

LETTER | Malaysians vs the Putrajaya megalomaniacs

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LETTER | Malaysians do not expect the government to solve all their problems. They know that to be successful and to make a decent living, they must be willing to work hard and spend conservatively. However, they despise a government detached from the realities of every day Malaysians. They loathe a prime minister who tells them they are poor because they are lazy, despite working countless hours.

They abhor a cabinet that tells them to work two jobs when they are already working 60-hour weeks, unable to make time for family and friends. They get enraged at a minister who tells them to not spend beyond their means when they are overworked and underpaid yet still earn below the poverty line.

Malaysians understand that it is not easy to make a good living, but they never pictured it as bordering on the impossible. It is irresponsible and shortsighted of the government to allow its people to spend money from their Employees'

Provident Fund (EPF) as a solution to the economic hardship faced during the pandemic, knowing that these funds are needed for them when they grow old.

It is preposterous that the government is more concerned with housing developers making astronomical profits than building affordable homes for ordinary Malaysians, particularly when one in four Malaysian families are yet to own one. It is unthinkable that the government refuses to increase the minimum wage (RM1,200) when the poverty line is almost double its amount (RM2,208).

Since the 1980s, the economic approach of the government has been heavily influenced by the doctrine of economic liberalism. The notion that 'the freer the market, the freer the people'. The idea that regulation is bad. They believe that tax cuts to the rich are good in hopes that their wealth will trickle down although it never has.

Four decades on, we have seen international economic institutions fail time and again. We witness the rich amass outrageous wealth while some people still sleep on the streets.

This must change. The role of government in Malaysia must change. It begins with ending the era of economic liberalism.

The role of the government is to ensure that as globalisation accelerates and the world develops at an increasing rate, nobody gets left behind. Malaysians do not want the system to be rigged in their favour — or preferences based on ethnicity, religion or social status — all they want is for everyone to have a fair opportunity at reaching their full potential. They refuse to believe that success is a zero-sum game; my success does not mean your failure and your failure does not mean my success.

It is for the success of all Malaysians that we yearn for. The role of the government is to bridge the gap between the rich and poor, the male and female, the able and disabled, among all races and religions. It is the role of the government to help the youths who have the ability, the drive and the will to attend the best universities but lack the financial capability to do so. It is the role of the government to offer a helping hand to the parents who work long hours yet still are forced to choose between paying the mortgage or the car loan.

Parents want the best for their children and believe that in a fair Malaysia, one does not need to be of a certain race or religion to be successful. The determined teenager who comes from a working-class family should be able to live the life she envisions because in a generous Malaysia, one does not need to be rich to be successful.

The young adult who was involved in a tragic car crash and lost both his legs believes that his country has a place for him too because in a tolerant Malaysia, physical or mental disabilities should be no barrier to success. It is the fundamental principle that despite our differences, we are one, we all deserve a fair and equal shot at life and that through hard work and perseverance, nothing is unachievable.

Our motherland was founded upon the values of liberty, equality and democracy. At a time when most Southeast Asian countries chose communism, Malaysia chose self-determination. Our founding fathers understood that to be a successful nation we must be united. They knew that despite our differences, we shared a common belief and an abiding faith in the promise of this land.

VT Sambanthan was born and raised in Sungai Siput, Perak. Twenty years earlier, his father had crossed the Bay of Bengal to Malaya. Tan Cheng Lock was conceived in Malacca. He was a fifth-generation Peranakan-Hokkien Chinese. They alongside Tunku Abdul Rahman founded Malaya and subsequently Malaysia. It brings me a great sense of pride knowing that our founding fathers were the descendants of immigrants.

Together we achieved independence not with the edge of a sword but with the power of unity and diplomacy. The values that come to form this nation must be

protected. One should have the right to speak and write his mind without the fear of being investigated by the police of Bukit Aman or spend the night locked up in Dang Wangi. People should be able to assemble peacefully for a common cause at Merdeka Square without being tear-gassed or sprayed with a water cannon by the FRU.

Every Malaysian has a right to practise their religion in peace and harmony in any part of this federation without the fear of retribution. Once every five years, it is our constitutional right to head to the polls and vote, either to retain or dismantle the federal or state government.

But these values that have come to define us as a people and this land as a nation are being suppressed by the megalomaniacs in Putrajaya. We are denied our representation in Parliament; our Federal Constitution currently suspended. Those between the ages of 18 and 20 are deprived of their constitutional right to vote. If we are not wary and miscalculate the importance of our democracy, we will return to the days of political retribution, despotism and intolerance that those who came before us endured for 446 years.

History tells the tale of a nation that is firm but not violent, diverse but united. Today, as we figure which path to take at the crossroads, remember the shared values, dreams and sacrifices that have come to form our motherland. When

tyranny and oppression ruled this land for over four centuries, we saw a generation rise to greatness and Malaya achieve independence. When racial riots broke and this nation seemed more divided than ever, our statesmen and people came together and unity reigned triumphantly.

When the Asian Financial Crisis hit, we responded by reaching for the skies with the Petronas Twin Towers and conquering Mount Everest through Magendran Munisamy as the Jalur Gemilang flew with might on top of the world. When a kleptocratic regime threatened our nation, we took to the polls and through the power of democracy, the rule of law was restored.

Today, as our people struggle to make a comfortable living, as our children are still segregated by race, when our democracy is at stake, I have no doubt that we will rise and protect our common dreams, values and liberty. Together serving the crescent, star and 14 stripes of the Jalur Gemilang. The Malaysian struggle shall never cease, until, in God's good time, we reach the Promised Land.

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