

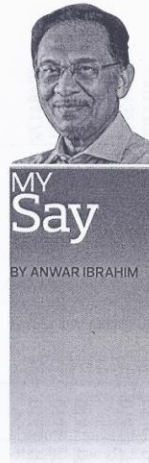
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Sustaining peace and development for all

We live in troubled times. The world has not recovered from the drubbing of the global economic crisis. The lessons of the frailties of casino capitalism have not been learnt. Indeed, in many ways the world financial system, shored up by enormous infusions of public money, seems ready, indeed anxiously willing, to return to its old unacceptable ways. The gap between the richest, who continue to get richer, and the poorest who become comparatively poorer by the day, yawns like a great abyss ready to swallow us whole.

Look around the world: growth stalls and jobs disappear as machines become the makers of the future. In country after country, climate change heightens the intensity of freak weather events. Change that is newness and difference is concealed by mere shifts of fashion and public perception. In short, as the poet would say, "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world", and in the face of this proliferating dilemma, "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity". More prosaically, the academic would say we live in post-normal times, times characterised by complexity, chaos and contradiction.

Where in all this confusion do we find stability, the point of clarity to identify solutions to our interconnected rapidly changing problems? Those who stand perplexed amidst chaos have lost conviction in enduring values as the foundation for policy. They have forgotten that values are not only sustainable but adaptable, flexible, ready for reinterpretation to meet the challenge of change and changing times. We find direction in holding to the values of justice, equity, openness and tolerance. This much is easy to say. The hard part is translating values into pragmatic governance and purposeful policy. Pragmatism and policy without values will always fail



to bring us closer to sustainable desired futures.

We have to learn the skills of foresight and analysis to understand the dilemmas of the times in which we live. We have to learn how the discourse of values can be used to shape policy by working back from our visions of desired futures to the pragmatic steps we need to take in the here and now to make our intentions attainable and sustainable.

There is no lack of direction if we hold true to our values. In Malaysia, achieving democratic change through the ballot box has allowed us to implement the option for the poor. We stand for human well-being and dignity as our most basic value and, in keeping with our values, say it must apply universally, irrespective of community or race. This vital change means it is the needs of the needy that will dictate the distribution of government assistance, entitlements and affirmative action. The old communal politics gives way to a refinement of policy which aims to leave no one behind. The road sweeper or poor fisherman must be able to feed, house and educate their family to be a fully responsible, no longer marginalised agent of civil society.

Education is another enduring sustainable value. We have to fit our young people with the skills to be productive, creative and entrepreneurial. We have to embrace the digital world of the future; we must be prepared for the rise of artificial intelligence, capable of meeting its challenge with critical awareness of its benefits and potential pitfalls. We have to fit all our young people irrespective of their origins with the tools to thrive in a world of work that will be radically different to anything we now understand as a job.

We have had enough of economic opportunity and wealth creation being siphoned off to the elite, squandered by mismanagement and stolen by shameless corruption. Distributive justice demands that we set limits; that we shun excess and ensure that all share in the endeavour and

rewards of enterprise and wealth creation.

Sustainable futures have to be built within the context of an open, globalised trading world. Globalisation has not and will not deliver distributive justice, fairness and equity automatically. On the contrary, while globalisation has lifted millions out of abject poverty, for the majority — in rich and poor nations alike — it has instituted a race to the bottom for a share of the crumbs. The beneficiaries of globalisation have been international corporations and the top 1% who have become the super rich.

We have to reimagine globalisation by ensuring there is enough moral hazard restored to the system to be a bulwark against irresponsible exploitative business, to chasten and encourage best practice. We have to foster enough profitability to sustain long-term investment and enable the development of new industries and technologies. We need enough foresight to build capacity and promote the sustainable health of our planet.

To transcend post-normal times, prudential limits are not restraints on endeavour and enterprise, they are the buttresses of a sustainable distributive process; a means to ensure there are benefits for all and they reach all sectors of society. Distributive justice means ensuring there is enough for all.

We can only move forward to sustainability by getting beyond dissent. We have to marry critical consciousness with the discourse of values to make both the active principles of practical policy. We must learn to hold the centre ground in the interests of all for the betterment of all. Any other kind of future will miss the mark. ■

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