

We ask for change but are we ready for change?

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Malaysia voted for change in the recent election. The word 'change' has since become the hottest and loudest buzzword ringing through the nation, and people everywhere mutter it like some magic mantra which will resolve all issues plaguing the country. And in a general way, of course, this is true, because solutions to problems can only arise with some sort of change driving them – to continue doing things the same way will do nothing to address the issues. MCPX

We want change in the way things are planned and implemented; we want change in the mindsets and attitudes of those who are in power. We ask our leaders to demonstrate high levels of integrity and rise above the meaningless pettiness which has persistently dogged our political landscape. Like the proverbial new broom, we demand that our leaders execute sweeping changes and clean up the mess accumulated over the decades.

All this is desirable, and even perfectly reasonable in view of the fact that much needs to be 'swept clean'. Whether true effective changes can occur, only time will tell. Our government has been thoroughly shaken to the core, literally, and the cracks which now show give an indication of where the structural weaknesses lie, and, therefore, where attention must now be focused.

There is no doubt that every leader now surviving or newly elected is acutely aware of the microscopic scrutiny they are subject to by the public. Well, at least for now. I wish our leaders all the best.

And what about us, the people of Malaysia? What role do we now play after instigating massive changes in the government? What is our next move, apart from holding our leaders to their promises, after we have ignited these raging fires which relentlessly razed through decaying and dying political structures?

Are we ourselves ready for change? Are we willing to do what it takes so that change doesn't merely become a rhetorical battle cry we used initially? Do we have the commitment, conscience and integrity to do what we ask of our leaders? Are we serious about incorporating moral and ethical values in our lives?

We demand that corruption cease. Are we ourselves willing to stop feeding it? When we are slapped with a speeding ticket, do we take responsibility over it or do we bribe our way out? When we need some official approval, do we go through the proper channels and procedures or do we pay to 'pave' the way quickly? Do we abide by the process or 'pull strings' to bypass them? Do we conduct ourselves with honour when in position of authority or do we expect kickbacks for carrying out our duties?

We expect our leaders to follow guidelines when exercising their authority. Are we ourselves willing to follow rules and regulations? Do we flout laws as and when it pleases us or do we abide by them? Do we blatantly ignore regulations when it causes some minor inconvenience or do we uphold them based on a sense of responsibility towards others?

We call for courtesy and respect when our leaders deal with us. Are we ourselves willing to be courteous and respectful to the people around us? Are we civil to each other or do we

treat others with arrogance?

We require our leaders to be fair and just in carrying out their responsibilities. Are we ourselves willing to match our words with our deeds? Do we keep discrimination in all forms at bay or do we practice it silently and selectively?

Do we behave in the manner and guise that we expect from our politicians?

It has been said that the government is just a microcosm of society, and the government we get is the government we deserve because it is the reflection of the people themselves. It should then come as no surprise that the failings of our leaders mirror the failings of the society. If we, as a society, expect our leaders to lead an exemplary life and carry out their duties responsibly and with integrity while we do nothing to raise our own standards, then we will never have the government we say we want.

We have to first gear our mindsets to make that crucial shift to acknowledge and be aware that the changes we seek in our leaders must also be the changes we wish for ourselves. It is a two- way flow: top-down as well as bottom-up. Only this sort of attitude can bring about true and lasting change, as opposed to a Band-Aid quick-fix which will only stem the hemorrhaging for a short period.

We will have to work together to bring about the changes we seek – we can no longer afford to say one thing and do another. The inexorable tidal wave of massive change has finally reached our shores; this is the best of times to remember what Gandhi said: 'Be the change that you want to see in the world'.

It is pointless to just demand change – we have to be an integral part of the change. Let us now answer our own call.

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