

RAMA'S SPEECH 2016 KIRKBY REUNION

20-22 May 2016 Kirkby Reunion at the Sunway West Hotel

Mr Chairman, Fellow Kirkbyites, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Since the last time we met in June 2014, we have sadly lost 17 Kirkbyites. Each passing of a Kirkbyite is an irreparable loss and diminishes our number as a community.

Of all the friends that we have lost over the past two years, and even before that, the demise of Cikgu Baharuddin was a heart-wrenching loss. Cikgu belonged to the pioneering group of Kirkbyites who blazed the trail for Malayan Education. He was very much part of Kirkby history.

He was there when Kirkby started and he went back to Kirkby two years later in January 1956 to be part of the Kirkby teaching staff until 31 December 1960 just before Kirkby's history came to a sad end two years later.

He passed away on 10 January, after his 90th birthday in September and his 60th Wedding Anniversary in December. He was such an affable person. We will miss him.

May the souls of all Kirkbyites, from every batch, who had passed on, rest in peace.

Fellow Kirkbyites:

We meet once again, as we do once in every two years, to share our common friendship and remember a place that remains an emotional landmark.

Once in two years we meet to perpetuate the Kirkby memory. And we have been doing this since 2004. The first three Reunions regrettably involved the last three batches only.

But beginning from 2010, when Penang organised the Kirkby Reunion we decided to throw open this Reunion for the first time to all the batches. And what an astonishing response we received. A total of 207 Kirkbyites and family members turned up! Even after more than 60 years the nostalgic pull of Kirkby was irresistible.

This bond that we share with Kirkby is special; this friendship is extraordinary; this fraternity is amazing.

I have been privileged to experience this remarkable fraternity in more than one way. Let me take some of your time to share this with you.

A few weeks ago, in an email to me, Mahaya Menon referred to me as “My Kirkby Brother.” That touched a chord in my heart. Mahaya was absolutely correct. In the Kirkby Family we are more than friends: We are brothers and sisters.

At the end of 2013, I picked up a terrible bug in Jakarta. I lost 7kgs in two weeks. I couldn't walk at the airport in Jakarta on my return trip to Penang and had to be in the wheelchair. The persistent fever that I suffered from took a heavy toll on me.

I was advised by my family doctor to get myself admitted into a private hospital in Penang for a thorough investigation. After 11 days and after being billed for RM12,850, I was told that the fever was from an unknown origin. The hospital simply could not cure me after all the expensive tests that I was subjected to. And I got myself discharged. What happened, I'll keep it for the next Reunion!

The point that I want to make is this. Another Kirkbyite, Inom bt Yon, from the 54-56 batch rang me up to find out how I was getting on. When I told her that I had to spend RM12,850 and was not cured, she immediately said, “Rama let me contribute something to ease your financial burden.” I told her, “Inom, I am okay and I don't need any help.” At once she said, ‘Rama, I'm your sister, let me help you.’ Of course I would not accept her offer.

I have never met Inom in my life. For her to readily offer financial help, it speaks volumes for the Kirkby spirit.

When I went to Alor Star for my heart procedure on 14 March 2016, Leo Turner from the 60-61 batch travelled all the way from Bukit Mertajam, driving all alone some 103 km to provide moral support for me and Poh Yuk. This amazing friend, once again came the next day when my heart procedure was done driving the same distance to be with us. This is the strength of the Kirkby family.

Sarada Menon, arranged for a prayer to be conducted in India at the time of my heart procedure and Punithavathy offered special prayers for a successful procedure. I only met them two years ago at the 2014 Penang Kirkby Reunion. Before 2014 I did not know that they even existed. Their concern for a member of the Kirkby family took my breath away. This kindred spirit was so over-whelming and heart-warming.

I was then reminded of a saying, “A friend is someone who reaches for your hand, but touches your heart.”

In the year 2000, i.e. 16 years ago, Choong Cheng Swee from the 59-60 batch went for his open-heart surgery at the IJN. Shan from Port Dickson and I from Penang came all the way and kept Lean Aing and her family company at the IJN and later left – Shan for PD and I for Penang - only after Cheng Swee’s surgery was successfully completed in the evening. Lean Aing was so grateful and touched, she thanked us profusely. I remember responding, “Lean Aing, we are a family.” That’s how we should conduct ourselves, as members of the Kirkby family.

There are many more incidences and occasions when this Kirkby spirit shone like a bright star in the sky. I have been, as many of you must have been, beneficiary of this affection and kindness. But you are too many to be mentioned individually but believe me I treasure those moments gratefully.

Kirkby evokes much emotion and many memories. It will remain as an emotional landmark that will not disappear. The soul of Kirkby is embedded so deeply in the hearts of Kirkbyites.

No institution evokes so much nostalgia or holds so many memories. Kirkby is truly an exception. Schools and universities do not have that binding bond. That kindred spirit only belongs to Kirkby.

In the words of Nat King Cole in the song Unforgettable,” It clings to you as a song of love.”

Kirkby is not a name or place or a memory. It is much more than that.

It opened up our minds; broadened our knowledge; instilled social graces; taught us to live in harmony with others of different faiths and ethnicity; it made us into wholesome human beings. This moulding of the person is the hallmark of Kirkby.

As inheritors of this fantastic education, we have remained true to the Kirkby spirit. It is that sustaining spirit of friendship that has brought us together today. Even after 64 years later that we could maintain our links with so many Kirkbyites is a remarkable tribute to Kirkby.

My life has been enriched by this friendship and the enduring affection that I share with so many others, even those I had not met or have had a long history of friendship.

Some people wonder what is so special about this friendship.

Let me quote what I stated at the Penang Kirkby Reunion in 2014:

“This is a friendship that transcends our ethnicity and religious differences. This friendship represents our common humanity. We are among people who are not seen as Malays, Chinese and Indians. You see them as people, as brothers and sisters – they are never seen as a Malay, Chinese or Indian.

This is what we inherited in Kirkby!”

This is why this friendship is so special.

I remain ever grateful to Kirkby for another very important reason. Kirkby gave me a wife who is completely devoted to me. Whenever some friends remark, ‘Rama, you look good,’ my standard reply has always been, ‘I owe it to God and my wife.’ And I meant it!

Let us remember, as I mentioned in 2010, ‘We are the custodians of Kirkby memory and it is our duty to keep that memory alive and going. That is why this biennial Reunion must continue as long as there are Kirkbyites who are around and able to organise. Otherwise we will be failing ourselves and it would not be fair to Kirkby.

We have to keep the Kirkby memory alive. That much we owe it to Kirkby.

As I had observed in the past, ‘We are the guardians of the Kirkby history; we are the keepers of that memory. Our memories may become vague with the passing of years and Kirkby history may have passed and gone but the memories and the history will not vanish from our hearts. They will remain in each one of us until the final day.’

Let’s be reminded:

**At the end of the day,
Memories are all that matter,
Things fade away,
People change...
But memories will live forever**

Thank you, my dear friends.