

Values for a harmonious nation

THE article "Five values this nation needs" by Prof Dr Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (*The Star*, Jan 16) prompted me to contribute to the discussion on the desirable national values.

This contribution is based on my intervention at a workshop themed "Nurturing National Values for Positive Transformation", which was jointly organised in October last year by UCSI University and Pupuk, the latter being a civil society organisation helmed by Asohan Satkunasingham, author of the book *A + B = C; Attitude + Behavior = Character*.

With regards to values, while it has been said that the strategy for survival of the species practised by primitive humans was to be guarded, suspicious and fearful of anyone looking, behaving and living not like themselves,

civilised societies progressed along a different path based on values promoting empathy and kindness, abandoning animal instincts and primal urges.

However, there is currently a regressive trend in many civilised societies around the world.

In Malaysia, we have regressed from a civilised multiracial, multicultural and multi-religious society living in relative harmony with empathy and kindness before Merdeka, and on which basis we gained our independence, into one with revived primal instincts and urges, suspicious, hating and fearful of each other.

The situation is of serious enough concern to warrant frequent exhortations from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Malay Rulers and responsible leaders to maintain national cohesion,

social harmony and unity.

We have been sternly reminded that public discourse on sensitive issues should be based on effective communication, and to practise patience and empathy before jumping at one another, jumping being a knee-jerk reaction rather than a considered response.

This unhealthy situation still prevails 53 years after the blueprint for national unity, the Rukun Negara, was launched on Aug 31, 1970.

While we are constantly being reminded of the Rukun Negara's five principles (Belief in God; Loyalty to King and Country; Supremacy of the Constitution; Rule of Law; and Ethical Behaviour and Morality), the objectives are seldom highlighted.

The result is that many are

unaware of the very important five objectives:

1. Achieving greater unity among the people;
2. Maintaining a democratic way of life;
3. Creating a just society with equitable sharing of prosperity;
4. Ensuring a liberal approach to the country's rich and diverse cultural traditions; and
5. Building a progressive society by harnessing modern science and technology.

To simplify, these objectives can be summed up as our national aspiration for a harmonious, prosperous, progressive and sustainable (HPPS) Malaysia.

To me, the workshop on nurturing national values for positive transformation was about transformation into an HPPS Malaysia, the "harmonious" component, which encapsulates

objectives 1, 3 and 4 of the Rukun Negara, being the most important cornerstone.

And we are a long way from achieving this.

Polarising forces in the form of divisive and toxic rhetoric, cultural ignorance combined with cultural arrogance, and interfaith intolerance and religious prejudice are still rampant.

In short, enduring social harmony still cannot be taken for granted; it's still a dream.

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(This is an abridged version of the letter. See the full version in thestar.com.my.)