

Merdeka Day reflections: Don't be swayed by manipulations of a few

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Comment

letters@nst.com - 08/31/2010

THE "Ganyang Malaysia" sentiment has boiled over yet again in our neighbouring country. This time, it has a special significance as Malaysians are in the midst of celebrating independence day today, and Malaysia Day on Sept 16.

For many, the rub can be easily construed as a challenge to the nation's sovereignty. Why the fuss when the so-called "issues" could have been easily solved within what is often regarded as the *jiran serumpun* framework?

It is not surprising that Malaysians are compelled to stand up and defend the nation and its flag. The irony about this is that before the present incident, some Malaysians had no qualms doing the same and soiling the image of the country.

Some even virtually throw "faeces" at the Jalur Gemilang. What separates them from the Indonesians is in the way it is done -- otherwise the net consequences are almost the same.



Malaysians, like sober minded people elsewhere, have come to rally around the nation's sovereignty and not let rabble-rousers get the better of them.

For example, it was reported that no less than a deputy editor took to task the directive that those in Ipoh city should hoist the national flag in conjunction with the Merdeka celebrations. In turn, he cited an example in the United States in 1963 where two siblings aged 10 and 12 refused to respect the American flag and were expelled by the school authorities. However, they were reinstated when the court ruled that it was within their right to choose not to respect the flag; the sacking was deemed to be against the freedom of expression and personal choice.

The deputy editor suggested that Ipoh should emulate the American siblings and not follow the directive issued on the matter. The intention was to mainstream what was a rather isolated incident in the US.

Luckily, sentiments such as this are not rampant. The same could be said of the noisy band of "Ganyang Malaysia" hooligans.

We know that the majority of Indonesians are sober and level-headed people who could reason beyond just emotions. So, too, Malaysians who have come to rally around the nation's sovereignty on such issues.

What is of concern is that those who tend to be noisy and emotionally-charged, are often the ones who are able to capture the media's attention and thus shape public opinion. It is these cumulative impacts that, over time, become the "standard truth" as more and more lone voices get reported. In the end, we have a Ganyang Malaysia effect, but internally driven by fellow Malaysians, intentionally or not.

Of course, they roll out the same argument about democracy and freedom --- but so, too, the group of "Ganyang Malaysia". Where the Indonesians fail to succeed, the Malaysians may do better. Together, they can work hand in glove.

Their outcome is even more glaring, since the more sensible majority remains rather aloof and detached. While most would certainly not let the "Ganyang Malaysia" syndrome get the better of them, they would rather be silent.

They understand that those who choose to spew their hatred over others by insisting on their rights to freedom and democracy to do so are no more than bigots and lowly chauvinists who have axes to grind.

Rest assured, to separate the two is often not as easy, even in the so-called more democratic and "free" western world where hatred is no less fuelled by minority views.

* The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia. He can be contacted at vc@usm.my

[Terms & Conditions](#)