



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
Y A Y A S A N
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

PERDANA LIBRARY
PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION
NEWSPAPER CLIPPING

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	8/9/2017

THE ROAD TO NATIONHOOD

NST-8/9/2017 pg-17

Malaysians must display the same pride and enthusiasm this Malaysia Day as they did when celebrating Merdeka

WHAT exactly does it mean to be a Malaysian? In the 60th Merdeka month of August just past, and 54th Malaysia Day anniversary later this month which coincide with the nation hosting the biennial Southeast Asia (SEA) Games, we are unfortunately witnesses to how most of us in our region are easily riled up when such symbols of our various countries as our respective national flags were inadvertently misrepresented by various parties involved in the games' organisation.

As a federated kingdom, we have a surfeit of such official symbols of our sovereignty. Each of our 13 states has its state flag, which is usually flown side-by-side with the Jalur Gemilang; its state anthem, normally sung after the *Negaraku* and its state ruler or Yang di-Pertua Negeri as ceremonial head of state.

These are essential props of state sovereignty, necessary reminders that while we may all be part and parcel of a larger federation, we all agreed, at one stage or another, to come together as a united whole called Malaysia.

For those in Sabah and Sarawak who perhaps, because the two states did not have a shared history of being administered as a single colonial entity as happened in the peninsula, feel a certain detachment from the rest of the country, the ties that bind them to Malaysian nationhood after more than half a century are nevertheless strong and enduring.

Many Sabahans and Sarawaks have now chosen to spend entire careers and lives over in the peninsula and take the privilege of such free movement across the South China Sea very



Performers waving the Jalur Gemilang during the Merdeka celebration at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur last month. Malaysians must learn to set aside their differences and stand united under one national banner. PIC BY MOHD YUSNI ARIFFIN

much for granted, although the same privilege is not enjoyed by Malaysians in the peninsula wanting to move to the two states in Borneo.

If anything, any lingering sense of alienation felt by Sabahans and Sarawaks living in the peninsula is almost always the result of slights or signs of insensitivity (usually perceived rather than intended) in their encounters with other Malaysians in their daily lives.

But, the general sense of pride in state is quite understandable and needs to be better understood.

As a prominent Sarawakian privately confided in this writer, the manifestation of such sentiments by fellow Sarawakians and Sabahans must not be viewed by other Malaysians as the former trying to "be difficult".

The very concept of federation entails the voluntary surrendering of certain sovereign rights by individual states but those rights retained by states must be safeguarded and respected so that the federation can remain strong and solid.

A perception that some state rights and prerogatives — particularly those specially accorded

to Sabah and Sarawak — have suffered erosion over the years must be corrected by a vigorous evaluation as to whether there is indeed basis for such a perception and if so, for appropriate remedies to be applied.

Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Abang Openg, who has vocally championed such state rights and prerogatives since assuming office in January, had also publicly stated how the Federal Government under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been open and proactively receptive to engaging fully with Sarawak over such matters.

As Malaysians in Sabah and Sarawak proudly and enthusiastically celebrate each Merdeka Day by raising the Jalur Gemilang and their respective state flags, and singing *Negaraku* alongside their respective state anthems, Malaysians across the country must, just as proudly and vigorously, do likewise this Malaysia Day.

Malaysian athletes from all states compete under a single national banner at the SEA Games. We all cheered each and every one of them during their moments of glory, irrespective of

which state he or she comes from.

We all feel vicarious pride and jubilation each time Malaysia earns well-deserved praise and accolades abroad just as we are all justifiably dismayed when the nation is at the receiving end of undeserved foreign parodies and approbations.

It may be a long time coming before Malaysians from every state and every ethnic or religious group meld all their differences and stand truly united as a single nation. It may very well be a journey without an ultimate destination.

Democratic federations, as diverse as India with its ancient civilisation, and the United States with its nearly two and a half centuries of independence, struggle even today with their own contradictions and internal differences. They certainly have not reached the promised land of united nationhood.

Malaysia, thus, may have a way more to go in that direction.

Johnteo808@gmail.com

The writer views developments in the nation, the region and the wider world from his vantage point in Kuching, Sarawak