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53rd Anniversary of Malaysia Day

Uphold the Malaysia Agreement and build a more just and inclusive Malaysia

On the occasion of the 53rd anniversary of the formation of Malaysia on September 16, Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GMB) calls on all Malaysians to revisit the Malaysia Agreement, to understand the spirit of the social contract that lays the very foundation of the formation of Malaysia and to unite under the Malaysia Agreement to build a more just and inclusive Malaysia for everyone.

The Malaysia Agreement was signed on 16 September 1963 between the Federation of Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore as equal partners to form a new union – Malaysia. While Singapore left the union in 1965, Malaysia continues to operate with three partners to this date.

The spirit of the Malaysia Agreement was somehow lost in the past 53 years with Sabah (North Borneo before joining Malaysia) and Sarawak gradually reduced to one of the 13 states instead of two equal partners to the Federation of Malaya.

While the 20-Point Agreement in relation to Sabah and the 18-Point Agreement in relation to Sarawak provided some safeguards to protect the interest of the peoples in Sabah and Sarawak, the roles of Sabah and Sarawak in the overall political and economic development of Malaysia are increasingly marginalized. The most startling reflection of this development was the confirmation of the World Bank in 2010 that Sabah had become the poorest state in Malaysia despite being a oil producing region and rich in natural resources. The World Bank's study further revealed that Sabah had only 10 per cent of Malaysia's population but accounted for 40 per cent of the national poverty. Sarawak, blessed with rich resources, was found to be second from bottom among the 13 states for having 33.1 percent of households in rural area earning RM1,999 or less in a household income survey in 2014.

More alarmingly, Sabah is now the new failed state of Malaysia with a huge number of undocumented immigrants staying in the state with many of them receiving citizenship in dubious manners as confirmed in the report of the Royal Commission on Inquiry in 2014. Security in Sabah is deteriorating for the locals and tourists, especially those living in the east coast, with cases of abduction and kidnapping taking place regularly despite the establishment of the Eastern Sabah Security Zone and a command center to enforce security in the region in 2013.

Perhaps the discontent of the peoples in Sabah and Sarawak can be better understood if one compared them with the development of Brunei and Singapore. The GDP per capita of Brunei and Singapore stood at US\$79,700 and US\$85,300 respectively in 2015 while the GDP per capita of Sabah and Sarawak in 2013 stood at US\$5,822 and US\$12,869 according to the statistics provided by the Department of Statistics. Brunei pulled out before the signing of the Malaysia Agreement in 1963.

Certainly, the domination of Malay supremacist and the racial politics in the Peninsular Malaysia did not help at all in addressing the marginalization of Sabah and Sarawak, but further alienated Sabah and Sarawak. The growing religious intolerance in the Peninsular Malaysia, as reflected in the "Allah" row on the Malay bible issue and the attempts of PAS to introduce hudud punishments that may

change the very nature of the statehood of Malaysia, is a cause for concern for many in Sabah and Sarawak on the future of Malaysia.

There is an urgent need to return to the 1963 Malaysia Agreement and address the imbalance of economic development and power relationship between the Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak in nation building.

GBM calls on the federal government respect the voice of the peoples in Sabah and Sarawak and not to sweep them under the carpet. The federal government should allocate more resources for the development of Sabah and Sarawak, especially basic infrastructure and social services in the rural areas. It is unjust that the oil revenue from Sabah and Sarawak are all going to the federal government with only 5% going back to Sabah and Sarawak in the form of oil royalty. There should be increase of oil royalty going back to Sabah and Sarawak to support their sustainable development.

More urgently, the federal government and the Sabah government must reexamine the effectiveness of the Eastern Sabah Security Zone Command Center (ESSCOM) and allocate more resources to beef up the security in the Eastern Sabah and to wipe out kidnapping and abduction completely. The federal government must work with the Sabah government to resolve the huge number of undocumented immigrants and the granting of citizenship in dubious manner, which undermines severely the integrity of elections in Sabah and distorted the genuine voice of the Sabah people.

The concerns of the population of Sabah and Sarawak on the growing racial politics and religious intolerance should be taken seriously in policy making of the federal government. They should have a say on the direction where this nation should be going.

The peoples of Sabah and Sarawak deserve no less than the people in the Peninsular Malaysia.