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## BUILDING A MALAYAN NATION

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**T**HIRTY years ago it would have seemed strange that British administration of the Colonial type should be devoting all the resources at its command to the formation of a Malayan nation. It was fashionable then to regard nationalism as a great evil, the cause of wars and the greatest barrier to the spread of peace and understanding over the whole human race.

In particular, those Western powers which had acquired colonial empires in South-East Asia tended to regard the nationalist movement in their colonies with deep suspicion, as a threat to law and order and to the colonial administrations which they had established. We have learnt better since then.

We know now that the emotional force behind modern wars of aggression may be ideological or racial, but is never likely to be national; and that a sense of nationhood is perfectly compatible with a determination to work together with other nations for the establishment of a lasting peace.

### COMMON INTERESTS:

In South-East Asia, and indeed all over the world the thinking of the British people has turned away from colonialism and towards the idea of the Commonwealth. In this group of free and self-governing nations, bound together by common interests and traditions and a common loyalty to Queen Elizabeth II as Head of the Commonwealth, the former colonies and dependent territories can best develop their individual way of life.

In it they can find the best solution to the problems of combining freedom with security and co-operation, which face

all small nations today. But it is a free association, and Malaya, when her time comes to choose, will have to decide whether to follow the example of India, Pakistan and Ceylon.

If Malaya, too, is to emerge from its present semi-dependent period as a fully self-governing state, then it is the Malayan nation which must govern itself. This Malayan nation does not exist. It has got to be formed. But that does not mean that self-government is inevitably far off, waiting on such age-long processes as went to the formation of a British nation.

The one event which is the key to the formation of a Malayan nation is something that could happen overnight. It is a change in people's attitudes. As soon as every permanent resident of this country thinks of himself or herself as a Malayan, and not as a member of this or that community living in Malaya, the Malayan nation will be born.

#### BY DEGREES:

All the other requirements of a nationhood can be provided as we go along and provided quite quickly; it is the change of heart that matters. Of course, this change of heart will not in fact take place overnight. It must happen by degrees, but it can happen quickly. I believe it *is* happening quickly.

There is nothing remarkable in the fact that no Malayan nation exists. By far the greater part of the Chinese and Indian communities, and a very great number of the Malays themselves, are children or grandchildren of people who came to Malaya, a foreign land, because it offered them a better chance of making a good living. There was nothing in Malaya then to attract their loyalty away from their homeland and towards this country, for Malaya was not, until very recently, one country at all.

For instance, 30 years ago the only link between a citizen of Johore and a citizen of Perak was a common connection with the British; and Kelantan and Kedah have less than 50 years of even that tenuous association. Even among the indigenous portion of the Malay people, therefore, the idea of a Malayan nation is something quite new. But it is a new idea which fits in very easily with the nationalist trend of all Asian thinking today.

A question which the politically-minded people in Malaya often ask is whether the British Government regards the formation of a Malayan Nation as an essential pre-requisite to independence. To talk in such terms is to over-simplify.

Of course, a completely self-governing Malaya is impossible

before the formation of a Malayan nation, for there would be nothing to govern itself; but both "self-government" and "the formation of a Malayan nation" are relative terms.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT:

It will not be possible, in sober fact, to say at any one moment "a Malayan nation is now formed", any more than it will be possible to say "Communism has now been beaten in Malaya".

In the gradual formation of a Malayan nation the development of self-government will itself play a very important part. Malaysians, over the next few years, will be governing themselves more and more through local councils and through legislative and executive councils at State and Federal levels.

This experience in responsibility for the affairs of the nation, which is shared at every level from the Member to the local councillor, should do a great deal to stimulate that change of attitude on which the formation of a Malayan nation depends.

It would be a tragedy, not only for Malaya, but for the hopes of all South-East Asia, if this experience were used to seek communal advantages and to perpetuate communal differences. Provided that the majority of Malaysians elected or appointed to responsible places in government think of themselves as what they are, the servants of the people as a whole and not of one particular community, the establishment of self-government and the formation of a Malayan nation will go hand in hand, each one forcing the pace for the other.

Certainly no one could intend to postpone complete self-government until after the completion, fixed by some arbitrary standard, of the nation-building process; for no one could define when the nation was finally built.

#### NEW CITIZENSHIP LAWS:

It is possible to measure the progress in the formation of a Malayan nation that has been made in the last few years in two ways. One can look at the government action that has been taken to provide the framework in which such a nation can grow and to encourage its growth; or one can look at the changes which have actually taken place in the way Malayan people think and live.

On the government side the most important steps forward have, of course, been the new citizenship laws contained in the Amendment to the Federation Agreement, and the electoral

laws. You cannot have a nation of which nearly half the population are not citizens.

The new citizenship laws, passed in 1952, made approximately three-quarters of the total population citizens by operation of law, and offered comparatively easy terms to those others who wished to become citizens.

There can be very few in Malaya now who want to become Federal citizens and are prevented from doing so. As the new generation of Malayans grows up, the proportion of those who are automatically Federal citizens will draw nearer and nearer to 100 per cent. When one looks at the genuine reaction of the people, however, it is clear that this citizenship does not yet mean very much. Ask the average new villager whether he is a Federal citizen and he does not know. He does not know because, for the moment, it makes no practical difference to his life.

As soon as we have pushed to completion the second part of the framework, that is the electoral laws for State and Federal elections, and political parties begin to compete for the votes of Federal citizens, the villager will soon be made to see that to be a Federal citizen means to have a voice that counts in the government of the country.

#### COMPLICATED QUESTIONS:

These electoral laws take time to work out in detail. There are complicated questions of constituencies to be decided and an immense labour of registration before an electoral roll can be prepared. Indonesia, for instance, although independent since 1949, has not found it practicable to have a general election yet and in India, with all its fine tradition of administration, four years passed between the adoption of the new constitution and the first general election.

In Malaya in 1952 and 1953 we got local and town council elections going and hope to see State and Settlement elections in 1954 and 1955 with Federal Elections not much after that. We shall see what recommendations are made by the recently appointed Federal Elections Committee.

Meanwhile, we are trying to give the Federal Legislative Council as much Parliamentary experience as possible by the development of the Member system and also by the appointment of a Speaker to preside over its debates. In this Council, future political leaders of the Federation are gaining in experience from the cut and thrust of debate.

The people's reaction to these elections has been mixed. In the villages the response has been excellent. The polls have been amazingly high and there has been little sign of communalism. In the towns there has been more of a tendency to vote on communal lines and disappointingly low polls. This might be considered to support the view, fairly widely held, that communalism is not natural to the Malayan people, and that where it appears in elections it is in fact fostered by political organisers.

#### EFFICIENT JUDICIARY:

A fully-fledged nation needs not only a government representing the people to make laws, but an efficient judiciary and police to carry them out and armed forces sufficient to repel any threat to overthrow it, whether from an internal or an external enemy.

The judicial system has long established a high reputation and the police force, which has recently undergone reorganization, can proudly take as its motto "Ready to Serve"—to serve in any way that is needed.

The armed forces are being expanded until they are capable of dealing with any purely local threat; and in that expansion the opportunity is being given to all communities to serve their country in the Army. Here, however, if we turn to the actual response of the Malayan people we see that it falls short of the opportunities which the Government has created.

The Chinese response to the opportunity offered by the creation of the Federation Regiment has so far been very discouraging; and if the new Malayan nation comes to birth with armed forces almost entirely composed of Malays it will be neither their fault nor that of the present Administration.

There is one other aspect of the approach of self-government which is extremely important, but is very often forgotten because it has none of the glamour attached to the more spectacular preliminary measures—that is the provision of an efficient administration of high integrity and capabilities. This is an absolute prerequisite and too little is said of it.

The spirit of a nation that has newly achieved self-government may be magnificent, but if the administration of that nation, of its forces of law and order, of its schools, its health services and of all the other varied activities that make the framework of the daily lives of its inhabitants—if that administration breaks down, then chaos ensues and no number of

high ideals and spirited aspirations will save that country from going gradually down-hill until it is a derelict, tatterdemalion, third-rate state.

#### THE YOUNGER GENERATION:

Of all things, that must *not* happen in Malaya, which has had for many, many years, an extremely high standard of administration. Let the people of Malaya remember that self-government is not a substitute for good government.

So much for the adults. But Malaya is an exceptionally young country and it is on the generation under 21 today—approximately half the population of the country—that the future of the Malayan nation will depend. For them the Government's plan is based on the gradual establishment of the common national school. This will take many years to achieve, but there is no doubt that it must come.

If the children are to grow up as Malaysians and not as Malays, Chinese or Indians, they must all go to school together. Fortunately, this is one respect in which Government is not by any means outrunning the people. No one who has seen the children of Malaya at work or play together could suppose that communal differences raise any serious barriers between them.

These are the main steps that have been taken towards the formation of a Malayan nation in the last two years. But nations are not created by government. In innumerable other ways, from the birth pangs of national political parties to the formation of such bodies as the Malayan Historical Society and the Arts Council, one can see that the political and cultural interests of people living in this peninsula are turning more and more towards Malaya instead of overseas.

The opportunities in such a community as this for producing a fusion of cultures, which will preserve the best of each rather than reduce all to a sort of Main Street mediocrity, are another reason for hoping that the Malayan nation will one day show the world something to wonder at.

#### PRIDE OF NATIONHOOD:

It is the policy of the Federation Government to foster and encourage every development, whether political, social or cultural, which will help to build this pride and consciousness of nationhood. This is one of the purposes of the expanded Information Services, for it is, for example, only through the Malayan films which they take to almost every village and kampong in the country that we can show the older and largely

illiterate people of this widely scattered Malayan community the events and developments taking place all over Malaya which are gradually and steadily moulding them into a Malayan nation.

It is essential that, during a period of stress and transition such as this, the people should understand and, if their support can be won, support, the actions of their government.

This campaign of mass information at the humbler level of village and kampong is, therefore, by no means the least important of the Government's contributions to the Birth of a Nation.

Britain has acted as midwife at many such births. If there are some indications that this may be a difficult one, there are even more that, if patience and experience prevail, the child may prove an infant prodigy. The heir of Malaysia, China, India, Ceylon and Europe should scarcely prove less.