

Facade of the 2011 Budget
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On the basis of relevant theoretical frameworks for development, the 2011 Budget is deceptive because it focuses primarily on the elitist based top-bottom economic growth model.

This will be to the detriment of the socially determined power-sharing of the political economy by the stakeholders of the nation from the bottom-top

But this is not new. It can be asserted with authority that since independence, the formulation of the entire planning process for development has been anchored on the economic growth model formulated on the basis of the experiences of Western democracies that had simply been adopted in toto in Malaysia.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the theoretical and empirical cross-dimensional implications of this scenario, but interestingly, recent articles by Farish Noor and Azly Rahman on line, as well as Agoes Salim in the print media (2009), are particularly relevant to such analysis.

Their articles provide some excellent pointers as to the origins for the adoption of the growth model and some constraints for the paucity of other more realistic options. Readers will most certainly benefit from these analyses, to which I most humbly add my own take.

Farish Noor's strong indictment of the political debate, as being comparable to "gossip" engaged in by "desperate housewives" may need to be further conceptually analysed, identifying causal factors and suggesting remedial measures

However, his immediate comment on the extremely poor quality of the debate suggests that the capacity and capability among academicians, professionals and the "think tanks" to contribute meaningfully is seriously lacking.

Actually, they're making the situation worse

Indeed, one cannot escape the conclusion that in making (atheoretical) submissions that are impressionistic, simplistic and superficial, these so-called "experts" - and the unsolicited comments by some VIPs - may in fact be making the situation worse by presenting ascenario that is not sustainable in terms of national integration and unity.

In this connection, as an internationally recognised political scientist, Farish's unusually hard-hitting criticism can in fact be extended to reflect the dire frustration faced by a few of us in having to confront "gibberish", not only by politicians but regrettably also by academicians, bureaucrats and self-styled social commentators as well in the extended political debate on race relations.

As a result, much of our researched, published work, including that commissioned by United Nations agencies calling for reforms and for specific measures such as the appointment of an Ombudsman, have failed to be implemented.

Indeed, at least in one particular instance, had the UN Development sabah rural people development 240609 03Programme report on the Social Impact Assessment of Felda (2002)

been implemented, the disgraceful blatant "cheating" of settlers could at least have been avoided, if not even prevented.

Azly Rahmat has sharply focused on Malaysia's growth model as being primarily the cause for unsustainable development because it was determined by social relations of production tied to political control from the top-bottom by the ruling elite, including the higher echelons of the bureaucracy.

This is an excellent analysis on the poverty of the political economy debate, to which I can hardly meaningfully add. Instead, it might be more useful to apply some of the more important arguments in the context of my own experiences in the development over the past 50 years.

The Malaysian experience

Soon after independence, there was no question that the entire economic planning formulation and project implementation had to be based on the economic growth model. This was because the model was strongly endorsed by a team of consultants from Harvard University, who were attached to the Economic Planning Unit.

The consultants arranged for a cadre of senior officials in the planning agencies to attend a specially structured course leading to a masters' degree in economic development. In this process, it can be argued that the officers were not only "fed" but "force fed" by growth model theories of Rostow and others.

As far as is known, little, if any, serious consideration was given to exposing the officers to comparative perspectives of other alternative theoretical orientations in an academic course structure that was not examination-based nor thesis-oriented.

111005The formulation of the New Economic Policy brought the growth model under sharper focus because of the need not only for growth, but more importantly, for distribution as well. It was argued that particularly because of the inter-ethnic nature of the population, the growth model drawing basically on "supply side economics" was not sustainable if there was to be fair and equal distribution for all in a level playing field.

In the debate that ensued to achieve this, however, James Puthuchearry's work on the ownership and control of the economy was the justification for a form of state intervention in the economy that would also enable the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at the eradication of poverty for all groups, irrespective of ethnicity.

This distributive developmental perspective, as might be expected, was not acceptable to all planners. The EPU still held on to the growth model, with further re-enforcement by a team of Norwegian experts headed by Just Faaland, who is generally "credited" with drafting the NEP as we know of it.

In fact it is true to say that the genesis of the narrow and restrictive thinking behind the affirmative action policies of the NEP in promoting "bumiputraisim" can be traced to this Norwegian group.

Becoming billionaires through quotas not sustainable

There was, at the same time, a more "enlightened" approach to the NEP by Agoes Salim. His contention was that the participation and involvement of Malays in the economy was

more important as stakeholders and that becoming billionaires through obtaining quotas and contracts (or "doing nothing") was not sustainable.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that Agoes, who was the first secretary-general of the Ministry of National Unity, subsequently "moved out" of the civil service.

Second Prime Minister Abdul Razak Hussein strongly advocated the two main dimensions of the NEP. but emphasised that the Malays could not dominate the development process. For the Malays to play a leading role, it is necessary for the leadership to be "elite, determined by ability, aptitude and commitment to the nation as a whole".

It is well known that Razak was fully aware that the political elitist tendencies among the Malay ruling class could negate the so-called "umbrella" concept in helping other Malays, and accordingly, initiated the establishment of a network of social institutions to empower the rakyat to be directly involved in power-sharing positions across the board and thereby to counter political elitism.

However, Najib Abdul Razak's budget provisions have once again failed to channel resources towards this objective of self-empowerment of the rakyat to enable direct involvement and participation in the democratisation of all social institutions for the development of a level playing field for all, as under Razak's original Red Book proposals.

Indeed, by ignoring this fundamental need to incorporate the demands and aspirations of the rakyat in the revolution of rising expectations in the bottom-top development and in the implementation process, the Najib administration may be said to be guilty of the basic requirement of good government for national integration and national unity in Malaysia.

COLLIN ABRAHAM can perhaps qualify as a product of 1 Malaysia - if ever there was one. Beginning a career as the first UM graduate to work as a field assistant in the Social Welfare Department, he moved on to become the director in Malacca and to social development consultant research postings in the Johor/Pahang Regional Master Plans, in Felda, and in rural development. He later joined USM to lecture on ethnic and race relations from where he retired as associate professor. He is the author of the *Finest Hour: Malaysia-MCP Peace Accord in Perspective*.

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