

'Extreme BN' sparks jitters
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COMMENT Politicians have taught us a very old lesson. The cynical would say that it was an elegant lesson in creating mass following.

By projecting an imagined external threat, politicians are able to create fear and anxiety. This sense of insecurity, of impending doom, will help silence any form of internal criticism and forge greater unity.

Whether the opposition likes it or not, the government has succeeded in creating this feeling of insecurity among Malaysians. Unfortunately for the government, this time around, fear and anxiety may galvanise Malaysians to support the call 'to save Malaysia' from BN.

bangsa malaysia multiracial malaysiaAs Malaysia is a multiethnic country, creating fear and anxiety requires a multi-pronged approach. Amongst the Malays, Perkasa has hammered home the fact that Malays are on the brink of losing their political power because they are divided into three political factions.

The reality that there has always been Umno, PAS and one other Malay political party that appeals to the urban electorate - like Parti Rakyat, Semangat 46, Keadilan or PKR - seems to have eluded that great unifier of the Malays, Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The divide amongst the Malays, as their electoral majority grows, is inevitable.

There is very little reason why Malays should allow only one faction, in this case Umno, to continue ruling the country. It might be better for Malays and the country as a whole if other political parties with Malay leadership like PAS or PKR are given a chance to govern. Ironically, the best way to secure continued Malay leadership is to allow all Malay parties some experience of government.

Everything the BN and MCA is throwing at the Chinese community does not seem to have any traction. No one has done a poll on Chinese support for the BN but if the tsunami has reached Sibu, it is quite clear that the waves of 2008 is continuing to erode Chinese support for the BN.

chinese people community and economyThe Chinese are concerned about the future. They will be among the first to feel the ill-effects of a double-dip in global economic growth.

If there is no change in policy from an ethnic-based to a needs-based affirmative action plan, the swing in votes in favour of the opposition will be permanent. This will mean the collapse of the MCA. Gerakan, without Penang, is quite irrelevant especially among its race-based bedfellows in the BN.

Donald Lim's recent call for the setting-up of a Chinese version of Perkasa and the DPM's defence of Perkasa is quite interesting. It confirms what Khairy Jamaluddin feared: that the BN is now identified with extremism. The coalition's domination of the middle ground is well and truly over.

Master of middle ground

Perhaps, to be master of the middle ground, one has to be a Mahathir. He is the only

politician who can compartmentalise different and opposing views so well that he speaks without seeing the contradictions.

"The development of Kampong Baru should involve the non-Malays. We can use them as a lure" to get investments, he said. Such statements just confirm for all Malaysians that race politics have truly reached a point of diminishing returns.

The reality is that what is good for Kg Baru should be decided by the people of Kg Baru. Why is a Malay village in Kuala Lumpur considered a 'slum'?

Is it not possible for the village to be developed in such a way that it retains the character of a Malay village - not just by having an arch but by upgrading the village into a model Malay urban settlement?

It will then be a great lure for visitors, both local and foreign alike. Then there would be little need to use non-Malays as a lure for investments.

However, if it is the wish of the residents that their village should make way for a major commercial development in the likes of Mont Kiara or KLCC, the government must make sure that their interests are protected.

It might be better if all the villagers became shareholders in the development - that they are not put in flats or removed from their existing networks and commercial activities, but are direct beneficiaries of the development.

If investments must come, it should come from government agencies and held in trust for the Malays. Kg Baru is after all Malay reserve land. If the British can be cognizant enough to look after the interests of the Malays in Kuala Lumpur, what more an Umno-led BN government?

Anxious Malaysians

All the scaremongering and threats of losing political power are real at two levels. For Malaysians, anxiety is felt because we all know that despite the figures, there is great economic uncertainty.

We realise that, if the West and especially the US and Europe do not recover economically, our exports will not do well. Yes, China is emerging as a big market for our goods but eventually the Chinese economy will also slow down.

We already have a big fiscal deficit, are we ready to go on another spending spree? On the political side, the realisation that there are puppet-masters pitting one ethnic group against another is worrying. The knowledge that only one side of the political divide is doing it has a calming effect.

The real fear and anxiety is felt by the political elite. One can see this in the highly discordant and often contradictory statements coming out from the corridors of power.

Ministers say one thing and their deputies say something else; there are flip-flops in policies and strange pronouncements like the country going bankrupt by 2019 if the current rate of subsidies remains unchanged against economic growth.

Then, almost immediately, the Finance Ministry issues something totally different. As one

Pakatan Rakyat politician said: if that is where BN is taking us, it might be better for Malaysians to put their trust in Pakatan.

Perhaps, there is some new strategy in going bankrupt by 2019. It is one year before we reach developed status. Perhaps the government knows something we don't...perhaps all developed countries will be bankrupt by 2020 and Malaysia would have just made it thus achieving Vision 2020 one year early!

But no, the recent performance of the government is not sterling and the same goes for the opposition. Pakatan must begin to behave like a government-in-waiting. If the BN feels that we need to cut subsidies to avoid bankruptcy by 2019, what is Pakatan's alternative policy?

azlanWhat does the Pakatan want to do for Malaysia in terms of foreign policy? How will it handle the economic and knowledge divide in Malaysia? What are its policies on Malaysia's dependence on migrant workers? Does it support minimum wage and if so, what are the preparatory steps it needs to take to make such a policy work?

Yes, they can scream that more democracy, more transparency and the replacement of race-based with needs-based planning will be a panacea to all our woes. Now that they have experience managing four state governments, they must hunker down to think about what reforms are really needed, can be implemented and how to convince Malaysians to support these new initiatives.

There was one coalition that held the view that one should seize the prize first and think about what to do with it later. Today, the US and the UK coalition is still mired in Iraq with no end in sight. Their war on terror brought terrorism to their own shores and their lack of preparation is surely sinking their economies.

It is time for Malaysian politicians of all hues to buck up.

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