

LETTER | Malaysia's happiness index in deep crisis

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LETTER | As we remain glued to the daily evening feed of news on the Covid-19 infections and death counts, we may have become numb and dumb about the people's happiness index.

It is a non-negotiable fact that the national happiness index does count in this battle against this Covid-19 pandemic.

The glue that holds the four frontiers of nationhood, namely politics, social and economic progress and environmental balance is our happiness.

When our political frontier is riddled with humongous allegations and legal battles of corruption, happiness sinks.

When our democratic political landscape is clawed away by a coup-styled, illegitimate government, happiness takes flight.

Today, if there is a word to capture our current political predicament, then it has to be 'messed up'.

On the economic frontier, who does not know that it is a done deal?

There is no money for national and household budgets. Jobs are slipping fast right under our feet; bills and loans cannot be paid; businesses are folding up; people are forced to re-set towards a 'day-to-day' living these days.

Meanwhile, numerous allegations are creeping through the grapevine of 'unofficial' but nevertheless 'hot' news - from flattening centuries-old caves; contracts for mineral extraction right inside huge forest reserves; mining and selling sand to China; 'secret' pacts to a tune of multi-billion ringgit, etc.

And our happiness can only keep sinking further as long as there is no official news from the government to willfully and believably prove that all such allegations are false and malicious.

On the social landscape, we see our happiness slipping away like quicksand - quietly but surely.

The occasional reports of aiding the homeless and destitute, food kitchen

militaries and even the government's directive that all NGO efforts must now be coordinated are just tips of the iceberg of our nationwide suffering.

We do not have reliable public information on the national suicide and running amok statistics by the weeks just as much as we worry over the late reports on skirmishes 'Di sana sini'.

We do not have reports by the month of how many thousands of citizens seeking medical attention in public hospitals - especially those needing specialists care and medical investigation or operations are being put on hold or delayed except to learn of it from affected friends and relatives.

The M40 population is fast entering the B40 bracket of societal poverty. This is the best-hidden truth.

Education quality looks very much like a dream now vaporising on the horizon of no return given the latest international rankings.

Religious divisiveness as well as increasing dogmatisation and religious surveillance are also contributing to a sinking happiness index.

As we continue to lose our gifts of nature to exclusive business barons and vested

parties and only to discover after the mountains are laid bare or the rivers dried up or the caves eliminated, how can we ever be a happy nation of people?

Indeed no one is seriously looking at the country's happiness index, or are we?

Of course, we cannot compare ourselves to the Kingdom of Bhutan whose King put the people's happiness above all the four frontiers of his country.

Of course, we are not going to be like the Maoris of New Zealand who maintain happiness-balance by their living philosophy of 'when you care for your land, the land cares for the people'.

But the least we can do is to bring the subject of the national happiness index into the foyer of public discourse, policy-making, leadership and as a national priority.

And place people's happiness as the measure of success of our four parameters of nationhood.

Failure to acknowledge that our happiness index has indeed plunged to its lowest since independence is the first, sure step towards the degradation of becoming a failed state.

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