



Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute
Dedicated To Creating A Better Society

Event	Still waiting for a fairer deal
Date	8 April 2019
Publish	The Star
Author	Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairman, ASLI Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS)

Still waiting for a fairer deal

I REFER to Wong Chun Wai's timely and pertinent article, "Middle class malady" (*Sunday Star*, April 7).

The malady of the general struggle is faced by not only the middle class but also by most Malaysians except the rich and powerful elite.

Most Malaysians live on their meagre incomes amid the rising cost of living. Hence, the middle class malady has become a wide and depressing Malaysian affliction.

Added to the struggle to put proper and enough food on the table, especially for the bottom 40% of our population, are major concerns over increasing racial and religious bigotry. Now, we also feel greater insecurity as a result of the alarming findings of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) that some state authorities could be behind the strange and sudden disappearance a Christian pastor.

All this stress on our sense of wellbeing and welfare is neither healthy nor promising for our personal and national confidence to progress as loyal individual citizens and as a hopeful and ambitious nation. We appear to be caught not only in a middle income trap but also, and more critically, we seem to be caught in a trap of uncertainty.

How do we get out of these regressive traps?

Of course, we can rightly blame the previous regime for much of our woes. These are the heavy debt burden, widened budget deficits, serious corruption and wastage of public funds, weakened national institutions, slow legal process to bring the crooked leaders to book, and the previous relative neglect of the bottom 40% of our population.

While tracing the causes of our present problems is a fair pursuit, it is neither sufficient nor advisable to mainly indulge in this kind of exercise. People have been informed well and are understanding and patient.

But our national patience is slowly but surely wearing thin. After about one year of the new and better government and greater good governance, people are now asking when we will have a fairer deal on the ground.

As Wong points out clearly in his article, statistics on economic growth and income distribution have shown improvements, but they are not felt at the grassroots where many are struggling to survive.

The Council of Eminent Persons (CEP) and National Economic Action Council (NEAC) must come out with their learned reports and seriously consider and possibly adopt some of the following proposals:

- i) Introduce an anti-inflation

package of effective measures to combat inflation. After all these years of fighting inflation, we know enough to be able to battle against rising prices. We have to be bold, think out of the box and be innovative. This could include modifying the old economic policies. We could increase licences and permits, reduce approved licences and allocate more land for food cultivation. This would raise food production and incomes of farmers and encourage more competition and higher productivity.

- ii) Accelerate the implementation of the useful education blueprint to produce more technicians, engineers and science and English language graduates. This would alleviate sooner rather than later the employment opportunities for our rising unemployed and socially threatened underemployed youth as well.

- iii) Strengthen our political will and raise our people's political support for all leaders who insist on fighting racial and religious bigotry. Hopefully, our respected royalty will take the lead for our political leaders and the rakyat to follow up strongly to build a more united Malaysian nation.

- iv) Adopt more policies to care for the poor even if we have to raise some wealth taxes. I believe the rich can well afford them. After all, as the Prime Minister has well

stated, social stability and further sustainable progress can only come when wealth is more equitably shared and spread among our Malaysian brothers and sisters like a large Malaysian family.

- v) The NEAC must develop and present us with a definite new socio-economic plan to overcome our national maladies as soon as possible. It's not rocket science and we, the people and voters, have full confidence in the CEP and NEAC to deliver the fruits of their long labour for lasting, stable and steady progress for our beloved Malaysia.

Many national and community leaders, both at the top and on the ground, have expressed their strong aspirations to break out of our socio-economic and race and religious traps to move forward and to progress faster. The people are waiting in peace and harmony and with great expectations for our leaders to lead us wisely and courageously to not only a new but also a better Malaysia.

We will be waiting and watching whether and how our leaders remove the many Malaysian maladies that we have unfortunately inherited from the past.

TAN SRI RAMON
NAVARATNAM
Chairman

Asli Center for Public Policy
Studies