



Malaysia Prihatin: Our responsibility as Malaysian citizens

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The rain was pelting down that night, and the cold air chilled us to the bone. Unable to fall asleep, my brothers and I quickly sought the comfort of our grandmother, a 70-year-old woman. Surprisingly, she was awake, almost as if she was waiting for our presence. As children, one of the greatest pleasures in life is to hear our grandmother's life story. And this time, it was when my grandmother witnessed the monumental day in our history, the Malaysian Independence Day. "I remember sitting on my father's broad shoulders, feeling on top of the world. As I tried to squint my eyes to get the bigger picture of my surroundings, the words *Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka* echoed throughout the *Padang* (what we now know as Merdeka Square). It was deafening, but the excitement of the crowd proved otherwise. And that's when I knew I belonged to this country.", she said. To some of us, my grandmother's story might be an incident of the past. But in the wise words of Bob Marley, the pioneer of Jamaican music, "In this bright future, you can't forget your past".

The stories that we hear and the books that we read all point to one notion, that is, independence is the freedom handed to us after years of hardship from being ruled by another country. Although this is indeed true, the essence of independence has faded throughout the years. Especially, when the COVID-19 pandemic took the whole world by storm, including Malaysia, many witnessed the echoes of lost desires and dreams. It still is one of the toughest battles to face, and the last thing to mull over is on the spirit of nationalism. With that being said, the idea of independence is so often linked with parades, fireworks, and parties, that its true meaning has somewhat perished over time. It took us a pandemic to fathom the naked truth that patriotism does not equate to big celebrations, but the invaluable lessons learnt and incorporated into our lives. The idea of independence now no longer revolves around physical participation, but is portrayed through the actions of the citizens in combating this deadly virus.

As the natural leader and representation of our voices, the Malaysian government is tasked to bear the brunt in the face of the pandemic. An immense pressure is laid on the government to introduce stringent measures to mitigate its effects. Although this worldwide crisis is unprecedented, it was, to some degree, anticipated. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the government and the health authorities took significant steps in the years leading up to the pandemic to strengthen Malaysia's health security for health crises and disaster preparation. This is particularly evident when Malaysia quickly adopted the "Search, Test, Isolate, Treat and Quarantine" strategy recommended by the WHO to keep track of the suspected cases. The Ministry of Health (MOH) with the sole purpose of promoting health and prolonging life, also played a crucial role alongside the government by developing and implementing several policies like the Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 to further restrict the spread of coronavirus. Efforts by the government are also apparent in protecting the welfare of the citizens. For instance, economic stimulus like the PRIHATIN packages were introduced as one of the means of assisting people who are affected by the pandemic. All these attempts to 'defeat' the virus depict one of the major lessons learnt from our independence, namely, the government's obligation to better protect itself, the country and its people against national crisis. A way to smoothen this process relies heavily on the citizens' noteworthy responsibility to participate in all governmental decisions that impact public welfare.

Next, the acts of valour by the Malaysian frontline workers also portray the duty of citizens towards Malaysia. The frontliners have shed blood, sweat, and tears to combat the pandemic. The Royal Malaysia Police, the Armed Forces and other competent agencies are going above and beyond for the benefit of our nation. But above all, the healthcare and medical workers deserve world recognition for their selfless sacrifices, relentless commitment, and everlasting efforts, even if it costs their own life, for the greater good of the country. They are the first to come into contact with people and the first to contract the virus. Although the fight isn't over, these national heroes have worked tirelessly since day one. To call them 'heroes' is the least we can do to display our utmost gratitude. This proves that the duty of healthcare workers trumps their very own safety, and their impact expands to all citizens. "Without their contributions, we would not be here" is certainly an understatement.

Adding to that, the essence of independence widely relates to the spirit of brotherhood. The synergy between the citizens to promote national unity is clearly

visible during the pandemic, specifically to look out for each other and provide assistance in any way. The phrase 'kita jaga kita' has been deeply embedded in the minds of the citizens in creating a better Malaysia. It ultimately boils down to establishing a safe haven for all Malaysians. This includes, on a personal level, the responsibility to comply with the standard operating procedures (SOPs), physical distancing, wearing a face mask in public environments, and staying at home as much as possible. On top of that, it also serves as a reminder to all Malaysians to support local businesses. It is a well-known fact that our locals are struggling to provide food on the table, and what better way to succour than to prioritise Malaysian-made items and food from local farmers. Besides that, large corporations have also shown their support to stay united during this time of crisis. A prominent example here would be Multimedia University (MMU). MMU has taken several initiatives this year to flatten the pandemic curve by providing vaccine jabs to the general public. The Cyberjaya campus commenced its operations as an Integrated Mega Vaccine Delivery Centre (PPV) on 15th July 2021 while the Melaka campus has also functioned as a vaccination centre since 16th June 2021. Such remarkable operations have certainly accelerated the national immunization programme which aims to accomplish herd immunity by the end of 2021.

All in all, just like the rest of the world, Malaysia is fighting a rather peculiar war against an unseen foe. Thus, it is only prudent for us to stand hand in hand to combat for Malaysia's freedom and independence from the deadly virus. It is undeniable that the pandemic has tested our resilience and will in coming together and overcoming obstacles. The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, which were hosted during a pandemic, are the best example of this. The cheers of the entire nation and the spirit of nationalism were visible throughout the commencement of the Olympics. Wouldn't it be great if we all could experience this soon? Therefore, in order to move forward, we have to put aside our differences and shift our focus to concoct a better Malaysia. In the spirit of Merdeka, let's all stand in solidarity to put an end to COVID-19 and its unimaginable repercussions. Even if the pandemic is likely to dominate the narrative again, the key is to always stay united through the tough times. Although I can't possibly recall my grandmother's exact words, the quote that often springs to my mind up till this day is "upholding freedom is not the task of the soldiers alone, but also the whole nation." Well, isn't it astounding how similar my grandmother's words of wisdom are to the phrase "Malaysia Prihatin"? Something to ponder upon...