



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement/Letter to the Editor

30 August 2021

The 64th Merdeka Anniversary: Celebrate with a Mindset Reset

As we celebrate the 64th anniversary of Merdeka – the seminal event that marked our breakaway from colonial rule and the creation of our nation-state – we should reflect on the core element that has shaped our identity and destiny as Malaysia. That key element or primal substance is none other than our diversity.

Our nation would not exist if the diverse communities and political entities stretching across Borneo and the Malay peninsula did not find the will and creativity to forge a common vision to create something even better – that is Malaysia. We would not have created the rich Malaysian culture that we all enjoy today in the fusing and intermingling of our food, economies and social identities. And we would not have become a development success story that raised the standard of living of our population and transformed our society from a low-income to one on the cusp of becoming a high-income nation.

Our diversity is our strength as it is the source of our innovativeness and it is the foundation of our resilience. It has provided Malaysians with a huge pool of resources, both natural and cultural, that has helped us overcome multiple challenges and crises over the last six decades. From the armed conflicts of the 60s and 70s to the increasing volatilities of globalization from the 80s until the present. And even today, we are able to hold ourselves together amidst the Covid-19 pandemic because of the core strengths that unify us as a nation.

Unfortunately, as we have become a more ‘developed’ society, we have also lost sight of the important elements that bind us and have taken our diversity for granted. We have become obsessed with the notion of difference manifested in the parochial issues of race and religion while ignoring the broader and richer aspects that unify our society. This obsession with otherness and difference becomes fertile breeding ground for the purveyors of hate – those who would benefit from creating fear and division amongst the rakyat and who would benefit politically through the divide and rule of our society.

It is imperative that we recognise this growing threat to our society and we take important measures to snuff out the agents of division and strengthen the unity of our nation. We are all Malaysians and it is time to celebrate our Malaysian-ness and celebrate Merdeka with an important mindset reset.

UNITY

This is the key to stability and progress. While the National Economic Policy (NEP) has contributed to reducing poverty and restructuring our economy, it has also raised some serious problems through the misapplication of the affirmative action policy.

It had introduced rent-seeking crony capitalism which benefited many rich and connected at the expense of the rakyat.

We have also ghettoised our education system by creating isolation instead of connectedness. We have

not created an inclusive and high quality public school system, which has made parents seek out other forms of education in the vernacular schools, religious schools and international schools.

And we have ghettoised residential areas into rich gated communities and poor crowded low-cost housing communities.

These isolation and separateness create a false sense of security as we really cannot separate ourselves from the other Malaysians who provide us food and services, or build our homes.

The COVID-19 pandemic drives this message home, that we are all affected and connected, rich or poor, irrespective of race. We have to save all (including migrant workers) to save ourselves, in order to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The rakyat must unite to create a Malaysian consciousness, and avoid communal politics. We are all in this together as Malaysians and we need to rethink our policies to create a united Malaysia, not a divisive one.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The current economic policy based on growth and private profit has produced the ever widening gross inequality and grave environmental crisis.

We need to reset our policies and programmes to achieve human well-being and social justice so that all Malaysians share the wealth that we produce.

Basic wages must increase to ensure that Malaysians can endure economic hardships during these uncertain times. We must be willing to pay more for uplifting other Malaysians but buy less for sustainable consumption.

Social justice is a basic necessity to create a safe, peaceful and secure Malaysian society. We must be committed to wealth redistribution so that the basic needs of all Malaysians are met. When we have fairness, our social fabric will remain intact.

The Government must work for the rakyat and not for corporations, developers, financiers and businessmen, whose main motives are profit and growth, not sustainability.

An enlightened rakyat will create a political system which is harmonious, non-divisive and fair. They should not fall for the divide-and-rule tactic of politicians.

ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

We are in an environmental crisis that threatens our very existence. Our policy makers don't seem to realise the magnitude of the problem and the need for radical change in the way we produce and consume goods and services. And develop in a way that does minimal damage to nature.

We must only take what is necessary from nature, not conquering it for our greed. Nature is telling us in so many ways that we need to change our ways, but we are not heeding the advice. Pandemics, landslides, floods, logjams, toxic water supplies, unbreathable air, rising sea levels and climate change, affect us all and recur so often.

Some blame it on nature, but we are the ones changing how nature behaves. It is sad and ironic that the victims of development are the marginalised poor and not the ones creating the problems.

As Gregory Bateson, the famous thinker puts it, “the major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think”.

We need to revive our traditional values of simple living and walking lightly on the planet and learn how to live harmoniously with nature.

The authorities have to spend money and create jobs in environmental rehabilitation, to clean up and rejuvenate our natural environment to give us clean water, air and food.

We also have to create more green areas in our concrete cities. To reclaim our cities from cars and highways and make cities more liveable and safer with community spaces, urban farms, parks, and less pollution. Cities should be made safe for children, families, cyclists and pedestrians as cities now are dominated and designed exclusively for cars.

We must be looking at ways to encourage rural livelihood and development as the rural areas will be resilient and life-sustaining – providing us with food and natural resource security. The urban provides us wealth, but it is the rural which provides us life.

NEW POLITICAL CULTURE

Politics must be rooted in ethics and not purely power seeking.

Corruption must be seriously eradicated with a fully independent corruption agency. Nepotism and Cronyism must be fought without fear or favour.

Communal politics must be eschewed. The rakyat should not entertain the divide-and-rule politics that makes a handful of people rich at the expense of the rakyat.

Politics must be people-centred and not politician-, party-, or rich-centred. It must be policy-driven and not driven by greed, divisiveness, hate or race.

The judiciary, civil service, police, and other state institutions must strictly safeguard their independence and integrity, and not bow to extraneous pressures and influence.

CAP wishes our fellow Malaysians to have a meaningful Merdeka and put on their thinking caps to make Malaysia a peaceful, healthy and prosperous nation, living up to its full potential.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers' Association of Penang