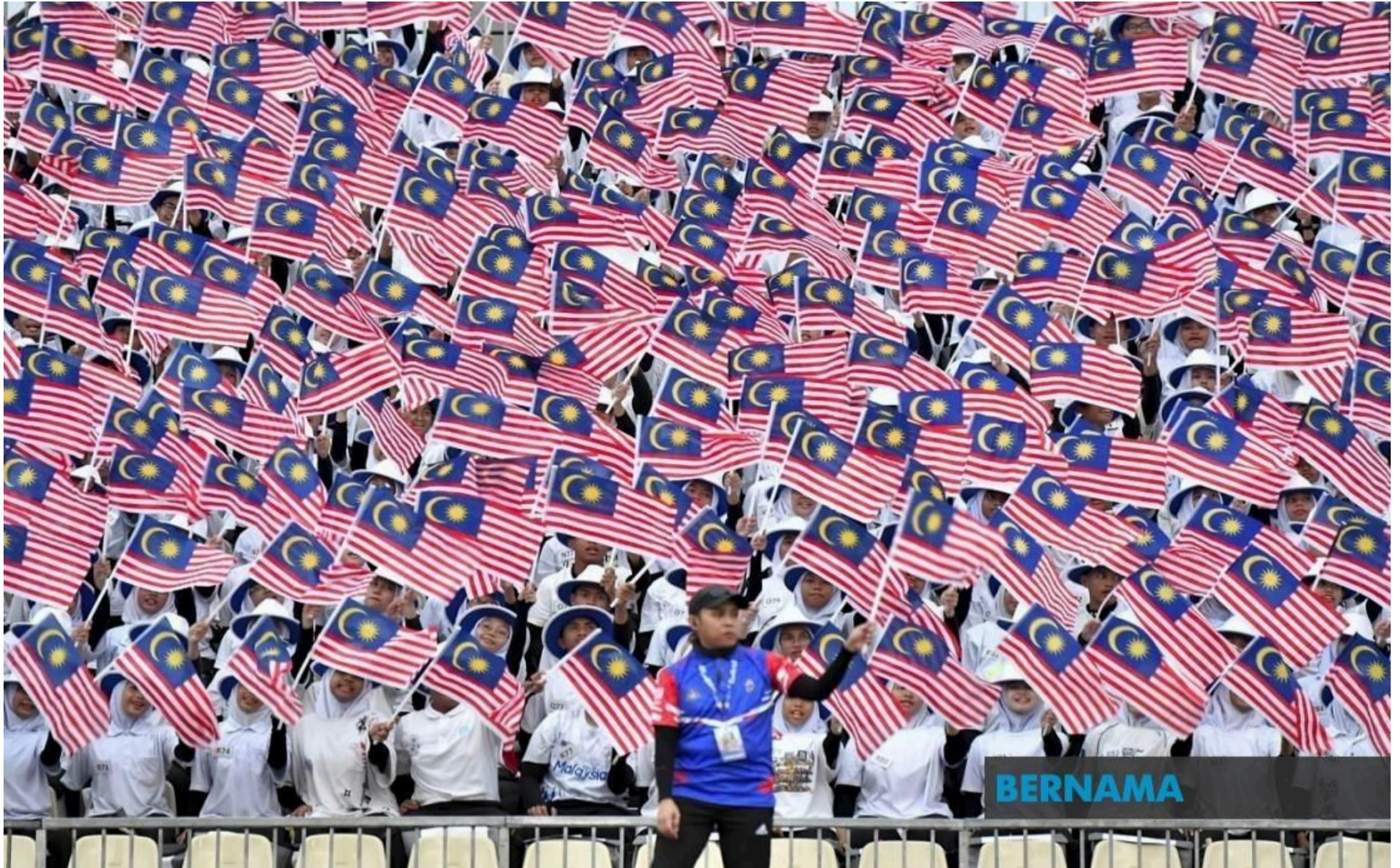


THOUGHTS

THE BEAUTY OF MALAYSIAN UNITY



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By Manishahz Sangkar

In a world increasingly divided by conflict and unrest, can true unity still exist?

Amid cultural and ideological divides, Malaysia stands as a beacon of hope, where diversity is not just acknowledged but celebrated as a strength. Ranked 10th among the most peaceful nations in the Global Peace Index of 2024, Malaysia's ability to harmonise diverse cultures, religions and traditions exemplifies its distinctive and resilient spirit.

For me, this diversity is a lived reality. Growing up in a Tamil household within a predominantly Malay community, attending a Chinese-medium school, and learning English in a Christian Sunday School immersed me in a rich tapestry of cultures and values from an early age.

Speaking multiple languages allows me to connect deeply with people from various backgrounds. Whether conversing in Bahasa Melayu with colleagues, speaking Mandarin with friends or engaging in Tamil with my family, I find that language breaks down barriers and fosters a sense of inclusivity. This rich upbringing has profoundly influenced my belief in the power of togetherness and continued to inspire my commitment to serving this nation.

This belief in unity extends into my career at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Malaysia. While issues can arise in many workplaces, I have experienced a positive and inclusive environment here. The diverse team in my workplace exemplifies the nation's spirit of inclusion, with our varied backgrounds fuelling collaboration and innovation daily. True unity is not merely about co-existing; it involves active engagement and respecting each other's cultures and traditions. These experiences continually reinforce my belief that unity must be nurtured through our actions.

Unity manifests in everyday moments

Beyond the workplace, unity manifests in everyday moments. As a frequent user of public transportation, I witness inclusivity in real-time. The Light Rail Transit (LRT) serves as a microcosm of Malaysia's diversity, where Malays, Chinese and Indians casually chat and joke in a mix of Bahasa Melayu and English, blending their cultures and languages seamlessly.

Recently, I saw a young Malay woman offer her seat to an elderly Chinese man while communicating with him in Mandarin, and a Sikh commuter handed his umbrella to a Malay mother with her children. These simple yet meaningful acts of kindness, carried out by people from different backgrounds, reflect how unity and diversity naturally exist in our daily lives.

Another beautiful example of unity is the annual Keretapi Sarong event held in celebration of Malaysia Day, where Malaysians don their traditional sarongs to celebrate shared heritage on public transport. These moments have become particularly close to my heart, whether during the daily commute or at cultural events, capturing the essence of Malaysia's oneness woven into the fabric of my everyday life.

In today's digital era, I truly appreciate how unity extends into the realm of social media. I am continually inspired by Malaysian creators like Khairul Aming, whose cooking tutorials during Ramadan bring people together through shared culinary traditions.

Similarly, Celoteh, Dr Mala's humorous yet insightful health advice, enriches our online experience.

I was particularly moved by Andrew, who recently received heartfelt comments after sharing a video of himself reciting the Azan prayer – a daily sound in his neighbourhood that many of us never realised could foster such a sense of togetherness.

Through their heart-warming family moments, delicious Malaysian-flavoured home-cooked meals and poignant reflections, these creators remind me of the shared values and aspirations that unite us as one.

Challenges make our commitment to preserve unity even more essential

Is not this the same unity our ancestors fought for when they struggled for Merdeka from colonialists?

They came together in their fight for independence, ensuring the national spirit that we share today. Of course, fostering unity is not without its challenges. Despite our nation's progress, issues like socio-economic disparities and cultural misunderstandings continue to pose obstacles, sometimes straining the bonds that hold us together. Yet, it is precisely these challenges that make our commitment to preserve unity even more essential.

Unity goes beyond the workplace, social media or specific spaces; it thrives in the simple moments of our everyday lives. Whether we are queuing for our beloved nasi lemak, a dish that transcends ethnic boundaries or cheering for a badminton match that unites the nation in shared pride, we witness unity in action. These shared experiences remind us that togetherness is a constant thread running through our daily interactions.

We, as a community, often emphasise that unity begins at home and within our educational systems, but it ultimately starts with each of us. Every small action we take can strengthen the bonds that unite us. Unity is not just about celebrating traditions or festivals, it's about nurturing a sense of belonging within ourselves, our communities and our nation.

As we celebrate the 61st Malaysia Day, let us reflect on how positive, everyday moments contribute to strengthening our unity. These are the moments I choose to remember because it reflects the true spirit of Malaysians – kindness and compassion, tolerance and respect. And these are the moments we should highlight and build upon to enhance inclusivity and foster a sense of

Happy Malaysia Day and Salam Jiwa Merdeka!

-- BERNAMA

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