

BN and PR will just have to cooperate
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The interest on NEP was ignited in the aftermath of the 12th General Election. At a recent forum, the participants were interested to know if the results marked a rejection of the NEP. I argued that NEP is only a political tool. To understand the future of the policy, we need to look at some implications of the general election. MCPX

I offered five main observations. Firstly, the outcome of the GE showed a regional political divide of the populace. BN lost majority support in four key states and the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur. Apart from Kelantan, it retained support of all rural and semi-rural states including the poorest of Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak. Meanwhile, the more urban and industrial states were won by the newly-minted Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

From this observation, BN holds states with rich natural resources and PR governs in states with key human capital. For Malaysia to surge ahead economically, both BN and PR must work on a viable working relationship to combine both our natural resources and human capital. Failure to do so will disintegrate our economic structure.

Second, the GE was also a barometer of BN's economic management. Poor governance and economic planning are the main factors why BN was routed badly. Since post-1997, the BN government did not have a clear and concise urban development policy to address issues related to housing, squatters, poverty, job creation, inflation, public transport, crime, social ills and others. Its leaders, especially those from Umno, had tried to divert their ineffectiveness and lack of imagination by pushing repeatedly both the religious and communal buttons. This strategy merely backfired.

BN not true blue racial model

Calls made by the business community to review archaic regulations such as the Industrial Coordination Act, the FIC guidelines and other prohibitive socio-economic policies went unheeded. These policies were seen as the main fuel of Umno's blatant racist politics but at a great expense to its partners in BN.

Thirdly, abuse of power, corruption, political scandals and a deteriorating institutional integrity were causes of concern to the more educated segment of society. All these symptoms pointed to the decay of the ruling coalition. As a result, many from the new generation of Malaysians took the plunge into civil activism work to counter the BN. Cyber activism took its roots from this movement.

Fourthly, the outcome of GE provided a crucial test and challenge to the BN elitist and feudalistic political model. I argued that BN is not true blue racial model but an elitist structure using race as a clever disguise. Clever because it managed to fool many Malaysians for close to 34 years since its inception in 1974.

Finally, BN ruling elites who used the NEP as a tool to enrich themselves and to distribute some resources to strengthen their political power found out that a growing population and mediocre domestic economic performance will soon prick their bubble. The 12th GE, to a certain extent, did some damage to the continuation of the NEP. With promises of open

tender, greater transparency and personal accountability, the power base is shifting away from the ruling elites towards the masses.

The most important question is are we seeing a more parity and democratic political milieu?

My advice is not to be euphoric but remain hopeful and engage with the new political forces. What are the viable options for both BN and PR - for survival and sustainability?

For a start, both BN and PR should readjust their political language. Being communal or autocratic is no longer sexy. What is expected is gritty political will to de-racialise and sanitise both political and policy language. Both coalitions must put unity as the main priority and not political squabbling. The latter will resign both coalitions to an early political death.

Politicians and law-makers should work with civil society to help enlarge the social sphere between communities in this country. We need more mutual collaboration and communication. The PAS lawmaker who recently visited a church is a good sign. But the visit must be followed up with real dialogue aimed at improving inter-religious understanding.

Fair and equitable policy

It is without a doubt that Malaysia has lost out big time economically since post 1997. Hence, both coalitions must now focus on issues related to our global competitiveness, sustainable development, environmental protection, human capital enhancement and the promotion of new sectorial growth and not sectarian interests.

I would like to urge both BN and PR to work towards the abolishment of the old NEP which promotes selective communal affirmative action and replace it with a fair and equitable policy aimed at uplifting millions of Malaysians out of the bottom social rung.

The abolishment of NEP in its current tainted form will be a first step to heal longstanding communal misunderstandings amongst Malaysians. It will also help to dismantle political patronage which uses the NEP as a tool to gather ill-gotten wealth and to corrupt.

Finally, both coalitions should help to promote and strengthen the rule of law in this country. Recent controversies surrounding the judiciary, the executive and the police force are negative to our nation's image and perception. It is likely that foreign and local investors will sit still and wait for the current political uncertainty to settle down.

Hence, lawmakers and politicians from both sides must now strive not only to make this country work but work better than the last decade.