

Parliament pandemonium
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There is a very modern philosophy which presumes that all things new are better. Unlike wine, which gets better with age – or civility which improves values over time with maturity – there is this uncanny but pragmatic logic that all things modern are better, always. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Just like the Merdeka Stadium once was a target of “piratising thieves”, it appears that the Malaysian Parliament is now on the radar screen of some yet other pirates.

malaysia parliament parlimen building 050907 frontLat once captured this world view in a cartoon many moons ago, “No Mehmood, they will not sell you those!” He was speaking to oil-rich Arabs who were ready to buy all and sundry in England, while looking at the British Crown Jewels at a museum. Such circumstances-defined attitude that “money can buy all” is now our supreme national ideology too.

But, Barry Wain's history lesson teaches us the truth about the unintended consequences of such a mind-set of politically conquering all while deploying money as our primary means. Our tradition, history and humble backgrounds should never be hidden or wished away – not by anyone, including Royalty!

Likewise, while greed promoted by our privatisation model of business development of the last 20 years has almost bankrupted the nation, such “flawed logic and so-called pragmatic values” must altogether be destroyed with the March 8 “tsunami for change”.

Here I support the call by former Gerakan deputy minister Dr Tan Kee Kwong to have a commission of inquiry or at least a white paper issued on the topic of the depleting Felda cash resources. As if we have not learnt enough from both the PKFZ and the Sime Darby disasters, the closed-eye culture of the “Boards of Ignorance” is becoming endemic.

A call for good governance

There is a need for real change towards proper corporate governance within this nation at every level of companies, as well as local, state and federal governments. That must now become the battle cry of the people, by the people and ultimately for the public interest of all Rakyat Malaysia.

Therefore, while I have reluctantly conceded the fact that we may need a new palace for the sake of Yang Di Pertuan Agong's institutional role within our Federal Constitution, I am not yet convinced that the logic for a new palace is driven by our love for our old institutions. It rather seems to be driven by the greed of a capitalistic nature guided by a rental model of purchasing of services.

Such greed today has been feeding and flowering the politics and economics of this nation, as has been amply pointed out and well documented by Barry Wain.

I had a roommate who is today a Member of Parliament. He told me that about 30 years ago, it cost him more than RM100,000 to fight and win the branch elections of an Umno division. I am not sure of the current cost or the going value, but if the trends and costs of the past have to continue then I am sure we may “need” a new Parliament building to

finance the next general election.

Most mega-projects today are merely strategic moves by the clever and connected to devise newer ways of stealing into the public and common wealth.

In traditional public policy formulation, any policy issue, problem or concern is articulated to the policy makers as a problem statement. This problem statement must primarily state the gap between the real issue or concern and the ideal for that concern.

For example, if the current Parliament building is going to collapse, one would call the concern a structural and engineering problem needing to be addressed.

Alternatively, if the problem is a leak in the roof, it is only a sub-structural problem. If the issue is that there are not enough seats in the current Parliament house that becomes a particular type of problem, and also needs to be addressed and resolved. But, what is the real problem today?

Thinking strategically

My problem with the current project-management approach is that there is little or no strategic thinking and planning, at least on the part of policy makers – i.e. the traditional kind of professional policy makers. Ministers are not professional policy makers, they are merely problem solvers always seeking to satisfy the constituencies they represent.

The project management approach happens when the Parliament is only seen as a physical project. And all we hear about it for the first time ever is that “a new building will be constructed in Putrajaya!”

malaysia najib new cabinet sworn in 100409 01The Cabinet had neither discussed nor decided on the subject seriously, I think. If they did, the paper would have been tabled by none other than the Cabinet division of the Prime Minister's Department. And then, only as a Cabinet paper and not just a 'kertas makluman' (information sheet) by some interested parties.

Pardon my ignorance, but can somebody smarter please tell me the logic and underlying reasons for a another new facility away from our historic Parliament Hill? Is there not enough space around the current Parliament Hill, which are mostly government quarters already?

Therefore, why could we not find the political will to find space right there on the historic hill, within the Lake Gardens and beside the Tugu Negara? Unless of course there is some other agenda!

Moreover, is not Putrajaya already positioned as the executive state of Malaysia? Will not Kuala Lumpur always remain the commercial and historical capital of Malaysia? Should not therefore the King's Palace and Parliament House as the other branches of legislative governance be located within Kuala Lumpur, rather than Putrajaya?

It is bad enough that the weight of the executive capital is already seen influencing the federal courts wherein justice is now being viewed as always compromised thanks to Linggam?

Towards a true democracy

My questions are sincere. Let us think through how to nurture a true and just democracy in Malaysia for the common interest of all Malaysians. For too long have we had a one-party state of governance.

Today, with Sibu as my cut-off point, we are moving towards a two-party system of governance. Within any such model of good governance, we need at least five critical and explicit institutions. These are the traditional three arms of the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary, as well as the professional public service and the mass media as the fourth and fifth.

sultan sharafuddin idris shah selangor sultan and his royal family tengku amir shah tengku zerafina tengku zatashah 290409 Institutions like the Yang Di Pertuan Agong are symbolic ones to protect and preserve the culture and religions of the Federation, and the real history and heritage of the new nation-state. They also have a necessary and important role of reminding us of our human frailty before God.

That is why, I personally do not support the American motto, "In God we trust", being inscribed on their coins. We, in the East, must remain humble with more human symbols that create some degree of awe and reverence for the "other" in a more defined way.

Our human kings perform a good and universal role – as long as they do not lose sight of their own humanity and frailty.

It is careless talk and unfruitful thinking that makes for what I have called an idiocracy, or systems that foster the rule of law by idiots. Please see a book by the Dean of Harvard Law School called "The Death of Common Sense."

Public policy personnel must use their God-given brains and brawns (which includes the heart) to think through the issues and concerns of all pretentious public policy ignoramus. In Latin, "ignoramus" literally means "we are ignorant of" or "we do not know."

Therefore, the current Malaysian government has a choice: continue to pilot the Titanic as if the people on the boat are all equally ignorant of the truth, or begin to realize that "the iceberg of blind ignorance" has been sighted by the people – due to the rise of the internet as a new medium of information and knowledge. So the rakyat sees and knows the truth as was demonstrated for the second time in Sibu recently.

Please change the direction of the Titanic and let us, as a people, steer this large ship we call Malaysia into blue and clear waters where everyone can enjoy the sun of truth, knowledge and justice. And this form of strategic thinking is what we at UCSI call a "blue-ocean mind-set".

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