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Model behaviour

By Firdaus Abdullah

Tan Sri Dr Abdul Taib Mahmud's 'Politics of Development' policy has instilled confidence in his people and transformed their mindset. FIRDAUS ABDULLAH writes.

ON this day in 1981, Tan Sri Dr Abdul Taib Mahmud, the law graduate with a goal to lift the living standard of his people, assumed the leadership of the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government and embarked on the task of transforming Sarawak and its people.

Having served at the Federal level for 13 years (from 1968 to 1981), Taib was an experienced politician and an administrator who started on his journey to better Sarawak.

From day one, he realised the need for a change in the mindset of not only the people but also his government machinery as well as the State civil service to ensure Sarawak's progress.

This was when his "Politics of Development" policy evolved.

Douglas Bullis in A Soul You Can See states: "This policy, as little understood outside Sarawak as it may be, is the keystone to Sarawak's economic progress today. It marks Sarawak's thread of development as clearly distinct from that of peninsular Malaysia."

However, to enable the people to understand his politics of development, he had to devote much of the early part of the 1980s uniting the State's peoples and explaining the virtues of this policy.

For Taib, the politics of development meant transforming the rakyat into a disciplined and positive-thinking force geared towards the development of mankind.

He not only explained this policy but also moved the entire government machinery towards "preparing" the people for change and progress.

Realising that Sarawak's diversity could also be its liability, he set about establishing a need for consultation and respect for authority.

Over the past 24 years, he has not only ensured that the playing field is level, he has also brought about greater development in the urban and rural sectors, be it physical development or in nurturing skills and knowledge.

The State's economy, from an entirely timber-based one, has experienced vast improvement and the people have benefited from the transformation.

Pockets of poverty still exist but they are due to the isolated nature of remote settlements and villagers who refuse to adapt to change.

In a nutshell, his politics of development has brought about a new confidence in a state full of natural resources, including that of the people.

He was fortunate that four months after he became Chief Minister, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad become Prime Minister.

Both leaders shared a vision for development and Taib's vision for the State was complemented by economic policies during that period.

The New Economic Policy (NEP), the Look East Policy and Vision 2020 fuelled Taib's commitment to take Sarawak to greater heights.

The Vision 2020 policy was similar to the politics of development in the sense that it was aimed at transforming Malaysia (and Sarawak) into a fully development nation by 2020.

Changing the mindset of the people has not been an easy task for him as he was forced to adjust his efforts according to the political climate.

During the early stages of the "Politics of Development" crusade, there

was opposition from various sectors. Some claimed that the policy was a government agenda to grab native land from the rural folks.

He continued without fear of favour and with great confidence that he had chosen the right path, and if election results are anything to go by, his move won BN many new supporters.

Today, Sarawak is a model state. It is a model for unity, a model for its development of rural infrastructure and also a model for prudent financial management.

Early this year the Federal Government announced that Sarawak is the best-managed state in the country with healthy coffers and transparent management.

Sarawak was also the only state to table a surplus budget for 2005.

Over the years, his vision, which was translated into action and implementation by government agencies, has prepared Sarawak and its people for greater challenges.

He has brought about a change in the hearts and minds of Sarawakians, and he is adamant about pursuing his vision to the end: where the State and its people can stand together with other Malaysians and be respected for what they are and where they come from. Well known as a disciplinarian for whom punctuality is a virtue, he has in recent years been pushing the need for a learning culture among the young.

"Only knowledge, skills and good values can take us further in this global environment and it is my hope that our young will embark on this journey with commitment.

"We must compete not among us anymore but with the rest of the world, that is the challenge facing us now," he told a political party gathering recently.

(END) Source : New Straits Times