

Nation before race
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 12, 2008
Neil Khor

Change is something many people have trouble accepting. The catalyst for change can come suddenly and, some politicians spend a lifetime trying to create those defining moments that will lead to a transformation of their nations.

Vision 2020 was one such attempt; to create a new sense of national identity free of narrow racial imperatives. Today, the politicians who once backed the vision of a united Malaysian nation appears to be back-paddling. Many still think that the BN is the best option and only model for governance. Remove the PM and all will be well again.

The reality on the ground is somewhat different. Even the Malays in the rural areas have woken up to the reality that the BN has failed to create an equitable society. That the alleged corruption of the PM and his family, so freely touted by many, is but a symptom of a wider network of corruption that is endemic in Umno.

Some people forget that 2004 can also be interpreted as a vote of confidence in PM Abdullah Badawi rather than an endorsement of the BN. If all Malaysians deserted the BN in 2008, it is not out of spite for Abdullah but out of disappointment that his reform agenda did not work out. One allegation about Abdullah is correct: he is perceived to be indecisive and at a loss at how to handle the economy.

People often view Abdullah as weak. They want Abdullah to go after the corrupt with a sledgehammer. That he plays by the rules expecting the judiciary and the AG's chambers to do their jobs according to their conscience is rather naive. Abdullah must not forget who appointed these judges, the AG and the IGP. On whose reign did they climb up the slippery pole.

If Pakatan Rakyat is to take over in the next few days, it too will be confronted with the same problems. Its credibility will be called into question if change does not come swift enough to satisfy the people. It is not that the people demand it but because of the rhetoric of "reform", "corruption free", "accountability" that both Abdullah and Pakatan has been spouting.

Dr Mahathir during his 22-year rule never once claimed to be holier than thou. Never once did he say that the government was incorruptible. He was being pragmatic. But even he must realise that there is a real danger that the people's rejection of the BN, for whatever reason, can become permanent if some fundamental issues like living standards, quality of life, transparency, judicial reforms and some new economic strategy in the line of creating a more equitable society are not addressed.

The era of "closed-door" discussions amongst the political elite is over. This is not to say that the policy had not benefitted Malaysia in the past. It is simply because we can no longer do things that way in the age of the Internet.

Dr Mahathir himself advocated a more open Malaysian society in Vision 2020. His multimedia super-corridor was part of that "opening-up" strategy. The proverbial genie is out of the bottle. It will be impossible to expect people to go back to an era where politicians discuss matters behind closed doors and present things like the PGCC as a fiat

acompli.

It is now time for those of us not in the corridors of power to think about our collective future. We must think hard of how we can continue to earn a living and care for our families independent of politicians. This is not impossible for most of us no longer respond to the narrow sectarianism of Ahmad Ismail.

More importantly, we must begin to put the nation first and must realise that politicians no longer have a monopoly over us or the national destiny. Malaysia has not come all this way to be destroyed by narrow parochialism, the rivalry of politicians and the battle-cry of race.

No one said ethnicity will not matter in the future. In an increasingly globalised world, ethnicity or the consciousness of belonging to a distinctive culture is fast gaining ground. But it need no longer dictate how we are governed. It must now recede into the realm of the personal, giving us strength and vitality to contribute to the country. It is time we put nation before race.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/89586>