

**1Malaysia broken and can't be fixed**  
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COMMENT A slogan is in trouble if you have to have a load of explanation to sustain it.

Winning slogans are magically self-explanatory. The best of them blend poetic craft with contemplative vision, translating tacit desires into attainable objects.

'1Malaysia' was a catchy slogan at its launch by Prime Minister Najib Razak when he took over as premier in April 2009.

It had lilt, its phonetics pleased the tongue and its pay-off line - 'People first, Performance now' - sent off ripples of resonance that hinted at subversion of the status quo.

No genius was required to know that the status quo, a year after the seismic general election of March 2008, was in dire need of change.

Every new leader at the helm needs a starting slogan, an 'all hands on the deck' catchphrase that invites the people to put their shoulders to the wheel.

NONENajib's '1Malaysia' had the lift of a trumpet blast, a striking summons to a new beginning.

Although he was seen as saddled with baggage that could not be conjured away, his gave off activist vibes that positioned him in welcome contrast to his ineffectual predecessor.

However, it did not take long for the forces of political gravity to work their deflationary poison and knock the stuffing out of the '1Malaysia' slogan.

First, Nasir Safar, an aide to Najib, uttered a racial profanity that is the very antithesis of '1Malaysia'. Nasir resigned but the damage was done.

Second, DAP aide Teoh Beng Hock mysteriously fell to his death while or just after a bout of interrogation at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission headquarters in Shah Alam.

The public suspects foul play; his interrogators say they were not responsible in any way. The mystery, more than a year after Teoh's death, continues to resist unraveling.

The ongoing judicial inquest, if it issues in a verdict that sounds inauthentic, will only stoke public suspicions that '1Malaysia' is all sound and no substance.

The third blow to the slogan's credibility was what private investigator P Balasubramaniam said on resurfacing after a 15-month disappearance that followed his sudden retraction of a sensational affidavit sworn in July 2009 in connection with the Altantuya Shaaribuu murder.

Real test

There were other '1Malaysia' deflating incidents, such as Petronas' disclosure of a sharp drop in its revenue, but nothing of the import of Nasir's faux pas, Teoh's death and Balasubramaniam's new revelations.

All three shindigs had the recognisably bad odor of the status quo that Najib's '1Malaysia' start shaped to radically alter.

But the real test of 1Malaysia's substance or inanity arrived when the New Economic Model was unveiled in March 2010.

The NEM intimated that poverty alleviation would henceforth be needs-based more than race-based, and meritocracy would be emphasised, a hint that affirmative action imperatives would be de-prioritised.

perkasa first agm 270310 bigger keris This drew opposition from Malay pressure groups with former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamed joining the chorus of naysayers.

Apparently, the opposition was enough to see the NEM relegated to a bit part rather than a major role in the 10th Malaysia Plan that Najib unveiled in Parliament in June.

By this time the '1Malaysia' slogan was looking like a kidney patient deprived of dialysis.

Current talk that the '1Malaysia' concept needs to be explained in some depth to resuscitate belief in it ignores the point that missed opportunities to give it credence had damaged its credibility irrevocably.

More talk would just invite more cynicism.

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