

Reforming Malaysia

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IT is only the beginning of the second week of the New Year and so much has happened. There will be another by-election. The political skirmishes continue. New financial scandals continue to surface. There are shakeups in the civil service. The has-beens in the past government continue to struggle to show relevance. The Pakatan Harapan government continues to be monitored, scrutinised and evaluated.

And of course the king has resigned. A historic event no less.

For Malaysians of my vintage, having seen and experienced social and economic crises over the decades, as well as political upheavals, culminating with the change in government last May, we are perhaps somewhat "seasoned". Perhaps we have somehow forged that necessary resilience to be able to face such upheavals more calmly and in a more accepting way.

But that does not mean we are saying that "it is all OK". Far from it. Perhaps our reaction is different, in the sense that we tend to reflect upon the past, to seek guidance and resolution to move on into the future.

Often we ask "what is going to happen now", after a particular event has occurred. The question often reflects uncertainty, worry and concern for the future.

If only we can see into the future. But we cannot.

However, we can help to shape that common future ... thinking and working

together, as Malaysians.

Today the favourite mantra is "reform". Everything and anything seems to get labelled as "reform". It is even considered as a "movement".

What does "reform" really mean?

It means "to make changes in something" (especially an institution or practice) in order to improve it. Synonyms for the word "reform" include improve, make better, ameliorate, refine, mend, rectify, correct, rehabilitate.

Certainly, the key factor to initiate and operationalise any reform is the human being.

That means the people must first of all not only be reform-minded but must be prepared to reform themselves. To change negative attitudes and perceptions, and to be prepared to accept the new, which is better. This is especially so when reform is to be pervasive in society.

Because reform is always linked to some political cause, there must first of all be that necessary reform in the political culture itself. In particular, to differentiate between politics of unquestioning loyalty and politics of national and social responsibility.

As such it is important not to lose sight of what and where exactly reform should be undertaken and for what reasons.

Certainly, the abuses of authority uncovered as of now have given us a good idea of where the reforms must be comprehensively undertaken. It has to do with ensuring clear parameters for



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authority and decision-making, removing undue discretionary powers, and an openness of governance.

It is about the need to reset the compass of governance.

There is also the need to erase the often blurred lines between purely political expedience and public and national interests. Sometimes, it may not even be the political expedience of party politics, but that of individuals or groups of individuals.

Reform must begin with changes in the political culture itself because often that is where vested interests reside.

The desire to cling on to power and authority to enhance one's position, and of course greed, are the biggest stumbling blocks to any reform. It is simply because that reform will have the effect of stifling political power and curtailing any excesses in wielding authority.

Of course, there may also be the resistance to reform things that have all the while served particular interests and objectives. It would be like killing the goose that used to lay the golden eggs. (When everyone else only had regular chickens and ducks).

Clearly, there must be that element of honesty and integrity for any "reform" to be initiated and followed through with zeal. Some reform may affect particular vested interests whether political or economic. There will be opportunity costs. But the benefits for society and nation would far outweigh the costs.

There are systems and structures

which must be rebuilt and strengthened. Some may have to be replaced with new ones that are in line with the new imperatives in the operating environment.

But most importantly, there must be that necessary reform of mindsets among the nation's stakeholders. From the various levels of office-bearers in politics and government to Malaysians at large.

"Reform" is not and should not be merely a movement or a political slogan. Reform is now an imperative for Malaysia to integrate successfully, again, into the global fraternity of developed nations.

There are several key areas already identified that require reform and change for the better.

Let 2019 be the year to see the changes being effected. Put narrow political expedience and party support on the backburner.

It is the rakyat, the millions of voters, who will evaluate and decide. Parochial minded politicians will only result in policies that look good to party supporters, the so called "base".

It is time to think national. To think Malaysia and Malaysian. Reform our mindsets. And reset our social and political compass.

Sejahtera Malaysia kita.

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