

54th National Day Celebration

For What Purpose?



This month, Singaporeans celebrate the 54th National Day of Singapore. Year after year, we celebrate our National Day with jubilation. For what purpose?

Pomp and revelry accompanying a celebration is indicative of our joyous spirit. However, there is more to the celebration than joining in the excitement, more than advertising our success as a nation, and more than whipping up feel-good national sentiments. It adds meaningfulness if we also recognize that an important purpose of celebration is to remember.

Remember what? Well, remembering how we came through struggles and were “re-born” as an independent nation.



There were consequences of separation from Malaysia. There are lessons to reinvigorate our “NEVER SAY DIE” spirit when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges to go it alone in all aspects of survival – economic sufficiency, national defence, sustenance with adequate life essentials (e.g., water), etc.

Someone Whatsapped me a joke circulating in social media, not so complimentarily comparing Singaporean's "KIASU/KIASI" attitude with Malaysian's "BOLEH" attitude and the Japanese's "CAN-DO" attitude. Of course, it is just a gag for us to laugh at ourselves, perhaps to have a light-hearted moment to take a respite from our usual serious-mindedness in most matters as we muse about how the humorous label came to be attached on us.



Serious-minded we were! When under threat of survival, our survival instincts trustworthily came to our rescue. "NEVER SAY DIE" was the spirit, rather than "DIE LIOW", "NO HOPE LIOW" or "KIASU/KIASI". As we celebrate our National Day, we remember.

Remember what? Remember the true grit of our first-generation leaders.

(Since when did our "NEVER SAY DIE" spirit morph into the "KIASU/KIASI" spirit?) 😊

We remember our Pioneer Generation and Merdeka Generation citizens who joined hands with the leaders to wrench survival out of hard-to-survive situations and laid the groundwork for the successive generations.

What for, remember? We remember and reflect.

Are we still as serious-minded as we were? Are the new generations of leaders and citizens (and will the future generations be) on the same page and up to the mark in imbibing the worthy values and ethos of our ancestors who built the nation

from scratch? Think about the marks we deserve. It is a great feeling if we earn high marks. However, while expressing pride with the joyous mood of celebration and captivating shows of how far we have come 54 years from the Day of Independence, let us not be sunken by pride and lose our way going forward.

We need to open our eyes and minds to the realities of the current challenges on a global scale with democracy and good human values under battering. Directly or indirectly, anything that happens elsewhere affects us even if it is not in our area or is half a world away. Singapore may be much more fortunate in comparison to the gloomy landscape in yonder places. However, we cannot take things for granted that “we are too good to fail.” It is a clarion call for more resilience and dedication from a population with an eclectic mix which can be a boon or bane depending on how we harness the good collaborative energy from diversity and manage the friction from fault-lines.



As Christians, how do we look at National Day? What does the Bible teach about patriotism?

We are told in Acts 17:26 that “From one man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”

Patriotism is undergirded by our faith in God, as we visualize God as the maker of every human nation and the decider of all land boundaries. There is thus the universality of man’s relationship to God. When we love God, we love the nation where He puts us in, and follow the instruction of His Word.

In this regard, we discern from the Bible that patriotism is imbued with traits of conscience, emotion and faith:

- Of conscience (Rom 13:5) – When we submit to the governing authorities as submitting to God.
- Of emotion and faith (Ps 137:5-6) – The fist-pumping emotional outburst was revealing of how the pious towards his country would feel emotionally afflicted when the country (in the psalmist's case, Jerusalem) suffered. It was also revealing of deep faith and hope in God for the country's recovery to glory when it was in a bad situation.

Patriotism is neither youthful idealism nor a nationalistic movement. Patriotism is a gift by God's grace for service to people that His nation will flourish to His glory.

Doing things to show our patriotism is not the same as conducting ourselves whereby we reveal our patriotism. Therefore, patriotism does not stop at celebrating our National Day with thankfulness for the physical blessings we enjoy in a materially prosperous nation. We should also contemplate about thanksgiving for blessings to the soul for a spiritually prosperous nation.

“NIMBY” (**N**ot **I**n **M**y **B**ack**Y**ard) is an acronym that was coined to characterize opposition by people who rejected things unpleasant in their neighbourhood but would not be bothered if the things were elsewhere not affecting them directly. Another expression of NIMBY in behaviours is: “If it does not affect me, it is none of my concern.”

Patriotism is neither an empty slogan nor a cover for political affairs. Hanging the words “I am patriotic” on one's lips does not make one a patriot. Patriotism is taking it upon oneself to bless the nation, displaying loyalty to the end through conscious

decisions and actions that contribute to the larger good, extending our thoughtfulness to matters affecting the wider spheres of society. We should discourage the NIMBY attitude as we show care and concern in our decisions and actions for the well-being of the nation.

After the National Day celebration, we should welcome the continuing dedication of our people as accountable leaders in all positions, loyal citizens in society, committed workers at workplaces, loving members in families and faithful believers in the Church.

For believers in the Church, patriotism recognizes that the nation is established by God for His glory to be manifest by the comings and goings. Singapore – a special place by God’s will as the Antioch of Asia – an independent nation independently navigating her path forward. The success of the nation hinges on every individual who would cherish year after year of National Day celebrations.

As we celebrate Singapore’s 54th National Day:

- We give praise to God for our blessedness.
- We pray for more good years with capable leaders at the helm.
- We wish all blessings to all Singaporeans to continue the harmonious living we enjoy.

To Christians, we wish them all blessings in Christ as they live out their faith.

Be thankful to God that we have all the good reasons to celebrate with patriotism founded on our faith in God, the maker of this good nation.

John Lee