

## Truly Malaysia! And Sept 16 will say it all

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MORE than 4,000 students from universities, polytechnics and community colleges were treated to an audience with the prime minister last Sunday.

It was an occasion most of them will remember for a long time because it was a gathering of *perpaduan* (unity).

Every one of the students present wore a multi-coloured T-shirt with the word "*Perpaduan*" emblazoned across it—in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese, and Tamil.

If a jawi version and that of the languages of the major ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak were also included, it would have been a more complete symbol of unity for Malaysia. After all, there are more than 65 ethnic minorities in Sabah alone!

The time has come for Malaysia to expand its multicultural identity from that of only the three major groups, Malay, Chinese and Indian, which in fact is only representative of Peninsular Malaysia.

Sabah and Sarawak must at least have one of its groups represented to make it "truly Malaysia" rather than just "truly Asia".

Despite this, the message that permeated the august Putrajaya International Convention Centre was certainly one that was "truly Malaysia".

For example, there was a call to recognise Sept 16 as a day of greater national significance, a "truly Malaysia" day.

We can begin to envisage *Hari Kemerdekaan* (National Independence Day) and *Hari Perpaduan* (National Unity Day) as two events that are uniquely and truly Malaysia.

The former can be occasioned by the various socio-economic themes and the latter could focus on the socio-cultural dimensions instead.

There are studies that show that unity in Malaysia is "thickening" in contrast to the disturbing (mis)perception otherwise, especially of late.

It is this sort of independent studies, carried out consistently over a long period of time, that must act as the "barometer" of unity and not the opportunistic elements that manage to capture the attention of the media, notably the foreign ones.

Unlike the stock market, we as a nation cannot be subjected to fluctuating sentiments, despite the strong fundamentals. In other words, Malaysia must not allow itself to be held to ransom by extremists lurking in our midst.

In relation to this, a pertinent question was raised by another student: should "unity" be preached only to the younger generation?

By implication, it means that the "older" generation is not walking the talk. Indeed, should not the "older" generation be wearing the same symbolic multi-coloured *perpaduan* T-shirts and the unity elastic bangles to make similar statements?

Or, perhaps, more importantly, they could be the role models for the younger generation to emulate by living and breathing messages of unity. There have been times when the concern for *perpaduan* was more of paying lip service to the younger generation.

This is felt even more so as the election draws near, where the race-card is likely to be played (if not already) in lobbying for seats and, eventually, votes.

For this purpose, unity of convenience and unholy alliances are being forged just so that some seats could be won based on chauvinistic considerations, even by those who claim to be promoting non-partisan politics.

So, it is not surprising to hear a comment from a student that "unity" can at times be likened to a carpet. All that meets the eye may be rosy—until you flip it over and find the dirt underneath.

Such dirt could be likened to the double-talk intended to subtly stir up politics of hate that will last long after the words are uttered.

The high point of the *perpaduan* meeting last Sunday was, of course, the symbol of unity in the form of the prime minister.

What came through was his sincerity in promoting unity. Talking like a statesman and a "father", he captivated the audience in re-asserting the importance of *perpaduan* to the survival of the nation.

The one most important take-home message was: unless there is genuine sincerity, in intent and action, there can be no lasting unity, let alone peace.

Thus, unless we learn to generate genuine sincerity for the sake of unity, our national unity will only remain on our wish list. And unless the current acute shortage of sincerity can be overcome, the threat to our unity will remain.

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