

Our lost decade
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COMMENT The end of 2010 brings to a close our first decade in the new millennium. It might be profitable to reflect on the last 12 months and see what we have achieved.

More importantly, what were the opportunities that we missed? The focus is in the realm of politics, the economy, environment, culture and society.

Politics remain at the top of everyone's mind. Politicians, almost all opinion polls show, are still distrusted. There has been little attempt to forge a middle path.

In 2009, after Abdullah Badawi leaving palace the now legendary routing of the BN and the resignation of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as premier, all types of provocations were thrown at the Malaysian public. We have been very fortunate as Malaysians ignored ethnic and religious baiting.

In 2010, the voices of discord have become so shrill that with each passing article, the sales of newspapers plummet to new depths. In cyber-space, opinions of all hues continue to pervade with social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter the main instruments of alternative political messages.

Whilst government supporters are now better organised, the battle for hearts and minds continue to favour contrarians. Will this translate into votes? Nobody knows and nobody wants to take chances.

The monopoly on information by traditional media is gone but it remains to be seen how effective the alternative media is in the semi-rural and rural areas. In short, polarisation continues to intensify in the political arena.

The missed opportunities in the political arena is that we do not have leaders who dare to be different; who can bridge the great divide and provide leadership on a national-scale.

NONENajib Abdul Razak is trying very hard and to his credit is gaining ground in his personal likeability index but this does not necessarily mean votes for the ruling coalition. Anwar Ibrahim although charismatic is now so wounded that it would be surprising if he can reprise his role as a unifying figure.

There is little indication of credible second and third liners. In short, we are politically screwed. With no middle ground there can be no possibility of proper parliamentary debate; instead there is increasing pettiness and obsession with self-preservation.

Nation of acronyms

On the economic front, we continue to bleed capital and talent. We are now a nation of acronyms. There are so many acronyms representing diverse development strategies that this writer will be very surprised if the average Malaysian understands what these policies are and why we need them.

The government is trying very hard to be everything to everyone. The New Economic Model will be race-blind when it comes to eradicating poverty, especially of the bottom 40 percent yet the NEP is still relevant.

The reality is one the government is unable to articulate: our institutions including the civil service has decayed for so long that national policies need to be validated by consultants.

The government is concerned enough about Malaysia's future to acknowledge that we are in dire need of new economic strategies.

Whilst we are all agreed that a more equitable Malaysia is a common goal, there does not appear to be any consensus on how to achieve it. The BN's strategy is to grow the pie bigger but we have had that for 53 years and we are still a rather unequal society.

The opposition wants to cropakatan rakyat penang rally 160608 anwar ibrahimwn the rakyat,advocating a rakyat-based economic strategy.

Like governmental acronyms, the opposition has not shown us the cards in their hands. If the BN's policies are not working, what is the alternative?

We now have a group of people who call themselves the 'Third Force', some even aspiring to be the Liberal Democrats of Malaysia.

Fine, but please someone tell us what should be our economic strategy to attract talent and capital to drive economic growth that is sustainable and as equitable as possible?

Un-sexy issues

Malaysians are also growing very uneasy about the environment. Floods in Kedah are a clear indication that global warming is having very real effects on the ground. We have not spent nearly enough attention to prepare for the full-effects associated with climate change.

So much attention is focused on politics that a very important conference on renewable energy was hardly registered. In the meantime, we have literally mountains of waste to manage.

Tazlanhe government is suggesting nuclear power as an option for our future energy needs and a lot of attention is given to it.

But what we've not focused upon is the continued degradation of our natural resources owing to commercial agriculture resulting in the loss of 1m of top-soil over the last century or that we are now building dams because we want to get at the valuable timber.

Culture and society are also subjects that are not 'sexy' and only come up if it is associated with a political statement. Interlinked with these two subjects is education.

Now, what sort of country needs to revise its history syllabus every time there is a political debate?

What kind of societypolice headquarters bukit aman kills women and children; where the crime rate is so high that even the homes of retired police officers are not safe?

As we mull over politics, do we even ask ourselves what is the point of it all? These

questions, which cannot be quantified, are irrelevant. It is as though we have lost touch with our own gut-feeling; our internal moral compass.

In the next week there might still be some interesting political fireworks. Whilst we obsess about who will win the next general election, the world continues to march. Some will say the human race is marching towards its own extinction whilst others feel that we are being left behind by the van of progress.

Whatever your view, it cannot be good if we are unable to think nationally about education, healthcare, the economy, culture and society without being coloured by politics.

Some see Malaysia's problems as indications that we are the sick man of Southeast Asia. It is more correct to say that Malaysia is a nation in transition. It is our duty as citizens to make sure that we transition to become a better nation.

Happy New Year.

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