

Need to preserve freedom

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Let's celebrate

National Day
49th

FORTY-NINE years ago, this nation freed itself from the chains of colonialism. And every year since then, we have celebrated the event. By and large, the celebrations are grandiose displays of patriotism by the populace.

For me, this year in particular, it is a time for introspection.

In 1957, the Tunku's voice rang out with that famous call, "Merdeka!" Although I was not born yet at the time, that grainy film image of him with his hand held high still sends shivers down my spine when I see it and hear his call.

Merdeka. Independence. Freedom. How sweet the sound. It was easier then; we knew who it was we wanted to be independent from. We knew what freedom was.

But today, when we scream "Merdeka" to the heavens, what is it we are calling for?

To whom are we declaring our independence and our freedom?

Perhaps it is to ourselves, for tyranny and oppression need not come from beyond our shores when we are more than capable of foisting that on ourselves.

When our forefathers laid the foundations for this nation, the cornerstone upon which it was



based was — and is — our Constitution. It is a document that promises democracy and freedom for the peoples of this nation.

A law designed to ensure the rule of law and through that a land that is civilised. It is our guarantee against tyranny.

Yes, it has taken a battering over the years, but I believe its spirit is still alive and as we reach our half-century mark, it is all the more important to ensure its survival and the survival of its ideals.

I felt despair therefore when I got a call from my friend Malek Imtiaz Sarwar saying that there was a death threat against him circulating on the Internet.

A death threat issued because he was at the frontline of

defending that very same Constitution and its ideals.

My first reaction was to worry for the safety of my childhood friend. My second reaction was a feeling of deep anger.

Not so much at the crude threat but as to what we as a nation, after so many years of independence, have been reduced to.

Have we become a nation in which some men and women resort to threats of violence over differences of opinion while the rest of us sit quietly?

And more importantly, have we become a nation in which differences of opinion can lead to violence in the first place?

The Government has been silent on this matter, as have

the components of the ruling party. And as they fret about the coming Merdeka celebrations, one wonders if they truly understand what it is all about.

Is the freedom that the Father of our Nation called out for nothing more than freedom from our colonisers? And now that it is achieved, is there no more that needs to be done?

But then, perhaps they are too busy. After all, there are vital matters at hand such as whether Kuching can host the traditional parades given the hazards of haze.

And of course, there is the all-important question as to why there are not enough people sticking little plastic flags on their cars.

In the frenetic activity, the

issue of one man's life and the protection of our Constitution are easy to ignore, I guess.

Of course, it would be too much to ask for any sort of reaction from the general public. After all, there is money to be made; and issues such as liberty, justice and fairness, pale in comparison to the all-important ringgit and the distractions of horse-drawn wedding carriages.

Furthermore, although the call for murder was done with venom and malice, it was also done in the name of God and that means we must all shut up.

I find that strange, though, because every time I do anything, be it to eat, or to drive or whatever, I make a little recitation that I have been taught

since young to recite, a recitation that says God is benevolent and merciful.

Odd then that there are those who think that this benevolent and merciful God could condone cold-blooded murder. But then, I am not a religious scholar and I have no beard to speak of.

As I sit writing this, the 31st of August is drawing close. And I think that this nation is at a crucial point in its history.

So much has happened in the past few months which do not bode well for our future. A culture of thuggery has appeared.

A culture where those with the loudest voices and the most threatening gestures are capable of shutting down civilised behaviour and principles.

This Merdeka, a line has to be drawn in the sand and we the people of Malaysia must decide whether it is barbarity that governs us, or whether the freedom we gained all those years ago, the freedom to live dignified lives in a civil nation, should be our guiding light.

If we do not make a stand now, then perhaps we don't deserve our Merdeka.

Happy Independence Day.