

The task of institutional changes is not yet finished

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THE year 2014 could be said to be the year when Malaysians went into a regressive mode. This year saw two major calamities involving Malaysia Airlines. Soon after, in 2015, the mother of all scandals known as 1Malaysia Development Bhd erupted, putting the nation in shock.

Regression in large groups at the national level takes place when a majority of the population (be it ethnic, national or religious groups) experience certain anxieties. It involves a society facing massive trauma involving loss of life, property or prestige and, oftentimes, humiliation.

The United States, for example, went into regression after the tragic incidents on Sept 11, 2001. When a large group or nation regresses, the leader's role becomes crucial. When a regressed large group has a strong leader, the signs and symptoms of its regression express themselves differently than when there is no such leader.

In the US, for example, after the 9/11 trauma, the entire nation rallied behind its leader, president George W. Bush Jr. Even the normally critical media and opponents of Bush became muted and rallied behind him providing him with the necessary support to handle the tragic event.

In Malaysia, when the large group regression began to surface in or around 2015, we saw the re-emergence of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Psychoanalysts, such as Vamik Volkan, say that in a regressed state, a strong leader and his team reinforces the groups' symptoms and may encourage the followers either to remain in a regressed state or

make attempts at progression. It was at about this time that Malaysia saw divergent leadership emerging strongly.

On one side was former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who attempted to keep the nation in a regressed state so that he could continue to engage in his alleged kleptocratic behaviour. Psychoanalysts agree that regression in large groups is subject to manipulation by political leaders. On the polar opposite was Dr Mahathir, who could no longer tolerate the situation in the country, resulting in him coming out aggressively to bring the nation back to progression.

The damage of the previous leadership was so great that many leaders in the opposition then, such as Lim Kit Siang, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Mohamad Sabu, rallied behind Dr Mahathir. This rallying behind a strong leader at a time of crisis resulted in the historical consequence of uprooting Barisan National (read Umno) from power after 61 years.

Having achieved the success of changing the government, many people fantasise that the task is over and that milk and honey will flow through the nation. In reality, however, the challenge to the new leadership has just begun. There is a major gap between the expectations of the people and reality. To undo the damage created by more than 10 years of gross mismanagement will take much longer than we expect. One can sense the impatience of various stakeholders in the nation — the rakyat, NGOs, professional bodies and others (including the current opposition parties) to correct the wrong.

Here it is appropriate to remind the various parties that the entire nation, with the exception of a small minority, is guilty of colluding with the previous government in bringing the near collapse of the nation's economy.

Our culture of not criticising the leadership resulted in almost the entire nation suffering in silence. A few who plucked the courage to speak against the leader were sacked.

When the entire nation tolerated the misbehaviour of the previous leadership for decades, we now seem to be impatient with the new leadership when it's been in power for just one year.

It is always easier to destroy than to build. We have seen how easy it is to bring down even high-rise buildings which can be completely flattened within days for redevelopment. To replace them with another new building will take years. So is nation-building — to destroy is easy, to rebuild is challenging.

On the first anniversary of Pakatan Harapan's (PH) administration, what the rakyat need to do is rally behind the leadership to help them rebuild the nation.

What the government has done to date is to relook at the allocation of scarce resources and redirect these resources as efficiently as possible (for example, renegotiating the East Coast Rail Link project and other infrastructure projects).

This is a basic economic principle ignored by the previous government. Other institutional changes are being undertaken, albeit at a slow pace. These changes, however, are intangible at best.

Their values would only be felt in the long run. Once the mission of correcting the anomalies in economic development as well as administration is completed, the rakyat will feel the tangible economic benefits.

What is required of the rakyat to put the country back to progression is to suspend judgment for the time being and provide space, support and trust in the leadership and rally behind the leader.

Otherwise the country runs the risk of falling into the trap "the operation was successful but the patient died".

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