



Dr. Chandra Muzaffar

**REFLECTIONS ON  
MALAYSIAN UNITY  
AND OTHER CHALLENGES**



11/2/2022  
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# REFLECTIONS ON **MALAYSIAN UNITY** AND OTHER CHALLENGES

by

*Dr. Chandra Muzaffar*

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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Kuala Lumpur



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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

**Chandra Muzaffar, Dr., 1947-**  
**REFLECTIONS ON MALAYSIAN UNITY AND OTHER CHALLENGES /**  
**Dr. Chandra Muzaffar.**

1. Social integration--Malaysia.
2. Malaysia--Social policy.
3. Malaysia--Ethnic relations.
4. Malaysia--Race relations.

I. Title.

959.5

ISBN 978-967-15667-0-1

**Cover design: Chaserz Ideas & Consultancy**

**Book layout: Intan Dayana Adinan**

Published by  
**zubedy ideahouse sdn. bhd.**  
5-7, Level 5, Oval Damansara,  
Jalan Damansara,  
60000 Kuala Lumpur  
TEL: 03 - 7733 6919  
FAX: 03 - 7733 6319  
[www.zubedy.com](http://www.zubedy.com)

Printed by  
**SBS Prints Sdn. Bhd.,**  
Wisma SBS, Block C7,  
Jalan Dataran SD1, Bandar Sri Damansara,  
52200 Kuala Lumpur.  
TEL: 03 - 6270 1810  
FAX: 03 - 6273 4810  
[www.sbsgroup.com.my](http://www.sbsgroup.com.my)

959.5

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## ***Dedication***

*For those malaysians who have a balanced  
perspective on national unity and are sincere in their  
quest of this noble goal.*





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# Acknowledgements

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No book owes its arrival to the efforts of the author alone.

In preparing this book for publication, I have been assisted by Ms. Ong Yuen Ling, the diligent Manager of Yayasan 1Malaysia (Y1M). Y1M Executive, Ishak Sairozi Abdullah, has also been a great source of help. Chaserz Ideas & Consultancy skilfully designed the cover. My deepest appreciation to all of them.

Over the years, I have held discussions on issues pertaining to national unity with a number of friends, most of them in Malaysia. I have benefitted immensely from these interactions. They are too numerous to be listed in a short 'Thank you' message of this sort.

I take full responsibility for *Reflections on MALAYSIAN UNITY and Other Challenges*. I am looking forward to the feedback from readers.

**Chandra Muzaffar.**  
**18 October 2017.**



# Preface

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The eleven chapters in this book contain articles written in response to issues and situations in Malaysia that had surfaced over a period of time.

The majority were written after the formation of Yayasan 1Malaysia (Y1M) on the 14th of July 2009.

Most of the topics covered deal directly with national unity. Some are indirectly connected with that larger theme. All of them are related to challenges that impact upon the people.

I have kept the articles as they were when I had first written them. What this means is that names of people and the offices they held remain unchanged. This gives a context to the topics discussed.

Articles within each chapter have been arranged chronologically. In this way, the flow is maintained. It helps the reader to comprehend in greater depth the concerns I have attempted to address in recent years.

Quite a few of the articles have appeared in local newspapers. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that a portion of the



articles were written originally in the Malay language, Malaysia's national language. They have not been translated into English mainly because a significant segment of the Malaysian reading populace is familiar with both languages.

I regard the present collection as a sequel to my earlier compilations on national unity. *Perjalanan ke Arah Satu Malaysia* published in 2012 embraces pre and a few post- 2009 articles. In 2010 *A Plea for Empathy The Quest for Malaysian Unity* which encompasses essays over a much longer period reached the public. In the seventies and eighties I had written extensively on unity issues offering solutions to challenges which persist to this day. Some of the articles from those two decades can be found in my *Challenges and Choices in Malaysian Politics and Society* published in 1989.

As I reflect upon these writings spanning almost five decades I have come to the conclusion that while some issues have changed, the powerful undercurrents that shape the discourse on unity in Malaysia have remained more or less the same. It is because Malaysian society as a whole does not appear to have the courage or the integrity to confront these undercurrents that we have yet to discover enduring solutions to the perennial challenge of uniting our diverse peoples.

*Reflections on MALAYSIAN UNITY and Other Challenges* is yet another humble endeavour to come to grips with those undercurrents.

**Chandra Muzaffar**  
**October 2017.**

# 1

## Overview

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### 1.1 16 September – National Unity Day

Yayasan 1Malaysia proposes that 16 September be observed as National Unity Day or Hari Perpaduan Nasional. There are a number of reasons for putting forward this idea.

1. While Malaysians of different ethnic backgrounds acknowledge that Unity is the key to our survival and success as a people, we have yet to accord Unity a special status in our national calendar.
2. A special day for Unity -- like a special day for workers or women -- will be a reminder to us of the importance of striving continuously for greater unity and harmony in our multi-ethnic society.
3. Since 16 September is the day in 1963 when Sabah and Sarawak joined with Malaya to form Malaysia, designating that day as Unity Day will help to underscore the significance of integration within the Malaysian Federation.

4. It is recognized that Sarawak and Sabah are two multi-ethnic states in the Malaysian Federation that have been relatively successful in maintaining an appreciable degree of harmony. Emphasizing 16 September as Unity Day would be an acknowledgement of the contribution of the two states to our national goal.

Of course, designating a day as Unity Day has symbolic – rather than substantive -- value. More substantive efforts aimed at enhancing justice for all, and elevating respect for one another, regardless of ethnicity, are greatly needed, if we are to become a more united nation.

**24 March, 2010**

## **1.2 Scepticism About 1Malaysia**

After two years of 1Malaysia, it is obvious that certain segments of society are sceptical whether the concept is capable of fostering national unity. While there may be many reasons for this, we shall highlight two major concerns often articulated by these sceptics.

A section of the Malays on Peninsular Malaysia (and a few Indians and Chinese) wonder whether 1Malaysia is achievable when we have separate language streams at primary school level. Ninety per cent of Chinese children and fifty per cent of Indian children, at the most critical phase of their lives in terms of the formation of fundamental values and attitudes, do not have the opportunity to interact with Malays in the same age category.

The situation has been aggravated by the increasing number of Islamic religious schools. How can an ethnically polarised primary school system create an environment that is conducive for integration?

At the same time, among a lot of Chinese and Indian Malaysians, there is a pervasive sentiment that ethnically skewed policies in education, the civil and public services, and the economy hinder and hamper the 1Malaysia ideal. They feel that the Special Position of the Malays and Bumiputras, as provided for in the Malaysian Constitution, and the way it has been implemented, are a stumbling block to national unity.

Both an ethnically polarised primary school system, on the one hand, and Special Position, on the other, will remain with us for a long time to come. For the Chinese community in particular, the Chinese school has become the bastion of its identity. Similarly, for many Malays and Bumiputras, Special Position is that entrenched constitutional provision that protects their rights within a competitive capitalist economy in which real power lies with the upper echelons of the Chinese community. These are perceptions which cannot be ignored in our endeavour to evolve a united nation. Our challenge is to transform these perceptions without causing a major upheaval in ethnic relations.

As far as the school system is concerned, we should adopt a two-pronged approach. Avenues for effective interaction among pupils in the different language streams should be enhanced. Establishing a common football or badminton team or setting up computer clubs that will draw pupils from the different streams

and even those in religious schools together are some of the yet untapped avenues for interaction. What about a common monthly school assembly or a shared sports day or a shared annual concert? The Wawasan School idea mooted in 1985 aimed to do some of these things but it evoked strong opposition from sections of the Chinese community and was subsequently abandoned. The time has come to revive and refurbish the concept.

The second prong would be to make our national Bahasa Malaysia based primary school more attractive to all Malaysian parents regardless of ethnicity and religion. Yayasan 1Malaysia in fact submitted a 10 point proposal to the government in February 2010 aimed at improving the quality and image of national schools. Among our recommendations were the rebranding of the national school so that it is perceived as “multi-religious and inclusive”; the recruitment and employment of quality teachers; teacher training programmes that strengthen awareness of what national unity entails; improving the standard of English; effective teaching of Chinese, Tamil and other vernacular languages; emphasising shared moral values; reducing bureaucratisation in the administration of schools; and ensuring that education departments and the Ministry of Education become more representative of the multi-ethnic population mix. If these reforms are implemented with the sincere support of all communities, it is quite conceivable that over time the national school will emerge as a truly national institution.

With Special Position, it is so important for Malaysians to understand its roots, its evolution and the real reasons for its institutionalisation. Not many people know that the constituent

elements of the Special Position of the Malays -- land reservations; public services positions; educational scholarships; and trade licences -- were spawned during British rule as a way of protecting the people of the land who were being marginalised by the colonial economy. They were integrated into the Constitution of independent Malaya in 1957 mainly because the conferment of citizenship upon a huge segment of the non-Malay populace on incredibly liberal terms -- in the twinkling of an eye, from 15 % of the citizenry, Chinese and Indians became 40% -- intensified the vulnerability of an abysmally poor people.

It is irrefutably true that the expansion and enhancement of Special Position through the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970 was a major factor in the economic and social transformation of the Malays. Within 40 years, absolute poverty within the community has been reduced drastically (in 1970, 49.3% lived below the poverty-line; in 2010, it was 3.2%) and the Malays have emerged as a significant component of the middle and upper echelons of society. It is this massive transformation that has brought stability and relative peace and inter-ethnic harmony to the country. It has allowed a functioning, though fettered, democracy to take root.

But the implementation of Special Position and the NEP has its downside. The wealth gap within the Malay community has widened considerably partly because some individuals have exploited and manipulated the NEP to further their own interests. The NEP has also had a negative impact upon sections of the non-Malay communities. It has curbed and constrained educational opportunities and social mobility for some of them.

In order to address both these shortcomings, the government should give greater emphasis to social justice in the policies and programmes emanating from Special Position. Only those who deserve assistance, from the perspective of justice, should be helped. Likewise, if justice demands that a non-Malay is given a helping hand or that his accomplishment is recognised and rewarded, the State should not hesitate to respond, in accordance with the constitutional provision on “the legitimate interests of the other communities.”

But justice itself should not be viewed through a communal lens. This is the bane of many a multi-ethnic society, including ours. If national unity is to be achieved, if 1Malaysia is to become a reality, we should approach justice from a more holistic and balanced perspective.

**6 August, 2011**

### **1.3 A Nation’s Road Signs**

As the 13th General Election looms large on the horizon, politicians and media commentators are talking about a nation at the crossroads. If we are at the crossroads, nothing is more important to the ordinary Malaysian voter than clear road signs. In a multi-ethnic society where internal divisions are more pronounced than in other societies, such road signs are crucial.

For a road sign to make sense in multi-ethnic Malaysia, it should fulfil a basic pre-requisite. It should be a road sign that accommodates the interests and aspirations of each and every

community. Because it is accommodative and inclusive, all Malaysians would be able to identify with it. What this means is that while the component elements of Malaysian society will be able to identify with it, the sign itself should transcend the various communities and embrace the Malaysian nation in its entirety.

There are four road signs that meet this condition -- the Malaysian Constitution, Rukunegara, Wawasan 2020 and 1Malaysia. All four of them are inclusive and resonant with Malaysians as a whole, regardless of ethnicity or religion. This is their fundamental strength.

The most important of these road signs, the Constitution, not only acknowledges the Malay root of the nation by placing the Malay Rulers at the pinnacle and recognising the Malay language as the national and official language and Islam as the religion of the Federation but it also embraces the languages and religions of the other communities as part and parcel of Malaysian society. Similarly, the five goals of the Rukunegara -- a united, democratic, just, liberal and progressive society -- guided by five principles -- belief in God, loyalty to King and country, upholding the Constitution, the rule of law, and good behaviour and morality -- appeal to the vast majority of Malaysians. Wawasan 2020 is in many ways an extension of the Rukunegara incorporating some new challenges such as creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed society; a fully caring society and a caring culture; and a fully moral and ethical society as part of its nine strategic challenges. Again, these challenges transcend cultural and religious boundaries. 1Malaysia needless to say is an all-encompassing idea whose essence is inclusiveness.

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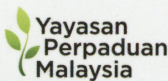
**Reflections on Malaysian Unity and Other Challenges**, is a collection of articles written by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar in response to issues and situations in Malaysia that had surfaced over a period of time. Most of the articles deal directly with national unity and challenges that impact upon people. The present collection is a sequel to his earlier writings on the challenges facing multi-ethnic Malaysia. It contains solutions to these challenges.

**Dr. Chandra Muzaffar** is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Yayasan Perpaduan Malaysia (*Formerly known as Yayasan 1Malaysia*), an independent, non-profit organization established in July 2009 dedicated to the promotion of national unity, guided by the Malaysian constitution and the Rukunegara.

Dr. Chandra is also the President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

He has published extensively on civilizational dialogue, international politics, religion, human rights and Malaysian society. The author and editor of 31 books in English and Malay, many of his writings have been translated into other languages.

Chandra was Professor and Director of the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya (1997-1999) and Professor of Global Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia (2007-2012).



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