

**Register to vote before this 'Titanic' sinks  
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Fifteen years ago, I used to make regular business trips to Manila, a country in its afterglow. The economy was small, the nation was suffering from political instability and years of plunder from the Marcos era. The nation depended on its women population who worked as domestic help overseas.

The 1997 financial crises which rocked Asean countries brought the country further into turmoil and poverty. Yet in the 70s I recall going there as a child and remembering being impressed by the modern city and its affluence.

Fifteen years ago, Malaysia was booming under the expansionary vision of Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Tallest buildings, longest flag pole and many other ego projects that put the country on the world map. During those expansionary years, civil society was slowly decaying from the inside. We were too affluent and too busy making money to realise that our freedom and laws were being changed in Parliament at lightning speed.

All these amendments to our constitution in that 20 years, which incidentally is more than the US in her 230 plus years of history was passed through a BN majority government. All these amendments would prove to be problems and major issues post-Mahathir era.

During those times, I had said that we were ten years away from the Philippines. As the Philippines enjoyed the boom years of the 70s and 80s, rampant corruption and decay of the judiciary system and any semblance of the rule of law began to disappear. This is what happened in Malaysia in the last 20 years. The fact that the Philippines has even surpassed us in FDI is a sign that we are in trouble. Confidence abroad has eroded for obvious reasons.

The failure to reform the political and economic terrain of Malaysia, the constant instability of race and religious issues, the lack of judiciary will to prosecute and solve major cases which involve murder and white collar crimes all lead to a drop in confidence abroad. Detractors say the Pakatan Rakyat wins in March 2008 is to blame. How then can we explain the fact that foreign investment in Selangor has not dipped but set to increase by year end?

The future is not bright. The inflationary rate is not a true reflection of the increase in price of goods and services as the basket of goods include government-controlled or subsidised items. The prices of goods and services may tailspin as the true inflation rate increases and the Malaysian ringgit begin to lose value. If there is no new injection of funds and no local investment, then the economy will shrink. Like the Philippines in the late 90s we, too, have a huge resource of educated human resources but because of the small economy, this human resource did not have jobs internally.

It may not be so farfetched that one day Malaysia will have to send her daughters and sons out to work as foreign labour. God forbid that that day should come but if we continue down this path of wanton abuse of our resources and widespread corruption without care for the rule of law then that day is not far off. For fear of being accused as a doomsday prophet or a pessimist, I will qualify that we - as citizens - can turn this around. Its not too late to turn the Titanic as we see the iceberg fast approaching.

Tell your aunties and uncles and cousins and colleagues to register to vote. Tell them that they can make a difference and that the country needs them more than ever. As I borrow from the great freedom fighter in US history:

'From the rivers of Sarawak, where there is no electricity to the hills of Pahang where Orang Asli are marginalised; from the peaceful city of Ipoh to the crime filled city of Johor Bahru and from the deep faith of Kota Bahru to the slums of KL; let freedom ring. Let there be a loud clarion call to change. Let justice flow like a mighty river across this land we call home.

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