

## Things that'll make us more resilient

By Dato' Steven Wong



**GET BACK ON TRACK:** *Promote greater engagement and communication rather than separation and unilateralism*

THE New Year is typically a time for celebration of the year past and, most importantly, hope for the year ahead.

More than an objective reality, the change in the calendar (Gregorian or otherwise) fills the very human need to approach the great uncertainties that lie ahead with optimism, confidence and enthusiasm.

The past year was particularly difficult for the country and Malaysians would be relieved to see it go. But it was not just the terrible tragedies, notably the twin air disasters and terrible floods, which were the cause of grief.

The speech, behaviour and polarising actions of the nation's leaders, nongovernmental organisations and a small segment of our population were also not cast in the best possible light.

So bad were these that one former senior politician called for the hitting of the national reset button, a reference to the desire to starting things afresh and anew.

The problem is that the reset button is only a figure of speech. There is no such button. If there were, hitting it would do no good because things are what they are for a reason - either for good reasons or the lack of them.

It is easy enough for one group of national leaders or citizens to demand other groups to change. That is merely the rough-and-tumble of democracy at its very best and very worst.

In the present age, we should be very thankful that these demands are peaceful and not accompanied by acts of violence. Some though are apparently not averse to issuing veiled threats and the exercise of power.

It is entirely another thing completely to demand for one's self or community's interests to change. In many senses, 2014 was marked by the insistence of one's rights and by the resistance to change.

Disappointingly, little thought was given for what was good for the nation as one undivided whole. The attitude that what-is-good-for-me-is-good-for-the country seemed to reign supreme.

Many Malaysians would benefit from a basic grounding in political science or at least how countries and societies can or should function. Even common sense of cause-and-effect is lost on them. Either that or they do not much care.



*We must be able to look back in 365 days and say that we moved the country further down the path of tolerance and moderation.*

Both cases are equally disturbing.

There is case after case of countries going downhill and never to recover when they are united only in name and the groups comprising them spend all their time and effort to advance their interests at the expense of others.

In most, if not all cases, state power was usurped to prevent opposition. In most cases, especially where it involved governments against their own citizens, this turned out to be futile.

For societies to thrive, there needs to be real cooperation on the ground. There are many theories as to how this is achieved, and practice shows that there is no one-size-fits-all, at least not in every detail and nuance.

Some countries find cooperation by giving more space for individual interests and expression, others by promoting those of the group. In almost all cases, it is not one or the other but a combination of the two.

Malaysia, too, must find its own way and for a great while it seemed to. Now that way seems to be disappearing with the country appearing to slide in terms of handling its differences, namely through coherence, tolerance and moderation.

It does not matter that countries may have it equal or worse than us. Raising the current race relations in, say, the United States may be intellectually gratifying but it says and does nothing for our current situation. Rather than hit the reset button and start afresh (who knows what we will arrive at), it would seem a better idea to rediscover and discover the things that will make us more resilient.

We need to invest much more time seriously thinking about how to promote greater engagement, communication, space for policy and action, reciprocity, joint payoffs and rewards rather than the track we are on now. Continuing to promote particularism, separation, isolationism, unilateralism and so forth are the true enemies of the country and its people.

My wish for 2015 is that we will be able to look back in 365 days and say that we moved the country further down the first path and avoided the second.

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