

LETTER | We seem to be a nation of blueprints

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LETTER | Someone has recently said in a Clubhouse talk that Malaysia is actually progressing quite well despite all the complaints about the country.

Our economy, he alluded, was growing steadily – we’re not going down like Venezuela or Greece.

We’re certainly not backtracking but undoubtedly, we’re lagging behind, as seen in Malaysia’s decline in competitiveness.

Malaysia was ranked 18th in the 2015-2016 Global Competitiveness Index. In just four years, we fell nine places, ranking 27th in 2019.

In 1965, Malaysia’s export of goods and services was above Singapore and South Korea.

When Singapore (US\$ 1.352 billion) surpassed Malaysia (US\$ 1.336 billion) in 1966, the relative percentage difference was 1.2 percent.

Last year, the difference was 97 percent, with Singapore recording US\$599 billion while Malaysia US\$207 billion.

Government's response

When South Korea (US\$ 4.935 billion) outdid Malaysia (US\$ 4.236 billion) in 1975, the difference was 15 percent.

In 2020, the difference has increased to 98 percent, with South Korea achieving US\$601.622 billion

Over the past 50 years, the export value of the two countries has not only surpassed Malaysia but has grown almost three times that of Malaysia's.

Countries such as Thailand and Vietnam that were less developed than Malaysia had even overtaken us in the last 10 years. Thailand surpassed us in 2010 while Vietnam in 2017.

Our government's response to this problem is by launching blueprints, with the

latest being the National Trade Blueprint 2021-2025.

It is the latest in the government's long line of blueprints, such as the Logistics and Trade Facilitation Masterplan, Services Sector Blueprint, and Aerospace Industry Blueprint.

Short of capable ministers

Even with all these blueprints, Malaysia still fell nine positions in four years in the Global Competitiveness Index.

The truth is that we are not short of blueprints. We are short of capable ministers, and the current ones at Putrajaya are not promising. Three recent failures tell it all.

While Thailand and Vietnam are now building their own high-speed rail (HSR), our government has cancelled the Kuala Lumpur–Singapore HSR project earlier this year.

The reason for the cancellation was due to our ministers' disagreement to appoint an independent experienced HSR company through open tender to manage the system.

The second instance is the current government's reversal of the Pakatan Harapan's policy that has led Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft to bypass the installation of subsea internet cable in Malaysia.

This policy reversal has risked the loss of RM12 billion to RM 15 billion of high-tech investment into the country and a missed opportunity to boost our digital economy.

No support

The third example is the side-lining of Penang in the 12th Malaysia Plan. Penang is Malaysia's most promising export-oriented state, recording the highest export value in the country in 2020, at RM 312.4 billion.

However, Penang's expansion of industrial landbank through the Penang South Islands project is not receiving support from the federal government. The RM2 billion federal loan guarantee for the development of Light Rail Transit in Penang was also cancelled.

There is no infrastructural or concrete development for Penang in the 12th Malaysia Plan. The few references of Penang in the document are about including the state in a couple of, well, blueprints.

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