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What do the people need?

What we need is a touch of humility from the leaders. If it is not too much to ask...

by AZREEN HANI

ALMOST seven months later and Malaysians from all walks of lives are still reeling from the social and economic impact brought by the coronavirus.

It is clear that the virus has affected each of us as we adjust our lives to the new normal.

Still, as written by *The Guardian's* columnist Chuck Collins in April: "Let's not pretend that we are all on the same boat while riding this storm."

Data from the International Monetary Fund revealed that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening due to Covid-19.

The wealth inequality, according to the monetary fund, keeps increasing despite the efforts by governments to redistribute incomes from the rich to the poor to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Malaysia, too, is not spared from this situation. *The Malaysian Reserve* reported on Monday that with only RM700 income shock, 800,000 households are falling vulnerable to poverty.



In this unprecedented time, perhaps what the people need is empathy and not an out of touch approach from the leaders

In essence, Covid-19 has affected all of us, but one might suffer more than the other. In other words, the poor remain the worst-hit, while the wealthy suffer in terms of shrinking assets or net worth.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy) Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed said in the Dewan Rakyat recently that Malaysia will see an improved economic performance in the second quarter of this year and to recover by 2021.

For now, the Malaysian economy is largely supported by domestic economic activities and the government, through the Eco-

nomics Action Council, is formulating a medium- and long-term recovery plans post-pandemic.

In the meantime, we will have to wait. For those who have trouble meeting their financial commitments, rest assured that by now, respective lenders may have reached out to you via email and text on the possibility of extension and repayment arrangement.

For those who have the means to spend, the government is encouraging you to spend for the nation.

There is jitter and anxiety among the youths, especially fresh graduates who are anticipating jobs with literally limited opportunities.

Malaysia's unemployment hit 826,000 in May. It is worth noting, however, that the number had declined to 773,000 persons in June following the reopening of most economic sectors along with various measures that have been introduced by the government.

Still, the concern remains if we are perhaps taking things a little too lightly. In this uncertain, "exciting" and again, unprecedented time, perhaps what the people need is empathy and not an out of touch approach from the leaders.

Still, recent events have shown that some of the public responses appeared to be tone-deaf in nature.

Asking people to keep a job with low pay, or seize any job opportunity rather than being jobless, is one example.

It is, of course, reasonable advice, but perhaps not one that is expected from a policymaker.

In fact, that is what ordinary citizens have been doing to survive because not all of us are guaranteed positions at government-linked companies.

A photo of politicians enjoying allegedly expensive meals in the Dewan Rakyat feels like rubbing salt into the wound among the working class, whose minimum pay is at a fraction of the entire meal's cost.

Ketereh MP Tan Sri Annuar Musa tried to clarify that the meal

seemed "normal", as opposed to Batu MP P. Prabakaran's accusation that the cost is between RM6,000 and RM10,000.

The point remains, as one Internet user pointed out, that nobody would question anyone's meal if it is paid from their own pocket, or done discreetly.

If it was not bad enough, a viral video of a student being fined for not wearing his mask properly in a public space seemed excessive, when photos of politicians and their followers gathering and campaigning sans mask have been making its rounds online.

The apparent lack of self awareness among these leaders might give the impression that they are above the law and this does not bode well with the public.

One now starts to question whether there are two sets of law and if this perception continues, the authority will suffer from public backlash.

We are all riding the same storm and we are aware that we are not in the same boat. In fact, some boats are built bigger than others.

What we need is a touch of humility from the leaders. If it is not too much to ask...

Azreen Hani is the online news editor of *The Malaysian Reserve*.