

12/09/2000

Equitable sharing of cost and profit

Abdullah Ahmad

MALAYSIAN politics is complex given its racial and religious mix. Therefore it does not and cannot follow a straightforward equation.

In an emerging k-economy era, which augurs both peril and opportunity, our overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the Malaysian spirit and not racial goals. Last Friday, I addressed on Malaysian politics organised by the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies of Singapore at the famed Pyramid Club. I was impressed by those who attended. They were mainly young Singaporeans who were clearly imbued with the Singapore spirit.

Bumiputeras and other Malaysians must forge a more determined and transparent partnership that transcends racial objectives. A collaboration based on consultation, cooperation and collective action, united by the principle and spirit of the Federal Constitution and the rule of law.

In this enterprise of nation building, all Malaysians must agree to equitable sharing of cost, commitment and profit. The well-tried and tested ground rules of Malaysian politics must be scrupulously observed. I believe the present constitutional arrangement has increased democracy, prosperity, harmony and reduced conflicts since 1969 and will continue to do so into the future. However, more can and must be done to achieve better results.

All efforts by the ruling Umno and partners to retain and enhance their power are not unjust, as the Opposition also has every reason to want to be the government.

Whether it succeeds is another matter altogether. Likewise, President Abdurrahman Wahid, despite Aryanti's allegation of an illicit relationship with him, has every right to do what he wants to consolidate his shaky presidency and Indonesia's precarious state of affairs. Does he appear to want to stay in power at any cost? The problems he encounters are numerous, and I suppose, how he continues to manage never-ending political haggling for Cabinet and political posts among others, will determine the fate of his presidency and also Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri's political career.

The Malaysian goals are clear. By the year 2020 we should have achieved developed nation status, with a population of between 31 million and 32 million. Singapore, after all, managed to achieve this status in the short span of 35 years. The Malaysian target, despite the financial crises, seems attainable provided that the reasonably fast economic recovery, current and probable growth rates, continued pragmatic economic policies and political stability are maintained.

The US, being the sole superpower, seems determined to recast the world along the American democratic model. Their determination seems to have only increased and not diminished. President Bill Clinton and all his modern predecessors, George Bush in particular, often spoke of the New World Order, and at times I thought as if it was just around the corner. But in fact, as Henry Kissinger observed, "it is still in a period of gestation, and its final form will not be visible well into the next century". (He said this in 1994).

We will not be spared this "American neo-imperialism", as witnessed in the last two years or so. This is an open-ended American policy (world domination) of trying to apply its domestic policies and American values to the rest of the world.

They have been trying to do this since the time when Woodrow Wilson was still President. Rest assured that this policy will be continued with various degrees of vigour by whoever succeeds Clinton.

Washington's "naib penghulu", Australia's John Howard Aussie and Aussie diplomats are entitled to their opinions, but they and their media must also report about Malaysia which bears some resemblance to the facts.

Malaysia's future will depend on the unity in diversity. However, the dividing line among the communities can be more tenuous before a distinct Bangsa Malaysia emerges. Of the projected population of 31 to 32 million, it is estimated that Bumiputeras will make up approximately 70 per cent, Chinese 21 per cent, Indians 6 per cent and others making up the balance.

It does seem that if political stability and sustainable economic development continue, Dr Mahathir Mohamad's 2020 vision will succeed.

We may even make it faster if we put more emphasis to the development of human capital - talent and creativity of all Malaysians who have made Malaysia their object of undivided loyalty. I sense a "Malaysian identity", which may not yet appear distinct, is evolving from a polyglot of the national composition.

Ours is a post-colonial success story, a distinct phenomenon. In Africa and elsewhere, the alternative to the status quo is an endless and brutal civil conflict.

Some Western leaders and media have always claimed they are interfering in the domestic affairs of sovereign and independent nations in the name of democratic principle and free speech. They are not. It is in their economic and political interest.

We value Richelieu's concept of raison d'etat - that the interests of the nation (Malaysia) justify the means. We do not have to apologise to anybody.

(END)