

A Plea For Unity

Written by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah

Friday, 24 February 2012 00:00 - Last Updated Saturday, 25 February 2012 17:18

I am indeed honoured to have been invited to speak to all of you gathered here this morning on a subject of great importance for the continued preservation and survival of our nation.

2. As all of you are aware, our nation became free from the fetters of colonial domination about five and a half decades ago.

3. Sadly and strangely, after 55 years of independence, I think we are farther apart now than we have ever been before.

4. On August 31, 1957 our freedom from the shackles of a colonial past was greeted with euphoria by the different races who came together on the basis of a common vision for a shared future.

5. We then had a Prime Minister who believed that the purpose of independence was the pursuit of happiness for the different races in the country, and our success in that pursuit was to him the ultimate test of our success as a nation.

6. Tunku's vision for the newly independent nation was based on the "greatest happiness principle", a subject of intense political discourse in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe.

7. Like the enlightened political philosophers in the western world, our father of independence believed that governments existed to provide for the happiness of the people, and nothing more.

8. "For us in the Alliance we have no dogma other than to ensure happiness for the people," the Tunku once said.

9. Tunku recognised that individual happiness was tied up with collective happiness, and that sometimes we needed to sacrifice our own comforts willingly so that people from another

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community were not deprived of happiness.

10. Like Jeremy Bentham, the great English philosopher would have it, Tunku therefore favoured policies that would bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of Malaysians.

11. In his words, *"what I gave to one, I also gave to others. In this way, we made everybody happy. This has always been my aim."*

12. In fact, according to him, *"that is what I live for, to ensure peace, happiness and prosperity for our Malaya which we all love so well."*

13. Tunku's policies were tied up with the golden rule that we must have respect for one another and treat others just as we wish others to treat us.

14. This golden rule was an important principle in an interdependent, multi-ethnic society such as ours.

15. Tunku's basic concept of happiness is best expressed in his favourite maxim, "live and let live".

16. It is a maxim that calls for acceptance of people as they are, although they may have a different way of life. Tunku applied the maxim in the public domain.

17. Tunku was a real father to the nation, as expressed in these words,

"... I am a happy prime minister and I have cause to be so. I can feel the pulse of this nation; I am not the prime minister of this nation, but the father to all the peoples who live here."

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18. If Tunku had boasted that he was the happiest prime minister in the world, it was only because the people were happy. In Tunku's words at that time, "I pray and hope that this happy state of affairs will continue for all times."

19. Unfortunately, however, Tunku's dreams were dashed to dust by the events of May 13, 1969.

20. This once happiest Prime Minister expressed the pain he felt as Father of Merdeka as he relived those traumatic moments:

"I have often wondered why God made me live long enough to have witnessed my beloved Malays and Chinese citizens killing each other."

21. Such was the man that Tunku was. He was the moving spirit of the nation.

22. Tunku has long gone, and today his premiership is a distant memory. Since the time he left, inter-ethnic relations have taken a turn for the worse on all fronts.

23. Today, we have a regime that promotes the concept of 1Malaysia with all its contradictions.

24. We have an official document that explains the 1Malaysia concept as a nation where every Malaysian perceives himself as Malaysian first, and by race second.

25. However, we have a leader who openly transgresses his own official policy by declaring that he is "Malay first" and "Malaysian second".

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26. The statement comes as a severe blow not just to the concept of 1Malaysia, but also as a nullification of Jiwa Malaysia or the National Spirit that Tunku was trying hard to inculcate.

27. No wonder that people can no longer recognize the jiwa — they just don't feel as though they are fully Malaysian.

28. It is strange that after 55 years of freedom, we have not learnt the simple art of living together as brothers and sisters.

29. The country's source of strength is unity, and this source of strength has been slowly whittled away over the years.

30. We have become a nation of strangers, as evidenced in the fields of politics, the economy, education and the civil service.

31. The strong presence of communal political parties in the country is chiefly to be blamed for the sad state of race relations in the country. These political parties invariably support racial policies and imbibe racial sentiments among the people whom they represent

32. In their day-to-day administration of the country, the powers that be often give scant regard to the constitutional provision contained in Article 8(1) which states that

“all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law”;

and Article 8(2) which states that

“ there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the

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establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment”.

33. One major sore point in the area of race relations is the New Economic Policy, whose original intention to create unity has been subverted to become a major source of disunity not only between the various races but also among the Malays and bumiputras in general.

34. The New Economic Policy, which was conceived in 1971 not long after the Tunku had retired as Prime Minister, was primarily created to address poverty, and to raise the level of Malay participation in the economy.

35. It was intended for all Malaysians, and not just for the Malays or bumiputras.

36. As a former Finance Minister, let me emphasise that it was never the intention of the NEP to create an incubated class of Malay capitalists.

37. If we visit the government departments or universities, we wonder where all the non-Malays have gone.

38. After 1969, suddenly there was this attempt to recruit mostly Malays into the civil service.

39. It is tragic that the civil service does not reflect the racial composition of the Malaysian population, as the predominant presence of only one race tends to engender a sub-culture that is antithetical to the evolution of a dynamic and efficient civil administration in the country.

40. Our school system is not as it used to be. The non-Malays prefer to send their children to vernacular schools, as the national schools have assumed an exclusively Malay character.

41. Needless to say, national schools have become even less attractive to the non-Malays as

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English is no longer used in the teaching of mathematics and science.

42. The situation will be very different if all discriminatory practices in the education system were to be abolished, and a common system of education for all is adopted.

43. National unity is the one area that we cannot afford to ignore, and the real genesis of national unity, I submit, is from an unlikely source: Parliament, warts and all.

44. It is the Parliament that has the final say in charting the direction the country is heading to.

45. We must have a strong and resolute government which recognises the needs of all Malaysians, and formulates the right policies for the propagation of a cohesive and integrated society.

46. If Parliament enacts policies that are just and fair for all Malaysians based on meritocracy and need, more than half the battle for national unity would be won.

47. In this respect, the rakyat as voters must realize that in the ultimate they alone hold the key to the future of this country.

Speech at the Breakfast Confidential Dialogue, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre organized by Paddy Schubert Sdn Bhd on Friday, 24.02.2012 at 8:30am.