

# Challenges facing the 1malaysia concept



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CHANDRA MUZAFFAR IT was 20 months ago that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak formally announced his 1Malaysia concept. We are now in a position to examine the challenges facing the idea, to reflect upon its achievements and to look ahead. The first of the challenges comes from vested interests with a stake in perpetuating ethnic dichotomies that are inimical to national unity. Among the Malays and Bumiputeras, there are groups who abuse the Special Position embodied in the Constitution and in certain public policies to advance their own interests. They alienate not only the vast majority of non-Malays but also a significant segment of the Malay and Bumiputera populace. Likewise, the pronounced push for Chinese primary and secondary education within the Chinese community, in contrast to its passive approach to education in the national language, has created a great deal of disillusionment among Malays who feel that the former are not inclined towards integration that acknowledges the identity of the land. A second challenge emanates from partisan politics. Some individuals and groups within the political opposition view 1Malaysia as a propaganda tool of the Barisan Nasional. They ignore the fact that 1Malaysia was presented to the people as a national mission on April 3, 2009 by the prime minister in his capacity as the sixth prime minister of Malaysia. Besides, right from the outset, 1Malaysia was anchored in the Constitution and linked to the Rukun Negara and Wawasan 2020, which are instruments of nationbuilding, not political party manifestoes. If it had not been for this negative attitude of some politicians, which has an impact upon a portion of the populace, 1Malaysia would have gained more traction. Certain unhelpful religious sentiments also impede 1Malaysia. There are influential elements in the

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religious establishment who do not realise that their narrow, bigoted interpretations of rules and regulations undermine that universal, inclusive spirit of Islam which reinforces the notion of common humanity that 1Malaysia envisages. On the other hand, there are non-Muslim politicians who are totally insensitive to Muslim feelings about Islamic etiquette, practices and institutions. 1Malaysia is also hampered by certain communal pronouncements and ethnic distortions and misconceptions which are ventilated more frequently than before in the public square. Words such as *pendatang* and *penumpang* directed at fellow non-Malay citizens are not only demeaning and degrading but also utterly reprehensible from the standpoint of our quest for national unity. They are, to some extent, a reaction to the constant attempts by a section of the non-Malay intelligentsia through the cyber media to question the Malay position. Ludicrous arguments are trotted out, such as that the presence of small pockets of Chinese on the Malay Peninsular for hundreds of years delegitimises the Malay position. On the contrary, the very fact that they were well integrated into what were essentially Malay milieus, sustained by Islam, the Malay language and the Malay sultanates, proves that the Malay polity was the precursor of the Malayan, and later, Malaysian nation-state. In spite of these formidable challenges, there are certain achievements that one should attribute to 1Malaysia. One, it has helped to foster -- to a limited degree at least -- a feeling of togetherness among a lot of young Malaysians. They understand 1Malaysia as an allinclusive idea that embraces the nation's diverse communities. Our accomplishments in regional and international sports throughout last year have also contributed to this feeling. Two, 1Malaysia has also been associated with the present emphasis by the government

upon extending assistance to the poor and needy, regardless of ethnicity. That social justice is a more important consideration than ethnic or religious affiliation is a critical 1Malaysia message. Three, for the first time, there is an earnest endeavour on the part of the government to recognise and reward ability and excellence, irrespective of ethnicity. The award of local and foreign scholarships to all 9A-plus scorers in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) in 2010 was testimony to this. Four, through 1Malaysia, efforts are being made to increase the intake of nonMalays in the civil service, the police and armed forces, and to ensure that there is greater mobility for them in these public institutions. Certain private enterprises dominated by one community at the managerial level should emulate this and also become more multi-ethnic. This year and beyond, apart from building upon our 1Malaysia achievements, the government, the opposition and civil society groups should do much more to overcome the challenges that confront 1Malaysia. Raising public awareness should become a more systematic and organised enterprise with the capacity to rectify serious interethnic misunderstandings. For instance, Ketuanan Melayu is not -- as erroneously interpreted by the English language media -- " Malay Supremacy". It is more accurately described as " Malay Sovereignty". The fight against the Malayan Union in 1946 was an attempt to restore Malay sovereignty, crucial elements of which were later incorporated into the Malayan and Malaysian Constitution in the form of the position of the Malay Rulers, the status of Malay and Islam, and the Special Position of the Malays. It should be sufficient to emphasise loyalty to the Constitution today, without harping upon Ketuanan Melayu, which from a 1Malaysia perspective is divisive and detracts from our noble endeavour to strengthen inter-ethnic unity and harmony through common

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