

# Rebuilding bridges in Malaysia

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The holy month of Ramadan is coming to an end and Eid al-Fitr (celebration of Eid marking the end of Ramadan) will soon be celebrated. At this time I want to say Eid Mubarak to my Muslim associates and friends.

Also, I would like to offer a bit of hope and optimism and share some thoughts and actions to balance what seems to be the daily dose of woe.

For centuries Muslims and non-Muslims have co-existed peacefully and mutually benefited from interaction and trade. Yes, there have been episodic periods of friction, as between many groups, but these ultimately end.

9/11 caused one of those periods of friction opening a chasm between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities that was so deep and wide that it seemed any meaningful communication between the two groups ended. This gulf has helped perpetuate the cycle of violence we are seeing today which is appalling to moderates in all communities.

At the time of 9/11 I asked myself, “What is the end game here, are we just going to try and kill each other and see who is left standing?” Clearly this path must be avoided at all costs as modern weapons mean millions could potentially die. Then, what could be a better path?

The ultimate solution has multiple paths. But, I started looking for ways to improve the situation and rebuild the bridges of old between Muslims and non-Muslims through my area of expertise, trade and investment. I say rebuild instead of build because the normal state

between Muslims and non-Muslims, save for limited times of tension, is one of tolerance and co-operation.

That is when I visited Malaysia a number of years back.

Malaysia represents a successful multi-cultural/multi-religious society that happens to be predominantly Muslim (61%) with Buddhists representing 20% of the population, Christians around 10% and Hindus 6%.

Malays have developed wisdom over the centuries on how to get along with diverse peoples because the Malay Peninsula has been a key global trading region for millennium due to its strategic location. The Malays have learned to adroitly deal with people from China, Japan, the Middle East, India, the West and the Pacific. As testament to this, Malaysia often acts in the role of peacemaker.

Indeed, Malaysia is a hidden gem. Why do I say hidden? Because most people outside of Malaysia know little about the country and its people, save the daily one-sided skewering they read in the WSJ about 1MDB.

Malaysia is a peaceful moderate predominately Muslim nation that is on a path to reach developed nation status by 2020. It is using solid fundamental economic principals to grow and diversify its economy, is building world-class infrastructure and is prudently managing both its fiscal and monetary policies to support growth. This is being done in an inclusive manner in order to help all Malaysians, not just any one narrow group.

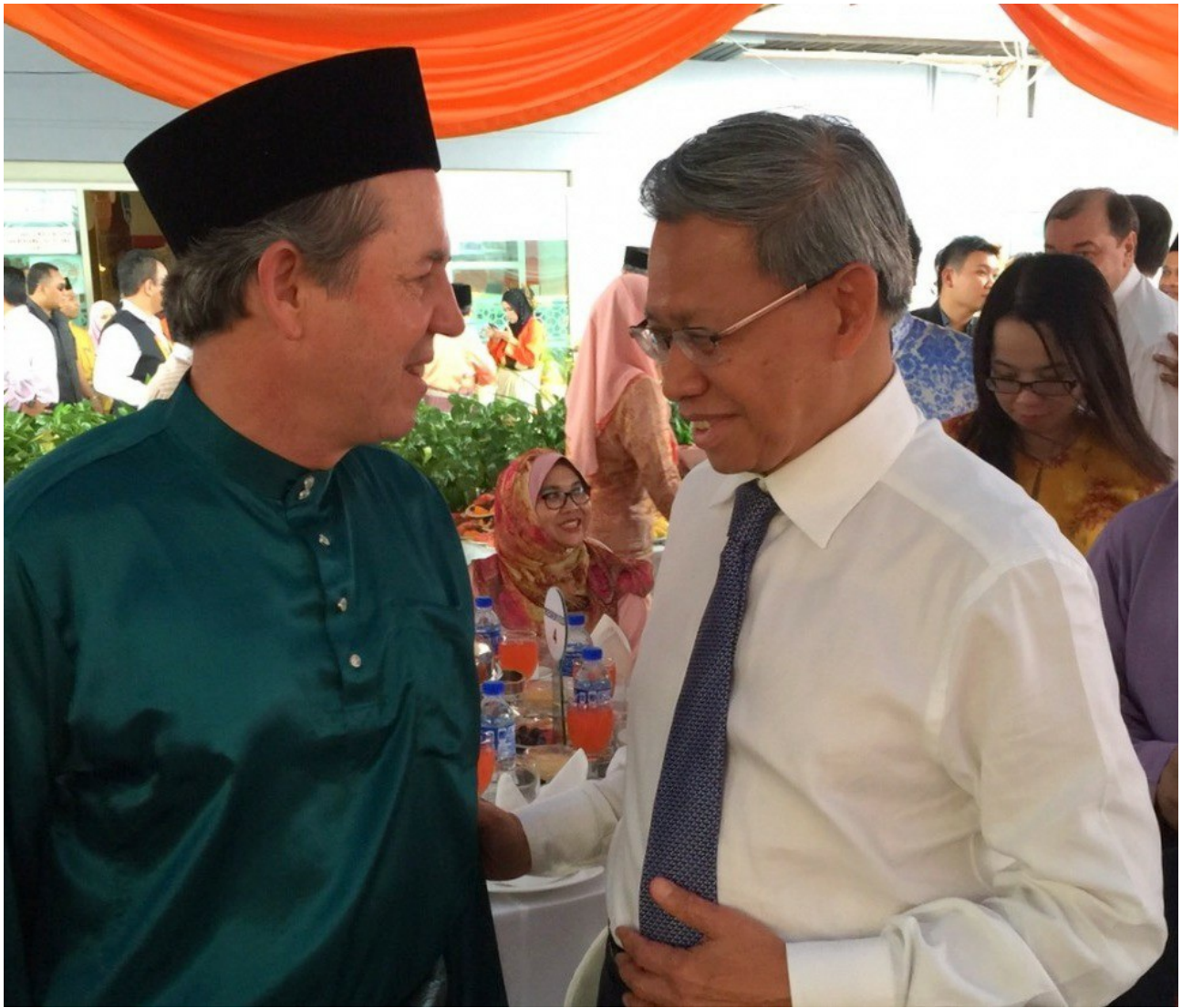
People of all faiths and persuasions should come to Malaysia and study how Malaysians are able to get along and prosper while being diverse with a tolerant and practical Muslim core. Malaysia should be encouraged and supported by the international community as the model for how we can solve some of the seemingly intractable problems we confront today and held up as a model to follow.

If Seagate Global's experience is any indication, new businesses and investors will find a warm welcome to Malaysia.

For example we were personally invited by the Malaysian Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Datuk Dr. Awang Adek Bin Hussin to focus on lending to SME's in Malaysia, which we are doing. Here is a picture of the seminal meeting with His Excellency (center left), myself, and Gene Krinn of SeaSpire (R) at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington DC:



We have also been encouraged by the Ministry of Trade and Industry to expand our trading operations. Here is a picture of a luncheon we attended with the Minister of Trade and Industry, Dato' Sri Mustapa bin Mohamed:



Many other Malaysian government officials have been genuinely welcoming to Seagate Global as well, and I am sure others will receive the same hospitality.

In our efforts in Malaysia I have been lucky to have great business partners, especially the CEO of Seagate Global Capital Sdn Bhd, Eng. Noor Adli Sapari. He has put together a highly talented Bumiputera trading operation (pictured above) focused on helping Bumiputera and other contractors and suppliers expand their businesses using international capital provided by the Seagate Global Group.

Seagate Global Capital has put on a number of educational seminars for SME's in Malaysia on how to obtain international investment. Here is one with Mr. Adli speaking:



Seagate Global Capital now has an active and well funded investment program to provide financing to SME's in Malaysia (see [www.seagateglobal.com.my](http://www.seagateglobal.com.my)).

We may sound idealistic to some, and maybe we are. But in fact our approach is very practical. Few businesses are trying to build bridges across the chasm because it is difficult and sometimes uncomfortable. This equates to opportunity. We have the support of the Malaysian government as we are focused on their agenda. We are helping grass root family businesses with limited access to financing with our investment program. We are providing a fair return to our investors, and we are creating a sustainable business that is rebuilding bridges between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. It is a modest chip against the stone, but we are fighting.

We are also optimistic because those wishing to divide have announced themselves, and they have nothing positive to offer. They will be corralled and the rest of us will go back to peaceful cooperation.

In the meantime, come down to Kuala Lumpur, get yourself a cool batik shirt, enjoy some of the best food in the world, and see how the Malaysians get along.

