

Post-Merdeka cheer

MY VIEW

BY DZULKIFLI ABDUL RAZAK



REAL good news is difficult to come by nowadays. Within the week of the national celebration the good feeling dissipated very quickly. We regret the boat tragedy that took at least 14 lives when a sampan capsized near Hutan Melintang. It was reminiscent of similar tragedies worldwide. There was then the case of seven pupils who were allegedly lost near Post Tohoi, about 60km into the jungles of Gua Musang. It has been more than two weeks now (at the time of printing), drawing attention to safety and security issues at schools especially surrounding orang asli pupils.

Not to be missed, the ultimate humiliation: 10-0 football debacle against the Emirates in a World Cup qualifying match. The coach had the decency to take responsibility and resign, cutting short the usual blame game. For now the FAM can still sit comfortably. Meanwhile, the Air Pollution Index continues to rage, hanging like a shroud over the region at this time of the year, despite numerous talks and plans of action to make haze a non-starter.

Fortunately, it is not all gloomy. There is some cheer too, post-Merdeka. They maybe too early to bet on, but it is suggestive of what we can hope for days ahead, that we are not just losers. First, the announcement that the nation's flag carrier, MAS, took to the sky under a new re-hauled company, thanks to the new "captain", Christoph Mueller. Definitely, something to cheer about, amid some still unanswered questions for now. Personally, I cannot help

but recall similar jubilant feelings when the acronym MAS (Malaysia Airline System) was coined by the then deputy prime minister, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman in the 1970s. MAS translated as "gold" seems to be just the Midas touch needed to light up the sky, but it was not to be. In fact, MAS at one point took a different meaning when the then Ministry of Transport had difficulties in even rectifying frequent flight delays. It was dubbed as Mesti Ada Susah! That "susah" image later ballooned. The rest is history.

Second, the successful launch of the historic 16th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) where Malaysia was pulled apart in all directions. The three-day event saw over 1,000 delegates from 135 countries converging in Putrajaya. At the end of it all, the "verdict" was that corruption in Malaysia was "not endemic". But like MAS, strict measures are still required to ensure that this remains so. Admittedly, there are still uneasy "scandals" that must be quickly resolved before Malaysia can claim to be "squeaky clean" in the eyes of the world. Unfortunately, the prime minister's absence at the IACC reportedly "with regard to security, and the atmosphere" was not only deemed as a huge opportunity lost, but raised other questions. Why could the prime minister not be "secured" at an innocuous international gathering of do-gooders?

The third cheer has to do with an idea that can be termed as "an environmentally friendly peaceful assembly (EFPA)" - inclusive of official events like the Merdeka and Malaysia celebrations. While an arguably peaceful assembly is a democratic right of the people everywhere - hence of late in Guatemala (whose head of government has resigned since), Beirut,

Tokyo - all taking place at the same time when Malaysians were doing the same, so too the right to preserve and safeguard environmental integrity as an inherent part of democratic rights. In other words, there must be zero-tolerance to all forms of anti-social activities, such as littering, vandalism, urinating in public, let alone all forms of aggression and violence, which invariably will adversely impact the environment while participating in exercising democratic rights. This is especially relevant because in EFPA there is the tendency to marshal multiple paraphernalia (some are unfriendly to the environment) as part of the herd-mentality employed in such assemblies. These can be potentially misused to harm the environment. In short, a peaceful assembly must also demonstrate that it is at "peace" with the immediate environment.

Taking a leaf from the "You Stink" protest in Lebanon, environmental concerns work both ways - for the protesters and the powers that be.

Perhaps the above cheer is the mere tip of the iceberg, yet they are moments to cherish so that post-Merdeka can be more hopeful as we look into the future. Succinctly, can Malaysia symbolically fly again to even greater heights as a nation that is not only "squeaky clean" - and devoid of any "scandals", but also where the rights to a peaceful assembly are respectful of the law; at the same time, one that is not in violation of the immediate environment of the assembly site. If this is possible, there will be many other cheers that we can look forward to come 2020.

With some four decades of experience in education locally and internationally, the writer believes that "another world is possible". Comments: letters@thesundaily.

LETTERS

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English - long road back to excellence

I REFER to "Keep politics out of education" (A to Z of English, Sept 8).

I thank Bhavani for writing about the poor attention that English language education is getting from the government. It is writers like her who remind us of the insignificance given to this very important language which is the lingua franca of the international community.

I taught English in primary schools in the late 80's and early 90's in rural schools in Terengganu and in Sarawak. It's sad to say that the standard of English among the English teachers in these schools is poor. I believe some effort is being made to rectify this situation but even the inspectorate from our Education Ministry seems helpless as there is interference from unseen forces or a very bad selection scheme or refusal to adhere to the standard selection scheme when choosing candidates for our teachers training colleges' English teachers programme.

There must be a genuine intention and steadfast implementation of the strategy created by the ministry based on sound advice from a panel of language specialists to undo the damage done to the teaching of English.

We need to accept that to achieve earlier standards of fluency in English will take some time even if the damage control process in schools is done sincerely and consistently. We need patience to see the next generation of school goers shine as internationally recognised graduates.

A holistic approach is urgently needed to improve the performance of our students.

Sundra Raj Perumal
Kuala Lumpur

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