

MAHATHIR'S VISION FOR MALAYSIA IN 2020

The dynamics of challenge, response

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THE word "vision" is a word that has been used to the point of becoming a political cliché. Among the definitions of this word is that of vision being a vivid concept, or mental picture. More than most other prime ministers in the nation's history, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been described as a man with a political vision.

On February 28 1991, the prime minister launched the Malaysian Business Council where he presented a working paper entitled Malaysia: The Way Forward. The paper and the ideas in it presented logically and lucidly were a concrete expression of the political vision of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir for Malaysia of the year 2020.

What distinguishes the banal and mundane from the innovative and far-sighted in politics as in other pursuits, is the capacity to see and work for objectives whose fruits may not be realised in one's own lifetime. Unfortunately, in the profession of politics more than others, the interests and dictates of the moment push out long-term considerations. As a result, the long-term considerations of most poli-

the year 2020, is one that will be shared and supported by all Malaysians, irrespective of their race or religion. It is a progressive vision. It is a dynamic vision. It is a vision that Malaysians can be proud of. And it is a vision that can harness the energy, zeal and commitment of every right thinking Malaysian today.

The other challenges include that of creating a psychologically secure and developed Malaysian society; fostering mature democratic values; establishing a moral and ethical structure; creating a matured, liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours, creeds and religious beliefs and yet feeling that they belong to one nation; the establishment of a scientific and progressive culture and a caring, economically just and prosperous society.

ishment. We must provide enough by way of essential shelter, access to health facilities, and all the basic essentials". This is a viewpoint on which all of us will agree and can support the Mahathir Administration 100 per cent.

The programme of social restructuring to provide a balanced and equitable society should, by the year 2020, reach a stage where none can say that a particular ethnic group is inherently economically backward and another is economically inherently advanced. In other words, there must be a situation where efficiency and effectiveness is combined with fairness and with dedication. This is also an objective that can be fully supported by all fair-minded Malaysians. National prosperity cannot be enjoyed in a stable and secure manner if there are acutely disadvantaged and depressed ethnic groups.

ticians are a series of short-term strategies often limited to the next party or parliamentary election.

Progressive

What exactly is this vision? In the words of the prime minister, the vision for the year 2020, is that of Malaysia as a fully developed country. This begs the question of what exactly is the notion of a developed nation. The premier stated that "by the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient".

The prime minister identified nine central strategic challenges which have confronted Malaysia since the achievement of independence. Among the most crucial of these is "the challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership made up of one "Bangsa Malaysia" with political loyalty and dedication to the nation".

The premier's vision of Malaysia in

Malaysians should be acquainted with the ideas contained in the working paper presented to the Malaysian Business Council. They are food for thought for the type of society that the present generations would like to work for and leave as a legacy to future generations.

Critics of the prime minister have branded these ideas as rhetoric and political maya. While the programme that has been outlined by the prime minister in his working paper and the reality that exists today, is separated by a wide and deep divide, it does not necessarily mean that the gap cannot be bridged by the resources and enterprise of Malaysians. Certainly, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is to be commended in the boldness of his vision and the political courage to articulate it in a forum made up of hard-headed, realistic and practical businessmen and other leaders of the business world.

The philosophy of striving for Malaysia as a fully developed country is underpinned by the recognition of a variety of steps that have to be taken to make Malaysia a competitive and efficient economy. Fundamental to this strategy, is the commitment of the Barisan Nasional administration to eradicate poverty. On this point, the prime minister said "this nation must be able to provide enough food on the table so that not a solitary Malaysia is subjected to the travesty of gross under-nour-

Miracles

The ideas and thought encapsulated in Malaysia: The Way Forward, are anchored in reality and fully cognisant of the rapid process of socio-economic change within the country and the developments in the international arena. The philosophy of action, as propounded by the prime minister is structured into a practical programme. Strong emphasis is laid on human resource development. To quote Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir: "From the experience in the last two decades of all the economic miracles of the countries that have been poor in terms of 'natural resources', it is blindingly clear that the most important resource of any nation must be the talents, skills, creativity and will of its people. What we have between our ears, at our elbow and in our heart, is much more important than what we have below our feet and around us. Our people is our ultimate resource. Without a doubt, in the 1990s and beyond, Malaysia must give the fullest emphasis possible to the development of this ultimate resource." His interpretation is one that is attested to by the success of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Malaysia is rapidly changing. The Malaysia of the 60s, 70s and 80s is being rapidly transformed by the imperative of development. The pace and

progress of development is not something that can be contained by internal economic and social factors. The world outside plays an important role in determining the pace and progress. Being an open society, Malaysia is effectively linked with the outside world. As such, it is only natural that Malaysians as a society will continue to experience information, technological, financial, ideological and social transnational inflows. To effectively filter and utilise these inflows, Malaysia has to be a resilient and competitive society. In this context, the prime minister outlined the process of deregulation, privatization, the accelerated industrialisation drive, the need for the development of the small- and medium-scale industries and the search for new markets.

Formula

In the past few years, the private sector has become the engine of growth. The Mahathir Administration has provided incentives for the private sector to develop and push ahead in infusing innovation and growth in the economy. The very setting up of the Malaysian Business Council is testimony to the Government's commitment to energising the private sector as the

national engine of growth. In the programme outlined, there are many elements that add balance and comprehensiveness for a national agenda.

Arnold Toynbee, the renowned British historian and author of the multi-tomed "A Study of History" put forward the concept that it is the challenge provided by particular environmental conditions which leads to the response that has been the basis for the great civilisations of the world. The political vision of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir for Malaysia in the year 2020, is an extraordinary response to an extraordinary challenge, that of creating "a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny".

It is a vision that can be shared and supported by all Malaysians. As we move towards the end of the century, the Malaysians of today will have the onerous responsibility of implementing various tasks towards the realisation of this vision if we are to avoid the condemnation of history and the contempt of future generations. But in the words of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir: "No formula is perfect. But the least perfect and the least productive is the perfect agenda unimplemented." It is, as Confucius once said: "The essence of knowledge is the application."