

**M'sia's increasing unattractiveness is 'karma'**  
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Without getting into the kind of superstition and quackery that many Malaysians swear by most times, it's safe to conclude that the chickens are coming home to roost.

The 10 percent economic growth rate envisaged this year for the country, if it's not a flash-in-the-pan, reminds us of the phrase that there are lies, damn lies and statistics. Again, this is indeed the unpalatable fact that we have to deal with in the run-up to 2020 and its aftermath.

The federal government needs to start thinking from now how they are going to explain in ten years time why we have failed to reach developed nation status and a high income economy.

NONEPrime Minister Najib Razak (left) claims that Malaysia has to grow at just 6 percent per annum over the next ten years to become a high income economy and emerge as a developed nation by 2020.

It was announced by the Economic Planning Unit in 1990 that the nation had been growing at 6.7 percent per annum since independence in 1957. As an economy grows and matures, it's more than likely that the annual economic growth rate would taper off, not accelerate even further. This is only to be expected. The bigger the base, the smaller the annual economic growth rate and vice versa. Developed nation status arrives somewhere along the way and taking into account the shifting parameters.

However, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad reckoned that Malaysia would achieve developed nation status under his Vision 2020 in thirty years if the economy grew at 7 percent per annum i.e. just 0.3 percent more.

He even admitted that would be no mean task. This would see the emergence of an economy eight times larger by 2020. Malaysia would be the first Muslim nation in the world to be developed, thundered Mahathir as he cast his eyes darkly at the west.

It was not for any reason that former finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah subsequently dismissed Vision 2020 cynically as just a gimmick by Mahathir who, he pointed out, "did not know anything about economics".

View through rose-tinted glasses

Of course, the 1997/98 Asian Currency Crisis intervened and sent the ringgit, share prices, property prices and other values into a nose-dive and the economic growth rates into negative territory for a couple of years. This was followed by the global financial tsunami and the global economic crisis and soon perhaps a double-dip in the developed world as deflation stalks the United States and elsewhere.

malaysia stock exchange market klse 141008 06And now we are expected to believe that Najib with his 6 percent per annum over ten years will achieve what Mahathir had estimated would take 7 percent per annum over 30 years.

Also, not to be discounted is the fact that Malaysia has not been posting an average annual economic growth rate of 7 percent during the 1990 to 2009 period.

Now, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) figures put a further damper on the economic picture in Malaysia.

FDI is the only measurable vote of the world's confidence in our economy and our future as a people and nation. That's bench marking that we need. That crucial element is missing because of the absence of security in our institutions, politics - read Sodomy 11 - and democracy, our diplomacy, in the currency, in prices and values, the cost of doing business and the lack of nation-building policies.

ong tee keat pkfz klang visit 060508 11So, the crucial element of the world's confidence in us is unlikely to return, like the wild birds which have been scared away from the grains being tossed to them, unless and until bitter memories fade.

Nepotism, cronyism, collusion and corruption must be brought to an end. Already, the Danish government has announced in Parliament that Malaysia would no longer qualify as an aid recipient nation "because of its government's profligate spending habits".

The special privileges, openly touted self-servingly by Umno for over 50 years, do not exist in the federal constitution. In short, respect and honour the constitution, in particular Articles 153, 152, 14, 10, 8 and 3 which have been observed more often in the breach.

Haunted by the past

There must also be compelling reasons to invite a positive rethink by investors on the country.

raja petra candlelight vigil 070508 ronnie and bannerTo put it even more bluntly, there must be transparency, public accountability and checks-and-balances. The doctrine of the separation of powers must be restored and the country must move away from the trend towards emerging as a unitary state. This calls for decentralisation and a return to the three-tier power-sharing structure of a federation, the drastic downsizing of the Prime Minister's Department which has emerged as a hyper ministry, the restoration of state rights and respect for the autonomy of Sabah and Sarawak.

Our past, in other words, has caught up with us in the present to haunt our future.

Christians, without flogging this writer's unpractising faith, believe that "as you sow, so shall you reap". This is neither being positive nor negative. It's neutral just as karma - the "scientific" law of cause and effect - is neutral.

Isn't there something to be said about looking for the silver lining in the clouds, looking at everything that happens as a blessing in disguise and counting one's blessings?

This is easier said than done especially when there are two sides to this story i.e. at the people's level and at the government level. Even if the people have not been found wanting, there's no doubt that the government leaves a lot to be desired.

malaysia stock exchange market klse 141008 05Patently there's still no sure codified approach, as in the past, for us to venture into the future despite the tons of press releases emanating from Putrajaya on the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), National Key Result Areas (NKRA), Key Performance Indices (KPI) to drive the Najib administration's 1Malaysia theme. This is not to say that there's little merit in these approaches but no is taking them seriously enough amidst the flip-flops.

We can be forgiven for concluding, if still not in denial syndrome mode, that there's a lot of hype going around these days in the country, especially in Putrajaya, amidst a general living on hope and wishful thinking.

Only those who suffer from the three monkeys syndrome - see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil - will be blind, deaf and dumb enough not to see that this country is not going anywhere in any great hurry soon in the near future.

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