

NEM and the spirit of the individual
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 24, 2010
AB Sulaiman

The government has just announced that the New Economic Model (NEM) slated to be the catalyst for Malaysia to put on track the elusive target of Vision 2020, will be unveiled to the public on March 30.

The Mother of all Embarrassment to the Malay polity is that despite all of the plans and policies implemented since Independence till today, the success rate of Malay involvement and participation in the wealth creation and distribution theatres (the main target of these plans) as been so dismally low; from one percent in 1959 to a most ridiculous three percent to date, plus 16 percent achieved by trusts and funds, making a paltry 19 percent. This is sacrilege, a huge blow to the Malay mertabat!

najib tun razakWould NEM be another failure? Surely Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (right), the NEM architect, would not want that.

As a country we have all of the fundamentals and essential features for economic progress and development not to fail. I'd list some of them.

- i. The availability of land and raw materials
- ii. A good total population to act as domestic market base
- iii. Intelligent and well-educated people
- iv. Good social and economic infrastructure like roads and bridges; education, telecommunications and health
- v. Good intellectual infrastructure
- vi. A high saving rate, good capital accumulation and investment
- vii. Reasonable level of computer skill and use

We have been blessed with the availability of these essential features, and in great abundance too. For good measure we do not have elements that can wreck economic growth: snow, frost, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, lava flow, mudslides, typhoons, widespread flooding.

An important point to note is that sitting right at the top of these factors lies the one factor that moves them all. It's the human factor, otherwise known as the spirit of the individual.

The individual spirit quickly defined is the wish and penchant of the individual to have a strong backbone, be independent minded and eager to develop high levels of self-confidence, self-reliance and self-worth. He is practical minded, and develops his god-given talents on his own volition.

He is full of confidence, confident in himself and in his ability to do things. And when he does things he does so with the best that his talent, ability, knowledge and skill can offer. He is the willing go-getter, willing to go the extra mile, to make sacrifices to get what he

wants.

He has what social scientists say, a high achievement motivation.

A good and properly focused human resource in an otherwise barren country would be able to create a sustainable economy; even when the essential fundamentals are deficient. Japan has done it; and South Korea too. As a perpetual reminder, think of Singapore as well.

But let the human factor slacken, and the engine for economic growth would begin to hiccup, and could even cause it to die. Burma (now Myanmar) and Zimbabwe have gone through this.

Ingredients for success

Malaysia thus had all the ingredients for sustainable growth from the traditional agrarian and agriculture-based economy to the modern manufacturing and services money economy. Indeed, in the late 90s Malaysia has been one of the top twenty export nations in the world and hailed as one of the major 'Asian tiger' economies.

With this chequered background, why on earth do we need a NEM? Or, where could it go wrong?

I venture to give a reason for this downward slide. In my view it coincides with the introduction of the NEP in 1970 stipulating that the Malay should be in control of 30 percent of the economic cake.

This has proved to be the One Big Trouble; it proved to be one big cancer in the economic sector for some obvious reasons I'd quote herewith.

Firstly, the generic Malay mind had no history of involvement, no experience in the modern economy principles. Within this context I'd say that the Malay mind has little sense of the individual, little achievement motivation.

malay muslim girl students tudung
Instead this mind is preoccupied with the status quo featured by conservatism, conformity and this particular penchant for the Hereafter. These race and religion concerns are regrettably not part of the essential fundamentals for economic growth mentioned at length above.

The generic Malay mind has a low level of self confidence and self-reliance. It depends on crutches to go about its daily routines. Many have termed it as the kampung mentality. It's a closed ethnocentric mind, fairly impervious to change.

Arguably this crutch and kampung mentality has been the primary cause of the failures of most, if not all, of the past economic plans and models.

No walk in the park

The crux of the matter then is that moving from the rural economy to the money economy, from the natural world to the secular world is no casual walk in the park. Obviously you cannot manage a business (whether retail, commercial or corporate) or be a trained professional neurosurgeon in an urban economic setting, with tending to the padi fields or tapping rubber trees as your curriculum vitae.

You need a whole lot of rehashing of the mindset, learning and knowledge accumulation,

training and re-training, and acquiring new skills to run any business big or small. It takes literally generations to master it.

Malay leadership tries to make up for this deficiency, thus the formulation and implementation of the various past plans and models. But this conservative and orthodox mind has not responded adequately enough. Instead it tries to glorify the psychological areas where the Malay is very strong: race and religion.

This is easy enough to do.

Firstly, 'the special position' of the Malays stipulated in the Constitution is unilaterally deemed to mean the 'absolute right' of the Malays. Yes, change it from a privilege to an entitlement.

Secondly the constitution again stipulates Islam as the religion of the country has been translated into Islam as the official religion of the country.

wikipedia ketuanan melayu entry 041106 These are contentious issues but as the Ketuanan Melayu has the upper say on the basis of 'might is right', its perception stays.

So, armed with these subtle and ingenious perceptions the Ketuanan Melayu elements had gotten busy:

- i. The ulamas clamoured for the Islamisation of the country.
- ii. The ultra-nationalists tried to Malay-ise the non-Malay population.
- iii. The civil servants protected their career turfs by filling government posts with Malays.
- iv. Professional government agencies like the police and the AG's office exceeded their professional parameters.
- v. The politicians were busy drawing and redrawing the electoral boundaries to give them the best advantages.

All of them were tampering with the ideals and spirit of the individual and the principles of democracy, like eroding the rule of law, and casting aside the principle of check and balance all in the name of their private interest. All this in the name of agama, bangsa dan negara.

But as we have seen, agama, bangsa dan negara are not in the list of fundamentals for economic growth. The glaring connotation therefore is that the Malay leadership, often referred to as Ketuanan Melayu has been doing the complete opposite to what it should be doing to progress, develop and prosper in the modern economy!

Unintended consequences

A lot of unfortunate unintended consequences then took place, and again I'd mention only some few obvious ones:

NONEi. The 30 percent allocation and target has resulted in huge wastage of resources. Barry Wain a respected journalist claims that as much as 100 billion (US or ringgit does not matter for the enormity is beyond normal human comprehension) has been wasted by former Prime Minister Mahathir alone. Mahathir (right) did not deny this, but instead

charged his successor Abdullah Badawi did worse!

- ii. The breaking down of institutions, especially of the judiciary and education.
- iii. Corruption at the highest possible level and at the highest possible amount.
- iv. Domestic capital flight.
- v. Drying up of foreign investment.
- vi. Marginalising and alienating the productive segments of the population.
- vii. Human migration away from this self-destructing madhouse.

Each of these points spell disaster for the country, and together they point the way to Myanmar and Zimbabwe.

Perils of power

How did this happen? My rationale for this blatant mismanagement is that the Ketuanan Melayu was experiencing power for the first time since the fall of Malacca. It forgot that in the modern setting, power comes with responsibility and accountability. As power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely it was too easy for it to forget its responsibility to the Malaysian polity but instead to institutionalise racism and by degrees to introduce theocracy.

They did everything under the ambit of agama, bangsa dan negara while mismanaging the economic fundamentals that would sustain the well being of the country in the world community.

For whatever it is worth I'd list down some items which I'd love to see in NEM come March 30.

- i. Encourage secularism especially among Malays by encouraging the development of the individual spirit. This might just be the tool to break Malay ethnocentrism and hopefully opening their eyes to the world at large.
- ii. Deinstitutionalising racism and theology. Scientifically, race is becoming an increasingly obsolete term, while religion is a matter of faith between one person and his god with no third party in between.
- iii. Re-establishing the rule of law; be rid of the rule of private individuals. It is the law who's king, not the king who's the law.
- iv. Promoting true people-orientated democracy.

Will NEM address these issues?

Early indications state the negative. For example an article in Malaysiakini (Mar 17) under the headline 'Bumi rights to stay in New Economic Model' hinted that all the racist and theological elements will stay.

sapp chua soon bui nazri abdul aziz parliament 070708 03 Apparently Mohamed Nazri Aziz

(left), Minister in the Prime Minister's Department stated in Parliament that NEM "will not abolish bumiputera special rights, but will lay more stress on inter-communal cooperation".

Then the latest enfant terrible (bad boy) of Malaysian life, Ibrahim Ali, via his Perkasa and ably supported by countless NGOs are clamouring for the protection of Islam and 'Malay rights' in NEM.

Such words and phrases are pretty standard euphemisms for more of the same.

In the event of which I say this to Najib: good luck to you but I can't say that your NEM would be successful.

Repeating past mistakes again and again is somehow not the best way to heal and strengthen the sick economy.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/127336>