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The Malaysia to come, according to Vision 2020

MUCH needs to be done to bring to fruition the vision that was born on Feb 28, 1991. The objectives are clear but just like the period after independence, the odds seem to be stacked against us, writes Noordin Sopiee.

I am a great believer in Vision 2020. It said what we had wanted to say but did not have the guts to for a generation.

It embodies the finest traditions of our people. It reflects our fondest hopes for our future and that of our children.

The first strategic objective of Vision 2020 is to establish "a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and 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 I have grown older I have moved away from the model of the single melting pot, where all are thrown in, and from which we get a single processed soup. That soup might be called "American" or "British" or "French" or "Japanese".

I do not know whether it is wisdom that comes with age or merely the early advancement of senility which tells me that perhaps the Malaysian way has to be a "Malaysia ubber alles" or Swiss approach.

Under this approach, we each retain our strong ethnic, cultural and other differences but we superimpose over our differing and multiple identities an identity, a commitment and a devotion to our country so strong that when it is necessary, when it is put to the test, our national identity is the first identity without equal, our commitment and devotion to the Malaysian nation is the first commitment bar none.

I used to believe that it was probably impossible to achieve one "Bangsa Malaysia" by 2020. I now believe that it is well within reach. It is within reach if we remain moderate and pragmatic, if we retain our genius for getting along, for compromise and for plain common sense.

I certainly know I speak for many Malaysians when I express my prayer that my children and my grandchildren will not have to deal with the racism, racial prejudices and bigotry that my father and I and those of our generation had to deal with.

The second objective of Vision 2020 is to "create 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.

"This Malaysian society must be distinguished by the pursuit of excellence, fully aware of all its potential, psychologically subservient to none, and respected by the peoples of other nations."

For the last 400 years, the peoples of Malaysia have suffered not from the corruption of power but from the corruption of powerlessness. This is the strong belief not in our ability but in our disabilities. As we knew only too well, there were many, many things we could not do - which others could.

Climb Everest? Not on your life! Sail around the world single-handedly? Don't be silly!

All of us were born free. Yet we were all in chains imposed by our culture, our beliefs. We have all gone a long way in breaking these chains of the mind, which are as strong and as much a handicap as are the irons

that many still wear on their feet.

I think history will say that we owe much of our progress in the essential process of psychological liberation, in the restoration of dignity, to Mahathir bin Mohamad, the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Of all the challenges set out in Vision 2020, I believe that the greatest headway has been made in this area.

Of course, from time to time we see crude excesses: the perverse jump from Malaysia Boleh to Kita Boleh Buat Apa Sahaja. Hopefully, the irrational exuberance of recent days will give way to a more mature and quiet confidence.

The third objective of Vision 2020 is the fostering and development of "a mature democratic society, practising a form of mature consensual, community-oriented Malaysia democracy that can be a model for many developing countries".

As someone who has seen much water flow under many bridges, let me say that our democratic political system and democratic society have undergone great changes. Some have been good. Some have been bad.

Some may yearn for the days when a small elite - which of course felt they were the best trained, the best educated, the most sophisticated - ruled our land. They ruled politically, economically, culturally and socially.

When they put on bush jackets, those who sought to rise in the world put on bush jackets. When they bowed deeply to the genius of P. Ramlee, everyone bowed deeply to the genius of P. Ramlee.

Those were the days of gentlemen politics, in the social and sports club, in the trade union, in the political parties.

There is no doubt that those days are gone very much in the way that life before the advent of television is gone. In the years ahead, we must seek the development of new productive political forms and processes. These must inevitably be more democratic, less directed from above, more participatory and less elitist.

We must not fear the new politics; rather, we must embrace the new politics of Malaysia in the new millennium. Just as the last decade has seen the most radical economic transformation of Malaysia, the next decade must be a decade of political development.

I know that preventive detention and detention without trial, police brutality and the use of money to buy votes are not Malaysian inventions. They exist in many countries.

But it is altogether clear that in the new politics of Malaysia in the new millennium, the Internal Security Act has no place, police brutality in any form cannot be tolerated, and money politics cannot be condoned.

If Umno is to prosper in the future as it has done in the past, it will need to renew, rejuvenate and re-invent itself. So will the rest of the Barisan Nasional.

Before the opposition parties celebrate this reality, let me also say that it is equally obvious that Pas too will need to change radically. The DAP too will need to change fundamentally if it is to remain relevant in the new millennium.

Do not get me wrong. Irresponsible liberalism is a danger. Ours must be an idealism that is without illusion. We must not forget the dictates of national security.

There are the most fundamental problems of maturity and competence and discipline among our young which must be tackled without naivety and with resolution. But many of the old ways and institutions of the past must give way to the new.

Amongst the key political challenges must obviously be the comprehensive engagement and the fullest participation of our youth and the most

important, the most neglected (and surely the most oppressed) citizens of Malaysia; the women.