

INDEPENDENCE FROM A NARROW MINDSET

LOW Yat is the venue for all things Information Technology (IT) to computer geeks in the country. It was thrust into the headlines recently by a fracas that involved a theft of sorts which later degenerated into a squabble which some said was ethnically motivated.

Fortunately the issue fizzled off as level-headedness prevailed and the incident is centred on a crime that must be handled appropriately. As the incident gradually faded into the background, another hitch emerged, fired by an idea for another Low Yat — Low Yat 2.

The proposal would have been reasonable if it did not remind one of the unpleasantness associated with Low Yat. Called it by any other name — nobody would have cared. Otherwise, many would jump to the wrong conclusion. Some misconstrued it as a “reward” spurred by a racially tainted criminal activity.

Low Yat 2 is a daunting suggestion by all counts. Instead of a more integrative solution, it is undoubtedly a divisive one, causing more segregation that will breed even greater polarisation when IT is all about connectivity, networking, sharing and collaboration — all the wonderful words that should make up Malaysia. Low Yat 2 is a cop-out move which is too simplistic a solution to a long-standing problem.

If Low Yat is a sovereign state, the

suggestion to “form” Low Yat 2 at the drop of a hat is almost tantamount to a secession involving only one particular group, moving away from the rest. Like all amputations, once limbs are dismembered, it is very difficult to attach them again.

So it is not surprising that as an idea to start with, Low Yat 2 is a “bad” one and therefore shot down by many. But, surprisingly, this includes those who (without knowingly perhaps) harbour the same Low Yat 2 mentality — divisive and segregative. This is more common than we think, cutting across domains: politics, social, economy, culture and even sports. Our education system is a classic example. Of late, I read in disbelief a statement by a high-ranking politician to pay particular attention to the party’s “brand” of education. It mirrors, no less, thinking in the vein of Low Yat 2 in contrast to “advice” to focus on the entire education system,

instead of centring on a particular one. After all, it is the success of the entire system — and not any particular one — that defines the success of the nation.

Schools can be instruments of unity and integration as a natural process of education. In an interview (NST, Aug 16), Education Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid said: “There are students who spend (their years in) primary and sec-

ondary schools in vernacular institutions, which means they spend their first 17 (formative) years without regular interaction or making friends with those from other races. This is something we must address.” But can we address it by resorting to the Low Yat 2 approach?

This is indeed the current dilemma especially for those who strongly believe in the Low Yat 2 mindset regardless of whether they are aware of it. At times, it is easier to discern this when others are involved, and not when it happens to ourselves.

We will have a chance to make a real change by dumping the Low Yat 2 mentality as we celebrate Merdeka. It is a great initiative to get other nations to celebrate it with us. Similarly, it is time that Malaysian citizens think inclusively too. Mahdzir was spot-on when he said that we must “strive to build a civilised society”. But he cautioned: “It takes a long time to build a civilised society, but we must do it.” The Low Yat 2 mentality will not take us there and must first be discarded through inclusive and balanced education as stated in *Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan* (National Education Philosophy). This, then, will be truly Merdeka — independence from a mindset that has haunted the nation for far too long.

The writer is honorary professor at the University of Nottingham and Chair of Leadership at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Email him at education@nst.com.my