

60th Merdeka Day

NEGARAKU SEHATI SEJIWA

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Tuesday
August 1, 2017

Time to mature as Malaysians

Comment by Balan Moses

AS Malaysia prepares to celebrate its 60th anniversary, it is a time to reflect on the state of the nation and prospects for the future.

The time is indeed opportune at this watershed moment for all to take an honest look at where we are heading as a people.

It brings into sharp focus the theme for this year's Merdeka: *Negaraku — Sehati Sejiwa*.

A slew of questions need to be asked, and answered, as to whether we are en-route to being of one heart and one soul as a polity.

Is this truly our nation (*Negaraku*) in every sense of the word, especially in terms of unity of purpose as Malaysians where heart and soul are concerned?

Have Malaysians reached a level of maturity expected of a "senior citizen" in the commonwealth of nations?

Are our actions as a people dictated by the necessities of the day that call for cohesion among members of the various races and religions or by narrow partisan interests?

Is the future of our progeny utmost on our minds as we make decisions that will affect the essence of being Malaysian?

There are no simple answers to these searching questions given the complexity of our history and profile of a diverse people.

But one thing is certain: It is incumbent on those who are actively participating in everyday life as citizens to act in such a way as to ensure the viable future of the nation.

Malaysians cannot allow political, economic or social developments of the day initiated by those with self-serving

interests to mar the character of the nation.

The harsh and often strident voices of demagogues who espouse extremist views have to be ignored in the larger interest of the silent majority who want what is best for all.

As the nation enters a symbolic era that can make or break the backbone of the people, it is time for all to rise above race and religion in the common interest.

We have to be of one heart and soul

if we intend to overcome the internal and external pressures being brought to bear upon our beloved nation.

There are innumerable examples of nations brought to their knees by fractious relationships within the population.

Malaysians have to wise up to the reality of the day and seek the strength in unity.

Sixty years of fruitful existence, common experiences that benefited all and a shared destiny cannot be sacrificed at the altar of partisan interests.

We have come too far to fail.

United we stand, divided we fall. It's as simple as that.

The road to nationhood



By Tunku Abdul Rahman
From Chronicle of Malaysia

Malaya is now on the threshold of nationhood. In 1957, we shall gain our independence, and be free to join other equal partners of the Commonwealth who have trodden this path before us. The Malayan people have every reason to be proud of the progress we have made in so short a time, but great tasks lie ahead of us.

I do not fear freedom. After a year as Chief Minister of the Alliance Government, I am more convinced than ever that we can shoulder the responsibilities of independence. Of course, we have unusual problems, for we have a society of several races, cultures and religions. There is also the challenge of alien Communist terrorism. These problems we shall face with determination. The challenge of Communism we shall take up with all our strength, sustained by our belief in democracy as the best way of life.

We have come a long way in a short time. It is often said that in Malaya before the war there were no politics and no nationalism. It is true that there was little thought of politics, but among the Malays there was already evident the first new stirring of a national spirit. Malay nationalism was finally reborn after the liberation of the country from the Japanese. All around us in Asia there was a great surge of nationalism. India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, the Philippines and Indonesia achieved independence.

These great events influenced the whole political outlook in Malaya.



Straits Times Annual 1957

Political consciousness began to develop. If I were asked what I thought to be the most important British contribution in the political sphere during three-quarters of a century as the protecting power, I would say that it was the acceptance with tolerance of the growth of political movements. The British finally recognised the development of Malayan nationalism as something that was inevitable.

The British also developed a sound system of administration and justice and they have certainly made a great contribution to our two main industries—rubber and tin, on which the economy of

the country is largely based. They were, of course, helped by the Chinese, Indians and other races.

Unfortunately, the Malays were sadly neglected in the early rush for wealth and Malay rights were consequently ignored. These rights of the Malays, as 'sons of the soil' are now being implemented, but the degree of practicability is naturally small, for fear that others might feel themselves unduly prejudiced.

The British finally recognised the development of Malayan nationalism as something that was inevitable

Hitherto the Malays have tended to concentrate on entry into Government service, and on agriculture, but they are now looking to other avenues of employment. I hope that commerce and industry will offer more opportunities to Malays and assist them to take their proper place in the Malayan economy. Malays must be able to play their full role in every part of the nation's life.

1956... Euphoria in the Year before Independence

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Straits Settlements (1874 - 1946)



Federated Malay States/Malayan Union



On New Year's Day in 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, Chief Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of the Federation of Malay States, set sail for England for independence talks with the British.

On Feb 7 1956, the students of the Malayan Teachers' Training College in Kirkby near Liverpool in England were told, at very short notice, to spruce up the campus for the impending visit of the Tunku. The students were told the Tunku would make an important announcement.





A representative of the Malacca Umno Kaum Ibu (Umno Women's Wing) then presented him with a kris. He lifted this in the air and shouted 'Merdeka' several times.

At noon, the Tunku, accompanied by Datuk Abdul Razak Hussein, the Minister of Education, was escorted by the college principal into the Kirkby grounds. He broke the news to the students assembled in the hall that Malaya would get its independence on Aug 31 the next year.

While the full impact of his announcement was still sinking in, plans were afoot for the Tunku to make the first official Declaration of Independence when he returned home. Accompanied by other members of the Alliance team — Abdul Razak, Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, H.S. Lee, T.H. Tan and Abdul Kadir Shamsuddin — the Tunku departed a few days later for Malaya with the good news.

Malacca was chosen as the venue for the announcement for a symbolic reason. For this was where the foreign invasion first began before the whole Malay Peninsula was colonised. Malacca was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511 and taken over by the Dutch in 1641. It passed to the British in 1824.

The independence proclamation was to be made at the Banda Hilir Padang along the Malacca seafront on Feb 20. Much needed to be done for the big event, but time was short and money was tight.

So, the organising committee comprising members of the Alliance Party and led by the head of Malacca

Umno, Ghafar Baba, got to work. They had to make sure the Tunku would be on a platform high enough to be visible to the crowd expected to come from all parts of the country. And also that his voice would be clearly heard by all.

But they lacked resources and thus decided they would make do with a makeshift stage. They borrowed two lorries from a Chinese *towkay*. They pulled the side and back wooden panels down, put the vehicles back to back, and *voilà!* a stage was made. To meet other expenses, they dug into their own pockets.

On the morning of the announcement, the weather was good, welcoming the 100,000-strong crowd at the padang. Some of them had camped overnight to make sure they heard the historic announcement.

The Tunku and his party arrived at the Batu Berendam airport where they were met by a motorcade that escorted them

to Banda Hilir.

In the meantime, the excited crowd waited. They were from all walks of life. Some even climbed trees and buildings to get a better glimpse of the key personalities. As the Tunku and his delegation arrived in a red Nash convertible (also borrowed from another Chinese businessman), the crowd became euphoric.

The Tunku announced that Malaya would be independent on Aug 31 1957. A representative of the Malacca Umno Kaum Ibu (Umno Women's Wing) then presented him with a *kris*. He lifted this in the air and shouted "Merdeka" several times. According to newspaper reports, the gathering, which consisted of leaders of various organisations from every state and settlement in the Federation, then called on the Tunku to wipe out the terrorists. They asked him to introduce national mobilisation if the Communist leadership refused to surrender.

Even with exhilaration and ecstasy in the air, there was no feasting or merry-making. The Tunku and his delegation could not even afford a tea party! Instead, they proceeded to the house of MCA founder and president Tan Cheng Lock in Heeren Street for refreshments before flying back to Kuala Lumpur.



Reproduced from
 CHRONICLE OF MALAYSIA —
 FIFTY YEARS OF HEADLINE NEWS, 1957-2007
 Publisher: Editions Didier Millet
 Editor-in-chief: Philip Mathews