

Symbols that unite command respect

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Article

[The Sunday Times - 09/02/2007](#)

THERE is every reason to be thankful for the progress and development Malaysia has gone through in the last five decades.

But the struggle must continue. Merdeka is one long process that cannot stop.

It is like a never-ending relay where each generation must take turns to safeguard the nation's independence.

This could be in any form and it must build and strengthen what we already have.

For someone like New Straits Times columnist Brian Yap, it may be about "spring-cleaning" when he wrote:

"As we commemorate the 50th year since Malaya gained independence, it is high time we cleaned house, too."

To him, it is a comforting ritual that he indulges to clear mind. Throwing things that are no longer needed, organising things and finding out what's not done. What things can be given away or requiring re-decoration.

Applying these rituals to a nation, too, can have an impact of clearing the mind.

More than that, we can create new visions and futures as part of the new struggle to sustain our independence and Merdeka.

Wawasan 2020 is part of clearing the mind, so is Islam Hadhari and Rukunegara. So too Wawasan 2057!

No matter, as Brian rightly pointed out, these are tasks that we need to perform for ourselves as independent citizens of a proud sovereign nation.

After all, it is our values, expectations and survival that we are articulating that will have a lasting bearing of our future.

"We will have to make tough decisions that will not please everyone to rid ourselves of habits, policies and institutions that no longer serve us in these modern times," wrote Brian.

To surrender this to someone else is to forsake one's independence and gradually surrendering our independence to do the things where we have capacity to perform.

He likened this to cleaning the cobwebs and dusting corners in one's house without relying on foreign labour to accomplish it.

Brian, 29, is known for his creative viewpoints on several issues at hand. A budding actor, he will be cast in a film called Muallaf, a new work by the well-known Yasmin Ahmad, scheduled to be released next year.

Although Brian claims to be as confused as a teenager with an identity crisis, he is certain of one thing: Malaysia is his home.

For sure, Brian has ably conveyed his concern on issues that many share and appreciate.

It is fortunate that Brian did not opt for another mode of expressing his thoughts and ideals.

For example, instead of using a "house cleaning" metaphor he could have used others like "flushing a toilet".

Or producing a video of the weird kind and put it on the Internet. Or simply deride the country like some prefer to do.

After all, this what independence means to most of them—one without a sense of pride and dignity, certainly for those who are unsure if Malaysia is home to them.

We have come across incidents that could be termed as "naive" when the national anthem was mocked, let alone the allegedly seditious content that accompanied it.

This is a clear case of *marahkan nyamuk, kelambu dibakar* — a display of utter arrogance and ignorance. To offer an apology, in this case, is rather futile as though *nasi sudah menjadi bubur* — made worse when it is only done through a proxy.

Mocking a sovereign symbol of any country is a serious matter.

The national symbols of any nation are sacrosanct to their loyal citizens, and are respected as such by their friends, but easy targets to their enemies, especially in Asia where values attached to national symbols are

held in high esteem.

Recently, a tourist visiting a neighbouring country was jailed for insulting one such symbol and then deported.

In a complex society like Malaysia where national symbols and institutions are rally points for people of various creed and ethnicity, the value of such symbols are even higher.

Without them it is that much harder for the society to be "one" and stay above their differences. In short, loyalty to a nation like ours very much hinges on the respect, if not reverence of such symbols.

Incidentally, there are the same symbols that we Malaysians pledge our loyalty to, and in the national anthem, this allegiance is clearly spelt.

One cannot get past the second sentence in *Negaraku* without realising what it means to loyal citizens. That is what *tanah tumpahnya darahku* implies, provided we understand the subtleties of the national language.

So let it be made clear that, as we celebrate the 50 years of nationhood, we could do some "spring-cleaning" as suggested by Brian.

In fact, it is desirable that we remove any excess baggage of the last 50 years. Certain things, however, cannot be compromised, or mocked, derided or insulted, under whatever pretext or reasons.

To do otherwise, is an affront to this beloved country and no apologies can be acceptable for such a perfidious behaviour.

Let us therefore stand proud and pay our allegiance to this nation of ours, not just in its 50th year but forever!

Selamat menyambut 50 tahun Malaysia Merdeka!

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