

**Marching towards the battle for Putrajaya**  
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OPINION The Barisan Nasional and the Pakatan Rakyat have held their respective pre-election-preparatory conventions, and both had tried to make themselves look good and attractive to the public. The BN convention, however, seemed to have missed something.

The BN convention did not make any announcement of any new policy or programme. BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak mainly reminded BN component parties to stay away from four "political diseases".

Najib also cited a Chinese saying "Xian tian xia zhi you er you, hou tian xia zhi le er le", which means that one must be concerned first about the welfare of all and enjoy the fruits after the people do.

The BN charter with seven principles was also unveiled. The seven principles are (1) upholding the Constitution and rule of law, (2) strengthening the racial relationship, (3) improving the economy, (4) assuring quality education, (5) defending the people, (6) strengthening the family institution and (7) rejecting corrupt practices.

But the BN charter lacks proposals on political, educational and social reforms, as well as the pursuit of democracy and openness. It is also the greatest deficiency of the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) and the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) promoted by the BN.

That is also why the people always think that nothing much has changed even after many plans have been launched by the government.

The Pakatan Rakyat common policy framework (CPF), on the other hand, is loaded with many proposals for change. It is a voluminous document, and the Chinese version actually contains 11,511 characters. Many of the proposed policies are related to democratic practices, including the abolition of the Internal Security Act (ISA), amending the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), allowing automatic registration for all citizens as voters when they reach 18 years old, and restoring local council elections.

Whether the Pakatan Rakyat can fulfill its promises is dependent on how it performs in the next general election. The most important thing at present is that it has a vision and a concrete plan of action to give hope to the people.

Because of the lack of political reform, the country has been ranked 71st out of 167 countries in the Democracy Index 2010 released by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), dropping three places compared to the ranking in 2008. What is worrying is that Malaysia has been listed under the category of flawed democracy.

Among the five indicators, we scored the lowest in civil liberties and political participation, with only 5.88 and 5.56 points respectively. It is also a weakness of the country's democracy. For example, university students are not allowed to participate in politics, the freedom of expression is restricted and a newspaper's publishing permit must be renewed annually.

The ranking has again shown that Malaysia is still in the middle position and is trapped in a stagnant dilemma. Other Asean countries like Thailand and Indonesia have been ranked better than us. Perhaps we could still console ourselves that Singapore has been ranked worse than us.

The government should not underestimate the importance of democracy. If the government efficiency is poor, yet there is a strong democracy and freedom, the executive will still be supervised to a certain degree and the country will still be able to attract foreign investment.

Today, people are talking about the economic scenario, including the government lack of transparency in contract distribution and unreasonable highway concession contracts, due to the lack of democracy.

The Pakatan Rakyat has pledged to abolish the toll system during the first 100 days of it taking over power. It is of course the people's wish but the crux of the problem is to accelerate the democratic process, so that democratization will bring sunshine policies to help the country get onto the right track as soon as possible. - mysinchew

\* The views expressed here are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of Malaysian Mirror and/or its associates.

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