

Happy people make a happy nation

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The purpose of independence, according to our first prime minister, was the pursuit of happiness, and our success in that pursuit is the ultimate test of our success as a nation, writes PRABHAKARAN S. NAIR

THE concept of happiness was a recurrent theme in many of Tunku Abdul Rahman's speeches.

Tunku's aspiration calls to mind the "greatest happiness principle", a subject of intense political discourse in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe.

We are fortunate in that our nation's founding father had provided some useful insights into the concept of happiness, which we need to examine as we gauge our success as a nation.

The Reason for Government

Like the enlightened political philosophers of the past, Tunku believed that governments exist to provide for the happiness of the people, and nothing more.

"For us in the Alliance we have no dogmas other than to ensure happiness for the people," said Tunku.

Tunku favoured policies that he believed would bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of Malaysians.

"What I gave to one, I also gave to others. In this way, we made everybody happy. This has always been my aim."

Speaking about the policies expected to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of Malaysians, Tunku said: "This is the only country in the world that has provided funds for all faiths to prosper, that has provided money for the running of schools of all languages of the peoples of this country."

"And so I am a happy prime minister and I have cause to be so. I can feel the pulse of this nation; I am not the prime minister of this nation, but the father to all the peoples who live here."

We need to be reminded of Tunku's vision of making Malaysia one of the world's happiest countries, a goal that he emphasised in 1960: "With our unity and co-operation, faith and tolerance for one another, with hard work and glad hearts, we can make our young nation one of the happiest in the world."

"That is my belief, that is what I live for, to ensure



peace, happiness and prosperity for our Malaya which we all love so well."

Tunku did not separate personal happiness from the larger happiness of the nation: "Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to see people make merry and take things easy and are happy."

In another instance he said, "I boasted that I was the happiest prime minister in the world, and that was because the people were happy."

Live and Let Live

Tunku's basic concept of happiness is best expressed in his favourite maxim, "live and let live".

This calls for acceptance of people as they are, although they may have a different way of life.

In his private life he was open about his weaknesses and laughed at himself, but at the same time wanted his friends to accept him for what he was.

Unfortunately, the way our society has developed over the past few decades appears to indicate that it is not the easiest thing in the world to let other people live their own lives.

Tunku applied the maxim in the public domain.

"Foreign visitors have remarked on the happy state of affairs here and attributed this to 'my wise and able leadership'."

"I said that it was mainly due to the desire of the people themselves, whose outlook in life is one of 'live and let live'."

"I pray and hope that this happy state of affairs will continue for all times."

In a press statement issued



Let us take the noisy cracker-firing (during Chinese New Year) in the happy spirit of the occasion, said the Tunku.

Let us all be happy and make merry while life lasts. There is no reason why we need to fight in order to survive, I believe we can achieve our goal by laughing and treading our way happily towards it.

Tunku Abdul Rahman



two days before Merdeka, Tunku said: "I believe in allowing the people to have their own way so long as they observe the law and order of the country."

"I believe in allowing them to run their own lives and to enjoy the fruits of their labour."

"Let them wear what they want to wear; let them do what they want to do; let them go

where they want to go. I do not think it is right to order their way of life."

"And it follows, therefore, that if they want to have their own clubs for their own particular community, let them run them, because clubs are made by a group or community of people for their social enjoyment."

"Let them have what they want so that they can have happiness and spread happiness in the country."

Tunku combined the "live and let live" philosophy with the larger goal of unity, and there was absolutely no contradiction between the two.

At the end of his press statement, Tunku also expressed his wish to see more clubs which provided for the intermingling of all the races in this country.

He reiterated this in his Chinese New Year message of Feb 9, 1967, when he advised the people to "work together with thoughts for Malaya and not individual or communal advantage or disadvantage".

Our Happiness is Dependent on the Happiness of Others

Tunku recognised that individual happiness is tied up with the collective happiness, and sometimes people would have to willingly sacrifice their

own comforts so that people in another community were not deprived of happiness.

This was tied up with the golden rule that we must have respect for others and treat others just as we wish others to treat us.

This golden rule was an important principle in an interdependent, multi-ethnic society such as ours.

In 1967, Malay was declared the main language in the country, an important goal aimed at promoting unity.

To allay non-Malay fears he said: "Do not be frightened about the loss to anybody of his culture, custom or language for we have had them for generations and we are not likely to lose them now."

In a speech on Chinese New Year eve on Feb 8, 1967, Tunku said: "Tonight, it gives me great pleasure to come before the Malaysian Chinese to wish them *Kong Hee Fatt Choy*."

"As I speak to you, Chinese families all over the country will be gathered together for their traditional family reunion dinner."

"There will be much firing of crackers as an expression of their joy and those who live in the urban areas will no doubt be disturbed and perhaps lose a few hours of sleep."

"But what does it matter so long as it makes others happy. As I have said before, it is better to lose a little sleep through the firing of crackers than lose many lives through the firing of guns."

"Let everyone, therefore, take this noisy cracker-firing in the happy spirit of the joyous occasion."

"Chinese New Year, like our other great festivals, comes but once a year."

At the same time, he did not think anyone would begrudge the protection afforded to the indigenous people of this country "who know no other country but this as their home".

Said Tunku in the same speech, "Chinese New Year's eve this year happens to fall on my birthday and it would be a lovely present for me if you would only give some thought and attention to my advice on the need to live together in peace, goodwill and harmony."

The fulfilment of his ideal of happiness is still the "lovely present" that the people of this country can offer in memory of the Tunku on this occasion of our golden anniversary as a nation.

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