

DAP unfurled the banner of Cultural Democracy challenge the Gerakan cultural policy of assimilation and subservience is far back as 26 years ago in the Great DAP-Gerakan Cultural Debate in 1968

Speech by Parliamentary Opposition Leader, DAP ISecretary-General and MP for Tanjung, Lim Kit Siang, at the third Penang 'Tanjong' 3' Marathon Thousand-People Dinner held at, Penang Chinese Town Hall on Wednesday, 5th October 1994 at 8 p.m

DAP unfurled the banner of Cultural Democracy challenge the Gerakan cultural policy of assimilation and subservience is far back as 26 years ago in the Great DAP-Gerakan Cultural Debate in 1968

Twenty-six years ago, on November 24, 1968 the DAP and the Gerakan had a historic cultural debate at the then Auditorium in Kuala Lumpur.

Each party had four speakers and I led the DAP team, while the Gerakan team was led by br. Syed Naguib Alatas and included Dr. Lim Chong Eu. The debate, which was chaired by the then PPP President, D.R. Seenivasagam, went on from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. without any break, and the capacity crowd did not stir from their seats for the entire six-and-a-half hours for we all knew we were not just debating, but fighting for the 'cultural soul' of the new Malaysian nation!

At the Great DAP-Gerakan Cultural Debate in 1968, the DAP unfurled the banner of Cultural Democracy to challenge Gerakan's cultural policy of assimilation and subservience.

The Great DAP-Gerakan Cultural Debate was sparked off by the Gerakan stand that Malaysian literature should only be should in Malay and that Malaysian literature should include Indonesian literature.

This Gerakan cultural policy was immediately challenged by the DAP. On behalf of the DAP, I declared that Malaysian literature could not be limited to works of one language, and that if Malaysia was a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation, Malaysian literature must comprise all writings whether drama, novel, short story, play or verse, written by Malaysians, which by emotion, identification description, social context and involvement relate to Malaysia whether written in Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English.

This laid the setting for the Great DAP-Gerakan Cultural Debate on November 24, 1968 on the definition of Malaysian Culture - and whether the process of the evolution of the Malaysian Culture and nation-building itself should be by way of cultural integration or cultural assimilation.

The DAP advocated cultural integration as the way to achieve Cultural Democracy to allow the various cultures to freely interact and interchange and evolve into a Malaysian culture, in contrast to Gerakan's cultural policy which refused to recognise other cultures as equally Malaysian in nature as Malay culture.

I conceded at the 1968 Cultural Debate that the forces of those who oppose Cultural Democracy were having an 'upper hand', but I pledged the DAP's continued commitment to fight for Cultural Democracy in Malaysia.

Even up to now, the Gerakan has not altered its official cultural policy and this is why Gerakan has not officially abandoned or repudiated its founding Cultural policy that Malaysian literature should only be

written in Bahasa Malaysia and should include Indonesian literature, while rejecting other Malaysian writings in Chinese, Tamil or English.

In Parliament in past 25 years, the DAP had stayed true to our pledge, remaining consistent and steadfast in our battle for Cultural Democracy on the issues of education, language and culture, although many DAP leaders had to pay a heavy price for such beliefs and ideals, such as detention under the ISA, court prosecutions, victimisations and harassments.

Malaysia today would be a very different if there had been no DAP in the past 28 years

DAP MPs and leaders can feel proud that when Chinese education, Chinese primary schools, Chinese Independent Schools faced their greatest threat in the 1970s and early 1980s, they were there to stand up in Parliament in the defence of Cultural Democracy.

Those were the darkest and most dangerous period of nation-building in Malaysia, which Culminated in the demand for a 'One-Language, One Culture' Policy in utter disregard of the fact that Malaysia is a nation of many races, languages, cultures and religions.

In the sixties, there were calls for the ban on 'un-Malaysian' symbols like the dragon in Malaysia, the closure of Chinese and Tamil primary schools and even the closure of Chinese and Tamil newspapers. In the 1970s, a powerful Cabinet Minister seriously suggested the replacement of the lion dance by tiger dance!

Malaysia would be a very different country today if there had been no DAP in the past 28 years to oppose, resist and check the undemocratic forces which wanted to establish a One Language, One, Culture' Malaysia, and there would definitely be no 'Minor Liberalisation' in certain government economic and educational measures in the past three years.

The 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past years three must be seen in the context of the 28-year political struggle of the DAP for a Malaysian Malaysia and the people's consistent support for this political objective.

'Minor Liberalisation' is taking 'three steps forward', but in the context of the 'thirty backwards' in past three decades, they are inadequate and have not even fully restored the rights which had been eroded

It is the greatest fallacy for anyone to think that the 'Minor Liberalisation' had fallen from the skies, or is the result of the 'charity' of the Barisan Nasional' Government, or even worse, is the achievement of the Gerakan and MCA. This is not the case.

The 'Minor Liberalisation' are the 'tiny results' of the long-term political struggle of the people with the DAP for a more just and equal Malaysia a Malaysian Malaysia for the Vast' three decades.

If we see the 'Minor Liberalisation' completely out of context of the people's struggle with the DAP for a more just and equal Malaysia, as if Malaysian politics started in 1991, we will get the impression -that the Barisan Nasional Government is getting more and more enlightened and we should be happy and content with the 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past three years.

However, if we judge the 'Minor Liberalisation' in the context of the people's political struggle with the DAP for the past three decades, we will then be able to place it in a proper context.

Although we welcome the 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past three years, we cannot overlook the fact that in the past three decades, the right of the people had suffered serious erosion and that the 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past three years had not even fully restored these lost rights.

If we regard the 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past three years as 'three forward steps', and look at them in isolation, then they are a great advance. However, if we place the 'Minor Liberalisation' in the context of the past three decades, where the Barisan Nasional policies had made the people to 'go back by thirty steps', taking 'three steps forward' - while welcome is clearly not sufficient or satisfactory.

This is why DAP has called for 'Full Liberalisation' as the people and the DAP cannot be content and satisfied with the 'Minor Liberalisation' of the past three years - which have not even restored the political, economic, educational, cultural and citizenship rights eroded away in the past three decades.

The 'Full Liberalisation' will serve as a standard to measure how far short the Barisan Nasional 'Minor Liberalisation' had fallen from the legitimate aspirations of the people

The 'Full liberalisation' call of the DAP will not only serve as a rallying cry for all Malaysians to demand a more just and equal Malaysia where all Malaysians can enjoy an equal place under the Malaysian sun, it will also serve as a standard to measure as to how far short the Barisan Nasional's 'Minor Liberalisation' had fallen from the legitimate aspirations of the people.

In the last three days, in conjunction with the Penang 'Tanjong 3' Thousand-People Dinners, the DAP had released three policy documents on Nation-Building Policies for Malaysia, namely on Full Liberalisation, Real Democracy and Human Rights and morning, the Charter on Mother-Tongue Education.

This morning's newspapers gave very big coverage the announcement by the Deputy Education Minister, Dr. Fong Chan Onn, that the government has decided to allocate maintenance funds to partially-assisted Chinese primary schools.

One Chinese newspaper even gave the front-page headline of 'Education Policy New Opening: Full Allocation for Chinese Schools'.

Actually, this is only allocation of schools' 'maintenance funds', and only for this year with no guarantee that henceforth, all Chinese primary schools and in particular partially-assisted Chinese primary schools would continue to receive such 'maintenance' fund allocation after the next general elections, or that this year's allocation is fair and just as compared to allocation to national primary schools.

Fong Chan Onn made it very clear that the Chinese primary schools, and in particular the partially-assisted schools, are still not entitled to receive full government allocation for the building of new classrooms, school premises or completely new Chinese primary schools. The allocation of 'maintenance funds' is clearly one of the 'election goodies' meant to win voters for the next general elections and which do not represent any fundamental change of the Chinese education policy of the Barisan Nasional Government.

The different reaction between MCA and Gerakan leaders on the one hand and the DAP leaders on the other sums up the real difference between us.

MCA Deputy Education Minister, Dr. Fong Chan Onn wants the people to believe that the allocation of 'maintenance funds' for Chinese primary schools this year represents a breakthrough' although there is no guarantee that. Chinese primary schools will now be put on par with national primary schools for all purposes of development allocations or that there would be a 'fundamental change of the Chinese education policy of the Barisan Nasional government.

The DAP's reaction is mere sober and restrained. For the DAP, there can be no 'great breakthrough' unless there is a 'Full Liberalisation' of government nation-building policies.

While we welcome the new government decision to allocate 'maintenance funds' to partially-assisted Chinese primary schools, we do not want this to be a mere 'election gimmick' and even more important, we want fundamental changes in the government's Chinese education policies which would give Chinese primary schools free and equal treatment as national primary schools.

DAP calls on Government to allocate regular annual grants to 60 Chinese Independent Secondary Schools

DAP calls on the MCA, Gerakan and the Barisan Nasional Government to endorse the DAP's Charter on Mother-Tongue Education released today, and in particular to adopt the following five-point programme for Chinese education as government policy:

REPEAL the 'ultimate objective' of the National Education Policy which must mean the conversion of Chinese primary schools into national primary schools and the closure of Chinese Independent Secondary Schools;

INTEGRATE Chinese primary schools into the mainstream of the national education system giving them equal and fair treatment as national primary schools, whether in terms of development allocation, teacher training, the building of new primary schools, etc;

GOVERNMENT ALLOCATION of regular annual grants to Chinese Independent Secondary Schools while, fully recognising their autonomy as well as their 'Unified Examination' certificates;

APPROVAL for the establishment of NEW ERA COLLEGE as proposed by Dong Ziao Zhong

APPROVAL for the revival of Nanyang University in Malaysia.