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New team should redefine 'Melayu Baru' by injecting proper values

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IN the 1970s, the non-Malays used to laugh at the way the Malays performed the silat, saying it was too elaborate, with too many frills and lacking the aggressiveness of other martial arts, especially the kung fu.

However, ask any Malay and he would vehemently defend the silat and provide details of its potency as opposed to other martial arts apart from the belief that the Malay silat is heavily laced with supernatural powers.

At the same time, the more responsive to the criticism decided to introduce variations like the silat lincah, the aggressiveness of which, if not surpassing, is equal to other martial arts.

But during that period, pursuing changes and being reactionary to them were not confined to the silat in so far as the Malay community is concerned.

In fact, during the 1970s, the Malays were definitely at a crossroads in almost all aspects, be it in their pursuit for economic gain, academic excellence and even in Islamic religious understanding.

The National Economic Policy became the catalyst, the impetus and also the proponent to these changes.

The policy brought hopes, dreams and ambitions among the Malays by allowing them to stand equal with the other races, especially the Chinese who seemed to excel in almost everything that moved in the country.

Even though it has been three decades since the inception of the NEP, Umno, both leaders and members, not only in this general assembly, but in almost all the preceding ones, keep talking about it, one way or another.

It is understandable as the NEP, whichever way one chooses to look at it, has succeeded in bringing changes to the community.

It is an Umno success which has inevitably changed the facade of the Malay community as a whole.

But as in any other case, not all that comes along with change is positive in nature.

In fact, change which brings along success requires an equally strong commitment and conviction to minimise the negative effects that had crept within.

It is about managing success even though some say it is not something to shout about.

That is what Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad meant in his opening address at the general assembly yesterday when he spoke at length on how some of the objectives of the NEP, including the push for Malay urban migration, had created a different kind of people, detached from the traditional values which had bound the community for years.

In many ways, the more prolific and adventurous new Malays adopted some of the ways the Chinese conduct their economic ventures and emerged as successful entrepreneurs.

Of course, at that time and even until present day, the reactionaries tend to oppose the need to emulate some of the good working ethics of the successful non-Malay businessmen, arguing that the Malays should stick to their non-aggressive approach in pursuit of worldly gains.

The justification is that this world is for the non-Muslims but the life hereafter is for the Muslim faithful.

Within this dichotomy of thoughts and perceptions, the nation propelled forward.

The more "liberated" Malays grabbed the opportunities while the

lackadaisical ones remained trapped in comfort zones created through their own sense of contentment and complacency.

Despite that, the new Malays, as a whole, still managed, either through conscious effort or otherwise, to share the success of the nation.

It is only the measure of success that differs.

Amid this success, less than a decade ago, the term Melayu Baru (new Malays) came to the fore.

Though no one actually gave a specific definition to it, it is generally accepted as an alumni for confident, aggressive and nouveau riche Malays.

By the time the 1993 Umno general assembly was held when the Wawasan Team under Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's leadership, swept all the top party posts, from the deputy presidency, vice-presidency, youth chief and numerous supreme council posts, the definition started to have added dimensions.

The Melayu Baru of Umno started to represent crass middle-class and nouveau riche Malays who flaunted their wealth and were Machiavellian in their pursuits of both political positions and economic gains.

In short, money politics was the order of the day for these Melayu Baru.

That established, further additions to what Melayu Baru meant included the vices, from being dangdut lounge regulars, womanisers to gamblers.

Of course it would be unfair to place them all in the same mould but some of the leaders were brazen in their practices which made it easy for the perception to prevail.

Redefining Melayu Baru through the essence of the Malay culture, values and religion as proposed by Dr Mahathir in his presidential address yesterday is definitely food for thought among the Umno members.

After all, much as there are other Malays who had fallen prey to the vices associated to the earlier alumni of Melayu Baru, these Umno members, who may have a hand in propagating them, have a responsibility to take the lead for the re-definition of it.

It is profound but the problem is again the polarity in the Malay psyche in dealing with such matters.

On one hand, the 'liberated' Malays, in pursuit of worldly prowess, tend to totally give up the values Dr Mahathir has raised on what the preferred Melayu Baru should be.

On the other, are the Malays, who in essence are still hanging on strongly to the traditional conventions and religious values but at the same time still believe that Datuk Azhar Mansor's success in circumnavigating the world was due to some supernatural powers that he possesses.

Now that the election of the vice-presidents and supreme council members is over and they would later be part of the post-Mahathir era, the responsibility to realise the Melayu Baru lies in their hands.

They will definitely be responsible for the process of re-generation of Umno and along the way, should try to inject their values.

After all, many of them were part of the Wawasan Team and the past should be able to provide them with extensive experience in what went wrong with the first generation Melayu Baru.

However, if they fail, then the Malay Dilemma, Part Two is about to unfurl.

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