

**Vote spoiling is not flying where eagles dare**  
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COMMENT | Exhilarated with a Chinese New Year card which I received from an 18-year-old teenager, I shared his message with friends who had helped with his case.

The boy wrote: "Dear Uncle Stephen, Thanks for your help! You are mega (very) kind. Happy Chinese New Year!"

Credit where credit is due. Thanks to Foreign Minister Anifah Aman, this boy managed to return home just in time to celebrate the Chinese New Year with his family after a short stint away from home.

As things looked bleak, a light shone through the dark clouds. When I shared the message with my friends, I said that when there is darkness all over, the eagle will always soar above the thunderstorm, which brought to mind PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli, who was recently sentenced to 30 months' jail.

"Be that eagle," I said.

Several people responded to my short words of exhortation. Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute director Ramon Navaratnam said, "Too many are sparrows – sadly!"

The conversation went on. As most conversations do these days, the topic switched to the forthcoming general election. Navaratnam expressed his concerns over some four million young people who have not registered to vote.

He said that with the #UndiRosak campaign, Malaysia will deserve the kind of government it gets.

"What is the point then for us to grumble about Malaysia?" Navaratnam asked. "We are to be blamed for the mess that we face!"

Navaratnam took my analogy a little further: "So be an eagle, and not a sparrow that is always in fright and easily takes flight!"

Since the late 1990s, he has been very outspoken on a few key issues.

In the 2000s, Navaratnam was invited by a university to speak on the New Economic Policy and its effects on the social contract.

At the event, two Special Branch officers came to introduce themselves to me. They were sending a subtle message to let me – and therefore, Navaratnam – know that he was being watched, yet Navaratnam was willing to speak up boldly against policies that were deemed a sensitive topic to politicians.

Most people would have chickened out upon knowing that two Special Branch officers were sitting in the lecture room. Navaratnam simply ignored them and expressed his concerns about where the country was heading to.

Navaratnam (*photo*) has been doing this since the late 1990s, and he continues to speak up, bringing to mind the Edmund Burke maxim, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

This is why I salute men and women of stature, especially professionals, academicians, retired government and diplomatic officials and even young men and women who are willing to stand up and be counted.

They should dominate the public arena, instead of the political jesters we have today who dominate the news cycle.

If some are willing to be eagles that soar above the thunderclouds, why are so many of us content to be just sparrows? Why do we allow others to make us think and feel like sparrows when we should be eagles?

Why should we want to be meek and spoil our votes instead of believing we can soar above the storm?

It is time for us to start soaring with our most powerful tool for change – our votes.

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