

Triple blow to Najib's reforms
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On Monday, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak launched the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP).

It was also the start of a week that saw the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) suffering a triple blow.

The first blow was Monday's tabling in Parliament of the 2009 Auditor-General's Report, which continues to be an annual tale of horrors of waste, mismanagement, misuse of public funds and corruption - as highlighted by headlines such as:

- * Federal government debt hits five-year high;
- * KTMB mired in RM1.45 billion debt;
- * Only 18.2% of pupils bring free eBooks to school;
- * Stimulus funds used for chandeliers, home theatre, government audit shows;
- * PTPTN to face whopping RM46 bil deficit;
- * PTPTN okayed RM23 mil to students who didn't apply;
- * Million-ringgit scanner stuck in KLIA, under-utilisation woes;
- * 'Sandwich kosong' for school kids, sardines missing.

The Auditor-General's Report, which was completed in July this year, NONE was deliberately held back when it should have been tabled on the first day of the budget meeting of Parliament on Oct 11.

Clearly, this was done to avoid the "annual horror stories" from stealing the thunder from Najib's Oct 15 budget speech and his Umno Presidential Address on Oct 21 - testimony that the Barisan Nasional government is not fully serious and committed to the GTP, or even to Najib's "People First Performance First" mantra.

The second blow was on Tuesday, Oct 26, when the 2010 Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) was released.

The findings highlighted the failure of the key National Key Results Areas (NKRA) in fighting corruption, under which the new low of the CPI score at 4.5 in 2009 was targeted to increase to 4.9 by 2010. In actual fact, Malaysia's CPI score in 2010 sunk to the lowest in 16 years.

Worst-ever plunge in corruption index

During nine years under the premiership of Dr Mahathir Mohamad from 1995 to 2003, Malaysia's TI CPI score was stuck in the narrow groove of between 5.32 in 1996 and 4.8 in 2000, while the CPI ranking fell 14 places from No 23 in 1995 to No 37 in 2003.

In the five-year premiership of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malaysia's TI CPI ranking fell 10 places from 37 in 2003 to 47 placing in 2008, while CPI score stuck between 5.0 and 5.1.

In his 18 months as Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak presided over the worst

single-year plunge in TI CPI ranking and score - a nine-placing fall from No 47 in 2008 to No 56 in 2009, with the score plunging to the lowest ever of 4.5 last year.

For 2010, Malaysia's ranking is still at the worst spot of No 56, while the CPI score fell further to 4.4.

abdullah ahmad badawi 020209 03Abdullah's (right) National Integrity Plan, launched in 2004 with a five-year target to improve Malaysia's TI CPI from 37th place in 2003 to at least 30th position in 2008 and the 5.2 CPI score for Malaysia in 2003 to at least 6.5 by 2008 was an utter failure.

However, Najib's 18 months have seen both Malaysia's TI CPI rank and score plunge to new depths despite all the fanfare and hullabaloo of GTP, NKRA and national transformation.

The third blow to Najib's GTP is Wednesday's release of 2010 Legatum Prosperity Index ranking Malaysia 43rd out of 110 countries, behind Singapore - 17, Japan - 18, Hong Kong - 20, Taiwan - 22 and South Korea - 27, although ahead of Thailand - 52, China - 58, Vietnam - 61, Philippines - 64 and Indonesia - 70.

The Legatum Prosperity Index sub-index on "safety and security" ranking of Malaysia as No 52 out of 110 warrants serious attention as it impacts on our international competitiveness as well as another NKRA on keeping crime low.

Lowest press freedom index in nine years

Based on this sub-index, the publication The Diplomat recently published a photo essay on "The Safest Places in the Asia-Pacific". The 10 safest nations named were firstly Singapore, followed by New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam and Kazakhstan.

The exclusion of Malaysia from this list is a national shame. What NONE have the prime minister (right) and the home minister got to say?

Both before and after the 2011 Budget presentation on Oct 15, there have been more world-wide indices adversely affecting Malaysia's international competitiveness, for example:

* Lowest press freedom index in nine years last week when Malaysia plunged 10 places to 141 in the 2010 World Press Freedom Index - outranked for the first time by Singapore since the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) began releasing its ranking in 2002.

* World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011 saw Malaysia falling two places from No 24 to 26 - despite the warning of the GTP Roadmap in January this year of the nation's competitiveness "slipping significantly from the top 21 most competitive nations in the world three years ago to our current standing of 24".

* Malaysian universities falling out of the league of world's Top 200 universities for the eighth year in a row - whether in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2010-11, the QS World University Rankings 2010 or Shanghai Jiao Tong University's 2010 ranking of top 500 universities.

These are not the signs of a country prepared to take a quantum leap to escape the decades-old middle-income trap to achieve inclusive, sustainable high-income developed status in 2020 - but those of a country heading towards a failed state or a bankrupt nation

in 2019, as warned by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Idris Jala.

'Time to wake up' warning not heeded

A veteran leader had warned that "it is time to wake up".

He said: "Without a doubt, Malaysia is slipping. Billions have been looted from this country, and billions more are being siphoned out of the country as our entire political structure crumbles."

Warning that corruption is the single biggest threat to the nation, he warned that corruption has become institutionalised in our political system and was ruining Malaysia.

tengku razaleigh hamzah 270908Who is this veteran leader? He is the head of the Barisan Nasional by-election in Galas, the MP for Gua Musang Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Will his views about the crisis of nation-building now be heeded?

Of course not - just as it is clear that the prime minister does not have the political will to implement the New Economic Model (NEM) that he launched on March 30 to transform Malaysia into a developed, competitive and high-income economy that is inclusive and sustainable.

Despite all its bombast and pyrotechnics, Najib's 2011 budget is not a child of the New Economic Model but bears all the marks of the old, discredited Mahathirish policies which have landed Malaysia in the middle-income trap for more than a decade, putting the country on a failed and bankrupt nation track come 2019.

The symbol of the 2011 Budget and the ETP is the proposed RM5 billion 100-storey Warisan Merdeka tower, which is a throwback to Mahathirish obsession with mega projects.

Even the young say 'no' to the mega tower

If Najib is seriously committed to a New Economic Model, based on economic, social and government transformation, wouldn't it be more appropriate for Malaysia to achieve targets of being ranked among the first 20, if not first 10, of the least corrupt nations in the annual Transparency International Corruption Perception Index or having at least 10 universities that are ranked among the Top 100 Universities in the world?

NONEIn fact, it must be asked whether Najib is secretly trying to out-Mahathir Mahathir (left), not only to build a tower higher than Mahathir's Petronas Twin Towers, but which could be acclaimed as the tallest in the world - however brief the claim? The "No Mega Tower" Facebook campaign was close to the 200,000 mark in less than 12 days.

The prime minister has asked the government to give priority to the social media and to respect the views of ordinary Malaysians, especially the young generation of all races.

The majority using Facebook are young Malaysians and the prime minister should seriously cancel the 100-storey Warisan Merdeka project as it will only end up as a white elephant.

It has been estimated that the 100-storey tower with 3 million sq-ft of space will add to the glut of office space in Kuala Lumpur - equivalent to 7.8 years of office space supply based on the average annual take up of 1.72 million sq-ft in 1985-2009, even without taking into account massive projects announced recently.

In Segamat, its tallest 20-storey building, completed in the early 80s, has become a Tower for Birds, housing swiftlet farms, with only the ground floor occupied. Let's not end up with the highest swiftlet farm in Malaysia, and probably in the world!

This an excerpt of DAP national adviser and MP for Ipoh Timor Lim Kit Siang's speech in Parliament on the 2011 Budget, delivered on Oct 27.

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