

Planning to Fail

From water and electricity shortages to graft to taking the easy way out, it would seem that the nation's 'planners' are habitually on course to fail time and time again. Haven't they learnt anything?

THE TIMING could not have been worse.

Just as we had Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his entourage of corporate chiefs in London and New York wooing foreign investors, several adverse news items were hitting the headlines back home.

Firstly, Klang Valley residents were told to brace themselves for water rationing as the water levels at the dams were at critical levels. The second big story was about the construction sector being so choked with graft that it was almost impossible to get approvals without giving out bribes. Third was the news that businesses were losing millions of ringgit due to the inefficiency of utility giant Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB).

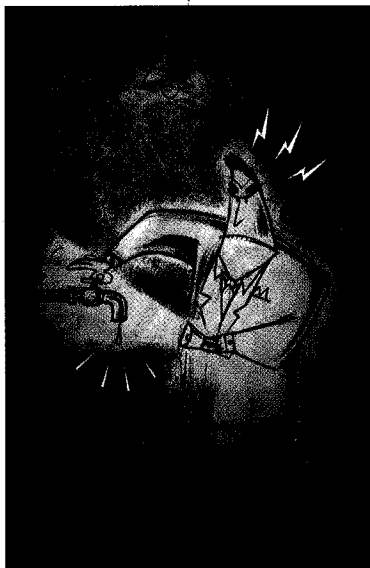
Given this, do we really expect foreign investors to beat a path to our doors with their millions or even billions of ringgit?

The truth is, foreign investors nowadays have plenty of other countries to choose from. In recent years, many countries have matched or even surpassed the incentives that Malaysia has to offer.

It is not only China that is sucking up the bulk of the FDIs. Even our own Asean partners like Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are beginning to attract FDIs in significant numbers. Are we up to the mark in terms of competitiveness to divert FDIs our way?

For one, we must realise that not all businessmen are willing to bribe their way to get things done speedily. They either just pack their bags up and leave or don't come at all. Of course, many of the civil servants are simply not bothered about this but are the first to complain when there is an economic downturn.

Where water and electricity are concerned these are two infrastructure facilities vital to any economy. Shortages or interruptions will only result in huge losses to industries.



Just look at media reports of a new foreign-owned factory in Melaka with no electricity supply, although it has a certificate of fitness.

It is, therefore, beyond comprehension why TNB could not have planned to connect supply. After all, an application had been made several months earlier. Something seems to be gravely wrong here.

Who is going to take responsibility for the fact that the factory owner is going to lose millions in revenue? Will the state government or TNB be prepared to provide compensation, as some quarters have suggested?

No wonder TNB is asking the government for a tariff increase. This seems to be the only way for it to earn more income. After all, if it is reluctant to sell electricity to new customers, how else is it going to increase revenue but to raise tariffs? There seems to be a serious mindset problem plaguing the workforce of TNB.

As for water, we are back to where we were many years ago when the Klang Valley was hit by widespread water rationing. If we can recall, there were big plans then proposed by the water authorities to ensure such a shortage would not recur. But it has.

Ironically, the water board has since been privatised. Many of the officials are still there, albeit with higher wages. However, little else has changed as no new dams or water supply sources seem to have been found. So, when there is a shortage, we can always blame God for the dry weather and pray for divine intervention to bring in the rains.

Common sense dictates that in a rapidly growing area like the Klang Valley, a ballooning population itself will eventually lead to increased demand for water. You don't need a drought to cause a water shortage.

As someone once said, no one really plans to fail. It is just that we fail to plan. Well, the planners had better start planning or we will soon be in dire straits. **mb**