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# LETTERS

## UNITY

# EMULATE THE PAULIAN SPIRIT

**A**S we celebrate Aug 31, I have been thinking about what it means to be a Malaysian and the Malaysian spirit.

I am reminded of the time when I was a student at St Paul's Institution in Seremban, Negri Sembilan from 1976 to 1986.

We embraced what we called the Paulian spirit. We Paulians never identified each other by race or religion.

It made us stand by and support each other. We even welcomed foreign students and treated them as Paulians.

We connected at a human level and this is what I understood to be the Malaysian spirit.

It is only when we left school that we began to identify each other by our race and religion. Suddenly, I began to realise that I was an Indian and Hindu and these began to matter.

**“We connected at a human level and this is what I understood to be the Malaysian spirit.”**

The only other time I experienced this Malaysian spirit after I left school was when I stayed in Jakarta a few years ago.

There, we were once again Malaysians and not Indian, Chinese or Malay. We were a happy family.

I may complain about what's happening in Malaysia or I may complain that my individual rights are sometimes infringed.

However, this doesn't lessen my patriotism.

I will still defend Malaysia until my very last breath. This is what I understand to be Malaysian.

So, today, why do I feel that we are being divided by forces that don't understand the Malaysian spirit? Can we bring back that spirit of being Malaysian?

**DR SEKAR JAGANATHAN**  
Seremban, Negri Sembilan

## RETIREMENT AGE

# Why stop at 60 if one is productive?

**WITH** a segment of the population past 60 years old and constituting about 3.3 million of our population of 32 million, it's time to consider raising the age of retirement to at least 65.

In developed nations, the retirement age is 65 on the average unless they opt for early retirement. These countries see this group as a plus factor and an asset.

To retire at 60 is a waste of manpower as many in that age bracket are healthy and can share their expertise. How many of these talented senior citizens were forced into their sunset years when they could still be gainfully employed?

Their knowledge cannot be acquired overnight.

Their experience will just go down the drain unless organisations are willing to extend their employment.

Inevitably, retirees get depressed and suffer serious illnesses due to inactivity. Walk into a hospital and you will see those seeking medical attention are from this age bracket.

With the rising cost of living, many families are hard-pressed to provide for their ageing parents who, in most cases, have exhausted their savings to sup-



Senior citizens who are healthy should be allowed to work and be gainfully employed.

port their children through tertiary education.

However, their children see their ageing elders a financial burden.

The nation benefited from this group during their employable years and to discard them when they reach 60 without offering any option or other work is a waste of their skills.

In the long run, the nation has no alternative but to support

them by providing medical care when they could be absorbed productively into the workforce while they are physically and mentally able.

Our society has not considered this issue seriously by creating a conducive environment where the 3.3 million can be gainfully employed.

**DR TAN ENG BEE**  
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## AIR QUALITY

# Haze is also harmful to vegetation

**WHILE** the effects of haze on air quality and human health are well known, its effect on plants is less understood.

Plants can make their own food, and they do this through a process called photosynthesis.

One of the factors of photosynthesis is solar radiation.

Haze reduces solar radiation. Consequently, this reduces plant photosynthesis, but a reduction in solar radiation also decreases the ambient air temperature.

That haze could cause cooling may come as a surprise, as many of us tend to associate haze with hot weather.

It is the dry weather that encourages the onset of haze, not the other way round.

Haze causes cooling because it comprises fine particles that help to reflect more of the incoming

solar radiation.

By lowering the amount of solar radiation reaching the ground, haze thus reduces air temperature. Roughly, for every 10 per cent decrease in solar irradiance, the maximum daily air temperature would reduce by five per cent.

Our country experiences hot weather, so if our high air temperatures could be reduced, this could help increase plant photosynthesis by reducing the impact of heat and drought stress on plants.

Haze increases the proportion of diffuse radiation to direct radiation. Diffuse radiation is the incoming solar radiation from all directions.

Plants use diffuse radiation more effectively than direct radiation because diffuse radiation

penetrates the plant canopies more deeply than the single-direction direct radiation.

Computer simulations have further shown that haze has a beneficial effect on the growth and yield of vegetables.

Discussions have ignored the detrimental effects of haze pollutants on plants.

One of the worst episodes of haze in Southeast Asia occurred in 1997, where 94 per cent of the haze particles over Singapore were measured to be smaller than 2.5 micrometres.

These particles are small enough to enter or cover the leaf stomata (tiny openings commonly under the leaves to facilitate gas exchange) to interrupt the photosynthetic process.

Other air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides could inhibit the



To clearly understand the impact of haze on plants would require the comparisons of field measurements simultaneously obtained from a polluted and 'clean' controlled environment. PIC BY ADI SAFRI

photosynthesis mechanisms.

During the 2014 haze episode, rice yields in Malaysia fell and rice hybrids suffered a decrease of plant growth by about 50 per cent.

The net impact of haze tends to be detrimental, as evidenced by actual field measurements on the plants.

To clearly understand the impact of haze on plants would require the comparisons of field

measurements simultaneously obtained from a polluted and "clean" controlled environment. Haze is undeniably harmful to our health and vegetation.

This is good enough reason to overcome this growing Southeast Asian problem.

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