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28 April 2021, Rabu
16 Ramadhan, 1442



Rumah Bersih & Teratur, Ibadah Saat Ramadan

Selamat Menyambut Ramadan Al-Mubarak



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What is 'sejahtera'?



By [Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - November 11, 2018 @ 9:48am

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Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng tabling the 2019 Budget on Nov 2. PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

MUCH has been said about the 2019 Budget’s three areas of emphasis: implementing institutional reforms; fostering an entrepreneurial economy; and ensuring socio-economic wellbeing of Malay-sians.

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While most commented on their quantitative dimensions, few said much about the qualitative aspects, creating a kind of value bias against the latter. This has many vital implications with regard to ensuring a more holistic and human-centric representation of the 2019 Budget.

This is best illustrated from the aspect of the third focus area: to ensure the socio-economic wellbeing of Malaysians, which in Malay reads as *memastikan kesejahteraan rakyat*. It is as though this aspect is the accumulation of the other two – institutional reforms and entrepreneurial economy – to arrive at the state of wellbeing (*sejahtera*) limited to the socio-economic realm. The limitation becomes even more obvious when rendering of “socio-economic wellbeing” of Malay-sians falls short of fully explaining what *memastikan kesejahteraan rakyat* is all about (the word “socio-economic” is not even implied).

After all, as explained in the 2019 Budget, this aspect has a broader spectrum, embracing the quality of life and welfare, health and social welfare protection, and employment and employability as its subthemes as the overall targets. The reality is that the keyword *sejahtera* is more comprehensive and sophisticated than just “socio-economic wellbeing” – which is just one layer of its meaning. *Sejahtera* is a rather multilayered concept that conveys a deeper meaning than any single word can convey. As such it has no equivalent in other languages, neither can it be accurately translated into different languages due to its close cultural leaning and nuances to the local Malay(sian) tradition.

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Hence to understand it from a one-dimensional perspective is to miss the whole point and can even give a very distorted meaning. What would be most sorely missed is the qualitative-cum-intangible aspects that are today's major concern. Health, for example, is not just about the absence of disease or illness that may be quantifiable, one way or the other. However health is also universally recognised as the state of emotions, sans “physical” diseases, that could lead to a situation of *tidak sejahtera* (read depression, stress, violence) without any clear signs and symptoms until perhaps it is too late to deal with.

A recent report that cited the case of some 20 per cent of students in Penang experiencing depression and about six per cent attempting suicide is an alarming case in point. This is just the tip of the *tidak sejahtera* iceberg beyond socio-economic terms. Indeed, *sejahtera* is foremost spiritual in nature, embracing both emotional and ethical dimensions that are too often left out in the limited understanding of the word. In short, it is defined by values and virtues as its basic framework.

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NATION Apr 16, 2021 @ 2:12pm

This takes us to the concern that Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been expressing all along: values must come first before any form of skills or competencies. In fact, with good values, it is a lot easier to acquire skills and competencies of all sorts because the ethical and moral disciplines are well nurtured as a base for any skills and competencies to be built upon. He was recently quoted, on his working visit to Japan, reaffirming his conviction leading to the establishment of the Look East Policy some 30 years ago.

Good moral values should be given attention and taught to children from kindergarten to university, said the prime minister. Accordingly, he remarked that the “national educational system should teach students good values and character” beyond imparting (marketable) knowledge which is the true purpose of “education” as per the “Falsafah Pendidikan Negara” (later “Kebangsaan”) (national education philosophy) .

Quality of life is another area that “socio-economic wellbeing” is inadequate at addressing. It fails to grasp the full meaning of the entire human person (life). “Life” as in quality of life is invariably related to the “spiritual being” first rather than the material being which is socio-economically defined and determined. Otherwise, values/virtues such as happiness, love and mutual respect will be marginalised.

In a nutshell the element of “sejahtera” must be fully understood, internalised and practised because it is the fountainhead of good values/virtues that are innately human (and divine too) that will lead to a righteous and balanced way of life in nurturing the human person as advocated by the “Falsafah” which is in no uncertain terms the basis of the national education system from pre-school to the university and beyond. The urgent question is whether this is taking place in a continuous, holistic and integrated manner (as advocated by the “Falsafah”).

Until this happens, “sejahtera” in all its forms and taglines are nothing but empty clichés. Applied to a document as critical as the 2019 Budget (the latest to leverage “sejahtera”), the outcome may fall terribly short of what the word is supposed to convey qualitatively as a way of life based on values and virtues that Malaysia desperately finds wanting especially of late. Salam sejahtera.

The writer is the rector of International Islamic University and an honorary fellow of CenPRIS at Universiti Sains Malaysia

TOWARDS the end of last month, Transport Minister Anthony Loke announced something which many had been waiting for. In fact, this column has several times pushed for it, and his announcement was welcome, indeed.

By 2020, said Loke, child car seats will be made compulsory for all private cars. Before then, he said, the ministry will conduct awareness programmes to educate the public on the importance of these seats. He went on to explain that another reason implementation would only be in 2020 was that at the moment, there were not enough suppliers, not enough stock.

Loke also wanted car seats to be sales and service tax exempt so as to make them cheaper. Malaysians, it must be said, are becoming more and more safety conscious. More and more, these days, you see couples with



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NATION Apr 16, 2021 @ 9:10am

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NATION Apr 27, 2021 @ 5:56pm

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NATION Apr 26, 2021 @ 8:24pm

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young children using such car seats. Kudos to them. Studies have shown that children in car seats have a better chance of surviving crashes.

But there are still those who refuse to take safety, of their children no less, into account when getting behind the wheel. Of course, when Loke's announcement came out, there was a little bit of a hue and cry.

The most common argument against it was that it would cost a lot of money, especially for the poor and those with many children. To be fair, the prices of such items are terribly high.

In 2007, a couple expecting their first child noticed the price of such items here. It just so happened the couple flew to the United States soon after and found the same item for a third of the price in Malaysia.

Of course, not everyone can go to the US to shop, and heading there would cost more anyway. But since then, perhaps because Malaysians are becoming more safety conscious, there are more such items available and prices have come down somewhat, though they are still high. And, that is exactly what Loke and the ministry are trying to avoid.

The reason why he mentioned that there were not enough suppliers and stock is because, right now, these items are expensive.

Having more suppliers, and local manufacturers, mind you, will allow for prices to come down, at least a little. Will they be cheap enough for the poor to afford? That remains to be seen.

But the more pertinent and infinitely more important question would be this: What price your children's safety?

Parents, generally, will risk it all for their children. They would sacrifice their lives for them. Yet there are many – perhaps through lack of knowledge or perhaps because they do not quite understand or just have not thought things through – who put their children's lives at risk every day on Malaysian roads.

We are not talking here about the car seats, per se, but about parents who have their children on motorcycles, minus helmets. We are talking about the parents who, while their kids are jumping around in the rear, ironically sit buckled up, safe and sound.

Having child seats is an extra precaution, but one which is completely necessary. And mandatory in many countries. So it is an extra expense, but so what? Again, what price your children's safety? Is your child's life worth so little? Just a few hundred ringgit, perhaps?

That aside, there are other things that the government needs to ensure before such a plan is implemented. The first is quality control. There must be certain standards which need to be followed right from the materials used in the manufacture of the seats. Then there are the proper guidelines. This is easy enough to do.

There are many countries which have such laws. Just look at these countries to determine what needs to be done here. For instance, when do babies outgrow baby seats? When can they use car seats, when do kids "graduate" to booster seats? Do they face forwards or backwards? Can seats be in the front seat? These are just some of the questions which need to be answered.

And then there is also what needs to be done after car seats are made mandatory. This cannot be stressed enough in Malaysia. Enforcement is the key to making any law successful, yet sadly, enforcement always seems to be lacking in the country.

Whatever it is, the ministry is taking a step in the right direction. What

whatever it is, the ministry is taking a step in the right direction. What needs to be done now is to ensure the move is successful. It is not just about implementing it. It is about researching best practices, coming up with solutions and proactive measures after 2020.

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The writer has more than two decades of experience, much of which has been spent writing about crime and the military. A die-hard Red Devil, he can usually be found wearing a Manchester United jersey when outside of work.

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