

Source: <https://www.thesundaily.my/opinion/a-true-blue-malaysian-YH933405>

# A true blue Malaysian

DZULKIFLI ABDUL RAZAK /  
02 JUN 2019 / 19:03 H.



**THE** ever adorable true blue Malaysian, Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim left us last week.

His knowledge of Malaysian history was encyclopaedic, let alone others ranging from sports especially soccer to the multiplicity of Malaysia's cultures and nuances.

He was an exceptional example of what a Bangsa Malaysia ought to be. All these made Khoo the voice of reason that played a crucial role in settling issues of "competing" views in the context of historical development.

He was sensitive to the prevailing context and nuances.

His "mediating" voice as a public intellectual was very much needed in the interplay of power and influence where people seem to be "loud" for no apparent reason. I can almost hear how Khoo sighed each time this happened attributing it to how much education had changed for the worst. Many rushed to say something without deep reflection and caused more problems instead.

A case in point is the Rukun Negara of which Khoo was one of the ardent architects. Where is it now? As we talk about values, the Rukun Negara is not even cited as a vital source as part of our national identity that we all should be embracing after 61 years of Merdeka.

A more mundane example is the usage of Bahasa Malaysia as part of that national identity which is still prone to debate among the highly educated elite. Whereas for Khoo, this was a given if one was truly proud to be Malaysian. The fight for the use of other languages can go on for it is good to be multilingual – but not as a façade to disguise one's deficit in the command of Bahasa Malaysia.

With his passing, this hypocrisy must stop because all other citizens of the world are fluent in their national language, and proudly so. Khoo will be the first to testify to this.

Relating to another lesson, I recalled a conversation with my son who was not happy when it came to finding the date for a historical event. He had different dates for the event depending on the references. This incensed him, leading him to enquire as to who was the best historian in the country. Being a form three student then he was not familiar with Khoo. So I mentioned the name.

He googled and found out who Khoo was, and shared his concerns about the differing dates. To his excitement, he got a response from the professor (who was then on sabbatical away from Malaysia). Admitting the dates can be problematic due to how events are interpreted, he advised my son to stick to the dates in the textbooks. Although it may not be the “best” option, because this is how the “answer” will be graded in an examination.

It was plain to see how Khoo appealed even to teenagers. The episode speaks volume of his persona as what an intellectual is about – unassuming and humble – yet well respected by all.

To this I cherish two humbling moments in my career that I was lucky to share with the esteemed academic, both as a mentor and a colleague: one was when we both received the Tan Sri-ship some 10 years ago, and other as Tokoh Akademik Negara in 2018. Such are among the moments to behold as guiding lights in the brutal world of academia. So rest in peace, dear professor. Thank you for showing us the way forward as true citizens of this beloved nation.