

Liberty should be our foundation

It will be harder to craft government slogans to encompass all Malaysians when politicians are exploiting the divisive rhetoric of race and religion, resulting in polarised communities.

ALL around the world we have seen how different narratives address the various crises of political instability, economic uncertainty, rising inequality and low wages. As we have seen in Malaysia in recent elections, political parties employ a mix of ideological arguments, populist slogans and dominant personalities to get their message across – and of course we have seen how the “3Rs” of race, religion and royalty have been weaponised in both directions.

The government’s current slogan which we have seen in abundance, especially in the ongoing period between Merdeka and Malaysia Day, is Malaysia Madani, superseding the various taglines of previous administrations: Keluarga Malaysia, Malaysia Prihatin, Malaysia Baharu, 1Malaysia, Islam Hadhari and Wawasan 2020 (I am sure some of these are more memorable than others).

Madani is supposedly an acronym of the core values of sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust and compassion – but even in Malay, it takes some alphabetic acrobatics to get “Madani”.

There are four agendas: to focus on problem-solving pro-



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cesses, meeting the needs of nation, creating a peaceful and prosperous future, and fulfilling the potential of the people and the country. These values and agendas in turn target the eight domains of economy and finance, legislation, institutions, education, community, culture, urban, and rural.

If one were to delve deeper, there would no doubt be all sorts of matrices and detailed targets that civil servants and (more likely) expensive consultants will have formulated in respect to specific ministries and departments to give this whole concept substance, presented in a slick manner. The abundance of infographics and corporate jargon belies the fact that the challenge of such initiatives is in pleasing everyone. We have to go further back in

time to find examples that were more explicit and ideological in their approach. Thankfully, there is one legacy which does see repeated use, especially during National Day celebrations. This is the recitation of the Rukun Negara – including its preamble which famously uses the word “liberal” – after *Negaraku* is sung.

Last Thursday in Negri Sembilan, as has been the case for years, the Menteri Besar led the crowd (with each principle punctuated by a suitably hefty artillery shot), and I was glad to see that the new opposition members in the State Legislative Assembly participated as well. In other parts of the peninsula, there was some doubt that state governments would adopt the official theme of the Federal Government.

Meanwhile, across the sea, there was a reaffirmation of Sabah Day, commemorating the self-government (but not technically “independence” – depending on who you speak to) of North Borneo on Aug 31, 1963. Even the foremost celebrations of national unity are mired in division, alas; thankfully the 16-day gap to Malaysia Day provides great economic opportunities for business-

es too.

Amid the Rukun Negara’s five principles, two key concepts are referred to by name, “Loyalty to King and Country” refers to the institution of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (and by extension the Conference of Rulers and the monarchs of each state). And “Supremacy of the Constitution” means that it is our Federal Constitution that primarily defines the institutions and processes of our country, in the context of our federal setup.

I have been busy explaining these things often this week, because so many international delegates are in Kuala Lumpur attending three conferences in which the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) has been involved: the Islam and Liberty Network Conference, the Asia Liberty Forum, and the Liberalism Conference. While in Malaysia “liberty” and “liberal” have become dirty words, it has been reassuring to meet advocates from Muslim-majority and neighbouring Asian countries who not only understand that such ideas are beneficial, but actually admire us because at the outset we were proclaimed, by Tunku Abdul Rahman with the

concurrence of the Rulers, as “a sovereign democratic state founded upon the principles of liberty and justice”. This is in contrast to many other countries which had their birth in communist or military dictatorships.

Unfortunately, I have to tell my new international friends that successive generations of politicians have distorted that vision. Today, politicians are either actively exploiting – or at least find themselves having to engage in – the divisive rhetoric of race and religion. As communities become ever more polarised, more placating of extremists occurs. It will become ever more difficult to craft government slogans that please everyone (to the delight of expensive consultants).

The only sustainable way out, in line with what was agreed by our founding fathers, is for statesmen to find the political courage to re-establish a consensus of why our country exists, and to deliver the civic education to ensure future generations understand why it is so precious.

Tunku Zain Al-Abidin is founding president of Ideas. The views expressed here are the writer’s own.

OTHER NEWS & VIEWS



Compiled by ARFA YUNUS, C. ARUNO and R. ARAVINTHAN

Woman falls victim to mooncake scam

A WOMAN realised she was scammed after being told to download a suspicious mobile app just to apply for a refund, reported *Sin Chew Daily*.

The woman from Seri Kembangan, Selangor, said she bought four boxes of mooncakes for RM440 after seeing an advertisement on Facebook, but did not receive the goods after paying.

When she complained to the “seller”, they asked her to download an app which would help her apply for a refund.

She realised she had been scammed after finding out that the app required her to divulge her personal details.

“They wanted me to download an app. Seeing this, I realised I

had been scammed!” she said.

She lodged a police report on Sept 5.

It is believed that the app was used in what is known as “recovery fraud”.

After being scammed the first time, the fraudster would then claim to be able to help the victim recover some or all of their initial loss.

They would often ask for the victim’s sensitive personal information or an upfront fee and would disappear before the victim realised they had been scammed a second time.

The daily had earlier reported that Facebook was the top platform for scammers to con unsuspecting victims.

Malaysians had lost a total of RM80mil and RM92mil to scams on Facebook in 2021 and 2022 respectively, according to the Communications and Digital Ministry.

> Malaysian filmmaker Chong Keat Aun’s second feature film *Snow in Midsummer* received critical acclaim after premiering at the Venice International Film Festival recently, reported *China Press*.

The film, which was shot entirely in Malaysia, tells the aftermath of the May 13 racial riots.

At the end of the film, some of the audience could not hold back their tears as the camera panned towards a series of gravestones at a cemetery in Kuala Lumpur.

When members in the audience asked if he faced any obstacles making a film touching on such a sensitive topic, Chong replied that filming had been smooth.

Snow in Midsummer was shown at the Venice International Film Festival on Sept 4.

> Art pieces created by superstar Andy Lau and his 11-year-old daughter became the highlight of an exhibition in Hong Kong recently, reported *Sin Chew Daily*.

Even though the exhibition featured collaboration between Lau and five other renowned artists, the public was more excited to see the ones created by him and his daughter Hanna.

Priest offers RM5.7mil bounty on minister

A HINDU *acharya* (priest-cum-spiritual leader) in North India has shocked the nation by offering a 100-million-rupee (RM5.7mil) reward for the head of a Tamil Nadu state minister, *Malaysia Nanban* reported.

This follows a statement by youth welfare and sports development minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, which is said to have riled up Hindu nationalists.

In a tweet, Udhayanidhi, who is the son of chief minister MK Stalin, is said to have commented that the Sanatana Dharma ideology would be driven out of the state by the state government which promotes secular, Dravidian governance.

This has been interpreted as him speaking against Hinduism in general. There have also been a flurry of police reports demanding action against the minister while he and the DMK party have stood by his remarks.

Meanwhile, Paramahansa Acharya from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh offered the bounty and staged a protest where he stabbed a picture resembling the minister and set fire to it.

The state police have increased security at Udhayanidhi’s home.

Cleaner mum abandons son at bosses’ home

A MOTHER, who worked as a house cleaner, abandoned her two-year-old son at her customer’s house in Subang Jaya, Selangor, *Harian Metro* reported.

The Welfare Department is now looking for the mother, only known as Thevegi, to resolve issues regarding the boy’s custody and documentation.

An officer, Nur Fadilah Ali, said the boy, known as Visha, who is a Malaysian citizen, was left in the care of a married couple since

September 2021.

“Previously, the mother would clean the couple’s house every weekend and, at the same time, visit her son.

“However, since January, the woman stopped going to the couple’s house and she could not be contacted,” she said.

The boy has no valid documentation with him.

> Malaysia’s king of pop, Datuk Jamal Abdillah, has called on the government to address issues sur-

rounding late payments by organisers to performers.

He said late payments had been an issue for decades and the rights of singers had been ignored.

“This has happened to me before and I urge the government to step in. What I’m raising today involves television stations and event organisers. Some organisers take months to pay us, sometimes even longer.

“As a senior in the industry, I want to highlight this because

there are many singers out there who are afraid to speak up because they don’t want their livelihood to be affected,” he said, *Berita Harian* reported.

The 63-year-old said this issue had been going on since he started singing at the age of 19.

“Some performers are only able to sing. They do not have any other job or business. I hope by raising this, I can help my comrades in the entertainment industry,” he said.