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A common crusade

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THE RECENT National Congress on Vision 2020 which was attended by 800 people comprising cabinet ministers, chief ministers, captains of industry, academicians, women leaders and young Malaysians was unprecedented in its free, frank and open exchange of thoughts, views and ideas. There was a meeting of minds on the way forward to achieve Vision 2020. Besides opening the congress, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad returned at the end of the second day for an open dialogue session with the participants.

The congress deliberated at length on the nine strategic challenges facing Vision 2020. It was an eye-opener for many of the participants, particularly those from the corporate sector, who had often regarded Vision 2020 as an economic programme. Many of them did not fully realise that Vision 2020 is a wholistic programme that encompasses a political agenda, an economic agenda, a social agenda as well as a psychological agenda.

Of the nine challenges, those that can be grouped under the political agenda include 'establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny, ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one Bangsa Malaysia with political loyalty and dedication to the nation' as well as the challenges of 'fostering and developing a mature democratic society' and a 'mature, liberal and tolerant society'.

The psychological agenda encompasses the challenge of 'creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society with faith and confidence in itself, justifiably proud of what it is, of what it has accomplished, robust enough to face all manner of adversity'.

The social agenda covers the challenge of 'establishing a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards' as well as the challenge of 'establishing a fully caring society and a caring culture'.

The economic agenda includes the challenge of ensuring an economically just society and the challenge of establishing a 'prosperous society, with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient' as well as the challenge of establishing a scientific and progressive society that is innovative and forward looking.

The prime minister provided a road-map of how the nation can move forward to achieve Vision 2020. Various other speakers also shared their perspectives on each of the nine strategic challenges. The congress also provided opportunity for participants to speak out. Women and young Malaysian representatives were especially articulate and forthright during the dialogue sessions. This augurs well for the nation. A number of interesting proposals were put forward during the congress. Many of them deserve to be followed up whilst others require further study.

To promote national unity, among the suggestions put forward were the need to achieve territorial integration and the promotion of common values. Politically, it was suggested that the political system should expeditiously move towards a multi-racial party with the Barisan Nasional reconstituting itself as one multi-racial entity. It was further suggested that ethnic or state-based parties should open their doors. Although it was recognised that affirmative action is still essential, we should endeavour to do away with the bumiputra-non-bumiputra dichotomy. Education

was recognised as a vital tool to foster national unity. The Elections Commission was urged to create more mixed constituencies. In his response the prime minister said that he 'would like to see a day when people don't think of race'.

On the challenge of establishing a democratic society, among the proposals put forward were to allow greater freedom to express dissenting views without fear and the need to balance rights of individuals and rights of society at large. The importance of citizen education was highlighted. The call for greater accountability and transparency was also made. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to have non-partisan representation in the Senate. Commenting on the importance of political stability, the prime minister said that a 'bad, stable government is better than a good, unstable government'. In fact, there was widespread acceptance of the argument that a key factor behind Malaysia's success is political stability.

On the challenge of creating a psychologically liberated society, it was stressed that inhibiting factors should be removed. The culture of conformity and the fear to be different as well as overprotective upbringing were cited as examples of inhibiting factors so much so that Malaysians generally tend to be risk averse. It was suggested that championing of the right role-models is essential. We need to also promote robust individualism, positive thinking and trust in others. Communication skills of young Malaysians should be improved.

On the challenge of establishing a mature, liberal and tolerant society, it was suggested that the word tolerant be replaced with mutual understanding. It was proposed that this challenge be achieved through the individual, the family, the government and the media. Another suggestion advanced is to have a positive value-based campaign.

To achieve a competitive and prosperous economy, it was suggested that we need international benchmarking, a master plan for the services sector, more venture capital financing and higher productivity. It was further suggested that we need to reduce dependence on imports of foreign components. It was also highlighted that we need more engineers as well as the means to turn them into entrepreneurs. To overcome the manpower shortage, it was proposed that efforts be made to attract the 150,000 Malaysians working overseas to return home. Human resource development was identified as a key success factor for achieving a prosperous society and competitive economy.

To establish a scientific and progressive society, it was suggested that Malaysia should aim to be a net producer of technology. We should also recognise how stiff the race or the competition is going to be. We need to create a 'scientific mind' among young Malaysians as well as to foster a research-based thinking culture. The question of how to make science more interesting in schools was also discussed. Another suggestion was to create a Malaysian Nobel Laureate Foundation to create our own version of Nobel prize winners.

In the discussions on the caring society and the caring culture, it was suggested that we need a comprehensive approach and a do-able programme. The important roles of the family and the media were highlighted. Four sign-posts of a caring society were identified:

1. absence or presence of voluntarism,
2. continuum of care - do we give care givers emotional or financial support?
3. protection of those who are marginalised, and
4. provision of social sustenance.

The issues of social stresses and needs of the family in the workplace were discussed. It was recognised that ultimately, we need to maintain

basic decency, courtesy and good manners.

To promote an economically just society, it was suggested that we need to have a good monitoring system. Other issues addressed included a level-playing field, poverty eradication, social responsibility, disparity between rural and urban areas, urban poverty and intra-ethnic income disparity.

One of the more important challenges now is the establishment of a moral and ethical society. Our growth momentum has set the economic agenda on track. There is general acceptance of the fact that morals have declined in Malaysian society with the rise of social decadence and that needs to be arrested. We need to restore moral fibre in our younger generation. Some of the suggestions put forward to achieve a fully moral and ethical society include:

- * sending the right message to our younger generation to have the right balance between pursuing economic success and other moral and ethical values,

- * developing a Rukun Niaga, just as we have a Rukunegara, to provide a code of ethical conduct for business which will incorporate salient features from common religious values.

- * launching a zero-corruption campaign, just as the government had earlier launched a zero-inflation campaign. It was noted that generally, there is a lack of public outrage against corruption. This has to change. People must abhor corruption.

- * providing the right role-models for our young. In this regard, the teaching of universal moral values was stressed. Good parenting was also emphasised. It was pointed out that those who teach moral values should practise good moral values themselves. It was recognised that efforts must be expanded to institutionalise good moral value systems.

- * instituting various reform measures that will encompass legal and institutional reforms, social reforms and awareness building.

- * making religion a way of life for Malaysians.

The prime minister also stressed upholding good moral values. He added that one important value to develop is 'virtue or value of shame'. We need to feel ashamed if we do wrong.

The Vision 2020 National Congress brings up the point that we need to collectively move forward. To do so, the whole nation must act in unison. Employers, employees, the unions, government and non-governmental organisations must together pull in the same direction. Vision 2020 provides us with a road map to reach our final destination of becoming a fully-developed nation. We need to manage the journey well. In this regard, business, NGO and political leaders must appraise their respective roles. Corporate managers too, as opinion-leaders and prime-movers in society, must play their part.

It would be useful for us to consider the next steps in our journey towards Vision 2020. One possibility is to create a People's Charter for Vision 2020 that will be a common declaration for Vision 2020. This should be recited regularly at school assemblies. Clubs and societies should also recite this charter before commencement of meetings. The government should also consider establishing a Ministry of Vision 2020 that will be a central coordinating body for all Vision 2020 projects as well as to develop long-range strategic planning for Vision 2020. Vision 2020 Councils should also be established at state, district and local levels to galvanise the national momentum to achieve all the targets set out under Vision 2020. Performance should be regularly monitored and reviewed and public feedback obtained.

In short, Vision 2020 should become a total national movement.

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