

Let's honour, respect and dignify Merdeka Day
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HISTORIC OCCASION: Both sides of the political divide should cease their political battles and show more veneration for the occasion



The National Day celebration at Stadium Merdeka in 1961.

WE just passed Aug 31, a day that's forever etched in our memories. What a day. I seldom miss celebrating this historic day, having participated in some of the earlier celebrations held at Merdeka Stadium.

In the 1960s, Merdeka Stadium was the venue for the march past and all the field activities. It was more memorable because this was the very venue where Tunku Abdul Rahman declared our independence.

At the stadium, I joined hundreds of schoolchildren decked in colours representing the Malaysian flag. We rehearsed the moves separately in our respective schools before several more joint rehearsals at the stadium.

When the day arrived, we were at the stadium before sunrise. We were dressed in full attire, looking and feeling very proud to be involved. There was no live television coverage, only black and white footages, courtesy of Filem Negara.

Dataran Merdeka, better known as the Selangor Club padang then, was nothing more than one of the main landmarks in the city. People would stop in their cars by the padang to see a football or cricket match.

In the 1970s, the National Day parade moved to Dataran Merdeka after the road fronting it was widened and dressed up. It was always exciting to see the once-a-year parade. I participated in the parade there as well, twice in fact.

But in all the parades, the sense of unity and pride was whole. There weren't any sideshows to distract the organisers, participants and the public.

Everyone converged at Dataran Merdeka for the annual National Day parade. Period.

For several years, we also had flag-raising ceremonies at Dataran Merdeka on the eve of Merdeka Day. It was one of the meaningful highlights of the celebrations, which has ceased. No reasons given, too. It makes us wonder why the flag-raising ceremony has been stopped.

A senior government official told me that this could be due to the personal preferences of the organising committee. And there's been several of these committees over the years.

The flag-raising ceremony should be maintained as a traditional start to the celebrations. Some parts of the annual celebrations should stay and be developed as a tradition. No one flies or pulls down the flag for no good reason.

At 55, as a nation, we should ask some fundamental questions about ourselves. Last Thursday night's incident of street demonstrations near Dataran Merdeka should be seen in a far bigger perspective.

There's a time and place for everything. Merdeka Day is an occasion of dignity and respect, of maturity and nationhood. The occasion is not for street politics, or politics of any kind for that matter.

Both sides of the political divide should cease their political battles and show more respect for the occasion. After all, Merdeka Day is a national celebration, regardless of political ideologies and what have you!

Our people must learn to rise to the occasion and not undermine it by all sorts of demeaning tactics. Of what good is Merdeka if we fail to honour, respect and dignify it?

For this beloved nation, we are our own worst enemies. Stop it, everyone!

Hati mesti berani

Semangat jangan luntur

Jiwa mesti merdeka

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