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Towards the civil society psyche for all Malaysians

Askiah Adam

CHANGING the Malaysian mindset is indeed a priority for it is obvious that something is not quite right.

Take, for instance, the very simple and obvious example of public amenities.

Be they publicly or privately owned, nobody seems concerned about maintaining them.

Buses plying many routes look very much like junkyard specimens.

Obviously, the enforcement officers are not enforcing and the people who use them are not complaining despite having to pay for the privilege.

Malaysians keep their homes clean and tidy but they will litter the public parks without compunction.

Look around you, people are also oblivious to the need for preserving sizeable areas of city green belts.

The city is densely packed, the proverbial concrete jungle, and suburbia is all about waves of houses in a sterile desert of shrubs and ornamental palms.

As the green lung is killed to make way for development, the resulting cauldron is throwing up even more opportunities for wealth creation as the astute among us realise the potential of hawking lifestyles.

It is too hot outside so why not tap into man's natural instincts to nest.

That the majority are oblivious to the environmental degradation going on around them is an indication that an awareness gap exists.

Even their retching lungs cannot punch through the impervious wall blocking their mental evolution.

When it does though, it is worn like a designer label. These are those who have become lifestyle victims.

They mistake westernisation for modernisation.

They are the ones who have no notion of true excellence other than to sport either Ivy League or Oxbridge qualifications.

Despite the prime minister's glaring example, they go on believing that it is not what you know but where you go to know that matters.

They are the ones who misperceive Dr Mahathir's call for a better command of English, for example, and go on to embrace the language with such gusto, even forsaking their mother tongue.

At the other end of the spectrum, there live a people who, despite the ample democratic space in the country, remain blinkered by a self-destructive ultra conservatism.

Staunch supporters of such political parties as Pas, they are working to spearhead the backlash against development.

These are those who revert to borrowed fundamentalist ideology, looking for trouble where there is none.

They fight to prevent their children from being modern because quite like the other lot they, too, are unable to distinguish between modernisation and westernisation.

They look back upon the past with nostalgia and hanker after socio-legal systems that have long fallen into disuse.

Neither is this lot better aware of the environment.

They despise all who do not share their archaic views. They are as a people living in caves.

The issue posed here by these two extremes is wither the change.

There is no doubting the need for a psyche makeover, but what are we meaning to gain from the change?

We know what we don't want. Do we, however, know what we want?

And, if we do, do we know for certain that what we want is right?

From the simple fact that much is made of paper qualifications with little interest in actual knowledge and knowhow, there is every reason to believe that Malaysia is managed by shallowness.

When those in charge lack pro-fundity, the truth is not so easily discovered.

The acting prime minister's call for a mental evolution is indeed timely.

In fact, the change must be revolutionary as evolution can cause the world to pass us by as we slowly lumber towards the future.

And, not only must we seek out the means but, we must, too, know the end of those means.

We mouth the call towards civil society repeatedly.

We talk of the need for clean public toilets and insist that those who avail themselves of the convenience help in maintaining cleanliness.

We abhor queue jumping, be it on the roads or elsewhere.

We decry corruption as an evil but, do we know why other than to dismiss them as evils.

At the rhetorical level, yes, they are all bad. Yet, these habits appear almost impossible to shed.

It clings on and refuses to dissipate, let alone disappear.

Why? To the average Joe dirty toilets don't kill us, queue jumping only fosters the survival of the fittest and corruption enriches quite a handsome bunch of people. So, why are we whining?

Like environmental degradation, the evil lies in its ability to annihilate humanity or, at the very least, life as we know it.

The loss of the world's jungle is contributing to global warming because the green jungles acting as the earth's lungs are disappearing.

As such, the jungles are our lung too. Without them we cannot breathe unless, of course, we mutate.

Bottomline, therefore, is the need for humanity to see the holism of divine creation's disparateness; the interdependency premiss: the interdependence between species, among them in the past, for the present and the future.

The genius of humanity is to create social structures that this holism can accommodate because breaking it is breaking us.

One of the most important is the rule of law, which will realise for mankind the justice they want.

However, what humankind wants cannot go against what mankind needs.

Civil society is all about its constituent members living within natural and created boundaries willingly with the full understanding of the mechanics of human social existence.

This is what a mental revolution must aspire to.

Only then will we know the havoc that corruption, nepotism and dirty public toilets can wreak and work towards its ultimate elimination.

A mind that is conscious is the one that will feed the country's drive for modernisation.