



Drastic measures are needed to stop the division among M'sians.

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To me, and I dare say most Malaysians, national unity centres around the feeling that we all belong – in every sense of the word, equally and without discrimination — to one country. We are Malaysians first and foremost before we are anyone else.

That means we celebrate our cultural, racial, language, food and other diversities knowing full well that we are inextricably linked and belong to one nation despite our various backgrounds.

We not only accept our differences, we recognise that as our strength.

What has prevented national unity – and hence the need for us to come up with ways to strengthen that – is that we have stressed our differences as divisive forces and failed to cultivate it as strengths. Not only do we not celebrate our differences we have become intolerant of them.

Differences have been raised to such an extent that we bargain for everything based on race, language and religion. Quotas and contracts, jobs and education, equity stakes – all of these are being split up on the basis of race with political parties representing, basically, races.

We attribute the “divide and rule” policy to the British who supposedly highlighted racial and religious differences to keep themselves more easily in power. But over the years, our politicians have taught the British a thing or two and have taken the policy to new heights.

Our politicians have finely honed their skills to evoke the required response from their constituencies by highlighting, stoking and sometimes igniting the fires of discord and dissent among the races to constantly keep the tensions – and their power – up.

To continue down this sad, sorry path is to descend into disaster for it will result in each community pulling in its own direction, sowing the seeds of national disunity, allowing the corrupt to crop up and rule and to eventually sink this nation into oblivion as we spend time fighting over the spoils instead of fostering an environment for the unrestrained creation of wealth and well-being for all of us.

One can only hope that the Government is serious when it asks for suggestions to improve national unity, that it is aware of the serious state of affairs and it is willing to take the necessary steps to avert this disaster which will surely befall us if we don't change direction.

What's required are radical steps and a real will by politicians to put the people and the country first above their own narrow, parochial interests and using thinly veiled threats about what lies ahead if the public does not play ball.

Here are 10 that we should seriously consider:

1. Ban race-based political parties: This is a radical suggestion and perhaps even undemocratic. But to continue to allow race-based political parties, which fight principally for the benefit of one race despite everything they say to the contrary, is to allow them to continue to drive repeated wedges between us Malaysians for the continuing benefit of the politicians.

2. Cut corruption: Much of the time it is the most corrupt among us who play the race card. We must guard against the benefits to our race being whittled away, they exhort, when what they really mean is that they don't want the power and patronage they wield that makes them wealthy – sometimes beyond belief – to be taken away from them. They champion their race only to continue in their corrupt ways.

3. Redress imbalance in government and the corporate sector: There are too many Malays in government and government-linked companies and perhaps not enough of them in the corporate sector. But while there are increasing numbers of Malays in the corporate sector, there has been a decreasing number of non-Malays in government. That's an imbalance that's bound to affect national unity in the long term. It can be easily rectified.

4. Introduce proper national service: It has been said time and again that there are not enough non-Malays in the army and the police for various reasons. One way out of this is to have compulsory, comprehensive and extensive national service for both army and police for those within a certain age bracket. That means we have reserve army and police back-up. This will go a long way towards fostering national unity compared to the current inadequate system which is really not national service as most people understand it.

5. Move to a single school system over the long term: Yes, the constitution guarantees vernacular schools. But to continue with this where schoolchildren of various races no longer mingle at work and play as the educational system becomes polarised is extremely unsatisfactory. Some system should be devised where mother-tongue education can continue unabated and at the same levels as now within a unified single school system. This is a major cause of disunity and can be changed if there is consensus.

6. Abolish racial quotas: Racial quotas are archaic as a means of achieving social distribution aims. The idea should be to help all disadvantaged. If that is done, and if a particular race as a whole is disadvantaged, it will automatically be helped more. That removes the considerable social angst and divisiveness of racial quotas and directly fosters national unity.

7. Abandon equity targets based on race: For the same reason as the point above, racial equity ownership targets should be done away with. Equity ownership should also be measured in more meaningful ways. Stakes owned by government corporations should be broken down according to the racial composition of the country or completely excluded from the calculations. It is important to always maintain data integrity by being transparent about how statistics are collected and collated.

8. Move towards equality of opportunity, not outcome: To do away with a dependence habit and to encourage and reward effort, the aim should be equality of opportunity. All disadvantaged groups can be given some forms of advantage to redress imbalances without bringing into play the question of race.

9. Award scholarships, university places etc based on need and merit: There are two ways to award places in universities and give scholarships – according to need and according to merit. When poor and disadvantaged groups need to be given a leg up, clear guidelines can be set and adhered to so that the process is transparent, effective and not based on race.

10. Introduce anti-discriminatory legislation and enforce it scrupulously: No one should

be discriminated against anywhere on the basis of race, religion, language or gender. This should be clearly set forth unambiguously in legislation and a commission set up to enforce it. In any country where there are minorities who are citizens, their rights must be scrupulously protected to ensure national unity.

At the end of the day, it is up to us.

Malaysians must rise up as 1Malaysia and deny politicians their weapons of divisiveness by insisting that they treat us as Malaysians first and Malays, Chinese, Indians etc only after that and work for the benefit of all of us.

Otherwise, we can use our ultimate weapon — refuse to give them the vote.

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