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LET'S SET OUR DIFFERENCES ASIDE TO NURTURE MALAYSIA BACK TO HEALTH

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'MENANG BERSAMA'

LET'S SET OUR DIFFERENCES ASIDE TO NURTURE MALAYSIA BACK TO HEALTH

Domestic political cooperation is crucial in managing the nation's Covid-19 response



TENGKU DATUK SERI ZAFRUL TENGKU ABDUL AZIZ

OFT-TIMES, in the face of adversity and crisis, the most Malaysian thing to do is put our differences aside and work together to overcome them. This is most apparent during natural disasters, or monsoon floods. Other examples include past financial crises, as well as the SARS and Japanese Encephalitis health crises, to name a few.

Our beloved country is still in a health and economic crisis. Many countries, including Malaysia, which had successfully contained the virus before are currently seeing a spike in cases due to the Delta and Lambda variants, which are more lethal and infectious than earlier versions. Yes, there may be much reason for many of us to be angry and play the blame game, but the omnipresent threat of the virus ill-affords us such luxury.

It is exactly this threat that underscores the urgency of the National Recovery Plan (NRP) which is based on six core principles, including reopening our economy, being guided by science and data, taking a whole-of-the-nation approach, and ensuring the plan is dynamic and adaptable.

At the heart of this core, however, is a sincere and serious effort cutting across party and ideological lines to embrace a diverse set of opinions — from opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, the business community as well as economic, health and social welfare experts — towards a common goal.

Ultimately, however, it is all about the rakyat's lives, which must be protected by ensuring



Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin outlining details of the National Recovery Plan during the special Dewan Rakyat sitting on July 26. BERNAMA PIC

our healthcare system — particularly its capacity to respond — can cope, and by ramping up our Covid-19 National Immunisation Programme.

It is important for everyone to remain united and focused on the task at hand by looking at the bigger picture. It is like we are on a flight, and the plane suffers some technical problems that need to be fixed mid-air to avoid a crash.

Instead of focusing on ensuring everyone's safe landing, the crew bicker about changing the pilot instead. Imagine us, the rakyat, as passengers on that flight — how do we feel?

Lives are at stake in our country, and the rakyat need to know that we have our act together to try and help this country exit the pandemic safely.

So, why waste a valuable opportunity to pool our viewpoints, knowledge, ideas and resources systematically via the NRP?

I believe the NRP is our best hope yet — and currently our most viable multivoice solution — in exiting this pandemic.

This is why we have also invited members of opposing political

parties like Pakatan Harapan, Warisan and of course, Pejuang, who have unfortunately officially refused the invitation.

In gathering viewpoints from as many quarters as possible, a good idea is a good idea. It should not matter who proposes it.

In fact, this is exactly what the Finance Ministry did during the 2021 Budget, when we incorporated various proposals — even from the opposition parties in the budget.

Pejuang's rejection aside, this will not stop us from continuing to reach out and engage all sides to consider everyone's views in implementing the NRP. As I have repeatedly said, the plan needs to be dynamic because the virus mutates aggressively, and we need to be agile in adapting the plan to current situations.

Closing ranks does not mean we have to agree with all the policies presented by the government of the day. In fact, many within the council have been the government's fiercest and harshest critics. But when lives are clearly at stake and our healthcare is tottering, we must rise above our differences and work

together so we can bring the country out of the doldrums of this wretched pandemic.

The NRP is meant to cover us until December this year, and until Covid-19 can be managed as endemic. Beyond December, the nation's recovery will be supported by the 2022 Budget to address short-term economic revitalisation efforts and the 12th Malaysia Plan, representing medium-term strategies to structurally reform the economy.

Domestic political cooperation on managing Covid-19 is not something new. In Canada, policies on economic relief and health safety measures were developed with broad consensus from both sides of the aisle.

New Zealand, which has been exemplary in the fight against Covid-19, established a bipartisan committee to oversee the nation's pandemic response.

Most recently in South Korea, both the government and opposition came together in a rare bipartisan agreement on additional budgetary allocations.

Our people deserve the same, if not better. Why can't we show the same political will and cooper-

ation to save our rakyat?

Our esteemed parliamentarians did this for the Covid-19 Bill in August last year, for which I am sure the people are deeply thankful, as it enabled aid and assistance to be channelled to them.

I am confident we will be able to do it again through the NRP.

I trust that all stakeholders are rich in their desire to see our beloved country free from the clutches of a devastating global pandemic.

We must seize this opportunity to work together, cooperate and ensure that Malaysia gets back on its growth trajectory.

I pray for sense over political satire, and for peace over posturing. Do not let our differences douse the Malaysian spirit to nurse our nation back on its feet again.

Let us, for once, put those differences aside, and draw upon that sense of solidarity from deep within each of us, to unite and ensure victory in our war against Covid-19, so we can one day declare that we have *Menang Bersama!*

The writer is Finance Minister.



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SUMMARIES

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