



RUKUN NEGARA: THE PRINCIPLES

- 1 BELIEF IN GOD
- 2 LOYALTY TO KING AND COUNTRY
- 3 THE SUPREMACY OF THE CONSTITUTION
- 4 THE RULE OF LAW
- 5 COURTESY AND MORALITY

THE OBJECTIVES

- TO achieve greater unity among Malaysians
- TO maintain a democratic way of life
- TO create a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared
- TO ensure a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions
- TO build a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology

Merdeka – freedom rewritten



JUST DIFFERENT

BY BHAVANI KRISHNA IYER

FOR many reasons, which feels not just strange but also euphoric, this year's Merdeka feels a lot more grandiose, not in a lavish sense but in sentiment and satisfaction. There seems to be a new flavour to just everything about the celebrative mood.

A video on its viral round landed with me recently and I am glad I opened it. I am not sure who sponsored or produced it but it was shot in Bukit Bintang, a popular tourist destination, which has seen great transformation in the past year.

In a simple game of compartmentalising people according to races it was revealed that we Malaysians have a lot more in common than our differences. It was a message so densely illustrated in lucid detail.

Apart from being racially different, we seem to have a cross-cultural sense of living, from what we eat, wear and do. Except for

the few who think it would be easier to achieve their personal and political agendas by inciting slurs, most of us are and will always be Anak Malaysia.

Notwithstanding the creativity, the video was a reminder of our core values as Malaysians and topping the list would be humanity and second to that would be our nationality as a Malaysian, which is all encompassing and binding.

We then have the universal values such as peace, freedom, social progress, equal rights and human dignity that are not any less important.

If I take a leaf out of this and talk about freedom, it is an absolute necessity to be able to continually exist in context and make a difference without being subjected to discrimination.

The often-asked question whether freedom is a right or privilege and the counter argument that it is God-given has seen many failures. It is mostly abused, restricted, battered, curtailed and even abolished.

Malaysia is gifted, more so now, and yet we do not appreciate what we have.

Freedom is a commodity for which a price tag cannot be attached, you will only know its value when you lose it. If you ever ask Nelson Mandela what freedom means to him, "My life" would be the most probable answer.

A life unparalleled for its bravery, conviction, devotion to a just cause and to the liberation of his fellow men and women.

A life in which he struggled against the might of the apartheid state and sacrificed his own liberty so that all South Africans could enjoy dignity, prosperity, and freedom.

For those aiming to promote democracy around the globe, Mandela's life also holds invaluable lessons for current and future struggles for freedom.

He is renowned for his principled opposition to a racist and undemocratic regime in South Africa, but his cause was also the cause of all people who seek to uphold the universal principles of liberty and equality, anywhere in the world.

In the same breath, I am glad that the younger generation is not easily swayed by the silly boundaries imposed on them and neither are they stunted by the hate speeches

that go against humanity. Their sense of right and wrong are well-placed. They have decided to break the bubble to experience and accept the good, bad and the ugly.

There are two sides to a coin as they say but when we go digital, there are no sides, only perception counts, which in itself is a matter of mindset.

The new government has surpassed the 100-day mark with many ticks in the to-do list box and, most importantly, the elusive elitist government that was is being turned around with the wrongdoers facing the wrath of law while the others are either squirming restlessly or running in paranoia.

At times it feels mystical that what we thought was terminal has been reversed in a matter of a day, the day when Malaysians came in full force, barring all differences, to do the right thing.

This Merdeka and for many more years to come I join Malaysians in praying that we continue to respect each other and live and prosper inclusively. Selamat Hari Merdeka!

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

No sense in a soda tax



ON THE OTHER HAND ...

BY HAFIDZ BAHAROM

I WAS intrigued by Tony Pua's suggestion to tax sodas, even if his line of reasoning that the "Bottom 40" income group "does not need to drink Coke". Of course, the idea of a soda tax was then backed by a few ministers before finally being mentioned by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Mahathir asserts that a "soda tax" is needed due to the high prevalence of diabetes among Malaysians. And here I thought it was the sedentary lives of Malaysians spending a minimum six hours at a desk that caused diabetes. Silly me.

According to the World Bank, the prevalence of diabetes among Malaysians aged 20 to 79 in 2017 was 16.7%, and is in fact the highest among Asean nations - unless Papua New Guinea joins us. But is it caused by sodas? No.

According to Euromonitor, we aren't even in the Top 10 list of soft drink consumers in the world in 2017.

In fact, according to statista.com, sodas rank fourth among the regular beverages of Malaysians. The top three? Coffee, tea and juice.

And let's be fair - our coffee, tea and juices are just as guilty for being excessively sweeter compared with Coke and Pepsi.

This brings me to a better idea for the government to implement - taxing sugar, not just sodas.

According to an infographic by a daily, our sugar prices are actually the lowest in the Asean region.

A sugar tax makes more sense than a proposed soda tax because Malaysians actually drink more sugar in tea, coffee and juices. While some argue about "natural sugars" it is

necessary to point out that all sugar is natural, it's the quantity that matters.

Sugar is sugar, all sugar is natural in all forms, and just

because you hide behind terms like sucrose, fructose and glucose doesn't make sugar healthier. Thus, a proposed tax should definitely be worded to include all of them.

I will also fairly point out that I am not entirely against sugar, because it is a necessity in certain drinks and foods to encourage a healthy lifestyle.

To test that out, try drinking the Homesoy Soymilk without sugar, and you will perhaps understand the need for sugar.

But how much sugar do we consume on average?

This is where it gets iffy. According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association, we consumed 55.1kg of sugar per capita in 2016, second only in Asia to Singapore at 49.9kg per capita - and Singapore has been shrinking that figure since 2010, while ours has been going up after a slight dip in 2013.

Mahathir went to China saying that trade should be free and fair - I do believe this should apply to taxes as well.

To tax sodas for allegedly triggering higher cases of diabetes while letting coffee, tea, juices and even Milo pass, is discriminatory.

But more importantly, a sugar tax would also attach itself on foods and restaurants serving high sugar content food and beverages as well, which would move towards healthier eating.

Of course, this would also have to apply to the kuehs we all love to eat during Ramadan - and, specifically, to the Kelantanese. That would mean taxing your "jalurmas" and "buah tanjung" combo too.

But more importantly, it will move the industry to innovate towards sugar substitutes - it

could be natural like stevia and honey, or more chemical compounds such as aspartame.

Some have pointed out that a sugar tax will not change the lifestyles of people who will still want an original soda rather than those with no sugar or a sugar substitute. I disagree.

If a sugar tax is high enough to the point that those dishing out soft drinks the most (read: fast food operators) decide to switch to the non-sugar counterparts, it will have an impact even if it is a minuscule one.

I think KFC is already serving out more Pepsi Zero rather than original Pepsi, which is artificially sweetened. And Coke is now sweetened by Stevia.

However, we should be cautious introducing a sugar tax, particularly because it will impact small and micro traders - the part-time bakers, Ramadan bazaar kuih and beverage makers, the food and beverage stalls at food courts, and even the mamak restaurants will be the worst impacted by this move, which will subsequently domino down to consumers directly.

Such is the price for a healthier Malaysia. So, tax sugar, not just sodas, especially if this is a move to lower the prevalence of diabetes. Also, park that money into the Health Ministry to continue pushing for healthy lifestyles or better yet, give people a tax credit for bicycles and gym memberships.

But more importantly, people who are overweight or obese have a higher risk for diabetes.

If the government is serious about hindering this, they should tax sugar and also look at the caloric content of foods.

If not, then let's just admit that diabetes was just a scapegoat.

Hafidz Baharom is a public relations practitioner. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Life lessons from Mount Kinabalu

BY MICHELLE CHUN



Freespace
Where young views rule

COLD slivers of rain flew across my face as thick fog danced through the shrubbery. Soaked to the skin, I fought to stay warm as the chilly air of the mountain enveloped me in a tight embrace. As I placed one foot in front of the other, I found myself wondering if this was really worth it.

A year before, we had begun making plans to climb Mount Kinabalu. It always seemed so far away, but before I knew it, the day came. Sometime last month, I found myself at the starting point of my climb: Timpohon Gate in Kinabalu Park.

The morning breeze was soft and inviting, the sun warm on our faces. I teetered between anxiety and anticipation, questioning my sanity yet excited to see how far I could go.

I knew a hard lesson in perseverance was waiting for me as we began the first leg of the hike, but expected nothing more. Little did I know that Borneo's highest peak would help me dig a little deeper and learn a number of lessons that can be applied throughout my life.

We began the hike up and, honestly, I never once felt like giving up during the ascent. It was exhilarating, the feeling of going farther than you thought possible. We reached the summit at dawn on the second day, and it was breathtaking.

White clouds had rolled into a puffy blanket covering the earth. The sun's gentle rays warmed our faces as it rose in its circuit from the east. It was utterly peaceful, and I now understood a little better why mountaineers never stop seeking the adventure.

The way down, however, was a natural obstacle course. First, the weather took a turn and an unforgiving rain fell for hours as we started our slow, painful descent.

I forced myself to keep moving, but I learned that no matter how much we try to control a situation,

there will always be factors beyond our reach. In these moments, it is whether we choose to see beyond the circumstances and keep going that really counts.

Then the pain came. Our legs were wearing down as we had worked them tirelessly for hours

on end. We had no choice but to push past the pain, for there was only one way down. In that, I learned that we are so much more capable than we believe, but only hardship can show us what otherwise remains hidden inside us.

Our mountain guide also taught me an important lesson. His words were few, but carefully chosen. It was simple, but Aidil advised me to stay calm no matter the struggle, to remain steady and to never stop moving.

In retrospect, I see that his words of wisdom can be applied to everyday life. Like the thick mountain mist, panic and anxiety can prevent us from seeing with clarity. A calm mind and steady heart often leads to making wiser choices.

Perhaps the most enlightening lesson from my mountain adventure, however, was the strength of companionship.

When I felt disheartened by the seemingly endless trek down, I was encouraged by those around me. In turn, when exhaustion hit my friends, I would tell them to press on. Our tired laughs and lame jokes echoed through the forest; it made all the difference.

The mountain has always been symbolic of a challenge to be overcome. I learned, however, that the real challenge lies within. A true overcomer never conquers the mountain; there it remains. Instead, we conquer ourselves.

So whether it's signing up to climb Mount Kinabalu next year, trying your hand at a new job, or doing something you've always been terrified of, do it.

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