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Education, human resource development key factors in OPP3

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) to be tabled in Parliament tomorrow is expected to outline comprehensive strategies to position the country on a firmer footing towards Vision 2020, analysts said.

Among the main thrusts of the 10-year plan (2001 to 2010), they said, should be the need to build a nation which is stronger economically, socially and in all aspects to withstand the challenges of globalisation and liberalisation.

Education and human resource development should be key factors as the country marches towards a knowledge-based economy and technological excellence, essential for achieving developed-nation status.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will table in Parliament tomorrow the OPP3 that will replace the OPP2 or the National Development Plan, and represent the second decade of development under Vision 2020.

By virtue of the new plan period, it will also provide the broad policy parameters for the formulation of the Eighth Malaysia Plan, which will be tabled in Parliament later this month, as well as the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

It is understood that the OPP3 also incorporates some recommendations made by the National Economic Consultative Council II.

Malaysian Strategic Research Centre executive director Abdul Razak Baginda described OPP3 as a vital 10-year plan for Malaysia as it would place the nation in a better position to face global challenges.

He said the next decade would be particularly critical to Malaysia's economy in the face of the changing international economic landscape as the OPP3 is formulated at a time of many uncertainties in the world economy.

Therefore many believe there will also be drastic changes or re-engineering in certain sectors of the economy.

The uncertainties in the economies of the United States and Japan - Malaysia's major trading partners - among other external factors, also point out the need for greater economic resilience at home.

But analysts were optimistic that Malaysia would do well, given its strong economic fundamentals and its ability to ride the storm during the 1997/98 economic problems.

A chief economist in a local securities house said that besides stressing on economic growth and resilience against negative internal and external factors, the OPP3 is likely to outline measures to further strengthen the financial and corporate institutions.

"The previous plan was targeted at increasing Bumiputera equity ownership in the private sector to 30 per cent but it achieved only about 19 per cent. So there will not be any changes in the equity ownership policy in the OPP3. It will likely strive to ensure Bumiputeras have 30 per cent share by 2010."

He expected the new plan to attempt to sustain growth of the country's gross domestic product which averaged seven per cent as targeted under OPP2.

While the Government would further develop the knowledge-based economy and society, another analyst said the manufacturing sector would also be accorded priority.

"Manufacturing has been the major economic driver since the country shifted from over relying on the commodity-based sector. We already have

the foundation to promote k-economy. It is a matter of having value-added measures."

He said while there are some short-term programmes to promote k-economy at present, he had yet to see any concrete long-term plans.

"Yes, we do have initiatives like the MSC (Multimedia Super Corridor) development. But we need more long-term measures that can be implemented effectively... something like the Capital Market Masterplan and Financial Sector Masterplan for the banking and financial sectors."

Prominent academician Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh hoped the OPP3 would give due emphasis to the education sector.

He said the education curriculum might have to be adjusted in line with the pursuit of k-economy.

"The education system or policy has to be flexible," he said.

Bagan Datoh Member of Parliament Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the Government needed to improve Bumiputera participation in business as the 30 per cent target was not achieved at the end of the New Economic Policy.

"Perhaps the Government can come do something to ensure Bumiputera shares do not fall into the hands of others," he said.