



Can Politicians Just Shut Their Mouths?

It is deplorable that half-a-century into independence, our politicians are still using the race and religion card to serve their own vested interests. Why do we tolerate such chicanery?

DON'T YOU SOMETIMES JUST WISH THAT OUR POLITICIANS WOULD SHUT THEIR MOUTHS? Okay, if that's too difficult for them to do, then perhaps they should stop saying dim-witted things?

Given the recent spate of foolhardy statements made by those on both sides of the political divide, you would think that we have a long, long way to go where national unity is concerned.

How many more years do we need? This year, we will be celebrating 50 years of independence. Yes, during these five decades, we have achieved quite a fair bit in economic development, thanks to visionary leaders.

But while we have done well at achieving our economic targets, we seem to have failed dismally when it comes to forging national unity. Why is this so?

You guessed it! Politicians.

They have, of late, been strenuously trying to sow discord among the various races and religions. Ironically, these are the very people whom we elect to lead the nation.

Lest we forget, it was these overzealous politicians who, in May 1969, caused racial riots to erupt following general elections. Sadly, today, we still have politicians who

use race and religion as tools to champion their cause. We don't have to name names but we know who they are. They come from all political parties.

There is only word to describe their actions -- disgraceful. From championing vernacular schools, language, special rights and their own vested interests, they will stop at virtually nothing to advance their political careers. For example, one senior politician even opined that the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* was wrong.

These people should be considered traitors to the country. And why not? Isn't anyone who does not have the welfare of the country at heart a traitor? What is more worrying is that some of them are members of the current administration.

There are even politicians who use religion as their platform. To exploit religion for political gains is despicable, to say the least. I suppose when you are bankrupt of ideas, you have to turn to exploiting religion as the last resort.

Such foolishness has to stop. Politicians should learn to serve and fight for the nation as a whole, not just one community, state or party.

There are so many issues, such as corruption, poverty, crime and other social abuses, that need to be addressed, which transcend race and religion.

Fifty years into independence is a good time to renew efforts to forge national unity.

We must start with our children. We should make national schools the school of choice among Malaysians, as it is here that the seeds of unity are sown and nurtured. Is it any wonder why our universities experience racial polarisation?

It is also time political parties put aside their petty differences. The Gerakan, PPP and MCA do not even want to discuss a merger. The MIC does not want to admit the IPF into the Barisan Nasional (BN) fold. This shows that being under one family does not always guarantee harmony.

Perhaps, it is time for the BN to show unity by holding its own annual general assembly. In that way, at least matters of larger

national interest can be discussed as opposed to the current practice where BN component parties hold their own annual assemblies to address vested interests.

But let's face it. It will be difficult for many politicians to change their ways, even if it means putting national interest before themselves.

The sad thing is, these politicians can't face criticism. And when push comes to shove, the media is usually blamed for having an 'agenda' for highlighting their wrongdoings. And for good measure, a racial or religious slant is usually thrown in.

Thankfully, the majority of our politicians are still level-headed and responsible. We must ensure that those who are racial bigots or religious zealots are kept out of mainstream politics for good.

Otherwise, issues like race and religion will continue to be exploited for the next 50 years. **mb**

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