

## Malaysia Day spirit

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Comment

New Sunday Times - 09/19/2010

MENTION the word "dove" and immediately a picture of a white-feathered bird symbolising peace and harmony comes to mind. Often, doves are released into the air to bring home this message worldwide. The most recent was during the 65th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan last month.

So when Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center in the United States and his few dozen followers declared the "International Koran (sic) Burning Day" to commemorate the Sept 11, 2001 tragedy it raised more than just eyebrows! Not only among Muslims; others too, not least Christians around the world, wonder who does the church represent?

Although the idea of the Quranic bonfire was finally doused, we must not miss the lessons from the latest brouhaha. What is most ironic is that in protesting against what happened nine years ago, the pastor falls into a similar trap. Firstly, it involved a small group of people who hardly represent the opinion of the majority. Secondly, they seem bent on making decisions that they think are the best renderings of their beliefs. Thirdly, they thrive on the idea of hatred and bigotry.

Jones and his band of (wo)men are emulating the same tactics that they claimed to abhor! Astonishingly, they still found support from others including New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, based on "freedom of speech".

These lessons have implications too for Malaysians as we seek clarity about what this country should stand for with respect to similar issues: namely, should minority views be allowed to represent the opinion of the majority? Many reports seem to indicate that the "freedom of speech" by a vocal few is hogging the headlines at the expense of the silent majority. Given the extensive media coverage they seem to shape national opinions indirectly or otherwise, causing the gulfs of understanding, sincerity and trust to widen. It is not surprising then that we are even more divisive today. While some parties are able to distance themselves, others are openly working hand in glove to realise their narrow political beliefs and exigencies.

The latter happens because of the failure to consider the larger picture as articulated by SP Setia Bhd president and chief executive officer Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin when he reiterated that decisions based on parochial beliefs are not the way forward because you will miss the bigger picture of giving and sharing. It is noteworthy that "kongsi" is now a Malaysian word, but its practice as part of a larger Malaysian culture is still wanting. Liew is right in saying: "Before we start asking them to give us more liberal policies... we must also allow them to come to our sector... If not, this so-called collaboration will not happen. They will not allow us."The "them" versus "us" terms are used often enough to show the current hypocritical state of affairs. So what happened to "kongsi", beyond food during open houses?

This sad state of affairs is further aggravated when Liew's viewpoint was allegedly attacked vociferously by a hawkish group of people. Perhaps his bold reminder that non-bumiputra companies should be more open-minded, transparent in their policies and understand the mindset and value systems of bumiputra firms is too much for the selfish few who thrive on the "bigoted winner makes all rules".

In reality, as long as such small-mindedness exists, much of the woes that plague not just nations but the world too can never be readily solved. Here, the good Tan Sri cannot be more explicit when recognising that "we must also learn to give, to take a step back and live in their culture and mindset" in reference to those who need help the most. For only then can we seek empathy for the betterment of the whole.

And there is no better time to reflect on this reality than on the occasion of Malaysia Day.

\* The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia. He can be contacted at [vc@usm.my](mailto:vc@usm.my)

[Terms & Conditions](#)