

Pakatan: Reformation through restoration
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Coming to nearly three years after the political 'tsunami' of March 8, 2008, Malaysians are generally starting to get confused, or clueless, about the message of change that Pakatan Rakyat is trying to bring to the nation.

This has become more apparent since Datuk Seri Najib Razak introduced a slew of new activities to keep BN alive, chiefly through the 1Malaysia slogan, and the various 'transformation' programmes revealing themselves in an alphabet soup of acronyms.

As Pakatan readies itself for its second convention in Penang, how is it going to re-articulate and re-bring its message of change, or reform, to the people in the face of BN's heavy onslaught of 'transformation'?

Perhaps Pakatan should take a leaf from the current 'restoration vs transformation' political debate in the United States.

The Democrats under the leadership of President Barack Obama has been using the message of 'Change' to win the presidency, as well as to push through various groundbreaking legislations (such as for greater regulation of the financial markets and healthcare reform).

In many ways, these series of programmes can be seen as the US' own political and social 'transformation'.

The result of this, however, has only brought heavy electoral defeat for the Democrats in the recently concluded mid-term elections in the US. The message the Republicans are bringing to the voters in their 'Pledge to America' is that America doesn't need a transformation.

What it needs is, to quote the Republican's poster girl Sarah Palin, "a restoration of all that's good and exceptional about America".

There is common feeling among Americans that the best days of their country are in the past. In many ways the same feeling of helplessness is apparent among Malaysians.

Looking back 53 years, Malaya did start off promisingly and on the right foot. We have a negotiated constitution that guarantees the basic rights and freedom of all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. We have a clear separation of the various institutions of state, within a constitutional monarchy.

We have a respectable, competent, and independent civil service and police force that inherit some of the best traditions of service for the good of the public. We have a strong foundation of federalism, which was obvious in the formation of Malaysia in 1963, together with Sabah and Sarawak (including the 20 and 18 points agreements respectively).

We have an independent judiciary which was the envy of others until the late 80s.

Sadly, all these great foundations, institutions, and framework of the country have all but

been destroyed today by the Barisan Nasional coalition that has ruled in an unbroken manner since 1957.

Even the very nature of the BN has transformed, from the Alliance coalition of equal partners to one that is nothing but an excuse for Umno hegemony.

The slew of 'transformation' programmes and rhetoric revealed by the BN federal government vis-à-vis their actions show nothing but business as usual. Despite 1Malaysia, we continue to see racial posturing from Umno leaders and other extreme organisations.

Despite calls for transparency and market-friendly policies in the NEM, direct awards of contracts and opaque application of quotas still persist. The rakyat is called to sacrifice their subsidies while various favoured corporate players continue to enjoy them.

In short, BN's 'transformation' has brought no obvious beneficial change to the people, and the coalition is looking increasingly unlikely being able to 'transform' us into a high-income, developed nation status.

So what should Pakatan do? A quick read through of the coalition's Common Policy Framework revealed at its first convention in December 2009 will show that most of the items reflect the promise, hope, guarantees, and institutions that were present 53 years ago at the birth of the Federation of Malaya, and subsequently at the formation of the Federation of Malaysia.

Pakatan promises to uphold the intent and spirit of the constitutional special position of the Malays, the institution of the Malay rulers, the position of Islam and Bahasa Malaysia, and the legitimate rights of all citizens, regardless of race and faith.

Pakatan wants to rebuild the integrity of the institutions of state by reverting to separation of powers, guaranteeing independence of the various commissions, freeing the civil service to regain its proud professionalism, and ensuring fair and clean elections.

Pakatan promises real federalism, where the states will retain 20 percent of their tax contributions, as well as respecting the spirit of the Malaysian Agreement signed by Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak.

Pakatan wants to implement race-blind affirmative actions that will reach the right segments of society to ensure fair and dignified living.

In a nutshell, Pakatan's 'reformation' is actually a 'restoration' of the very foundation and framework of our country, agreed upon through negotiations among our founding fathers who represented all the major ethnic groups.

We started off on the right foot. We started off with great hopes and promises. However, these hopes and promises have slowly evaporated away from years of abuse by BN, made worse by Malaysians who generally have not felt or seen the need to intervene and put a stop to the abuses.

Not until March 8, 2008, that is. But more than that, Malaysians also want Pakatan to provide compelling reasons why it should be handed federal power, what compelling visions it will bring, and how these would be brought to fruition.

'Reformation' is a word that is, honestly speaking, sounds a bit tired and old when

compared with the BN's 'Transformation'.

Perhaps Malaysians can be fired up with a new clarion call, such 'Restoration', that is, to reform by restoring the original intent and spirit of our Constitution, institutions of state, our federalism, our freedom, respect and acceptance of all, our civil service and security forces, and our economic hopes and promises.

Pakatan should articulate its vision of how our country's best days are ahead of us with the call of 'Reformation through Restoration'.

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