

Najibnomics or banana republic?
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COMMENT The phrase "banana republic" described a country governed by those primarily concerned with economic gains for the benefit of a colonial, political or corporate power, to the detriment of socially benefiting values such as democracy and welfare.

Conjured up during the days of American 'gunboat democracy', it referred to central and south American dictatorships set up with foreign backing (usually the United States government or corporations) to exploit agricultural crops, mainly bananas.

The concept has evolved with the political climate, so that rather than bananas or other crops, natural resources such as lumber and oil fuelled the development of banana republics in the 20th century.

And rather than foreign powers, new age banana republics are presided over by local tyrants, much like Idi Amin who wanted to stamp his own brand of colonialism on the face of Africa.

Banana republics are characterised by rampant corruption at all levels, making governance untenable and unstable, a breeding ground for bribery and under-the-table dealings as resources are stripped bare for profit's sake.

In order to maintain order amongst a disenchanting populace, most banana republics also featured a bloated military or state security apparatus. Sometimes backed up by paramilitary or citizen 'pressure' groups that do the government's dirty work.

It is also most often marked by increasing reliance on privatisation to fulfill basic services, in most cases leaving the population with reduced wages and worsening living conditions as cronyism and commercial interests overrule social welfare.

This also set the stage for an upper class elite to lord over the populace, concentrating wealth and power in an 'old boy network' oligarchy and its attendant pedigree-based dynastic politics.

'Transformation' plans

While we are not in central or south America, Premier Najib Abdul Razak's economic policies dubbed 'Najibnomics' appear like a shortcut to a banana republic instead of the route to Malaysia's manifest destiny and promised future it is being sold as.

NONE With as much pomp and ceremony as his foreign public relations advisors could advise and public coffers can pay for, the premier announced his 'transformation' plans towards a high income economy.

But in the implementation, his slap-dash alphabet soup of Idris Jala's Pemandu-scripted plans do not jive with the gung ho messages he is delivering to the populace.

One fact to be noted is the profligate defence spending which saw billions being spent on

new weapons despite cheaper alternatives and the lack of a proper threat to the country.

This move was followed by the increase in the number of territorial army companies and expansion of Rela membership.

While it may not be the postal votes sleight of hand many thought it is, it does increase the number of paramilitary personnel available for government deployment.

NONEA scary thought, with Najib declaring silat warriors as defenders of the nation and rumours of even Pemuda Umno arming itself. More so with the PM's promise to defend Putrajaya (hold on to power) at all costs, even if their bodies were crushed.

Added to that is the government's tacit acceptance if not support of vocal Malay rights NGO Perkasa which many say is the subcontracted arm of Umno's racist policies which now go against Najib's more pluralist 1Malaysia.

Are they setting up a fall guy to do their dirty deeds? One has to remember that the excesses under Hitler were not started by the Nazi party but a more radical offshoot called the SA, Ernst Roehm's 'brown shirts'.

While crime prevention and national defence has always been waved around as an excuse for such expansion, it is suspicious that more resources are not poured into crime prevention measures instead.

Plans for CCTVs to prevent crime for example, fizzled after the initial contracts went out. Indeed, the police budget is spent largely on the government security organ, the Special Branch, rather than crime prevention units,

The SB, which employs huge numbers of personnel and eats up considerable resources, is mostly used to monitor journalists, the opposition and those suspected of anti-government tendencies rather than preventing crime.

With the alarming rate of fatal police shootings, deaths in detention, brutal reactions to peaceful gathering and injuries via 'seizures' in custody, one wonders if the police are keeping the peace or gearing up to put down and clamp down on the rakyat?

Ranked poorly in graft studies

Similarly, a pattern of abuse of power and corruption continue to see Malaysia and its enforcement agencies ranked poorly in corruption studies. Are we going the banana way?

Adding to the verdict are of course the mega projects and massive privatisation, done at the expense of the public trust, as government-linked corporate interests sidestepped and ran roughshod over the rakyat's welfare.

azlanWhat we have are hundred-storey towers and tax discounts on luxury items mainly bought by the elite, while essential items and services for the rakyat had their prices hiked again and again.

The government may sugarcoat this with politically correct words like "adjustments" and "rationalisation" but the result still burns a hole in the pocket and livelihood of the rakyat, even as it enriches cronies and bloats the profit margins of the well-connected.

But more seriously is the arrogance and verbal diarrhoea of the country's elite that continue their outpouring of excesses in speech, lifestyle and corrupt ways, a political haemorrhoid which continues to blight and malign the nation.

These are 'leaders' only in name who continue to enrich themselves while telling the rakyat to tighten their belts, some acting like thugs and spewing abusive and racist statements, without even an apology to follow, just more justifications to do as they please.

Whither now Malaysia, Najibnomics or banana republic?

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