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TOWERING MALAYSIAN

Let's build on Tunku's legacy

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THE legacy of Lee Kuan Yew, as a founding father of a city state, a competent nation builder and a pragmatic statesman, is admired by multitudes.

However, many may not remember, or have chosen to forget, that the birth of Singapore and its subsequent steady progress might not have been so peaceful had Lee not encountered the true giant of Asian politics.

It was the good fortune of Singapore that Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, as the prime minister of the newly-formed Malaysia, had made that monumental decision for a peaceful separation.

In an age of violent independence struggles and civil wars, Tunku did not succumb to nationalistic pressure or hubris to block the separation by constitutional means or by force.

Other lesser rulers would have resorted to violence, as a natural extension of political discussion, to suppress secession, such as in the agonising birth of Bangladesh as a nation in 1971 in the aftermath of a civil war in Pakistan.

Interestingly, when Pakistan was embroiled in a self-destructive civil war of needless mayhem, it did not even have to deal with the ethnic and religious complexities of Malaysia in 1965, as it was a Muslim-majority nation.

Likewise, when the American Civil War (1862-1865) broke out, it was a wholly-Christian nation.

World history has been shaped as much by chance and error as by the courage and wisdom of individuals. If there were only a Pakistani or an American Tunku Abdul Rahman, there would have been two fewer civil wars of carnage in the annals of human conflict.

Tunku Abdul Rahman was, first and foremost, the people's prince, devoid of any elaborate royal protocol and self-aggrandisement. As a Malay aristocrat of the Malay-Thai royalty, he firmly held on to the noble belief of *noblesse oblige*, which is a French phrase literally translated as "duty of nobility". This simple ideal is that those privileged in society are not confined to royal titles and material regards alone, but a noble obligation to help the poor and marginalised of society.

Tunku was a devout Muslim, but never the self-righteous kind who would manipulate Islam for populism and vote-getting. He held the Federal Constitution as sacrosanct, to be upheld as an ideal of rule of law, and not rule by arbitrary law.

Present-day politicians ought to learn from the leadership example of Tunku as a pious Muslim, an honest politician and a law-abiding prime minister. There was no aspersion cast on the reputation of his

probity simply because Tunku had cultivated the virtues of *amanah* (trust) and *bersih* (avoidance of personal avarice) as his Greater Jihad.

The controversy of implementation of hudud in our multi-faith society, which has been governed by a secular Federal Constitution since 1957, is not so insurmountable, if only we adopt Tunku's philosophy of moderation.

The practice of Islam — or any other faith — is a personal matter, and it follows, naturally, that such a monumental decision to implement hudud should be decided by individual Muslims and non-Muslims in a national referendum. No political party, no matter how large its majority in the legislature or party membership, should resort to a unilateral implementation of hudud, with the expressed aim of creating a theocracy.

After all, Islam forbids coercion, particularly against followers of other faiths, and the reading of Islamic jurisprudence must be done even more strictly by *ijtihad* (intellectual reasoning and scholarly enquiry), and not *taqlid buta* (blind faith). This is about moderation.

Thus, Tunku Abdul Rahman has been always held up as a rare gem of humanity among everyday politicians of his time, and for all times.

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