Celebrate our independence by appreciating all Malaysians

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FULL TEXT

I WAS 12 years old that rainy morning on Aug 31, 1957, in Stadium Merdeka. The seven cries of “Merdeka” by the first Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, still reverberate in my mind, body and soul.

This feeling has always been a source of pride, humility and honour in my life. Alhamdulillah, at 78, I am blessed by Allah with the fortune of celebrating the 66th National Day, today.

On this occasion, I am compelled to reflect and share the journey of our country’s freedom as encapsulated by that “keramat” (sacred) word of M-E-R-D-E-K-A, which every Malaysian of whatever racial origin and heritage must appreciate, protect, cherish and uphold.

The Nusantara possesses generations of untold wealth of human settlements, enriched with a unique multicultural history and heritage which may even surpass other known civilisations.

The independence of Malaya from the British in 1957 was the culmination of commitment and effort by our ancestors from diverse communities that had lived, worked, fought and managed the region for the wellbeing of its people of many ethnicities, religious beliefs and social strata, complemented by varying socio-economic achievements.

Much sacrifice of blood, sweat and tears were made by our predecessors.

Their noble and selfless efforts were due to the the constant spiritual belief in humane social justice, acceptance, tolerance, respect and value in our natural differences, and integration for common unity and true survival of people and nation.

The fact that my police officer father, Abdul Majid Ismail, was the liaison officer involved in drafting the Constitution of Malaya with the Reid Commission (1956-1957) together with other civil servants, such as Abdul Kadir Shamsuddin, gave me further reason to appreciate and respect our nation in honour of their invaluable contributions. It is, therefore, appropriate that we remember and extend our posthumous gratitude to them.

In the last 66 years, and within the spirit of the Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara, the country has progressively benefited via 10 leaderships with varying socio-economic achievements, reflecting their respective dynamic local and global circumstances and expectations.

The challenge today is no different. Yet, the objectives and solutions must be innovative, constructive, positive and reflect the new norms.

Throughout my life, all my aspirations and actions have been motivated and inspired towards elevating, in whatever small way, the harmonious wellbeing of our diverse people and country.

Alhamdulillah, I was at Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara over the last weekend with about 100 participants for a sketching competition to document the relationship of the two historic buildings, with the new iconic Merdeka Tower 118, the world’s second tallest building, another fitting milestone for Malaysia’s journey since Merdeka in 1957.

It was a nostalgic moment when I stood at the very spot in the stadium as I did in 1957, which brought much memories and reflections of growing up, living amongst my multiracial schoolmates at Pasar Road English School and Victoria Institution, and the exposure to diverse social activities, art and hobbies.

These childhood experiences had evolved into my architectural career, as evidenced by the variety of buildings designed and built in reflection of contentment and gratitude for the opportunities to contribute towards nation-building.

Notwithstanding the many commendable socio-political, economic transformation and achievements in Malaysia, other unpleasant changes have inevitably happened for better or for worse, but we must always remember and ensure that our dignity and pride of existence always take precedence, and be protected and not be compromised. This is embodied in a Malay proverb: “Dignity must be protected and dignity must not be traded or pawned.” Such are the fundamentals in nation-building within global existence, and we must always be cautious of the threats, trials and tribulations that constantly confront and can confuse our people and nation.

Critical thinking for respect and inclusivity of all Malaysians are uppermost in our quest for greater human success, survival and accomplishment, because, “without our past references, there is no present and future”.

A heartfelt congratulations to all Malaysians on this auspicious 66th Merdeka. May Allah sustain, bless and protect our beloved nation, Malaysia!

Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka!

The writer is a former president of the Malaysian Institute of Architects

DETAILS

Subject:	Architecture; Nation building
Business indexing term:	Subject: Architecture
Location:	Malaysia; Malaya
Publication title:	New Straits Times; Kuala Lumpur
First page:	26
Publication year:	2023
Publication date:	Aug 31, 2023
Publisher:	The New Straits Times Press (M) Berhad
Place of publication:	Kuala Lumpur
Country of publication:	Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--Malaysia
Source type:	Newspaper
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2859288563
Document URL:	https://ezproxy.help.edu.my/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/celebrate-our-independence-appreciating-all/docview/2859288563/se-2?accountid=50218
Copyright:	Copyright The New Straits Times Press (M) Berhad Aug 31, 2023

Last updated:	2023-09-01
Database:	ProQuest One Academic

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