

## MY SAY: Why is unity so hard to forge?

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

MY SAY

The Edge Malaysia - 06/29/2009

Any hint of a merger or possible "unity talk" will invariably invite a variety of responses. More so because unity is Malaysia's mantra, well embossed on the nation's coat of arms: *Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu*, though not much attention is given to it. Today, the choice seems to be the more trendy Rukunegara or a myriad of other catchy slogans.

So is this why unity is so hard to forge? Perhaps. In essence, unity has lost its true meaning as it has become more of a description of convenience for whatever exigencies: political, economic and social. All this excitement about forming a unity government is like the durian-inspired muhibbah gatherings — such meetings have become seasonal. As the durian season becomes more erratic, so have the muhibbah gatherings — now they are almost unheard of. After a while, people become more sceptical and give unity a bad name. Increasingly, many would prefer to enjoy durians by themselves, without having to strike up small conversation for the sake of unity.

But largely, the mindset still remains durian-induced! In other words, we cannot strive for unity just for the sake of unity. There must be another reason for it: if not durians, then some other unpleasant and selfish reasons. Otherwise, it will arouse suspicion that someone is treading the path of betrayal. Yet, we shout at the top of our lungs that unity is important for national survival. We criticise the younger generation for being polarised and not united. But when it comes to us, we conveniently change the goal posts, and complain about the state of social cohesion.

No wonder our young people are confused and cynical. Worse still, it exposes our state of blatant hypocrisy, without us realising it — saying one thing and doing exactly the opposite. And that is also why the so-called cohesion that we want to forge is anything but that. It seldom lasts since it is more of a window-dressing exercise to pursue some hidden agenda of power, fame and fortune. Unity has become a mean to an end, and not an end in itself.

Whenever the proposal is mooted, conditions are set — it is actually a deliberate exit strategy to fall back on when unity fails. In short, unity is a game being played to get ahead in a scheming sort of way.

All this boils down to the absence of sincerity and trust — the very elements to cement the nation permanently. They are a must, given that the sole purpose of coming together is to merge the opposing positions and viewpoints of the contending parties. If not, why bother at all?

It follows that in striving for a united stand, there must be compromises and sacrifices or, at the very least, an agreement to disagree so that unity can be meaningfully sustained. This can only happen if the level of trust and sincerity is extremely high. Or conversely, the level of hypocrisy is extremely low. If not, no genuine unity can take place.

Sadder still is while some people are ready to get together, others are quite eager to throw a spanner in the works. To some, unity is a zero-sum game: If two opposing views or positions can be merged, it will be bad news for them because they do not believe it can snowball into a larger form of accord.

Lest we forget, unity is an intangible value that emanates from a sincere heart and trusting soul. There are no key performance indices for it. Thus, it will be difficult to realise if people demand tangible evidence that it can work. One can always cite a bad experience to make unity a non-starter. As human beings, we are prone to harp on the bad points rather than give credence to the good ones. After all, we know that bad news sells better.

Therefore, despite the mantra, despite the history that allowed this country to progress by leaps and bounds as a united entity for most of its 50 years, it is still hard to come together in a spirit of sincerity and trust. What our founding fathers have managed so well, we seem to have squandered for some parochial reasons.

Let us be reminded of the saying: *Bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh* (united we stand, divided we fall). There is no substitute for unity for those who want to genuinely see Malaysia continue to prosper and blossom as a united multicultural nation.

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak is Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

[Terms & Conditions](#)

