

A mature developed society (Pt 1)

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What is a mature developed society? When can we call ourselves a developed nation in our own mould? When is someone mature? Is sixty years the age of maturity for humans? Why is one's 60th birthday such a big deal in many cultures?

Well, last week was a monumental one for me. My eldest son's wedding dinner was held; I turned 60 and then my wife and I celebrated our 29th wedding anniversary. Does that make us, Doreen and I, matured? When does a nuclear family mature and act their age? These are rhetorical questions or reflections as I pass into my golden or premier age of life.

Is Malaysia a politically mature country? On the one hand our ruling party is abusing the nation, vide its poor economic stewardship of the country. On the other, deep down south, a neighbour can change prime ministers without batting an eyelid. How is that possible?

I particularly liked the quote carried by most newspapers excerpted from 'pendatang' Julia Gillard's statement: "I've asked my colleagues to make a leadership change because I believe that a good government was losing its way... and at risk at the next election... I was not going to sit idly by."

Gillard (right) first entered Australia as a young girl of five when her Welsh parents migrated there in 1966. And she is now prime minister of Australia. In Malaysia, "pendatangs cannot become PM.... unless!"

In a mature developed society even first-generation migrants can become prime ministers, presidents or governors, as in California. Sometimes, physical birth is a requisite qualification. Yet in other maturing republics like India, even an Italian Catholic can lead the largest Indian party or, as in the Philippines, the son of two national heroes of a democracy movement can quietly and cleanly be elected as president of the nation.

These are all signs of a maturing democracy! Most notable in the Australian case was the transition in leadership without any severe tussles involving "back-stabbing and grandstanding!" These are all good and wholesome processes reflecting a mature democracy.

Maybe PM Najib or MB Khalid feels the same way, having been nurtured in modern democratic values, and maybe some others within BN may feel the same way about Najib's leadership style and model; but, in wayang kulit Malaysia, what we see on the screen is never the real story.

Double- or triple-speak is usually the order of the day! No politicians in Malaysia, except a rare few, can "say what they mean and mean what they actually say!" Gillard not only said it but has delivered on it and began her new leadership style immediately with seemingly good effect! That must be true-blue mature leadership in a democratic society.

Wayang kulit culture

In Malaysia, there was a state that one fine day declared itself a mature and developed democracy! Even the EPU disagreed with their definition. I wrote a column in protest!

But today in our kampong-style politics, even the new leadership of the state continues with

smokescreens full of rumours and more wayang kulit! And our equally half-baked media is ready to speculate upon and write on these as if they were "facts beyond doubt!"

Therefore Azmin Ali is going for "the so-called kill!" And the Selangor MB will be dead soon! Investigative reporters cannot become interpretative reporters?

azlanBut why all these - a wayang kulit model of old and feudalistic anarchic governance; wherein front-screen reality is different from back-screen reality? Why cannot Azmin, if he truly believes he has the requisite followership that Gillard claimed she had, simply make a public declaration, using the same exact words to declare his intention to provide better leadership? And let the party delegates decide to accept or overrule him?

Is that not a better way than wayang kulit politics of the Tanah Melayu culture with contours of palace-type intrigue and scheming as in the Sejarah Melayu? Is not the Freedom of Information Act more important than all this wayang kulit stuff?

All governance processes and models in Malaysia must improve for the good of the nation. We can only migrate towards a mature two-party system when we the people are not just capable of "opposing but also able to manage and steward good governance."

For a fact, if right now fresh elections were held in Selangor, I am not sure whom I would vote for. If Najib puts a brand-new and untainted mix in a truly multi-ethnic BN team for Selangor which appears colour-blind, I am not sure whether PR could retain the state.

Let me quote two case stories for which I have sufficient evidence to make my point.

A green philosophy?

One deals with the philosophy of "new development especially in relation to hills slopes and green lungs." Although the state government made some "good public policy statements" when they first came to power; almost 27 months later I am not convinced that much has really changed at the operational level.

There is a perceptible green movement philosophy (at the level of recycling bags), but currently local governance agenda does not come under this philosophy in a serious way. Only one exco member appears to be a true believer while others seem to pay lip service. She is now tabling the Freedom of Information Act; which is a very concrete step forward! Cheap talk only is BN's way of doing things!

In 1999, two weeks before the then general election, the earthmovers came and raped our 30-year-old "ungazetted old green lung." In the name of development, a children's playground was abused and raped; just because the land was not legally surrendered following due process to the local authority.

It was always public land and must remain public property land; I believe so, even today! Look at any map of Petaling Jaya and it is coloured as a green lung! However this green lung was "stolen from public interests and developed to benefit one community". I believe they had a legitimate need for a new place of worship, but "their planned needs were abused by a GLC housing developer due to the company's greed for profits."

The original plan for the mosque was therefore revised (presumably by extra-legal means) and the same land converted for housing and profits.

And most unfortunately, this same "illegal mosque" was recently legitimised by the Sultan of Selangor with his presence at "the opening of the mosque." Maybe no one told the Ruler and MB that the land on which it stands is public property land and not religious land! Maybe someone should now be stripped of his "Datukship!" Over to you, Your Highness!

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