

Malaysia's strength in unity

RESILIENT NATION: *While small, we will still be heard in times of international crises, even to the remote reaches of Donetsk*

BY ELINA NOOR

IN the last few years, our fortitude as a nation has been tested; from our faith in each other as a community of diversity to our resolve in defending our borders, on land and at sea.

Now, and in the coming years, we will have to deal with Malaysians fighting, and being recruited to fight, abroad in the name of religion. In the coming years, we will have to contend with these vain-gloried individuals returning and spreading their brutal ideology to others at home. Thanks to the Internet, this is, in fact, already happening on social media through videos, photographs and direct communication.

Our security forces have dispatched misfit outfits like the Al-Maunah, Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and Jemaah Islamiah, and foiled an unknown number of terrorist plots.

They have done such a good job that we have come to take a secure Malaysian state for granted. It is not until we are jolted by incidents like the Lahad Datu incursion and kidnappings off diving havens that we begin to consider the security imperative of our nation.

After a half century of relative peace and stability, our collective approach to security is perhaps due for both an attitude and pulse check.

National security is not just the responsibility of our security agencies but of everyone. It radiates outward from the core, so that how externally resilient we are as a Malaysian nation, depends exactly on how Malaysian we are as a nation.

Not how Malay, Chinese, Indian, or others we are. Not how Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh or animist we are. Not even how much more apparently religious we are within our own faiths. Certainly not how much more any one of us deserves, or is entitled to, this country over the other.

We work ourselves into throes of exasperation when discussing domestic developments because we now have the public space to do so and we care deeply about where we are headed as a nation.

As a maturing democracy, this is healthy and important questions about governance, accountability, and transparency should continue to be demanded of those we vote into office, regardless of political divide.

It is these sorts of checks and balances that will ensure political grievances are aired and addressed. Ignored or repressed, this remonstrance festers instead into manifestations of extremism, militancy or terrorism in the same way that inflammatory expressions of zealotry, left unchecked, can morph into an unmitigated monster.

There are many things that we are trying to work out as a young nation — the fine line between constructive and destructive criticism; the temperance to engage in a bid to respect and ultimately, accept one another; and the courage to stand for moderation in thought, speech, and action.

The sooner we manage this, the more effectively we can head off not only internal security risks of radicalism but also external challenges to our sovereignty and dignity as a nation. A strong and united Malaysia will ensure that there is no room for bigotry in the country — whether of race, religion, or gender — by any quarters. A strong and united Malaysia will make it clear — politically, diplomatically and militarily — that there is no part of this constituted territory and waters around it accorded by international law that is violable, least of all by those who seek to take it by force.

A strong and united Malaysia will also ensure that while small, we will still be heard, in times of international crises even to the remote reaches of Donetsk.



A women writing a message of condolence to victims of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 at Mid Valley Megamall, Kuala Lumpur.

Today, we are a *rakyat* united in shock and grief following the horrific tragedy of MH17 so soon after the still unresolved disappearance of MH370. In the aftermath of being caught in a distant conflict we had nothing to do with, we will have to resist the geopolitical test of wills between major powers; reevaluate our strategic calculus, if necessary; and determine what justice would actually mean for the victims once the facts of the crash have been established.

We will, as a nation, together reconstitute our spirit and resolve in these times of adversity. We will put aside our differences to focus on what matters. We will show ourselves and the world what it means to be a strong and united Malaysia.

Elina Noor is ISIS Malaysia Assistant Director, Foreign Policy and Security Studies