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Silver Lining In A Dark Cloud: May 13 Was Not All Bad News

By **MT Webmaster** Last updated **Dec 15, 2013**

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Raja Petra Kamarudin

Today, Malaysia Today has just crossed its tenth month of existence. Initially there was no blog — it was added about one and a half months later. We thought, instead of just reading what was being published, we would allow readers to also post comments and debate issues close to their hearts.

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In the beginning, we experimented with an ISLAMIC DEBATE section. This experiment failed miserably and after awhile we had to remove it when the debates degenerated into a slinging match and were starting to become counterproductive. Recently, the GENEREAL DEBATE section too had to be closed when it suffered the same fate — race versus race and Islam versus the rest of the religions.

This is what Puan Hajjah Marina Yusoff wrote on 11 June 2005 in her short press statement called '***Thank you to the people of Pasar Chow Kit***':

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Yesterday, at about 9.30am, I went to Pasar Chow Kit to buy some provisions. On my way out, I slipped and fell on my face, my head bearing the full brunt of my fall. I tried to get up but could not, so I just lay flat on the cement floor completely helpless.

Though dazed, I sensed a commotion around me. Apparently, the Chinese vendors, realising what had happened, had come to my aid.

One Chinese man picked me up from the floor while another quickly found a stool for me to sit on. Another propped me up by supporting my body as I was still very dazed and disoriented.

I could feel the blood oozing from my forehead trickling down to my face. People around me were fussing and wiping the blood with tissue. One Chinese lady helped clean my wound then applied medication to it to try to stop the bleeding. They also put some plaster on my wound.

I was overwhelmed by this demonstration of concern by total strangers. I being Malay and they Chinese was not at all an obstacle to their feelings of compassion for me. I felt so grateful and truly appreciated that all they were concerned about was that a fellow Malaysian was in distress and they sincerely wanted to assist.

Thank you so much all the wonderful people at Pasar Chow Kit. When I am feeling better, I will make a visit there to personally thank them.

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Reading through the various comments posted in the blogs would give one the impression that Malaysians are at war with each other — Malay/Muslims against the other races/religions. Actually, this is not true at all and these racial slurs and Islam-bashing comments are being posted by a mere handful of the many readers we have. Those rabble rousers and agent provocateurs number maybe a dozen or so of Malaysia Today's large readership. Unfortunately though, as is true in most things, the dozen bad apples always spoil it for the rest of us.

When I read Hajjah Marina's press statement on Saturday, I thought I just have to reproduce it in Malaysia Today as this gives us a clearer perspective of the minds and attitudes of a large segment of Malaysians. The handful of bloggers who, by their provocative and abrasive (not to mention rude and uncultured) postings, give the impression Malaysia is terribly divided are in the minority.

One ironical thing about all this is that the confrontational bloggers are apparently the educated lot. It appears that education is no guarantee we will be able to breed a more understanding and tolerant society. In fact, the opposite seems to be happening here. The higher the education, the less tolerant and understanding they become. The less educated or uneducated lot seems to be more accommodating.

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We hear a lot of stories regarding the infamous 13 May 1969 race riots known as 'May 13'. We read about the atrocities, cruelty, unfairness, and so on. Reading through those eye-witness accounts and comments posted in Malaysia Today's blogs would give the impression that May 13 was of ethnic cleansing proportions.

But this was not so. May 13 was more than that. It was not just about killings and massacres. In fact, it comes nowhere close to a killing field. May 13 does have some good news and tales of tolerance and compassion, similar to what Hajjah Marina wrote on her experience — a Malay in distress in a predominantly Chinese market. Let me relate just some of those stories.

My late father, Raja Kamarudin bin Raja Sir Tun Uda, was a director of Lever Brothers (now called Unilever) during the May 13 era. One of his Chinese managers lived in Jalan Raja Abdullah (yes, THE Raja Abdullah, partner of Yap Ah Loy) in Kampong Baru, the epicenter of May 13. And his family was at home that afternoon of 13 May 1969.

When the Malay residents of Jalan Raja Abdullah heard that trouble had erupted along Jalan Raja Muda, they quickly 'smuggled' their Chinese neighbours into their homes. When some Malays started going house-to-house searching for Chinese, the Malays dressed the Chinese in *Baju Melayu* (Malay costume) and brought them over to the Kampong Baru Mosque — which by then had become a sort of refugee centre for all those stranded in Kampong Baru due to the curfew that had been imposed. No one could enter or leave Kampong Baru so the mosque was the safest place of refuge.

In the meantime, the Chinese manager was stranded in Lever Brothers' office in Jalan Bangsar. He could not go home because of the curfew. Anyway, to go home would have been suicide because Kampong Baru and the areas surrounding it saw some of the worst racial skirmishes. The manager phoned the police who went over to his Jalan Raja Abdullah home and found the house burnt to the ground and the family missing. He assumed they had all been killed. The distraught manager did not know they were safe in the Kampong Baru Mosque dressed as Malays. Imagine his relief when many days later he found his family alive thanks to his Malay neighbours.

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In Pasar Borong, an all-Chinese wholesale market (then along Jalan Ipoh behind the old Tabung Haji headquarters) it was the other way around. There was this lone Malay trader who was stranded there when trouble broke out. The Chinese traders at the market hid the Malay in some fish boxes, safe from the marauding Chinese who were looking for Malays to kill — just like what the Malays in Kampong Baru were doing.

He had to suffer the stench for a couple of days but the Chinese kept him alive until it was safe for him to emerge from his hiding place and go home to his family who had given him up for dead.

These are but two though by no means the only 'good' stories of May 13. Taman Seputeh was then (and still is, I think) a mixed Malay-Chinese neighbourhood. The residents got together to form a guard unit (equivalent to the *Rukun Tetangga* before the word was even invented) to patrol the area. When any armed Malays came to the neighbourhood, the Malay residents would go face them to negotiate safe passage for the Chinese and if any armed Chinese came instead, then the Chinese residents would reciprocate. Taman Seputeh saw no bloodshed the entire period.

May 13 was bad. It brought out the uglier side of Malaysians. But May 13 also showed us that Malaysians can be compassionate, tolerant and understanding when the situation demands so. And Hajjah Marina's experience last Saturday, though certainly far from another May 13, just strengthens our faith that the majority of Malaysians are nowhere near some of the posters in this blog.

So let the ten or 20 bloggers post their hate-Malay, hate-Chinese, hate-Indian, hate-Islam, and hate-other-religions comments in this blog. They are but a drop in the ocean. They do not represent the majority of Malaysians. What we should do to silence them is for the Malays to refrain from engaging the non-Malays in a slinging match, and vice versa. The Malays should stay silent when the non-Malays whack them and the non-Malays should also do the same when they are whacked by the Malays. Instead, the Malays should whack their fellow Malays when they get out of line while the non-Malays should also do the

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same when one of their brethren too embark on Malay-bashing. Let the Malays police the bigot Malays and the non-Malays the bigots from amongst them. Let not a dozen or so troublemakers spoil it for the rest of us.

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