

RSOG Knowledge Sharing Platform: “CONSTRUCTING AN INCLUSIVE AGENDA FOR NATION BUILDING”

by

Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria

When : 16 May 2013
Where : Razak School of Government
Who : Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria

About The Seminar

The 13th General Election was the most closely contested elections in the country's history. Race and religion was used extensively during the campaign period by certain quarters to create political mileage and this has inadvertently reminded us that these classifications continue to shape our thinking and policies.

Even after the elections, the issues of race and religion continue to rage on. These factors have also been used to explain the results of the elections, further widening the ethnic divide and bringing race relations to an all-time low.

There have been calls from both sides of the political divide, for a more inclusive Malaysia. Regardless of the election outcome, the current government has the responsibility of fulfilling the promises that it has espoused during the campaign period and to advance the interests of the general public. It is crucial that those who shape administrative decisions take on an inclusive mind-set and remember that is a government to all Malaysians.

Summary

Dr. Denison told the audience that the social reality of Malaysia has moved beyond ethnicity and the recent polls results is a testament of that. He said that there are four new aspects in the current Malaysia context and ethnicity is no longer the dominant factor. It is important for society and the government to recognise these four new aspects and act on them. They are: the new social reality; the development paradigm; the need to strengthen existing institutions; and revamping the media.

He pointed out that despite calls from some quarters to label the polls results as race based, the landscape of Malaysia has evolved beyond that. There are rural and urban factors and this factor is further split into the upper class urban voters and the lower rung of urban voters. There are gender issues, the elder vis-à-vis the younger generation and the digital divide. He said that these new realities are here to stay and everyone needs to recognise the changing trend.

He also explained that the groundswell of voters against the current government was a result of uneven development – the benefits of the policies and programmes were not trickling down to society but remained at the elite level. He said that development will need to incorporate social, economic and civil rights factors. The planning process is vital to ensure smooth delivery and the rakyat has to be included in the planning of the country. He also stressed the crucial role entrusted to the civil service. He said the civil service should be the custodian of planning and is bigger than politics and therefore, should not bow down to the pressure of politicians.

Dr. Denison also voiced out on the urgent need to strengthen the existing institutions in the country. He explained that Malaysia practices the British Parliament system and the august house should be further strengthened to allow bi-partisan discussions. As practiced in the United Kingdom, the Opposition Leader should be respected and a Shadow Cabinet should be formed. All parliamentarians have to be accountable for their actions. And functions of state (country) should include all MPs regardless of political affiliation.

Mediating institutions, which are intermediaries between the government and the people, should remain independent and perceived as such. These institutions are not government agencies and thus should not be led by former government servants. The people appointed to these posts have to be independent, credible and give the perception that they are trustworthy. These institutions cannot play its role as a mediator between the community and government when there is a deficit of trust. The government also has a responsibility not to issue statements that deride and undermine these institutions.

Denison went on to reiterate the importance of restoring local government authority. He said that most of the problems faced by urban dwellers are local urban problems, which could be addressed by the local government. The very fact that local elections are held reinforces the importance of local government, who should assume responsibility for local matters, and not the Federal government.

He concluded the talk by addressing the impartiality and openness of the mainstream media. He said a serious review on the media has to be conducted and the media has to be accessible to all. Propaganda journalism is no longer relevant. There is a need for differing views and senior civil servants must be prepared to articulate, explain and defend government policies.

Issues Raised

- A new paradigm to address the change in the Malaysian society. Old paradigms such as race and religion are no longer dominant.
- Participatory development is demanded by the people and they want to have a say on how development is taking place in the country. Policies and programmes need to be inclusive to all levels of society and regardless of race or religion. Policies that benefit the elite only are no longer enough.
- Institutions need to be strengthened so that democracy can truly take place. This could help to address the deficit of trust that the people have against the government. Governments come and go but the state and its institutions remain to safeguard the interest of the people.
- Reforms have to be carried out in the media. It is not a mouthpiece of the government not its propaganda. Ethics, integrity and independence have to be restored in the journalistic field.

About the Speaker

Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria is Principal Research Fellow of the Institute of Ethnic Studies at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

He was on the National Economic Consultative Council from 1999 to 2000, the Royal Police Commission from 2004 to 2006 and the Human Rights Commission from 2006 to 2006. From 2010 to 2011, he was attached to the Prime Minister's Department.

He was conferred the Panglima Jasa Negara by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 2006. He has a PhD in sociology from Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom in 1996.

Contact

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at programmes@rsog.com.my

Photo Gallery