

Government Transformation Programme a mirage
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The Roadmap for Government Transformation Programme (GTP) of the prime minister is a mirage to hoodwink Malaysians, especially those in Sarawak. It is a roadmap which will not be realised or sustained.

The six key performance areas or six areas of improvement or the National Key Results Areas (NKRAs) announced were reducing crime, combating corruption, raising the living standard of low-income citizens, widening access to education, improving infrastructure in rural areas and upgrading public transportation.

These are not only valid areas of concern but also an admission of the failure of governance under Barisan Nasional. In Sarawak, these have been the neglected areas since the formation of Malaysia.

Yet, these are not the only fields where the Barisan Nasional government has either failed or has been strong on rhetoric but poor on delivery. With respect to Sarawak, I refer to the omitted or unmentioned areas of healthcare in the public sector, social welfare, labour rights, public administration, human rights, tourism growth, environmental protection, and historical and cultural heritage preservation among others where Sarawak is trailing far behind.

Reducing crime

The public is increasingly alarmed by the rising crime rate. In Sarawak, even some top public figures and government officers and have fallen victim; the public now feel doubly insecure and vulnerable. Statewide, about 40 cases of crime are recorded per day on average, some 14,000 cases in 2009.

Suhakam Commissioner to Sarawak, Dr Hirman Ritom, at a talk on human rights in October 2006 discussed poverty, education failure, unemployment and criminality. I urge the government to address confounding fundamental issues which may be at the root of the rising crime rate. The root causes promoting recruitment to crime must be addressed through broader political legislative and administrative actions to redress socio-economic injustice.

Poverty and socio-economic alienation are the major concerns of the marginalised and dispossessed; they suffer directly. Government and society has to understand that poverty-related crime affects everyone at all strata of society.

Raising the living standard of low-income citizens

I have said that it is not merely the eradication of abject starvation-level poverty but also ensuring that the poor-rich gap does not keep increasing till it reaches a socially unacceptable level. Relative poverty can reach levels at which it leads to widespread adverse outcomes, even social instability.

Under the NEP, towards the aim of the eradication of poverty, the federal and state BN governments have clearly failed, jointly or separately. With rising costs and real incomes falling, some 30% - 50 % of the people may soon be suffering from relative poverty, depending on the threshold criteria used.

The prime minister's proposal to institute a minimal wage, admittedly a worthy start, has however come too little, too late. The essential welfare of Malaysian workers have been neglected by the BN government too callously and for too long. There has not been development under this government of an inflation-indexed wage and income policy; it is simply a government sleeping at the wheels as far as basic social policies are concerned.

The fruits of economic growth in better times have not been fairly shared with the actual producers of the growth, but have been siphoned off by corruption, incompetency and wastage by the government.

If no wealth-distributive strategies - such as developing a social safety net - are put in place in time, poverty in Sarawak and in Malaysia can be expected to escalate rapidly.

Combating corruption

Transparency International Malaysia recently announced Malaysia's position in the TI Corruption Perception Index 2009. In this latest survey, Malaysia's ranking plunged to its worst ever in the last decade, standing at 56 among 180 nations, with a CPI of 4.5 (out of 10).

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission has also revealed that up to 60% of government allocations for Sarawak, amounting to billions of ringgit and meant for vital infrastructure projects between 2002 and 2008, have been misappropriated. There is thus a serious competency, accountability and transparency problem concerning public expenditure festering for years in Sarawak.

Much was promised by the previous PM and little of consequence achieved. The former PM, promised to deal with some 18 'big crocodiles' but caught only a couple of 'anchovies'; which means the 18 or more 'crocodiles' still thrive in the muddy streams.

There has been virtually nothing substantial in combating corruption in Sarawak, not even a meaningful beginning. Little progress shall we expect from the current PM.

Public transportation

I said before that the government should draw up a master plan for the development of public transport in Sarawak. The people of Sarawak are indignant that public transport in the state is far inferior to that of Malaya before 1957. Road infrastructure is fourth grade, rail service still a daydream, the city Rapidbus service may take a decade to be introduced.

Urban traffic congestion is worsening by the year from population growth but public transport infrastructure is so remarkably deficient. It all adds to stress of urban living, increased air pollution and loss of economic productivity in Sarawak.

The state Housing Development and Urban Development Minister Abang Johari only last month bemoaned the decrepit bus service in Kuching.

Improving infrastructure in rural areas

The responsibility of rural backwardness is clearly the result of the BN government's decades of rural neglect. The track record in Sarawak under BN does not give room for optimism as basic rural infrastructure is still lacking in many communities, eg, piped water, electricity, tar-sealed roads, and affordable housing, not to mention IT access.

This is against the backdrop of native NCR land dispossession, large-scale deforestation and new mammoth palm oil estates, the benefits of the latter not shared with the rural communities.

Widening access to education

The fundamental right for mother tongue education is severely compromised when schools of the vernacular streams and the mission schools are not fully funded as national schools are. A vibrant multicultural nation must be founded on multi-cultural educational content, in addition to a core of national emphasis.

On the other hand, mere access to education has been greatly devalued by a continued slide in the quality of education, especially higher education.

The BN government, federal and state are leading the people down a steep and slippery slope of a decline in performance for a range of socio-economic sectors.

To realise the dreams of raising the living standard of low-income citizens, the critical drivers of success are

- political will for genuine and not bogus reform,
- clean and competent governance,
- sustained GDP growth and
- retraining and attracting both human and financial capital, among others.

The BN government has not just put its own 2020 vision in critical jeopardy, it is dragging the nation down with it *viz a viz* competitiveness with several other Asian countries

This transformation programme will have little impact at both macro and micro-levels of national life.

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