

Ramon V Navaratnam

# Malaysia's Transformation Challenges



## Debating Public Policies

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MALAYSIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT  
Institut Pengurusan Malaysia





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Policies





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Ramon V Navaratnam



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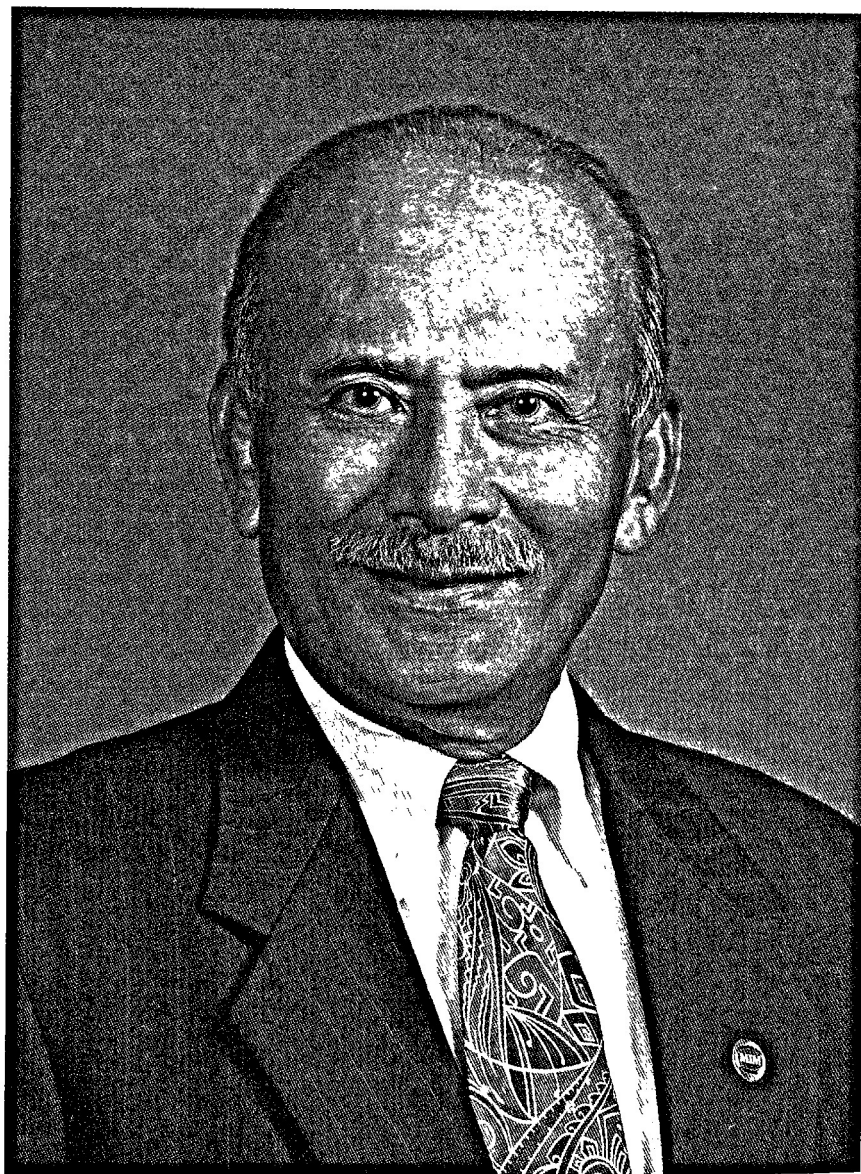
# Dedication

Including my Autobiography,  
this is my 12<sup>th</sup> and probably last book,  
on the Malaysian socio economy, entitled  
*Malaysia's Transformation Challenges*  
- *Debating Public Policies*.

All these books have fulfilled my deep desire  
to promote more public debate on national issues  
and policies, currently and for posterity.

I therefore would like to dedicate this book  
to my dear wife Samala and my loving family,  
especially our beloved grandchildren  
Suhanya, Sunetra, Michael and Sarah,  
for their encouragement and to my relatives,  
friends and readers, who have faithfully  
supported my humble aspirations!

And of course I dedicate this book to  
the Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM)  
and all its devoted leaders, keen members and staff.



**Tun Haji Mohammed Hanif Omar**  
President, Malaysian Institute of Management

# Foreword

Ramon Navaratnam is one of my oldest friends. In fact, he “ragged” me when I was a “freshie” at the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1956, one year before Merdeka. He made me crawl across the dirty Rochor Canal together with 50 or 60 other freshies, saying that we should imagine it was the Suez Canal and we were Egyptian soldiers defending the famous belly dancer Samia Gamal from the British-French-Israeli invading armies. It was all good, clean fun, of course, although later when I became the IGP he confided that he wondered if I would somehow take it out on him! Those were the days of genuine social cohesion at least among the English-educated, when we regarded all Malaysians and then Malaysians as brothers and sisters regardless of our differences.

As a young man Ramon was playful, noisy and always in the thick of the fun. I think, however, that it was at the university campus that he acquired his debating skills from the likes of Lee Kuan Yew and David Marshall who used to debate in our Ooi Tiong Nam (OTN) Hall. He also followed the events leading to Merdeka and developed the qualities of loyalty, patriotism and service to nation. After graduating with an economics degree, he joined the somewhat elitist Malayan Civil Service (MCS). He belonged to the Merdeka Generation,

like many of his colleagues in the G25. He thus enjoyed the honour and privilege of taking over from the British civil servants who returned to London shortly after Merdeka.

His generation of civil servants acquired the rich traditions of the Malay Administrative Service and the Malaysian Civil Service in serving God, King and Country, just as others did in the Royal Malaysian Police Force and our military services. Indeed, the public service as a whole was characterised by the values of integrity, dedication and a firm commitment to the service of our newly independent country Malaya, and then Malaysia. Ramon has inherited all these moral values like most public servants of that era.

Ramon has had wide experience in economic and fiscal planning in the Ministry of Finance, where he served for nearly 30 years. This included two years as an Alternate Director on the World Bank Board of Directors in Washington, and then as the Secretary General at the Ministry of Transport. He was the CEO of Bank Buruh for five years, and has been Corporate Advisor with the Sunway Group under Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah, for the past 22 years.

He has thus worked at senior levels in both the public and corporate sectors, where he has developed sharp insights on good governance. These insights are revealed in the 12 books he has written, which incorporate his frequently published commentaries in the press. Ramon's writings are mainly about public policy issues.

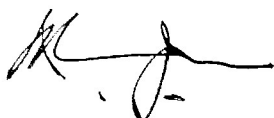
He writes honestly, openly and critically, but also with the right decorum. This is how I think he has succeeded as a critic in sensitive Malaysia.

I believe that most readers consider him a patriot who is trying hard to influence policies that would help rather than hinder nation building and national unity. His writings do not show a marked political partisanship. In fact, I believe he has never been a member of any political party. His writings reflect moderation and a “Malaysianness” that is hard to reject, even if we disagree with some of his views. His many readers, no doubt, respect his right to express himself freely.

Now aged 81, Ramon is still full of concern, enthusiasm and hope for Malaysia. His book shows that he is keen, even as he and his generation ages, to give his views on national strengths that need to be fortified and weaknesses to be addressed. He repeatedly stresses in this book that strong and dedicated leadership is required to ensure that the dreams of our Founding Fathers will continue to be realised. He also believes that our Constitution must be well protected and preserved for posterity. Who can deny these noble aspirations?

Finally, I wish my dear colleague and friend Ramon Navaratnam all the very best. I hope that many more people like him will write and keep voters focussed on a moderate and progressive path. I also wish that our leaders will consider some of the many sound proposals made by him and other constructive critics.

As President of the MIM Court of Emeritus Fellows (of which Ramon is a long standing member) I am also happy to report that Ramon has pledged to donate all profits from the sale of this book to the MIM. I thank him for his kind and continuing support.



Tun Haji Mohammed Hanif Omar  
President  
Malaysian Institute of Management

15 September 2016

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# Acknowledgement

I wish to warmly acknowledge my gratitude to Tun Haji Mohammed Hanif Omar, our dear distinguished President of the Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM) and our dynamic Chairman, Dato' Ng Tieh Chuan, for their steadfast encouragement to publish this book of commentaries on Malaysian public policy.

I also wish to record my deep appreciation to MIM CEO Sivanganam Rajaretnan and Executive Secretary Puan Ruhaida for their considerable care in seeing this publication through.

Finally, let me thank Haema Latha, my loyal secretary, for all her patience and commitment in helping me publish my previous 11 books, including my autobiography entitled *My Life and Times*, which was also published by MIM.

All the royalties for this book will go to MIM, where I serve as an Emeritus Fellow and General Council member with pride and much satisfaction.



# Preface

I have sought herein as always, to express my honest views and - hopefully - provide constructive criticism, on public policy issues as they have affected our daily lives in Malaysia. This is my 12<sup>th</sup> book and it includes articles and letters that have been published in local newspapers over the years. I have written my autobiography entitled “My Life and Times”, which also aimed to reflect the major developments and the changing Malaysian socio-economic environment.

## *Why I Write*

Many people have asked me why I write. My answer is that I have always felt a strong urge to comment on national issues that impact our lives and the direction Malaysia is going. I have to confess that very often, I feel restless and experience a deep sense of duty, as a patriotic Malaysian, to express my thoughts. Thus, I find some relief from my restlessness by telling the truth as I see it, without fear or favour.

As a former permanent secretary/secretary general and senior civil servant for 30 years, I have been trained to speak up freely and frankly to my seniors and ministers. In the past it was a strong civil service tradition. We were actively encouraged, to “speak up” to influence public policies and practices internally.

I have the same urge to express myself, even now - long after I have retired from the Government. Fortunately, during my subsequent years of service in the private sector, I have also been encouraged to publicly express my candid and sometimes controversial views. To be fair, so far, no one has officially told me to go slow or to keep quiet!

I have been inspired by the righteous values of my loving late parents to stand up for the truth. As the great physicist Albert Einstein once said: “the world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything”. The 18th century British parliamentarian Edmund Burke said something similar: “all that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good men to do nothing”.

I have always held in high esteem all those who speak up for justice, and especially those who speak up politely. In this way, no-one can ignore honest critics by pointing to their use of rough language and not the substance.

### *Do our Leaders Listen?*

But are our leaders willing to listen? When people ask me this question, I reply that our leaders had better listen to the critics for their own sake, if not for the best interests and general good of our nation as a whole. If these leaders are still resistant to positive criticism, then they should note that the voters are waiting and watching! Politicians who do not listen to the critics had better be prepared to lose their comfortable seats in parliament, the state assemblies and even local councils.

There are many limitations to defiance and open demonstrations. Such demonstrators have their important role in democracies, especially during trying times, but they are often unfortunately and unnecessarily constrained by the authorities.

Indeed, it is usually better to use more rational means of persuading the authorities to respect basic human rights and freedoms and to promote fair policies. Government policies should be formulated for the good of all our peoples and not mainly for the benefit of the privileged and elite minority.

Any democracy worth its salt needs to hold open discussions and debates in order to thrive. Too many silent voices will only dampen democracy and may even destroy it. We will then inadvertently allow evil men and women to succeed. That is why those who speak up and write honestly have to try to reflect the views of the silent majority, who hopefully will, in time, become bolder and more willing to act in defence of the truth.

We in Malaysia have come to a stage in our political and socio-economic development, when our people are afraid to express themselves frankly. Legislation such as the Sedition Acts hang like the sword of Damocles over our heads. Today we live in an overly sensitive society. Almost everything is deemed or can be construed as “sensitive”. Even light-hearted cartoons can be regarded as inciting hatred! We are therefore at considerable risk of losing the national sense of good humour of our founding fathers.

### *Political Commentary*

The solution to this problem of fear and a sense of intimidation is to strive to strike a balance between being polite and civil in our critical comments, on the one hand, and professional, pointed and sharp, on the other. It's admittedly not an easy balance to strike. I myself have experienced pressure from well-meaning but unrealistic associates, who have often pushed me to express my views in a more aggressive manner.

I have resisted such pressures. As a former civil servant, I have been trained to be persuasive rather than arrogant or pushy. I have learnt from experience, that to be aggressive and confrontational is not consistent with Malay or Malaysian *adat* (custom) and culture. We have to respect the form and the substance. What is more important is that criticism is made honestly and received in good faith. In any case, I do not regard myself as an abrasive person, and I try to be more polite than pugnacious.

### *Malaysia's Problems*

Readers will notice that most of the underlying policy concerns in my book are related to the quest for more good governance.

We are a blessed country. Our natural resources are relatively plentiful. We are mercifully spared the horrific natural disasters that befall many countries - even our close neighbours. So we have every reason to do much better than countries that periodically suffer from

earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions. Hence we should be doing far better than those less fortunate or less blessed countries. But sadly, this is not the case.

Why is this so? I believe it is because we have badly fallen short in the area of good governance. For instance, we spend too much time on wasteful politicking, racial dissension and religious bigotry. The common perception at home and abroad is that corruption is high and worsening, and that our national institutions are weakening. The generally poor public opinion of our judiciary, the public service, the electoral process, with its disruptive “money politics”, is also not encouraging.

Safety and security standards have declined, and law and order has been diminishing, while extremism and terrorism have been on the rise.

In Malaysia, the same major political parties have dominated the Government since Merdeka. The opposition parties have never been in power at the federal level, to provide an alternative government and adequate checks and balances. Yet the latter is essential in order to maintain a high degree of good governance and ensure a lively and responsive democracy.

With so much centralisation at the Federal Government there is growing concern that the Government is becoming less sensitive to the basic needs and the human rights of the rakyat and the state governments. Hence, income disparities are widening, education standards are

falling, graduate unemployment is rising, and immigrant workers are flooding our labour markets. Such developments do not contribute to good governance

### *State Capture*

“State capture” refers to the control of the institutions of state by vested interests, which use them to serve their own narrow aims and aspirations. The World Bank refers to state capture as the control exercised by big business interests to influence Governments to serve their own vested interests.

State capture can occur in any country. Some would argue that it is present in varying degrees in almost every country. But state capture need not be the preoccupation of big business alone. State capture can operate in the political field. It could manifest itself as an unholy alliance between big business and the political elite in ways that enables a Government to stay in office for as long as possible.

State capture can happen when the opposition is suppressed so much that it becomes fragmented and weak, and almost incapable of providing the basic prerequisites of a lively democracy, which is to provide checks and balances. We have therefore to be more vigilant, to ensure that such a situation does not occur in Malaysia.

Yet another major concern in my book concerns the need to introduce structural changes. The Government and

Pemandu have initiated several healthy transformations. They have been useful, but they have been largely administrative in nature. Major policy areas like the New Economic Policy, the need for more competition and less protectionism, Bumiputera equity targets and poverty and income distribution issues, have not been adequately reviewed and addressed. These are vital structural concerns that have to be resolved sooner rather than later, if we are to break out from the “Middle Income Trap” within which our nation now finds itself.

### *The Search for a Solution*

Looking to the future, my book stresses repeatedly that, Malaysia should go back to basics. We should ask ourselves, how far we have preserved or deviated from the Principles of our founding fathers? Has our original dream of a united, multiracial society with harmony, religious and racial understanding, been achieved? What do we need to do to increase social cohesion and national unity?

Unfortunately, the National Unity Report which was finalised after about two years of hard work by the Government appointed National Unity Council, has still not been made public. I was a member of the Council and I recall that there was considerable consensus on where we are and where we want to go undue and long to build a more united nation. The people may soon ask why there is this delay in publicly debating and adopting the recommendations of this report. I wonder what would be the Government’s answer to this vital and valid question.

We have to also review the role and function of the public service. The *rakyat* needs to be assured that there will be a leaner and more efficient public service that will be more representative of the racial and religious composition of our country. Only then will there be a lower “trust deficit”, more public support and a greater sense of belonging. Currently, there is an unhealthy disconnect between the Government and the *rakyat*.

### *Conclusion*

All our public institutions should also be reviewed to see where we can strengthen them further to meet the higher standards of globalization and our own national integrity and sustainability. We should implement the new United Nations Sustainable Goals and targets introduced in the U.N. last year. We could also adopt the relatively new “happiness index”.

Modernization and moderate policies have to be adhered to and firmly implemented in order to promote greater peace and progress. Extremist and outmoded practices of all religions must be excluded from our society. In short, we have to become more and more inclusive and progressive for the sake of our beloved country prosperity.

The purpose of this book is to highlight the need to address the negative developments that have emerged in recent years. Racial, religious and even social prejudice, parochialism and unprogressive policies and practices, will surely stifle our growth as a united, modern,

peaceful and progressive nation. We need therefore to strive to become a more progressive and united country that we can all be proud of.

I hope that this book will stimulate discussion and encourage more Malaysians to speak up on the issues that I have outlined as well as other issues and concerns, in a hopefully more open atmosphere of constructive criticism. Let us speak up for more justice and a better Malaysia in the future or forever regret that we, as Einstein said, “watched evil without doing anything”.

I therefore appeal to all Malaysians and friends of Malaysia, to do their very best to speak up and to more strongly support and serve our noble cause and struggle for a better Malaysia.

### *Seniors Can Contribute to Society*

Before closing, I would like to say a few words about the way the older generation in Malaysia society can contribute to this process. I wish that more of my former colleagues and other senior citizens would become actively involved. I believe in the famous Chinese saying that the “Fish begin to rot from the head”! It is important that we do not deteriorate too early because we are not actively involved in meaningful and rewarding activities. I am glad that no one has asked me whether I am retired. Of course, now I have reached the age of 81 some of my relatives and friends ask me whether and when I plan to retire. Only God knows the answer to that! I am also asked if I am tired of working and whether I am looking forward to retirement.

But I thank God that I have never really retired. In fact, I have been working continuously without any break between jobs since I officially stepped down from Government service in 1989 as Secretary General of the Ministry of Transport. Even if there are no suitable jobs available for retirees, particularly during this time of economic slowdown, there is ample scope for voluntary work. There are many leading non-government organisations that do splendid work to improve our society. They are always short of good staff and would genuinely appreciate the willingness of older citizens to provide voluntary services and share their rich experiences.

Former civil servants, businessmen and women retirees can perform important roles in helping NGOs liaise closely with Government Ministries, agencies and the business community. This can be done to enhance the cooperation and coordination of their collective efforts to help the poor and needy.

I myself have been involved in the Children's Wish Society and the Child (Children Health Information Learning Development) Society and the Education Welfare Research Development Society (EWRD). I also serve as a Board Member of the Selangor Crime Prevention Foundation, and represent Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah in the Kidney and Liver Foundations, where we raise funds to help poor patients and research.

### *Don't Feel Left out!*

The rewards of being actively engaged in society and its welfare are that you will never feel neglected or left out. The benefits of working and living a full life are immense. There is always some meeting, event and discussion or charitable act to look forward to. Retirees who remain active will not feel marginalised or worse still, experience a sense of “worthlessness”. I know many of my friends feel that way, and it is sad. They get frustrated, negative and pessimistic and often very cynical. They feel despondent and depressed, and often don't even want to socialise.

Even when you work after retirement, you will need the support of the Government and society and, of course, your family. Those on Government pensions have a great advantage since medical and hospital care is almost free. Those who are not Government pensioners and who don't have health insurance coverage, on the other hand, experience a great deal of anxiety.

They worry about their future health and how they will be able to cope. All of us hope and pray that we will not have to suffer from serious illness for a long time. We all pray for a quick and easy departure. Nevertheless we all have fears that we may have to linger and hope we will be able to bear the costs of hospitalisation and nursing care.

That is why Governments should have sound and long term plans to provide adequate social protection to their senior citizens. There is little point in boasting of strong

industrial status and high per capita incomes if the wealth and economic growth are mainly with the rich and powerful elites while the poor are neglected. What kind of society will we have and how can we be proud of our country and ourselves, if we do not provide decent care for the underprivileged?

The Government should therefore introduce a health insurance scheme that is subsidised to cover the care and interests of the poor.

### *Advice to Those About to Retire*

I have always told my colleagues and friends who are about to retire to plan ahead. This planning should begin well before you retire, that is about five years before the mandatory retirement date. You have to ask yourself the following questions and answer them seriously, thoughtfully and prayerfully:

1. Do I want to work after retirement?
2. If yes (which I hope will be generally the case), what do I want to do?
3. Do I want to work for someone, become self-employed or a businessman?
4. If I want to do business, have I got the capital and knowhow? If not, then don't rush in.

What you should do is:

1. Spread the news around that you want to work, and what you would like to do.
2. Contact all those who know you, your work and your character and potential and ask for advice.
3. Don't ask for much more than your market worth.
4. Be content with your new job offer.
5. Improve your marketability once you have a job in hand.
6. Most importantly, do not neglect your health.

After you have examined the above and other pertinent questions of your own, please consult your wife/family and listen to their counsel. Pray for guidance in your decision making and sleep over your thoughts. Then, as the days draw near for retirement, you will be calm and confident as you would already have had some tentative offers or near offers for a new job and career. I followed the above process and recommended it to many friends.

### *Achievements*

In all modesty, I feel confident that I have realised almost my full potential. Not all have the same talents, character and will to develop themselves to their full potential.

I have exceeded my own expectations. Coming from a lower middle income background, from a minority ethnic group like those of Sri Lankan/Ceylonese origin, non-Muslim/ non-Malay and with no connections, I did not expect much for myself. I was also not diligent in my studies at school or at University either. I only became more serious and conscientious in my work and career as I rose up the ladder.

It's not my style to talk about my achievements. But suffice to say that I have had the satisfaction of being directly involved in policy formulation in most of the major developments in our country soon after Malaysia's Independence. The annual Budgets, the Five Year Plans and a wide range of national issues over the years, have been our concern as civil servants at the senior levels of Government.

I have enjoyed considerable satisfaction in helping to influence and formulate policies of national and public interest. Amongst other positions, I served as Vice Chairman of the Malaysian Business Council, member of Malaysian External Trade Development Council and the National Economic Consultative Council (Mapen 2). I was the South East Asian Group Representative on the

World Bank Board of Directors for two years in Washington, under the Chairmanship of former US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara.

Later I was appointed to the Human Rights Commission and the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission, where I served as Chairman of the Prevention Panel. Now I am on the Selangor Crime Prevention Council.

### *My Writings*

Throughout my career, I have written to the press and participated in television interviews and public fora in business or church platforms. Some of these press articles were edited and published in books that I have worked on over the years. Luckily, I learnt to type and use the computer which enabled me to write all my books. I still write to the press when I get the urge and feel concerned with developments that trouble me. These books are listed below:

1. Managing the Malaysian Economy (1997)
2. Strengthening the Malaysian Economy (1998 )
3. Healing the Wounded Tiger - How the Turmoil is Reshaping Malaysia (1999)
4. Malaysia's Economic Recovery (2001)
5. Malaysia's Economic Sustainability (2002)
6. Malaysia's Socio Economic Challenges (2003)
7. Winds of Change (2005)
8. Quo Vadis (2006)
9. Quo Vadis (Second Edition 2006)
10. A Memoir of my Life and Times (2004)

11. A Memoir of My Life and Times (Second Edition 2011). I would encourage all retirees to write, and especially work on their autobiographies or biographies. Writing gave me a lot of fulfilment and I believe it will work for others as well.

It is difficult to retire. Perhaps I will only do so when my health or energy begins to wear out. That can happen any time at my age. But when the time comes I think I will be prepared - God willing!

Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam  
15 September 2016

# Publisher's Note

Ramon Navaratnam is a Malaysian commentator par excellence. His criticisms are trenchant and, while often unpalatable to those in power, they are also carefully considered.

As a former Deputy Secretary General of the Treasury and then the Secretary-General of the Malaysian Ministry of Transport, a member of the National Development Planning Committee, CEO of Bank Buruh and currently corporate advisor to the Sunway Group, Ramon is eminently qualified to speak on issues that concern both the government and the private sector.

Political criticism is vital for the creation of a well-informed public, especially in a country like Malaysia where the basic principles of democracy are still only partially understood. Those standing outside the Government may lack the resources available to policymakers when expressing opinions or suggesting alternative strategies. But there seems little doubt that such observers have a vital role to play. No matter how well-meaning government policy may be, the feedback provided by independent commentators is invaluable.

Malaysian politicians may not like listening to criticism from frank commentators like Ramon, but the best among them will, however reluctantly, acknowledge his important contribution. No-one likes to be told they are incompetent, lazy, or worse – corrupt! But if the facts bear out the observation, then it is important for the health of the political system that the criticism be made and listened to. Like politicians, however, political commentators have responsibilities as well as rights. Their criticisms must be balanced, offering bouquets as well as brickbats whenever it is due and Ramon does so in his writings.

A critic operating in a democracy who finds absolutely nothing positive to say about the Government of the day risks undermining his own credibility. And to the extent that he is believed, he risks encouraging citizens to take matters into their own hands in ways that could threaten the continued existence of the very institutions that ensure the smooth functioning of democracy itself. Ramon, however, is not of this ilk. Those holding the reigns of power will find within these pages both criticisms and commendations – all boldly stated without fear or favour.

More significantly, however, it is to Malaysians as a whole that the author addresses most of his appeals. Touching on the problem of religious and political extremism, for example, the author argues that the problem will only be resolved when the nation's silent majority speaks up. Urging the government to come

down hard on hate mongers is not enough: “We must prepare to identify such individuals and vote against them should they attempt to get elected.” and “Let us all, as loyal Malaysians therefore, exercise our full rights as citizens and marginalise extremists and fanatics before they try to overcome us all!”

The author's long experience in government also enables him to speak with considerable authority when urging the government to action. Referring to the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, for example, he warns that “if we get too preoccupied with unnecessary and wasteful politicking, then the impressive 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan will remain just a plan - without much effective implementation”. Malaysians, he believes, need to “talk less, work more and strive to realise our Vision 2020 goals” and more forward.

Perhaps Ramon's greatest contribution to the debate about Malaysia's current social-economic and political situation, however, is his warning about the threat posed by “State Capture”. This term, which has appeared with increasing frequency in the reports of the World Bank and other international institutions in recent years, refers to the control of state agencies by private interests. It is a broad concept that encompasses the formation of laws, rules and decrees by a wide range of state institutions, including the executive and the legislature. Civil servants can also be said to have “captured” the state if they use their authority to further their own interests, at the expense of the public good.

The influence of private interests on government decisions is a normal feature of the political process, even in mature democracies. But what makes the phenomenon of “State Capture” different here is that it is informal and non-transparent, thus leading to a wide range of abuses. The solution in Malaysia, as in other countries, does not involve banning private sector influence. To do so would risk eliminating the sort of feedback on policy that every government needs in order to function effectively. Rather, as Ramon notes, it is important to ensure that such influence is directed towards legitimate and transparent means of interest intermediation, for the public good and not narrow vested interests.

Given that the author is a graduate in economics both at the University of Malaya and at Harvard in the U.S., it is not surprising that much of the commentary in this book concerns the Malaysian economy. Numerous articles refer to perennial problems such as the Brain Drain, graduate unemployment, budget deficits, the weak ringgit and the extent to which bureaucratic waste and corruption could prevent the country attaining its Vision 2020 goal – and sustaining developed country status. Given these circumstances, rating upgrades by organisations such as Moody's Investor Service are treated seriously. Without fundamental reforms, he believes such improvements are unlikely to be sustained.

It is here that Ramon highlights yet another major concept – the well known Middle Income Trap. This

refers to a situation in which a country attains a certain income level but is unable to advance much further. The author argues that Malaysia is caught in this trap because of its mediocre education system, relatively inefficient public service, preoccupation with protectionism and a general insistence on following policies that encourage mediocrity over meritocracy and complacency (*manja manja*) over competitiveness.

Realising Malaysia's full potential, he argues, requires nothing less than a total transformation. But for that to happen, ordinary Malaysians will have to stand up and demand the necessary reforms on a sustained basis. Will those who read Ramon Navaratnam's book take up the challenge for the sake of future unity and progress? Only time will tell.



# 1

# Good Governance



# What True Malaysians Want\*

It's a breath of fresh air and a source of much pride to me that a former PTD (Pegawai Pentadbiran Diplomatic) colleague, Tan Sri Alwi Jantan, has come out strongly to support our cherished national values of secularism, liberalism and pluralism, "Torchbearers for founding fathers" (Sunday Star, Sept 4). In short, he urges for greater national unity and good governance, which have been sadly declining.

As a leading member of the Group of 25 (G25) comprising eminent former senior Malay civil servants and intellectuals, Alwi (and the G25 as well) is indeed a torchbearer for our founding fore fathers. He and G25 are therefore fully worthy of the whole-hearted support of all true Malaysians!

The G25 handicap may, however, be that it is preaching to the converted, especially those Malaysians in the more sophisticated urban areas. Currently, the G25 has a limited number of members (about 40) and thus has to expand its membership and also now consider being more inclusive. The G25 has to include leaders in the

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\* 9 September 2016

rural areas and also non-Malays and those leading moderates in Sabah and Sarawak.

There has been a worldwide tendency for politicians to look towards the next general election to preserve their privileged vested interests. Their vision is therefore limited to the short term. They tend to pursue the dubious doctrine of state capture in order to prolong and perpetuate their political dominance and power often for self gain.

In direct contrast, the independent and experienced thinkers and patriots in the G25 are committed to the long-term national interests unity, modernity and sustainability of our country. And that is why we all must rally around the G25 to strengthen it and to develop a kind of "G25 Movement" that stands for moderation, integrity, equity, fairness and unity in diversity.

As Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai wrote in his column, "We should not provide a platform for extremists like. (academic) Ridhuan (Tee Abdullah) to spew hatred and disunity. It's like providing oxygen for his fanaticism", "Unite, not divide, the people" (Sunday Star, Sept 4).

This begs the worrisome question: Why is justice not being done or seen to be done? Are some types of people less susceptible to allegations of sedition? Surely, the authorities don't want to give the impression that we have selective justice or bad governance in our country? What if others follow Tee's terrible example?

There could be chaos, as Alwi has rightly suggested. We don't want that possibility, do we?

In fact, any politician or individual who promotes hate, racial and religious bigotry and supremacy of any kind must be isolated and alienated politically and socially. Most politicians find it difficult to isolate bigots because they have to fight for, or even buy the votes of bigots.

Hence, it is welcome news to hear that the G25 will be going beyond their current critical concerns "to find solutions to the overlap of civilian and syariah laws" and to also delve into the vital question of good governance. This new emphasis is fundamental because with little or no good governance, all the progress we have proudly achieved since Merdeka will dissipate.

We are all deeply anxious about what my civil service brother Alwi boldly states, namely that "good governance has been eroded at an alarming rate".

The G25 Report on Political Financing Reforms that was submitted to the Prime Minister and Paul Low, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, has thus to be seriously discussed in Cabinet and even in Parliament. Hopefully, the G25 Report's recommendations will be adopted by the Government well before the coming general election in the interest of good governance.

All the *rakyat* really want is a fairer, more reasonable and equitable Government and greater national unity with good governance. That is the natural aspiration of

the *rakyat*, especially the bottom 40%, regardless of race and religion. At present, they could be and are feeling marginalised! They may even experience a sense of alienation from mainstream development, and feel a reduced sense of belonging and low level of patriotism.

We have to therefore go back to the basics and follow the principles of good governance set by our wise and honest founding fathers. Otherwise, as the G25 clearly suggests, we could fail badly and fade away.

So, let's all rally around the G25, form a "G25 Movement" and appeal for more good governance from our political leaders of all shades to pass on a better Malaysia.

This is what all true Malaysians want and fully deserve.

As we approach Malaysia Day on Sept 16, we, the rakyat, believe that we will win if we are united against all abuses from any and all quarters!

Selamat Hari Malaysia and may God bless our beloved country!

# Transferring is not the Answer\*

Public Service Department director-general Tan Sri Mohd Zabidi Zainal has publicly announced that 50 civil servants holding “sensitive posts” will be transferred within a week. He also said this exercise would be “ongoing”.

I wonder why the haste and how many more will be transferred out. Has the problem of sensitivity and corruption in the civil service suddenly become very serious? Is there now a kind of crisis about this stagnancy of officers in sensitive posts and making money? The drastic exercise also begs the question as to whether the person or the post is the sensitive problem. If it's the person and he/she is performing badly or dishonestly, he or she could be dealt with under the Government's disciplinary rules or General Orders.

## *Little Napoleons*

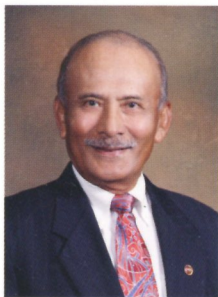
If the problem is the sensitive post, then for the sake of good governance, please desensitise the post. Introduce tighter procedures so that so-called Little Napoleons do not find loopholes to exploit for their personal gain.

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\* 12 April 2016

Political criticism is vital for the creation of a well-informed public, especially in our country Malaysia, where democracy is still only partially understood. Those standing outside the Government may lack the resources available to policymakers when expressing opinions or suggesting alternative strategies. The author Ramon Navaratnam has the advantage of having worked as an “insider” in Government for 30 years which is apparent in his writings. As such there seems little doubt that observers have a vital role to play. No matter how well-meaning government policies may be, the feedback provided by independent commentators is invaluable.

Malaysian politicians may not like listening to criticism from frank commentators like Ramon Navaratnam, but the best among them will, however reluctantly, acknowledge his important contribution. No-one likes to be told they are incompetent or worse – corrupt! But if the facts bear out the observation, then it is important for the health of the political system that the criticism be made and listened to. Like politicians, however, political commentators have responsibilities as well as rights. Their criticisms must be balanced, offering bouquets as well as brickbats whenever it is due and Ramon does so in his writings.



Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam writes honestly, openly and critically, but also politely. This is how I think he has succeeded as a critic, despite some of the nation's harsh laws!

Tun Haji Mohammed Hanif Omar  
President, Malaysian Institute of Management



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