

Language, the soul of the nation

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

[The New Sunday Times - 08/27/2006](#)

This Merdeka, we should appreciate the role the Malay language played in achieving independence.

This week we celebrate the 49th year of Merdeka. We have not done too badly, compared with many countries that gained their independence about the same time.

With the launching of the Third Industrial Master Plan (IMP3) recently, the country has taken another step in the right direction to become a developed nation.



The young must not dismiss Merdeka and what it stands for as something unimportant.

Universities and research institutes will be enhanced to ensure industrial growth contributes towards equitable distribution and balanced regional development.

In short, development of human capital remains essential. The need is for the technically skilled in critical areas of science and engineering.

Unless the plans to nurture the appropriate human capital and talents are undertaken with a sense of urgency, our march towards being a developed nation may be affected.

As we move closer to celebrating Merdeka, the younger generation must learn to appreciate our accomplishments and not take them for granted.

They should also not dismiss Merdeka and what it stands for as something unimportant. They may not know about the difficult times of pre-independence but that doesn't mean they can't appreciate the suffering and sacrifice of the people who fought for independence.

Statements such as "I will sound stupid, if I speak Malay" may be cute to some but arrogant and downright ignorant to others.

What they must be made to realise is that the Malay language was instrumental in making *Merdeka* (a Malay word) possible.

By applying the axiom *Bahasa jiwa bangsa*, it has been shown that one can get the full feeling of pride and confidence, motivating the need to be independent as a nation and people.

It was the majority of the Malay-speaking school teachers and professionals who were at the forefront of the Merdeka movement. No one sounded "stupid" then; it should not be the case now.

That the "stupid" statement was made at the recent Festival Filem Malaysia by a Pelakon Wanita Terbaik (Best Actress) does not make sense considering the festival promotes local culture and values.

One cannot help but recall a time, not too long ago, when a top Malaysian diplomat (no less a celebrity too) who headed the United Nations General Assembly and conducted the session in Malay in full view of the world.

The question then is if it is possible to speak the language at the world stage without sounding "stupid", why should it not be the case at a local film award ceremony?

While it is not wrong to use other languages, could that statement reflect a failure of pride and confidence in the Malay language?

Another thing needs to be said. Of late, there seems to be a preoccupation with aping what others are doing.

This is apparent in the pop entertainment industry, ranging from reality shows to sitcoms. It looks like there is a dearth of creative energy to advance our cultural local values and ideas.

Many prefer to take the easy way out by imitating Western shows, though with some superficial modification.

To the young and impressionable minds this "copycat trend" is a sure signal that we are bankrupt of any worthwhile original ideas and thus the need to depend on imported ones, backed by brand names and all. This soon transcends behaviour and attitudes. To be associated with anything local seems inferior.

Come Merdeka, it is time to seriously ponder and to intro-spectively look at ourselves and ask how "independent" we really are.

Not just externally, but more vitally, in mind and spirit within the context of our own culture and values. What can we do to make things better?

[Terms & Conditions](#)