

## **Appreciation of history: A pathway to national unity**

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**By Lee J Peter**

KUALA LUMPUR (May 1): It was my privilege to have had the opportunity to participate in the Sejahtera Malaysia Forum on April 29, at Le Quadri Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, where the Minister of National Unity Malaysia, Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, delivered the keynote address alongside distinguished panel speakers such as Dr Kelvin Yii Lee Wuen, MP of Kuching, Faye Lim, founder of The Rojak Projek, and Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, president of the KSI Strategic Institute for the Asia-Pacific. I was struck by the profound depth of our discourse.

This forum serves as a beacon for exploring Malaysian identity and laying the foundations for nation-building. It offers a crucial platform for dialogue that celebrates our diversity while working towards a more unified and prosperous future for all Malaysians. Importantly, it highlights the pivotal role of the Rukun Negara in fostering unity, peace, and harmony within our nation.

However, alongside this central theme, I would like to offer my insights and propose that history offers another compelling avenue for fostering unity and national cohesion. Malaysia's historical narrative is a tapestry woven with threads of resilience, diversity, and unity amidst adversity, influenced by the convergence of multiple cultures and civilizations, spanning from the ancient Malay sultanates to the colonial era and the struggle for independence.

Addressing mistrust and intolerance among different racial and ethnic groups requires prioritising history education at the grassroots level. Initiatives such as incorporating history role play into primary education can sow seeds of unity among future generations, helping to alleviate contemporary societal challenges.

Additionally, enriching the history syllabus, especially in secondary school, to include a chapter on Rukun Negara and highlighting the diverse contributions of ethnicities and minorities can foster unity and mutual respect. Promoting a nuanced understanding of Malaysian history, beyond dates and events, allows students to appreciate the diversity that defines our nation.

By delving into the intricate contributions of each ethnic group to the nation's development, students can foster a deeper appreciation for the diversity that defines Malaysia. This entails exploring the rich cultural heritage of the Malays, the entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese, the scholarly traditions of the Indians, and the indigenous wisdom of the Orang Asli and Dayak communities.

Moreover, history serves as a bridge between disparate communities, nurturing empathy, understanding, and mutual respect. By examining the shared struggles and triumphs of Malaysia's past, students can discern the common bonds that unite them as Malaysians, transcending ethnic and cultural differences. This can help dispel stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions that often sow seeds of discord and division.

Furthermore, history imparts invaluable lessons on the consequences of division and the imperative of unity in achieving national progress. From the tumultuous events of May 13, 1969, to subsequent efforts to promote racial harmony and inclusivity, Malaysian history offers poignant reminders of the perils of communal strife and the importance of forging a shared destiny. By internalising these lessons, students can appreciate the fragility of unity and the urgency of nurturing it through dialogue, compromise, and understanding.

Awareness of history can empower Malaysians to make informed decisions, foster inclusivity, and advocate for national unity. History unites us beyond ethnicity, religion, and culture, guiding Malaysia toward a brighter, inclusive future. Let's cherish our diversity and recognise history as our esteemed teacher on the path to unity.

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