

Tunku's goodwill inspired confidence in communities

AMID the divisive babble of a selfish few, I'm grateful that there are many who don't subscribe to their claptrap.

And these upright people have been quick to point out that peace-loving Malaysians don't believe in inciting fear or compelling people to support their perverse beliefs.

Against the irresponsible stirrings of certain vintage personalities, I'm drawn to a highly-respected nonagenarian from Penang, Tan Sri Mohd Yusoff Latiff, who's the antithesis of hate speech.

He heads Muhibbah, a well-known non-political body in Penang, whose official name is the Penang State Consultative Goodwill Council. It is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

Muhibbah, which stands for goodwill in Malay, was a term in vogue after the May 13 riots in 1969. Its greatest proponent was first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj.

Over the years, we've covered much ground in building goodwill among ourselves, and it would be anathema to peace-lov-



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ing Malaysians to allow misfits to run this formula to the ground.

Muhibbah, under Yusoff's stewardship, has always portrayed Tunku as its goodwill icon as it plays an important role in creating goodwill among the diverse communities in Penang.

It's no mean feat to be an umbrella body of 16 associations representing Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese (Sri Lankans), Indian Muslims, Sikhs, Pakistanis, Eurasians, Hindus, Malayalees, Thais, Myanmar and Baweans (from East Java).

"Consultations done with goodwill in mind have always helped us overcome many challenges in Penang.



Tan Sri Mohd Yusoff Latiff

"We nip problems in the bud," says Yusoff, who hopes such a mechanism can be replicated in other states.

"He says, in a recent conversation, that Tunku epitomised goodwill, tolerance, moderation, peace and justice, values that held the nation together when it was formed.

Yusoff, who has led Pemenang or Persatuan Melayu Pulau Pinang since 1984, says the letters in Tunku's name symbolised his characteristics: T for tolerance; U for understanding; N for noble; K for kind; and, U for unique.

Such attributes, he says, are

much needed in today's rat-race world and to avoid conflicts.

Yusoff is especially enamoured of Tunku's favourite quote: "It is my daily prayer that all the different races in the country will continue to live together in friendship. Independence could never have been achieved without the unity of the various races."

Muhibbah celebrates Tunku's birthday on Feb 8, which was also the same day that the then 53-year-old Tunku signed the country's independence agreement along with Malay rulers and British officials in London in 1956.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah penned this interesting passage in a book on Tunku produced by Muhibbah in 2014: "Without Ayah (in reference to Tunku) and his dream of peaceful co-existence amongst the people that now make up this nation, Malaya would not have been born free from the killing and mayhem that have typified independence struggles of the last century in many parts of the world."

In describing Tunku as "the greatest Malay patriot of the 20th

century", Tengku Razaleigh recalled that it was tragic Tunku was portrayed by some as an "anti-Malay" despite his good intentions and great concern about Malays.

The book also captured the views of Tan Sri Rais Yatim, who recently retired as Dewan Negara president, who stated the country's challenges most lucidly: "Without Tunku's stewardship during the difficult first decade of the country's independence, the inter-communal structure of politics based on cooperation and understanding among the various might not have taken firm root.

"The framework for inter-racial cooperation and accommodation that was established by Tunku continues to remain the only feasible option and hope for the country.

"There is still no viable alternative to long-term stability and racial harmony other than the way shown by Tunku. His keen sense of fair play instilled confidence in the communities."

The writer is a former Bernama chief executive officer and editor-in-chief