

CORRUPT FREE MERITOCRACY

LEE KUAN YEW : AT 85 , THE FIRE STILL BURNS

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Singapore 's Minister Mentor, Lee Kuan Yew, who was Singapore 's founding father, has always been very direct in his comments. This was the man who outsmarted the communists in Singapore (with the innocent help of Malaya then and the willing help of the British) and who later outwitted the British and outpaced Malaysia in all spheres.

Singapore practices corrupt-free meritocracy and Malaysia affirmative action. The former attracted all the best brains and the latter chased out all the brains. The Singapore cabinet consists of dedicated and intelligent technocrats whereas Malaysia has one of the most unwieldy cabinets. Not only that, brain wise it was below par not even good for the kampong.

With that kind of composition, one that is very brainy, naturally Singapore, with no natural resources could outstrip Malaysia in every aspect of development. Malaysia, on the other hand, was too much preoccupied with its Malayness and the illusory 'Ketuanan Melayu' and was also more interested in useless mega iconic development rather than real social and economic development.

Whenever Kuan Yew utters anything that deemed to be a slight on Malaysia, voices were raised admonishing him. Malaysia would never dare to face reality. That Singapore had shown that it could survive was a slap on those who believed that Singapore would fold up once it left Malaysia. Therefore it was natural that these doomsayers would try to rationalise their utterances to be in their favour to combat on whatever Kuan Yew commented. Its political jealousy.

Singapore achieved its development status without any fanfare. But here in Malaysia, a development that was deceptive was proclaimed as having achieved development status. It was trumpeted as an achievement that befits first world status. This was self delusion. Malaysians are led to believe into a make believe world, a dream world. The leaders who themselves tend to believe in their own fabricated world did not realise the people were not taken in by this kind of illusion.

Lee Kuan Yew believed in calling a spade a spade. I was there in Singapore when the People's Action Party won the elections in 1959. He was forthright in his briefing to party members as to what was expected of them and what Singapore would face in the future. Ideologically, I did not agree with him. We in the University of Malaya Socialist Club had a different interpretation of socialist reconstruction. But he was a pragmatist and wanted to bring development and welfare to the Singaporeans. Well! He succeeded.

Malaysia was so much embroiled in racial politics and due to the fear of losing political power, all actions taken by the main party in power was never targeted towards bringing wealth to all. Wealth was distributed to the chosen few only. They were the cronies and the backers of the party leadership to perpetuate their own selfish ends.

Seeing the efficiency and the progress achieved by Singapore caused the Malaysian leadership to suffer from an inferiority complex. That Malaysia should suffer from this complex was of its own making.

In a recent interview, Kuan Yew said that Malaysia could have done better if only it treated its minority Chinese and Indian population fairly. Instead they were completely marginalised and many of the best brains left the country in droves. He added that Singapore was a standing indictment to what Malaysia could have done differently. He just hit the nail right there on the head.

Malaysia recently celebrated its 50th year of independence with a bagful of uncertainties. The racial divide has become more acute. The number of Malay graduates unemployed is on the increase. And this aspect can be very explosive. But sad to see that no positive actions have been taken to address these social ills.

Various excuses were given by Malaysian leaders why Singapore had far outstripped Malaysia in all aspects of social and economic advancement. Singapore was small, they rationalised and therefore easy to manage. Singapore was not a state but merely an island.

There was one other aspect that Malaysia practises and that is to politicise all aspects of life. All government organs and machinery were 'UMNO-ised'. This was to ensure that the party will remain in power. Thus there was this misconception by the instruments of government as to what national interest is and what UMNO vested interest is.

UMNO vested interest only benefited a few and not the whole nation. But due to the UMNO-isation of the various instruments of government, the country under the present administration had equated UMNO vested interest as being that of national interest. Thus development became an avenue of making money and not for the benefit of the people. The fight against corruption took a back seat. Transparency was put on hold. And the instruments of government took it to be of national interest to cater to the vested interest of UMNO. Enforcement of various enactments and laws was selective. Thus a 'palace' in Kelang, APs cronies and close-one-eye umno MPs could exist without proper procedure. Corruption infested all govt. department, the worse is the police and lately even in the judiciary.

Singapore did not politicise its instruments of government. If ever politicisation took place, it is guided by national interest. To be efficient and to be the best in the region was of paramount importance. Thus all the elements like corruption, lackadaisical attitude towards work and other black elements, which would retard such an aim, were eliminated. Singapore naturally had placed the right priority in its pursuit to achieve what is best for its people. This is the major difference between these two independent countries.

Malaysia in its various attempts to cover up its failures embarked on several diversions. It wanted its citizens to be proud that the country had the tallest twin-tower in the world, although the structure was designed and built by foreigners. It's now a white-elephant wasting away. It achieved in sending a man into space at an exorbitant price. For what purpose? These are what the Malays of old would say "menang sorak" (hollow victories).

It should be realised that administering a country can be likened to managing a corporate entity. If the management is efficient and dedicated and know what they are doing, the company will prosper. The reverse will be if the management is poor and bad. The company will go bust.

For Malaysia to redeem herself, UMNO must be eradicated.

There are five countries around this region. There is Malaysia, and then Indonesia. To the east there is the Philippines and then there is that small enclave called the Sultanate of Brunei. All these four countries have abundance of natural resources but none can lay claim to have used all these resources to benefit the people. Poverty was rampant and independence had not brought in any significant benefits to the people.

But tiny Singapore without any resources at all managed to bring development to its citizens. It had one of the best public MRT transport systems and airlines in the world and it is a very clean city state. Their universities, health care, ports are among the best in the world.

It is impossible to compare what Singapore has achieved to what all these four countries had so far achieved. It was actually poor management and corruption, and nothing more. Everything is done for the vested interest of the few.

Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines and the Sultanate of Brunei need good management teams. They would not be able to do this on their own steam. I would advise that they call on Kuan Yew to show them what good governance is. Why look East to Japan when it is just next door across the causeway.