

Let parliament be one of reconciliation

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Article

New Sunday Times - 03/16/2008

DEMOCRACY in this country is very much alive and kicking. Although many used to have cynical views about it — it was often a case of sour grapes—this may not be so after the recent general election.

Most were stunned by the "tsunami-like" socio-political impact which numbed almost everyone, not unlike that of the Aceh tragedy of 2004. There is, however, one important difference: everything is still intact, all is not lost.

The political shift is perhaps best epitomised by the image of the ballot boxes itself. From an "opaque used-tin biscuit box" way back then, it has been transformed into a sophisticated, tailor-made transparent box befitting the 21st century. Not only are the differences in physical appearance so stark, even more so, metaphorically speaking.

Thus, instead of lamenting in terms of winners and losers, we should all take this as a learning experience, as part of the growing pains in nation-building.

Otherwise, imagine remaining in an "opaque tin biscuit box" — even after 50 years of independence, where "change" is the only constant.

We could have remained in the "tin biscuit container" if not because of the courageous leadership taken by the prime minister.



He has taken upon himself to build a nation not only of first-class infrastructure — as we have, in the last two decades, though not without controversy — but more significantly to building first-class human capital and human beings as his priority.

For example, his statement, barely a year after taking office, on the need for not less than an "education revolution" still rings loudly in our ears.

Difficult as it is to ignite such a "revolution", the noble and sincere intention is clear.

While admittedly, it will not be as easy as erecting a building or a tower, the process has started to "reform" if not "revolutionise" the education system.

For this purpose, a different kind of leadership and perseverance is needed because the skills to build a towering personality is not the same as that of a towering building. There is no need for apologies.

Instead, developing an enlightened human capital can have a far-reaching impact which is often underestimated, especially in a new found transparent and open (real or perceived) atmosphere brought about by the administration.

Although there are those who went overboard, many more feel comfortable to express themselves.

The realm of human capital development is such that it will invariably impinge on the "mind".

Indeed, democracy is one product of the mind, the intellectual capital as it were, something that cannot be contained or boxed in.

In fact, there is a lot of truth in the saying that the mind once stretched can never be the same again. This is the same for democracy. This time around, we clearly witness how far it can be stretched once it goes beyond the opaque.

One learns from history what *glasnost* and *perestroika* can do to a then superpower at the turn of the century in an attempt to combat corruption and the abuse of privilege by the political classes.

In parts, it was triggered by a spirit of intellectual discourses and cultural openness which encouraged freedom of expression, liberating the mass media.

Greater public debate and participation made this possible and consequently led to a Russian version of a political "tsunami".

"Losing" in this context is rather relative — half empty instead of half full, which is "winning" in a sense. What is sure is that Russia will never be the same again, intentionally or otherwise.

If one cares to learn from the "democratic tsunami", one must be mindful that in moving forward, there is no longer any room for trivialities, hollow arguments and sexist remarks in nurturing the new found freedom.

The next time parliament commences, it must be one of ideas, intellectual prowess and reconciliation in the national interest.

To paraphrase the editorial in *Financial Times* (March 11), provided that politicians on all sides behave responsibly, the 2008 election "could usher in a period of increased accountability, transparency and democracy".

And this can only be good for all Malaysians and for Malaysia. In short, everyone wins!

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