



Through many windows

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IN general, managing the socioeconomic and political environment as well as managing the perception of the citizens is paramount in ensuring continued and true national unity in the country.

It is clear as daylight that without national unity, not only will the economic development of the country be hampered but the collective happiness of the citizens will also be reduced.

All citizens must feel and believe that the country is their home and that the institutions in the country will protect their legitimate rights.

They must also believe that in this country they, their children, their friends and all citizens will have the opportunity to achieve their dreams without state interference and unjust discrimination. At the same time, the state will facilitate the achievement of dreams of those hardworking and dedicated citizens.

Such a belief and perception will naturally give birth to patriotism and lead to a desire to be united for the common good.

The question always is - what is the common good and the Malaysian dream?

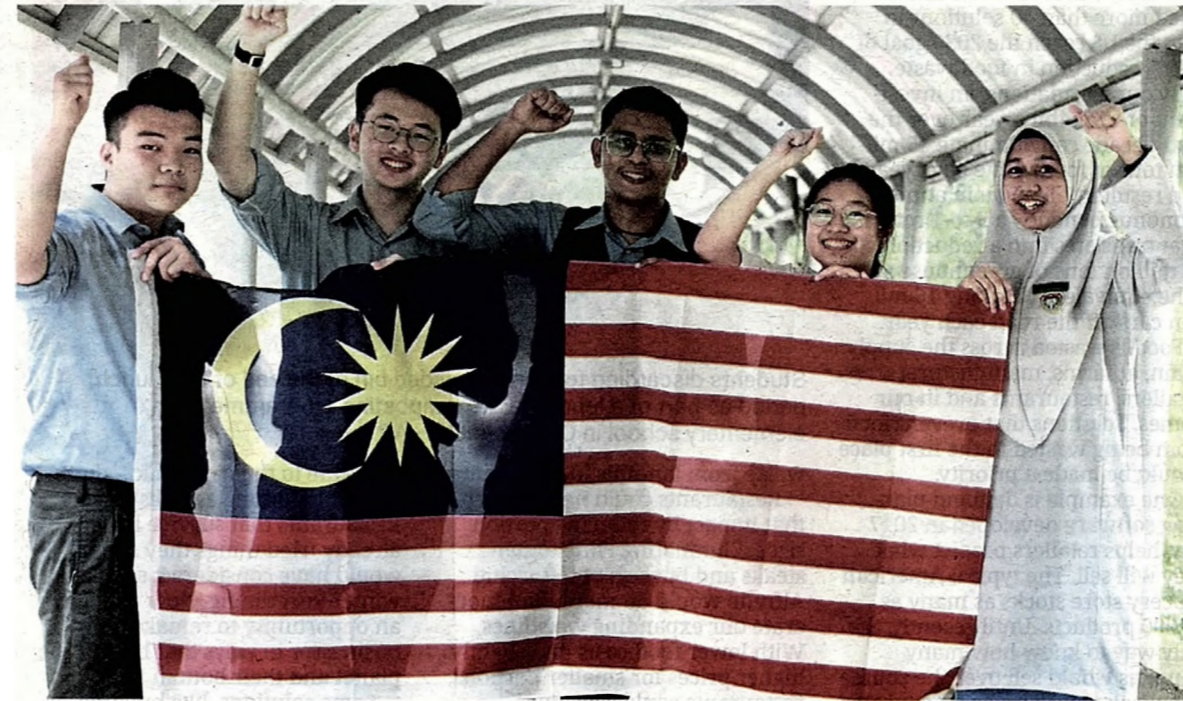
A caring and responsible government must be able to identify common goals and dreams that can unite Malaysians.

It will be useless to speak of national unity if the daily rhetoric in public is reminiscent of disunity and divisiveness.

Malaysia is not only multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural but is diverse in many other ways that some of the powerful elites

To achieving national unity

We need to feel that Malaysia is really our home; only then will we love it unconditionally and make sacrifices for the sake of the nation.



Shared understanding: We need to seriously teach compassion as an important value in our schools.

refuse to acknowledge.

To unite the citizens under such diversity, we first need a common national goal. This is still lacking in a strong way.

The prevalent perception is that we are increasingly being pulled by conflicting interests and directions, for example in the sphere of law. I would caution that this matter ought to be civilly and properly addressed without any political manipulation so that it does not give rise to divisiveness in the country across ethnic and religious boundaries.

Second, after 60 over years of independence, we should be mature enough to understand that we have to nurture a thinking society that is not afraid to debate differing viewpoints, preferences and worldviews.

We have to halt this puerile attitude of shamelessly hiding behind the excuse of so-called sensitivities whenever we are confronted with issues that require us to apply our cognitive abilities. That is the only way to progress as a civilised and thinking society that is not manipu-

lated by those with vested interests.

If we have a society that cannot handle differing viewpoints and diversity, it will result in conflicts, which in turn will disrupt the movement towards national unity.

The specific objective of nurturing a thinking mind is different from that of education in general.

Third, national unity efforts cannot ignore wealth distribution and economic opportunities in the country. This was part of what the earlier DEB sought to achieve, that is, the elimination of economic activities being identified with race.

Positive discrimination to assist the poorer segment of the population now ought to move away from simply being ethnic based. Unequal distribution of resources and unjust discrimination between ethnicities can cause dissatisfaction and disharmony. Conflict and tension will arise if the poorer segment of the population is ignored in preference of the wealthier ones on the basis of race or religion.

Fourth, the politics in the country itself must speak the narrative of

unity and not play on racial and religious sentiments.

In launching the National Unity Policy Blueprint 2021-2030 recently, the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin himself aptly cautioned us to "be aware of the manipulation of racial sentiments by politicians. This is the main challenge of almost all multi-racial countries. The political actors will try to raise themselves by exploiting racial sentiments, which we must avoid".

Laws must be enforced strictly against politicians who use this dangerous divisive method to garner political support, even during elections.

Fifth, since Muslims form the majority population of Malaysia, we should be wary that the enemies of the state may try to destabilise the country by creating disunity among the Muslims. This may be done in many ways including accentuating differences in interpretation negatively or violently, encouraging extremist behaviors and thoughts and politicising the religion of Islam. Divisiveness within the majority reli-

gious group in the country does not augur well for national unity. The government should specially address the possible conflicts and tensions that may arise if and when the practice of the religion of Islam is politicised, "over-regulated", or civil discussions on Islam are disallowed among the Muslims themselves.

Sixth, the content of what is being taught in schools especially history. School curriculum must be focused on the effective dissemination of information for the purposes of education, encourage critical and creative thinking, imbibe the interest in life long-learning and the ability to distinguish between facts and fiction. It cannot however sacrifice truth or facts in order to bolster patriotism or ethnic pride. History must be taught in a way that does not offend the sensibilities of a multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious community like ours.

Seventh, we need to seriously teach compassion as an important value in our schools. The definition of compassion that I propose is this: compassion is the understanding of another person's suffering followed by a desire to alleviate this suffering. If we have compassion, we will be able to reduce our collective sufferings and increase our collective happiness because we will try to understand the pain and suffering of the other. When the heart is compassionate, unity among humans follows automatically.

At the end of the day, our policy makers and the policy implementers must endeavour to make Malaysians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or culture, feel that Malaysia is their home that they can depend on. Only then will there be unity, love and the willingness to make individual sacrifices for the sake of the nation - if and when the need arises.

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