

The art of policy making
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Marina Mahathir is someone I respect a lot and recognise as a public intellectual. She is her own person and her views do not reflect any other's view.

Even though she is daughter of the former prime minister, her father was the first to declare this trait in her - that she speaks her own mind and heart.

She does not rely on titles or other form of 'inherited' externalities to speak the truth; and very often she does it; with a class of her own.

Her column in the Star of April 27 was an excellent one regarding the 'knee-jerk policies' of two government-linked agencies. One was the private citizen public email fiasco, about which she rightly points out that 'privacy is the core issue'.

My consequential question is: Does that email campaign mean that the private email address of the citizen becomes available to every public agency, including the BTN?

The other was the Terengganu boot-camp programme for younger Malaysians of a different lineage from the mainstream or the average Malaysian. Again, she rightly says the core issue is the dignity of the individuals and their God-given privilege and responsibility to live a life of destiny.

My consequential question is: Do we play God in their lives, or should we allow the parents who raised them up to do so?

After a half-century of defining development, why are we still not able to deliver basic development to many parts of this nation? Sabah and Sarawak are merely topmost of these, not excluding Kelantan and Terengganu. Is it probable that we have lost our basic policy direction?

Nonetheless, we are still considered 'an almost developed nation' in our own mould and by self-declaration. Even Malacca, the historic state, has declared itself as 'developed'. My only problem is that I am not sure whether Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat were actually Malay warriors or Chinese ones who came with Hang Li Po.

Is it therefore not the developed mindset then that is a prerequisite for any definition of development? Or, are we content with First World infrastructure and Third World mentality?

Strategic policies were formulated in the past which often set longer term directions and defined the specific goals for our nation-state. Historically, in Malaysia, the EPU defined and set these overall goals in terms of the five-year Malaysia Plans. The nation started with the 1st and 2nd Malaya Plans; after 1965, we switched to the 1st Malaysia Plan and today we are into the 10th Malaysia Plan period.

Starting 1970, we had the first Outline Perspective Plan (OPP) for a 20-year planning period and agenda. That plan set the New Economic Policy Agenda. The agenda was straight forward and simple: to achieve national unity vide a two-prong strategy of eradicating poverty and reducing economic imbalances between ethnicities. We subsequently had the OPP2 and OPP3.

Half-baked ideas

Today, one is never really sure what macro-modeling direction Malaysia is headed in the next 10 years. My hope is that somebody actually does and this is more than the ETP and NKRA teams, who appear to be only project focused.

I hope some group in EPU or the NEAC has developed a macro-economic model, which should be

revived by all those interested, as some people have serious questions and issues about the efficacy of the input-output model.

If our macro model was developed under the traditional input-output analysis framework, how then do we factor in the 'age of discontinuity'? That was what Alvin Toffler called the Information Era.

With so much discontinuity and change as the standard today, how can we really rely on the predictability of the older model based on past performances of the economy? I call this new era the knowledge business with the evolution of the knowledge industry.

In fact it was this specific lack of predictability of new realities that caused Henry Mintzberg, although he was the president of the Strategic Management Society of US, to write a book entitled, 'The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning'.

It was in this context that, in the late 1990s, while at the NITC, we introduced the Scenario Planning Methodology made famous by the Shell Global Corporation and made even more famous by the Author and Planner at Shell Peter Swartz, called 'The Art of the Long View'.

In light of these uncertainties, where is Malaysia really headed? Public policy making cannot become the plaything of idocrats. Idiocrats do not use their brains to undertake serious analysis. They simply use half-baked logic, and incomplete perspectives based only on limited information, to evolve their policies.

As a public servant with 30 years of work experience, any of us with that 3G (three generation) perspective of policy science would know pendulum decision-making when we catch a glimpse of it.

Marina has ably highlighted two of them. But, my question is: Why is the government allowing incompetent ones, who are no more than idiocrats, to make and drive such policies?

For example, on the email nonsense, did anyone study the history of the NITC and evaluate the efficacy of the National IT Agenda?

In fact, right there in that Agenda was a clear policy for nationwide distribution of access enabled by the smart-card identity card of Malaysia. The more important question is why that roll-out was stopped, only for so-called private sector to 'initiate a new ETP project'. All this is bunkum!

On the other brainwave of abusing the dignity of the not-so-manly males among us in Terengganu, my question is: Did the idiocrats even consult the Family Services Unit under the Welfare Ministry? Again, it does not take all of brains to understand and study the specific problem especially if you talk to the right people.

But, as public policy making today happens, an equally idiocratic minister or deputy comes up with a hare-brained idea and the public policy officials merely write up the project management plans and public relations material.

Then when there is a major goof-up, everyone says they were misquoted. I have been trying hard to get the media to quote me, and they do not - so why is it so easy for ministers and their deputies to be so easily misquoted?

The country and nation in her governance has to move away from idiocrats and idiocratic policy making. That is one of the goals of the Masters in Public Policy which we are developing at UCSI.

I hope more students will sign up too learn the art of policy making and stop being goofs all the time!

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