

How not to become the new BN
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The newly-elected opposition coalition that forms the government in five states should put aside polemics, political differences and ideologies and get working for the sake of the people who have given them undivided support and confidence. MCPX

It should refrain from intemperate statements and instead focus on its common objectives to create a just and equitable society where every Malaysian has fair opportunities to succeed and prosper together for a better future.

We should avoid the distortions, abuses and excesses of Umno and the Barisan Nasional (BN) where affirmative action policies for the benefit of the poor and marginalised communities have been hijacked by a select group of influential persons and other cronies to enrich themselves and their families.

Instead the opposition should:

- advocate open and transparent government, fair and equitable policies and opportunities for all races;
- assist the needy and marginalised with programmes that supports self-confidence, improved skills and innovation;
- uphold the rule of law; respect the special position of the Malays and the native peoples and the legitimate interests of the other races;
- defend the status of Islam as the official religion while protecting freedom of religion;
- support a free press, freedom of expression, assembly and association;
- enhance the use of Bahasa Melayu as the national language while supporting the use of English and the vernacular languages in government, business and education; and
- defend Malay Rulers and the institution of the constitutional monarchy (after all it was Umno/BN that whittled down the powers and prerogatives of the Malay Rulers, removed their immunity and vilified them in the public and media during the constitutional crisis of 1983 and 1992).

The institution of the monarchy itself must reform and be seen to be apolitical and impartial, full of integrity and wisdom. The Rulers must avoid becoming involved in political, financial and private scandals and public chicanery.

They should keep a safe and dignified distance from both Umno/BN and the opposition especially in these changing and trying times when the nation is gradually evolving into a two-party democratic state. Old allegiances and ways of thinking must change in tandem with the people who want to see a more open, democratic, vibrant and tolerant multiracial, multi-religious nation.

lim guan eng and penangI have no problem with affirmative action polices provided that these are transparent, fair and effective. That is what DAP secretary-general and Penang

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng meant when he denounced the excesses of the NEP in its implementation over the last 38 years.

Umno supporters (including a large number of Indian Muslims who now want to become Malays) and the rent-a-mob demonstration in Penang over alleged neglect and discrimination of Malays in the state by the new DAP-PKR government (which incidentally took office only a week ago) have obviously missed the point.

Lim never said that he intends to remove or reduce Malay rights and privileges and neither did he say that Malays would be marginalised in Penang to the point of irrelevance. He would not be that stupid to commit political suicide in the first few days of his administration and both PKR and PAS would not allow such a thing to happen to Malays in the state.

As Lim rightly pointed out, the state government will implement an open tender system based on competitiveness, ability and value for government projects designed to benefit all races in the state. This by implication would put an end to decades of cronyism, corruption and abuse in the awarding of government contracts, licences and permits.

No wonder his statement was distorted by the disgraceful Malay-language newspapers, the so-called national news agency, Bernama and television stations owned by Umno that have been spewing racist and seditious propaganda with impunity over the last few days and inciting the Malays to take action against non-Malays in the purported defence of Malay rights.

To their credit, most Malays have them have rejected this worn-out tactic of Umno to play the race and religion card every time it faces a crisis of confidence and leadership. The fear of this mob is that Umno cronies and their families will be left high and dry in Penang without any projects under the new state government that is committed to good governance, transparency and accountability.

'Depoliticise civil service'

There are problems in Penang such as poor housing, lack of employment opportunities, affordable health care and transportation that affect all the races. The new government has promised to solve these problems and I believe that it can, as it has the right team and policies - provided of course that it is not undermined and unfairly treated by the federal government and its supporters in the state Umno and BN.

pak lah abdullah ahmad badawi putrajaya malaysiaThe prime minister and the BN leadership especially the extremists in Umno should be reminded that it is unconstitutional if not unlawful for the federal government to deprive opposition- controlled state governments of public funds.

These monies belong to the people as embodied by the state. They are not the personal funds of Umno or the BN. Throughout, the recent election campaign the BN blatantly misused and abused public funds and facilities with the connivance of the Election Commission and the police. This should stop at once.

Civil servants should be reminded that their loyalty is to the King, Rulers and the government of the day, not to a caretaker government or a former government irrespective of their political feelings and sympathies. After 50 years of single party rule, the civil service at the federal and state levels has become so politicised and corrupt that many civil

servants behave as if they are extensions of the ruling party and owe their allegiance to its leadership.

This was clear from their involvement in party political functions, campaigning for the BN and sharing the stage with BN politicians to explain government policies even after the dissolution of Parliament. This was also evident in the manner in which some of them behaved during the last election campaign as election and returning officers. The Chief Secretary to the Government ought to be told that the civil service as it currently stands is a disgrace to the country and does an injustice to its well-earned reputation (prior to the Mahathir era) for impartiality, integrity and efficiency.

The 'new' state governments should depoliticise the civil service and return it to its apolitical and neutral stance as before. This can be achieved by only making appointments and promotions based on merit, integrity, competence and efficiency and not based on political affiliations and party membership.

The practice of allowing serving and retired civil servants to obtain contracts, projects, licences and permits should cease. They should be stopped from doing business with the state governments either directly or indirectly. A cooling-off period of at least two years should be imposed after their retirement.

Civil servants should be reminded of the poignant words addressed to them by the last British High Commissioner in Malaya, Sir Donald MacGillivray, on the eve of Merdeka in 1957: "...The integrity of the service and its freedom from political influence are precious possessions. Without them there would be chaos and decay. Cherish them proudly. Ever uphold the fine traditions of a service of which you are privileged to be members and which I am proud to have served with."

Instead of misleading the Malays, these so-called Umno leaders in Penang should explain what they have done for the Malays in the state over the last 50 years. Perhaps an independent study should be carried out to separate the truth from the myth. I have no doubt that the results will show that apart from lining their own pockets and those of their cronies, the average Malay person in Penang was left in the lurch by false promises and unfulfilled dreams by these same politicians who are now raving and ranting over their loss of power and position.

bumiputera malaysia people market chartThe same can be said about Malays who live in the rural parts of Kedah, Perlis, northern Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu and parts of Pahang. Let us also include the Orang Asli and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, they too are bumiputeras.

It saddens me to see the conditions that they live in. It seems as if nothing has changed for them despite so-called privileges and rights under the Federal Constitution and the affirmative action policies of the NEP. Why is it that they earn such a meagre income, have no proper housing and sanitation, poor medical and schooling facilities and the absence of basic amenities?

These people have for decades supported the Umno and BN leadership. Why isn't Umno demonstrating in favour of this group of underclass and marginalised bumiputeras? After all most Malays in Penang are fairly urbanised and have a better life compared to the rural and semi-rural bumiputera communities in other parts of the country.

Instead of working for the Malays and other bumiputeras in an open, honest, truthful and

sincere way (as is required by Islam), the Umno and BN leadership is more concerned with sending a Malaysian into space (as a paid passenger), the Monsoon Cup, the Formula-1 Race, mega- projects and the interminable corridors that now surround the whole country (hopefully in the next election the people will show Umno and the BN a corridor out of power for good) and of course the very necessary Scorpene submarines and Sukhoi fighter jets (some of these should be diverted to Mongolia as well).

Unmitigated disaster

The NEP was designed to eradicate poverty and redistribute economic wealth but there exists a large number of bumiputeras, many Indians and pockets of Chinese who seem to have been marginalised and forgotten in implementation.

It by far has only contributed to enforced racial stability since 1969 (due to a compliant media and repressive laws) but there still exists underlying racial tensions because of the failure to assist in nation building and removing racial and religious barriers and distinctions. Eradication of poverty while much taunted by Umno and BN as a success has not been an out and out success when you actually look at the incidence of poverty, and the conditions and cost of living.

petrol price hike demo protest 020306An income of RM540 as the average is ludicrous, given the rising costs of fuel, food prices and basic amenities. Perhaps the Umno and BN leadership and their families should try to live on an income of RM540 in a small low- or medium-cost house or flat for one month and then talk about having eradicated poverty.

The arrogance and the hypocrisy of the BN government is glaring when we compare the lifestyle of the Umno and BN leadership, from even the branch level to the prime minister to that of the ordinary Malaysian who has to work hard and face all sorts of difficulties and obstacles with the minimum of assistance from a government that is more concerned with personal power, privilege, enrichment and grandiose plans that benefit a small group of cronies and corporate figures.

Extravagance, flamboyance, wastage, corruption and immorality often prevail over truth, decency, honesty, hard work and selfless service in the corridors of power of our nation today.

As far as redistribution of wealth is concerned, the NEP has been an unmitigated disaster. The income disparity and distortion in Malaysia is one of the highest in Asia and the highest in Southeast Asia. Only cronies of Umno and the BN and corrupt corporate figures have benefited the most. The Malays should rise up and ask the Umno leadership who exactly owns all the bumiputera equity in the country and why is it that after 38 years of the NEP, they seem to be still unable to meet the 30 percent equity target? Where have all the benefits gone?

If an independent study is done by the IMF or the World Bank, it will show that the redistribution policies of the NEP have only benefited the Umno-puteras and their corrupt corporate supporters from the Chinese and Indian communities through the ubiquitous 'Ali Baba' and other dubious schemes.

biggest bn banner ad billboard 070308No wonder many corporate figures decided to take to the hustings this year to condemn the Opposition and support the BN. Some even went to the extent of wrapping their corporate offices and buildings with the BN banner.

I have nothing against corporations making political contributions provided that they are transparent, regulated and do not corrupt the democratic process. But I wonder if as a corporate leader I would be treated differently by the BN government if I had wrapped my building with a giant rocket, the ever-seeing eye or the huge full moon?

I support Umno's right to demonstrate peacefully but not by inciting hatred and disorder. Demonstrate for the right reasons and with the full facts and figures, not just simply for the sake of intimidating others and trying to paper cracks in the Umno leadership.

The police should be fair and impartial. Since they allowed the demonstration in Penang, in future (until the repeal of the Police Act), the Inspector-General of Police should instruct state and district police chiefs to allow all demonstrations for at least one hour before they are ordered to be dispersed. There should be no firing of tear gas or water cannon, or arrests carried out until the time period is up.

The Attorney-General and the police should also stop applying for restriction orders in advance from the courts to prevent such gatherings and protests in the future. No prosecutions either under the Police Act, Sedition Act or the Penal Code. I am glad that the street protests by the Umno leadership in Penang (or is it by beruk and penyayangak to quote the very well-educated and refined personages of Khairy Jamaluddin and Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz of Umno) has led to a more open and democratic space for dissent in the country.

Indeed it is a new dawn for Malaysia as PKR's Anwar Ibrahim would say, and rightly so.

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