

**Place nation at centre of political compass**  
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In the last week, we have heard of potential party hopping amongst our venerable MPs. There are several reasons why this is not good. MCPX

The first has to do with the nation's need for real reform and not reform as a banner to bring certain individuals to power. Real reform takes place when we make a success of the open tender system, provide more transparency when awarding government contracts, scrutinise the declared assets of ministers and most importantly, change the way we think by privileging the state over race. All this will take time.

Secondly, the non-BN state governments will need time to learn how to govern and even more time to start reforming the way these states were once administered. Even in Kelantan where PAS has been in power since 1990, its new brand of welfare state needs time to root itself. If, as many have said, these states are going to be model states, a prelude to what the entire nation can be, then time is what they need.

Thirdly, time is needed for Malaysians to accept the role of a vibrant and intelligent opposition in parliament. For too long the role of the opposition has been ignored. Before the elections, BN had more than a 90% parliamentary majority. They literally reduced the opposition to a sideshow. Yet, every democracy needs a vibrant opposition. The dictum of oppositional politics is 'to oppose for the sake of opposing'. In layman's term, to play Devil's advocate.

Previous BN administrations did not understand this. Coloured by race, they considered any opposition as a challenge to their 'ketuanan' or hegemony. Malaysians must realise that if they want a good and solid piece of legislature, then every bill that goes through parliament needs to be opposed to find its weaknesses. If we have carried on the tradition of respect for oppositional politics, we may not have had to endure the nation-dividing tensions that arose from bad legislation.

Those who use reform as their catchphrase need to remember that they need time to prove their worth. If the BN can be rejected, so can they. It would be sad if they did not deliver and we go back to a one-party state. It is more important therefore to make the five non-BN states work. More importantly, the opposition in parliament needs to demonstrate how to oppose intelligently and constructively.

I believe the opposition should set up a shadow cabinet to monitor every ministry and make sure that all projects are implemented effectively. The shadow cabinet should also have a website where crucial discoveries are revealed to the public. If the opposition wants a chance to govern, they have to learn how government functions. The shadow cabinet will be a first step in that direction.

The BN also needs time to reflect and make innovative changes to the way it runs the country. BN parliamentarians, led by their lawyer whip, also need to be more responsible. That the Abdullah Badawi government recognises that reforms need to take place in the judiciary is certainly lauded. But right gestures alone will not help the BN. Action, they say, speaks louder than words.

Finally, a really positive change has come about amongst the Malay rulers. In Perlis, Perak and Selangor, the Sultans have demonstrated grace and maturity when exercising their constitutional rights. Without a doubt, the Sultan of Terengganu also has the welfare of his state and his people at heart.

We must not forget that there were three parties to the nation's independence negotiations. The British returned sovereignty to their Highnesses the Malay rulers who then gifted their absolute power to the people. In the process, we have a unique system where our rulers are more than merely ceremonial. They can, if they choose to, exercise certain privileges to protect their state or the nation.

Just as we respect our monarchs, it is also important for Malaysians (the BN and the opposition included) to recognise the role of the opposition in parliament. It is important for all parties to place Malaysia, the nation, at the centre of their political compass. In that way, they cannot go wrong.

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