

Broadcasting a narrow view

Dr. Mahathir
EVERY Monday night at 9.30pm on RTM 1, the current-affairs programme "Isu" tries valiantly to say something about the things that happen in this country.

It is one of the least-watched shows on television, because nothing is ever said that hasn't already been said to death.

This week, they tried to say something about the 70 million population policy. You will recall the 70 million population policy. Let's call it the 70MPP for short. (Might as well abbreviate what we can, because everything else about the matter seems awfully long-drawn.)

The 70MPP first appeared in September 1982, in a mention at the Umno General Assembly. It was tied-up and dressed for action in the Mid-Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan, published a year later. It was granted Cabinet approval on April 7, 1984.

Thereupon, it got extensively talked about by everyone. Eventually, it fell exhausted by the wayside of policy; unable to keep pace with the leading pack of domestic socio-economic initiatives.

For some reason, "Isu" thought it prudent to attempt to breathe some life back into the old-model 70MPP, apparently unaware of the new improved models already in the advanced-design stage. This earnest flogging of a moribund horse would suggest that there are people in current-affairs broadcasting who are having trouble keeping their affairs current.

So, sadly, it becomes necessary once again to give yet another



shake-out to a woefully worn-out argument. Deep breath. Here we go. (Again.):

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE 70MPP.

- OBJECTIVE: A Malaysian population of 70 million.
- PRO: A wider population base, generating a sufficiently large labour pool and the consequent consumer demand to achieve a self-sustaining domestic economy.
- CON: Overpopulation i.e. population demands exceeding availability of living resources and space, thereby lowering quality-of-life.
- TIME FRAME: 115 years.
- SUB ISSUES: Marry-at-19, Go-For-Five.
- OVERALL SENTIMENT: Ambivalent. The 70MPP as articulated in 1983 had both merits and demerits, but a century-long forward view embodies too many variables to enable a completely clear position on such a matter now.

Furthermore, babies have a tendency to decide for themselves when to appear, in what numbers and to whom.

In other words, the development of population ultimately depends on people happily doing what comes

naturally. Therefore, it might be best to let nature have a say in the matter. So:

- FINAL VERDICT: None.

These matters were cleared almost four years ago, after it had become apparent that the POMPP was controversial for only one reason:

People insisted on seeing it as a means, and not an end.

The true object of the exercise was to work towards generating an economy that can sustain a population of 70 million: not produce 70 million people in order to sustain the economy.

To clarify: A Malaysian population of 70 million is a dream, not a directive. It is a hope, not an edict.

It is a dream based on the hope that Malaysians will sense great promise in this country, and be eager to bring that hope literally to life by granting their homeland the gift of generations.

It is the hope that people will be happy to marry and have children here, because there is work to be had and money to be earned; and there are roads and houses and clinics and schools and shops nearby and a good life to be lived.

It is the hope that Malaysian children will be born in the knowledge that here their lives stand to mean something; here they will have the opportunities to grow up to be good and happy people, of relevance and comfort to each other.

For Malaysians to have hope in themselves; for Malaysia to have hope in itself — this is the dream that underlies the 70 million population policy.

ACT - 4 DEC 1987
In the four years since the 70MPP was first kicked around, this baseline ideal has become much clearer than it was back then. It has since been seen that the whole point of the POMPP was not to breed as if there was no tomorrow, but to build as if there most certainly was.

Build roads and houses. Build schools and industries. Build opportunities. Build confidence and optimism. Build pride. Build hope. In a word, build the economy.

It meant-and means-so much more than merely churning out either profits or babies, but then Malaysia's greatest ill-fortune has always been in its almost unnatural abundance of narrow-minded people.

But no... we shall not be so harsh. For "narrow-minded", read "ignorant".

Narrow-mindedness is the result of ignorance, which at least allows the consolation that it need not be an incurable condition. Ignorance is cured through information and education.

This is what TV programmes like "Isu" try to do -to inform and educate — and it would be unreasonable to assume that they're not doing the best they can.

The real problem, therefore, seems to be that the makers of such programmes, in common with the officials they interview, seem as badly in need of education and information as the rest of us.

And (if you will forgive my continuing excesses with the English language) how shall the teacherless teacher teach?