I am a Chinese, I will be unhappy. Sometimes, we can't blame the government. I think the leaders make fair statements.

The intention is good, but when it comes down the line, it goes out of their control. We have to educate our civil servants.

Syed: What's your most important hope for Malaysia?

Dr Rozaidah: I really hope we can remain focused instead of arguing about Malay or Chinese rights. We are all Malaysians. It is enshrined in our Constitution that everyone has their rights and everyone can look forward to prosper.

Kulasegaran: After 49 years, I want to know I belong here. Malaysians feel very strongly about it. Bangsa Malaysia and racial harmony are very important. This is my motherland, irrespective of my race. I was born here; I'll live here; I'll fight here; I'll stay within the system. I think there's a lot of hope for us.

Dr Rahman: For the Malay community, we have our own difficulties. For instance, it's very difficult for a Malay to work in a private company. It's almost impossible. There are requirements like (knowing) Mandarin. I'm hoping for a genuine economic partnership. As for Malays who just want quick profits, we have to make sure these people no longer receive the goodies.

Dr Wee: I think this is possible. Even as a Chinese, I understand the Malay culture because I grew up in a *kampung*. Although I went to a Chinese primary school, it did not stop me from interacting with other races. I learned the importance of national unity at *sekolah menengah kebangsaan* between the ages of 13 and 18. That's where we mixed. I think *memperkasakan* (strengthening) *sekolah kebangsaan* does not mean primary schools only. It should include secondary schools. One must understand that pupils at Chinese and Tamil primary schools learn their culture. But the syllabus is from the Education Ministry and I don't see any problem with this. But from secondary school onwards, we have to encourage students of all races to interact.

This is a country for all races and we should not differentiate between the races. We should try to be fair to all. This is my hope. It is high time we produce more moderate leaders. Let us be realistic. In this era of globalisation, we have to face the world together.