

# Moderation the way forward for Malaysia

NST- 29/11/2006

COMMENT

By Ramon Navaratnam



ALL Malaysians, except for the extremists, will agree that the only recipe for building greater national unity in Malaysia, as indeed anywhere, is moderation.

Our prime minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi came out strongly in his closing speech at the Umno general assembly for moderation in our multiracial and multi-religious society and to reject extremism from all quarters. He reiterated this wise theme at the United Nations Association annual dinner on Monday evening.

The Regent of Perak, Raja Nazrin Shah, also stressed the need for moderation in our policies and practices after some political leaders went overboard at the Umno general assembly in attacking fellow Malaysians.

These extremists have rightly been roundly criticised for their somewhat seditious views. It is now hoped that they will be made accountable for their irresponsible remarks and for causing so much hurt feelings.

Inflammable speeches and the waving of weapons are not charac-

teristic of mature and responsible leadership and should certainly not be condoned. Our country cannot tolerate racial or religious extremism, particularly at this time when we approach our 50th Merdeka anniversary, having achieved considerable peace and prosperity.

We have to follow the sober advice of our prime minister and Raja Nazrin that Malaysia is for all Malaysians and that we have to be true to the philosophy, rich values and traditions set by our founding fathers. They inspired us not only to be moderate, but to be fair to all Malaysians, regardless of race or religion. This path is, to most Malaysians, the very basis for our "social contract".

If there is no moderation or fairness, there cannot be lasting national

unity, now or in the future.

Datuk Dr Zainal Aznam Yusof wrote in the *New Straits Times* yesterday about the need for "moderation and tolerance as the glue for better race relations".

I agree with the basic need for moderation but would prefer to promote understanding of our rich diversity in varied cultures and religions rather than just to tolerate each other. We have to develop the mindset of celebrating our diversity and national uniqueness with pride, rather than feel insecure about God-given assets.

There is now a danger in our society that the minority racial and religious extremists are working hard to undermine our national unity and national integrity. They seek to stamp their own brand of bad governance and dominance over the overwhelming number of Malaysians of all races and religions who form the "silent majority".

This trend must be stoutly resisted by what Dr Zainal calls the "voices of reason", which have the long-term

national interests at heart, rather than narrow, parochial and self-interests.

For this new openness in our society and for moderation to further progress, we need greater liberalisation with more responsibility. We need to expand rather than constrict our basic freedoms and human rights.

Surely Malaysians can manage these freedoms rationally after nearly 50 years of Independence? All these progressive measures will also help to raise our present level of democracy, as revealed by our low scores in the recent international Democracy Index.

But national unity can also be enhanced if we truly and sincerely follow the noble principles enunciated in our Federal Constitution, the Rukun Negara, the New Economic Policy, Vision 2020 and now Islam Hadhari.

This is not difficult to achieve, if we really have the political will. After all, the majority of Malaysians will support the policy to eradicate poverty —

regardless of race. Who will oppose it but the extremist and exploitative elements in our society?

On the restructuring of the economy, we should reduce the emphasis on corporate equity targets. We have made creditable gains that have mainly benefited a relatively small group of the business community.

Instead, we should concentrate on what Abdullah has been striving for — the enrichment of our human capital, to make us far more competitive against the rising tide of globalisation.

If we do not take up these challenges seriously, we will suffer the adverse effects of an economic tsunami, sooner rather than later. This would wash away our prospects for national unity.

It is, I am sure, the hope and prayer of all true Malaysians that we will be able to follow our prime minister's clarion call for us to be moderate and also fair to all Malaysians. Then we will be able to comfortably achieve national unity and reach our Vision 2020 goals on time.