



ISTANA ISKANDARIAH
KUALA KANGSAR

**TITAH
DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SULTAN NAZRIN MUIZZUDDIN SHAH**

**PELANCARAN BUKU
“REFLECTIONS ON MALAYSIAN UNITY AND OTHER
CHALLENGES”
KARYA DR. CHANDRA MUZAFFAR**

**TARIKH: 27 ZULKAEDAH 1439 / 9 AUGUST 2018 (KHAMIS)
WAKTU: 11.00 PAGI.
TEMPAT: ZUBEDY SUITE 5-7, LEVEL 5 OVAL TOWER
DAMANSARA KUALA LUMPUR.**

*“MALAYSIAN UNITY;
IT’S EXISTENCE, CHALLENGES AND ENDLESS EVOLUTION”*

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh
Salam Sejahtera.

“Reflections on Malaysian Unity and Other Challenges” adalah kompilasi tulisan Dr. Chandra Muzaffar. Setiap negara menghadapi isu perpaduan, dan setiap negara menghadapi pelbagai cabaran yang tidak ada kesudahannya (*perennial*). Malah negara yang komposisi warganya terdiri daripada rakyat yang seragam atau *homogenous* tidak sunyi daripada perselisihan dan tidak bebas daripada menghadapi cabaran; apatah lagi bagi Malaysia, sebuah negara yang memiliki segala elemen mencabar untuk mewujudkan perpaduan. Warga Malaysia berlatar belakangkan pelbagai budaya, bertutur di dalam pelbagai bahasa, terdiri daripada pelbagai kaum dan menganut pelbagai agama; di samping



memiliki tahap pencapaian ekonomi dan intelek yang berbeza, melalui sistem pendidikan yang begitu pelbagai lagi berbeza, dipengaruhi pula oleh pelbagai idealisme politik yang dijuarai oleh parti-parti politik yang begitu banyak bilangannya, bagi sebuah negara kecil daripada segi keluasan geografi dan bilangan penduduk.

2. How diverse or heterogeneous is Malaysia? From the beginning of our existence, from more than 400 years of being colonialized by different powers (Portuguese, Dutch, British, Siamese and Japanese), and from the migration of people into the Golden Chersonese or Tanah Melayu, we today have more than 60 ethnic, sub-ethnic and indigenous tribes in Malaysia. The Malaysia we live in comprises speakers of 137 living languages, and of these, 41 are spoken in Peninsula Malaysia. The majority of Malaysians will probably not even know that among the original inhabitants of these lands are the Balabak, Bukitan, Bulongan, Iranun, Ida'an, Kayan, Kejaman, Lahanan, Lisut, Lugat, Rungus, Tabun, Tagal, Kwijau, Mangka'ak, Maragang, Minokok, Rumanau, Tambanuo, Tidungand Ukit. Perhaps, we are more familiar with Melanau, Bidayuh, Bajau, Suluk, or with the major ethnic groups of Malay, Indian and Chinese.

3. But even amongst these, there are more sub-ethnic groups, including Java, Batak, Betawi, Banjar, Boyan, Minangkabau, Bugis, Brunei Malay, Melayu Asli, Cocos Malay, Cape Malay, Baba Malay, and Ambonese Malay. Among the Chinese, we have the Hakka, Kwongsai,



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Foochow, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hainanese, Teochew, and Hockchew. And among those categorised as Indians, we have the Punjabis, Malayalees, Marathi, Sindhi, Gujrati, Parsi, Bengali, Pathans, Tamils, Telugu, Kannada, Bihari, Goan, Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils. More than one hundred languages, and almost as large a number of ethnic, indigenous and tribal groups... Perhaps there are few countries in the world that are as plural or as diverse as Malaysia.

4. Therefore, Dr Chandra Muzaffar in his book, *Reflections on Malaysian Unity and Other Challenges*, tries to look at and address the issues a country like ours faces in trying to maintain unity. But as history has shown, and as we ourselves have learned in our short 60 years of Independence and in a millennia of existence, it is always a work in progress. And if it is a work in progress, by any standards, compared to the rest of the civilised world, we have done well.

5. Dr Chandra has touched on numerous aspects of unity – the current trends in our society, the challenges, citizenship and integration, the Malaysian identity, our commonalities, the national language, religion, culture, liberalism and religious pluralism, corruption, integrity, the Rulers and sovereignty. As an academic and as a thinker, he has put forward suggestions on how Malaysia can deal with these and other issues which affect unity.



6. In the context of corruption, Dr Chandra's scrutiny of why we have not succeeded in curbing corruption, written in June 2015, seems today prescient. He wrote:

“At the root of the phenomenon of relative deprivation is the lavish lifestyle of the opulent elite. In fact, it is partly because of their addiction to this lifestyle that some members of the elite resort to monumental acts of corruption. They abuse their power to accumulate wealth through foul means. They set a bad example for the rest of society. Elite corruption, as many studies have shown, is most difficult to combat because of the power at the disposal of the elite – unless there is a major political upheaval.”

Dr Chandra concludes that lack of governance, corruption and abuse of power leads to inequalities and inequitable distribution of wealth and income, hence further widening the fissures in society.

7. One would be hard-pressed to disagree with Dr Chandra's assertions now that we have seen how, after 60 years of status quo, Malaysians have voted in a new Government which has promised to address the inequities in our society. There is a sense of euphoria and elation, and expectations are very high. However, we must remind ourselves that such evolution has and will always happen in any society, as it has happened over thousands of years, and that new beginnings, such as what we have in today's Malaysia, are part of that evolving process.



8. The 18th century English poet Alexander Pope said that hope springs eternal in the breast of man. As Malaysians, we are now hoping that there will be changes for the better, and that both the new and old will learn lessons from the mistakes of the past. Malaysia, as mentioned earlier, continues to be a work in progress and there are high expectations for a new dawn.

9. Allow me to touch on some of the main subjects in the book, which I believe, are crucial to keep “our work in progress” in momentum, and to keep the peace and harmony we have largely enjoyed, not only since Independence, but in our last 500 years of history since the Malacca Sultanate.

10. With more than 100 living languages, and almost as many indigenous, tribal and ethnic groups, who embrace all the major religions of the world, it must be acknowledged that language, democracy, and in Malaysia’s case, the monarchy, all have significant roles in not only maintaining but enhancing our unity.

11. In our country, the majority population speak the Malay language, which we have adapted and which we know as Bahasa Malaysia – the Malaysian language. It is our *lingua franca*– our bridge or common language, or link language, which is systematically used to make communication possible between people who do not share a native language or dialect. *Lingua francas* have developed around the world



throughout human history, either for commercial reasons or for cultural, religious, diplomatic and administrative convenience. In the case of Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia is our *lingua franca* and is key and integral to ensuring that our unity as a people prevails.

12. Dr Chandra rues that many institutions and organisations have failed to use Bahasa Malaysia extensively, and hence, this has resulted in some Malaysians not developing a sense of ownership vis-à-vis the national language. In fact, he says that even the Malay elites need to be convinced that Bahasa Malaysia has the ability to bring our various communities together for the greater good. I quote from his chapter on Identity:

“In a vast archipelago, it was Bahasa (Melayu) that broke down barriers and helped evolve a shared cultural ethos that gave the diverse peoples of Nusantara a sense of oneness in the old days.”

13. That, ladies and gentlemen, is no less true today than it was 500 years ago when the first Arab, Indian and Chinese traders came to Malacca. It is no less true today than it was when the first influx of the forefathers of today's citizens came to this land seeking greener pastures. It is no less true today than it was in 1957 when we gained independence and when outsiders predicted that we could never make it work because we were too diverse, we were too different. But we proved the worrywarts and the naysayers wrong. And Bahasa Malaysia played a very crucial role, as depicted by Government campaigns in the early days of Independence, such as Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa (Language is the



Soul of the People), in breaking down the barriers and developing our sense of oneness.

14. Yes, we have had some rough patches; but which country in the world hasn't?

But the reasons we have succeeded are outlined in Dr Chandra's book:

- The National Language;
- A political leadership not obsessed with power;
- A Constitutional Monarchy which has largely stuck to its constitutional role;
- Accommodation and acceptance of minority groups by the majority ethnic group;
- Freedom of religion; and
- Democracy.

15. It's not perfect. We have cracks and fissures. We need to work on the separation of powers. We need to ensure the role of the monarchy is not abused, and neither should its role as the safety net and protector of all citizens be diminished. We need to ensure that the majority do not suppress the rights of minority groups to their culture and religion, and neither should we have tyranny of the minority over the majority. Our democracy works, as we saw in the recent peaceful transition of power, and we are encouraged by the commitments that have been made to



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strengthen our institutions, and by the reforms that have been articulated.

16. In his writings on integrity, Dr Chandra has one section on prime ministers and the phenomenon of power. There, he recalls that our first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-haj, stepped down from his post for three months in 1959 in order to strengthen his party, the Alliance, for the Federal state elections. Dr Chandra concludes that the Tunku's willingness to give up power "was extraordinary by any standard" and "showed that the privilege of position was not central to his life." And in 1969, after growing criticism of his leadership, the Tunku relinquished his position, choosing not to cling to power.

17. It was the same for his successor, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, who exercised enormous power as Director of the National Operations Council (NOC) following the May 1969 riots. But instead of perpetuating NOC rule – which he could have – Tun Razak and other key leaders brought back parliamentary democracy rather than the unfettered power of absolute authority.

18. His successor Tun Hussein Onn gracefully stepped down after five years due to ill health, and Tun Dr Mahathir, after having steered the country through the crippling Asian financial crisis and winning a decisive general election in 1999, announced his decision to step down willingly barely three years later. Despite great pressure from his party leaders



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and the public to stay on, Dr Mahathir stepped down in 2003 and handed over power to his chosen successor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

19. Again, six years later, despite winning a heatedly contested general election, although by a reduced majority, Tun Abdullah stepped down for a smooth transition to his successor Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. And nine years later, after the Barisan Nasional lost the general election, there has again been a smooth and peaceful transition of power to the Government we have today, once again, headed by Tun Dr Mahathir. Our unity is intact, our evolution continues...

20. We may not agree with everything the author says, but what is more crucial is that it gives us food for thought, and a desire to achieve greater unity as a people and as a nation. He provides us with historical perspectives on a past that we need to understand before we can plan for the future. Malaysia has progressed; that cannot be denied. But there is certainly much more that we can do, and if the past is any indicator of the future, I am confident we will pull through. We just have to be progressive in carrying out our "work in progress."

21. Dua puluh dua hari lagi, Malaysia Insyallah akan menyambut ulang tahun Hari Kemerdekaan keenam puluh satu. Pilihanraya Umum Keempat belas, berdasarkan bilangan yang turun mengundi, risiko yang diambil oleh pengundi berani memilih untuk menukar kerajaan, peralihan kuasa yang berjalan secara aman dan harmoni, memperlihatkan akar demokrasi semakin subur, dan pohon demokrasi semakin rendah di



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bumi ini. Trend pengundian di kalangan generasi lebih muda dan lebih remaja pula memperlihatkan, kaedah mendapatkan sokongan dengan mensensasikan isu-isu agama dan kaum semakin kurang berkesan sebagai faktor daya penarik. Pengundi lebih mengutamakan aspek tadbir urus yang baik (good governance), dan defisit keyakinan berlaku kerana faktor-faktor rasuah dan salah guna kuasa; pengundi mahukan tadbir urus yang berpaksikan undang-undang dan tidak kepada karisma seseorang individu.

22. Sentimen pengundi wajib dibaca secara tepat oleh kerajaan yang telah diberikan mandat memerintah. Sentimen pengundi juga wajib dijadikan panduan kepada parti-parti politik yang berusaha untuk meneruskan jangka hayatnya. Sentimen pengundi yang lebih menumpukan kepada tadbir urus yang baik lagi telus, dan semakin kurangnya daya pengaruh isu-isu sensasi berteraskan agama dan kaum, membuka ruang luas untuk budaya politik di negara ini dapat dibangunkan atas penyebut atau *denominator* yang sama. Semoga perpaduan negara yang dibangunkan atas penyebut yang sama akan terus diterokai, diadaptasi dan diamalkan demi masa hadapan Malaysia yang lebih bersatu dan lebih gemilang.

Dengan lafaz Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim, Beta melancarkan, “Reflections on Malaysian Unity and Other Challenges”.

Wabillahi taufik wa hidayah

Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.