

Not just a mechanic but a good social engineer

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has said many times that he is politically responsible to all Malaysians. To that end, he has introduced his own agenda in the Ninth Malaysia Plan, writes SHAMSUL AMRI BAHARUDDIN.

OF all Malaysia's five-year plans thus far, the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) is arguably the best as a political document.

It crafted and weaved beautifully the political ambition of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the socio-economic design of Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and the moral discipline of Tun Hussein Onn, within the reinvented politico-economic template set by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Bringing about national unity in the newly-independent multi-ethnic Malaysia was more than a political ambition to Tunku Abdul Rahman.

It was a secular salvation that made him the toast of both Malays and non-Malays. Indeed, the Chinese community gave him the highest honour by naming the university that they built after him.

The spirit of national unity that Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed and practised informs the overall political tenor of the 9MP's long-term ultimate objectives.

The content of the New Economic Policy, the brainchild of Tun Razak, with its twin-pronged objectives of eradication of poverty and restructuring of society, launched with the 2MP (1971-75), albeit in reconstructed form, shaped many of the Bumiputera-related policies and implementation strategies of the 9MP.

Some are pretty obvious, in particular, those relating to poverty eradication, a subject not highlighted prominently since 1981. In fact, the 9MP is both an exercise of stock-taking and future stock-making in terms of its policies and implementation strategies relating to Bumiputera participation in the all-important commercial sphere.

In its intent and purpose, Tun Razak's NEP spirit is very much alive in the 9MP.

The Plan may not have spelt out clearly the detailed policy and method of stamping out corruption and malpractice in our bureaucracy, but the "National Mission" that the 9MP represents, as proclaimed by the Prime Minister, reminds us of Tun Hussein Onn's emphasis on moral discipline.



Abdullah has had to deal with many complex issues since taking office in October 2003.

If Tun Hussein had brought the then "Malay hero", Datuk Harun Idris, to justice for corruption as a public demonstration of his moral discipline, so has Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In fact, Abdullah did this in his first few months in office. There is no doubt that he will continue to adopt a strong ethical approach during the 9MP period, with or without success.

If Dr Mahathir introduced the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia to provide the latest on the state of the international relations in which Malaysia has to navigate, the Malaysian Institute for Economic Research as an economic weather station on the state of our economy, and IKIM as an information gathering centre for anything Islamic in Malaysia, Abdullah has created the National Integrity Plan and Institut Integriti Nasional (IIN) as "national moral discipline" radar, tracking malpractices nationwide.

In principle and in practice, Abdullah has taken what Tun Hussein initiated and carried out during his brief term as prime minister one step further, broader and deeper.

The 9MP's major political task, which is written between the lines, is to provide the political and economic frame for sustained damage control from the impact of the last two decades of Malaysia's ups-and-downs.

Dr Mahathir was in power for 22 years, surviving a series of challenges along the way, even as he pushed the country towards becoming an economic powerhouse that could not be ignored. However, his long and strong influence over Malaysian nation-building has also produced a downside or "collateral damage" — to borrow the rather dramatic title of Dr Ooi Kee Beng's latest book.

To be fair to our beloved Dr Mahathir, he is not to bear all the blame for the collateral failures. It is equally erroneous to ascribe the whole credit for the country's success to his leadership, because it was built on the strong foundational contributions of the leaders before him.

Nevertheless, the onus of office for Abdullah, to a great extent, is to come to terms and simultaneously to deal with, quickly and effectively, the complex of issues that he inherited when he took office in October 2003.

For instance, he has to find ways and means to deal with the army of hungry Class-F contractors who are mainly local Umno elites.

Abdullah has to deal with the "Malay agenda", too, the language issue, the inexplicable craving for "one negeri, one university" and much more.

Equally challenging, he has to calm certain high-level individuals who believe that the national car project needed a major realignment and wheel-bal-

ancing, and weigh the pros and cons of such a perception.

Besides having to deal with the costs and benefits of past policy, he has to introduce his own agenda in the 9MP in order to leave a lasting impact on the economy, politics and society of the country.

As an astute and sympathetic foreign observer recently said at a seminar, "Pak Lah can't only play the role of a mechanic, repairing damaged social relations. He has to show that he is an equally good social engineer inventing as well as reinventing new things for all Malaysians."

Nonetheless, all his efforts are limited in some sense because of the previous political and economic template left by his predecessor. This is clearly shown in the way the 9MP has been crafted politically. It is a highly inclusive plan in the sense that it contains the ideas and policies of his predecessors as well as his own.

The NEP, launched by Tun Razak in 1971 and supposedly to have ended in 1990, has been given the new deadline of 2020, the year Malaysia hopes to become a developed country, a vision introduced by Dr Mahathir in 1991.

Therefore, whatever his detractors have to say, the 9MP is solid proof that Abdullah is a political inclusivist par excellence. He has even changed the DAP leadership's viewpoint.

Abdullah's adoption of the inclusivist position has to do with the results of the March 2004 general election.

The Barisan Nasional may have won 90 per cent of the seats in Parliament but it managed to garner only around 60 per cent of the vote.

Therefore, as Abdullah believes that V stands for Victory and not Vendetta, in his mind, and he has said this many times, he is politically responsible to all Malaysians.

The 9MP is the concrete evidence he has to offer.

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