

## **Young Malaysian Ambassadors**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's concept of 1Malaysia is for the country to be truly a nation for all races, and this is only possible if our children believe in the spirit of one people.

Though different in religion and race, students K. Chandra Sekhar, Cliff Asher R. Ongil, Ahmad Ruiz Mohd Asri, Lina Na'ilah Abdul Talip and Edmund Lau proved that 1Malaysia is a reality when they visited Russia and Kazakhstan to experience the space industry's advancements and witness the Measat-3a satellite launch under an all expense-paid educational programme last year.

Though watching a rocket blast into space smack in the middle of the cold, barren desert is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, Chandra, Ahmad Ruiz and Cliff said that it is the friendships forged and the opportunity to share the meaning of 1Malaysia with nine other compatriots from Indonesia, India, the United Kingdom and the Philippines that made the trip truly memorable.

Ahmad Ruiz described meeting the other students from around the globe as "the highlight of the whole journey."

"It was truly touching to see how students from five different countries and cultures are able to sit together like a family - that's what the world should be aiming for. I think the friendships that we have forged will last a lifetime," he said.

Chandra agreed. “Spending time together made me realise that we have lots of things in common.

“By making an effort to keep in touch, we can enhance our knowledge and ideas because we will be privy to a globalised perspective of things,” added Chandra.

Asked to share their thoughts on Najib’s 1Malaysia concept and whether they represent its ideals, Ahmad Ruiz said he “truly and whole-heartedly” believed in a “Malaysian’s Malaysia”.

“I hold to this principle dearly and do not differentiate my peers by race or culture.

“I would like to think I represent the meaning of 1Malaysia in my interactions with others during the trip because the concept means uniting all the races with love. Our differences should not separate us,” he said.

The eloquent 17-year-old opined that the ideals of unity needs to be implemented not only by Malaysians, but by the world at large.

“1Malaysia is a great start towards this goal. Let us be the nation that sets an example to all other nations of the world,” added Ahmad Ruiz.

Cliff said despite their very different backgrounds, they identified themselves as “Malaysians” rather than by their respective race or religion.

“1Malaysia will significantly strengthen our unity and understanding - two of the most fundamental assets to our country’s liberty.

“People are now becoming more open-minded and mature, hence are more willing to compromise. We can realise this concept,” he said.

The one message the teens felt was important to get across to their foreign counterparts was unity.

“I would like the world to learn from us — how our forefathers attained freedom by being united.

“There is much talk about the Malaysian unity crumbling these days, but I don’t think it’s true. It’s just that the issue of unity is seldom highlighted while the issue of division is always in the limelight,” Ahmad Ruiz said.

Cliff wanted others to believe in Malaysia’ infinite potential. “Even though we are still far behind in the aerospace industry, we can achieve the same successes of other far more developed nations while upholding the virtues that make us uniquely Asian,” he said.

The Malaysians did the country proud dispelling certain misconceptions while enlightening their new-found friends about our history.

“The students from the United Kingdom thought that Malaysia was made up of the ‘Malaysian race’ because it was probably the first time they’d met any Malaysian.

“In a way, it is good to know that the outside world sees us as one, and not as a country separated by races,” said Ahmad Ruiz.

Chandra said he had fun “giving them a brief history about our country, culture and the reasons for the diversity”.

“It’s surprising that the Britons didn’t have any idea that we were a British colony.

“It was a little disappointing because they are closely linked to us historically but they were not aware of the past,” he shrugged.

Chandra said being with the international students was a real great experience.

“I got first hand knowledge about their respective countries by mingling with them.

“From what I saw, the difference between the British, Indians, Filipinos and Indonesians is just the distance. The world has indeed shrunk.”

Ahmad Ruiz, however, found the different characteristic and quirks interesting.

“Did you know that there about 12 ways to say ‘no’ in Indonesia and some of them require the usage of the word ‘yes’?,” he said, noting that the Filipinos were very patriotic.

“That is something I have yet to see among our students here,” he said.

The foreign students who were on the trip were impressed with the Malaysian group. They were not only friendly but were able to speak up on any issue, said Peter Adams, 19, from the United Kingdom.

He admitted that he “didn’t know what to expect from the Malaysian students” before the trip.

“I didn’t know what they were like and whether they could speak English - the only thing I knew was that they’d earned their place on the trip!

“My initial impressions were that they were very friendly, chatty and happy ... easy to have a laugh with.

“The fact that they all spoke in English was a pleasant surprise.

“What I found interesting was that our cultural differences were hardly noticeable. We were a group of teenagers from across the world, yet we got on brilliantly.

“The impression I got from the students is that Malaysia is a harmonious nation that that takes pride in her achievements.

“The trip was brilliant and the launch simply breathtaking, but it’s the people whom I’ll miss most – Malaysia ought to be proud of them,” the University of Central Lancashire’s first-year journalism student said.