

9th Malaysia Plan: 'There is sense of ownership'

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The following are excerpts from an interview with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) over television on Monday. Abdullah was asked by former journalist Datuk Johan Jaaffar to outline the main policies and strategies of the 9MP, which he has termed part of the 'National Mission'. Stating that the 9MP was an important milestone for the country, Johan asked how the Abdullah administration was going to overcome the obstacles in realising the lofty ideals laid out in the plan.

Q: How has the response been to the 9MP?

A: The response from the rakyat appears to be good.

Q: Vision 2020 is identified with former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Why did you not choose a new icon identified with you personally?

A: I was a member of the Government when Dr Mahathir launched Vision 2020. Just like Tun, I am committed to Vision 2020, which aspires to make our country a developed nation; to make Malaysians a successful people.

In the last 15 years, we have done many things to reach that target. We are at the halfway mark. There is no reason why we should change course midstream.

I do not want to start on a new mission just to inscribe my name.

Q: The 9MP is ambitious and the people have great expectations. Do you think they really understand the true objectives of the 9MP?

A: I believe they do. We will face great challenges due to global uncertainties. As an open economy, we are exposed to events beyond our control. But to become developed, we have to remain open and must be prepared for any eventuality. We cannot develop our nation or race in a cocoon or in isolation...

The road ahead is an uphill gradient... we have to struggle to get to the top of that hill and that is why we must make this our national mission so that we have the strength and resolve to achieve our objective.

Q: The Government is looking at spending RM200 billion under the 9MP. Do we have that kind of money?

A: Yes, we do. If we did not, we would not undertake (this).

Q: You said the country should have a strong and stable economy and a society with the right mindset, attitude and values, and strong institutions.

A: To achieve our mission, we need to ensure those undertaking this mission must be strong, in knowledge, physically and morally. That is why we stress the development of human capital. The entire structure and objectives we want to achieve rests on human capital. And human

capital is not complete unless it has stability and moral strength.

Q: What are the major obstacles?

A: We need to change our way of doing things. If our methods were suitable in previous times, they may no longer be suitable today because things have changed.

The 9MP is a 15-year mission which we will constantly evaluate and improve further; determine where we are weak, where we go wrong, so that we will do better going forward. Therefore, the 10th Malaysia Plan ought to be better than its predecessor, and the 11th Plan ought to be the best because this will be the Plan that brings us to the year 2020.

I pray to Almighty Allah that by 2020, whoever leads our country then can stand in awe of our achievements.

Q: Were external factors such as the threat of terrorism and rising oil prices taken into account when formulating the plan?

A: Yes. I cannot predict what will happen in the coming years. But I consulted think-tanks, experts from Europe, Asia and the US.

They gave their views on the world of the future, about how America, Europe and other countries would fare; on new industries and on depleting energy resources.

In our country, we discussed with different groups comprising academicians, professionals, the private sector, serving government officers as well as those who have retired.

They all chipped in. They all have a stake in this country; they all have a role to play in the 9MP and want to help implement it.

They told me: "Pak Lah, we want to be involved in this implementation; we want to be involved in the planning." That is why I feel there is a sense of ownership.

That is what I want. This is not a Government mission alone. Not the private sector's mission alone. This is a national mission; the people's mission.

Q: In the 9MP, you spoke about the need for racial unity. Racial polarisation is still evident in schools, workplaces and in society in general. Without racial unity all that we have planned will come to naught.

A: I agree. Without racial unity, there will be friction. Prejudice will abound. And in such a situation, anything can happen.

If something happens, our efforts will be derailed or destroyed because there will be no political stability.

Although it is not easy to forge genuine racial unity, I strongly believe that education is the solution.

I am sorry that it is taking a long time. We intend to hasten it... to make the national schools the school of choice. I hear people have doubts about national schools... maybe with the teachers;

maybe for other reasons. I notice international schools face no such problems.

We see the students are of various races because the parents do not make their choice based on racial sentiments. They choose the schools based on the belief that they are the best for their children.

This issue is a difficult one because everyone thinks he is an expert in education.

Q: The New Economic Policy did not achieve the target of 30 per cent equity ownership by Bumiputeras. But the 9MP targets to achieve that equity by 2020. What is the real difference between the old and the new strategy?

A: The targets are the same. But the approach differs. Distribution of economic wealth should be done fairly. The question is, how to do it? We cannot generate the economy just focusing on one sector. Instead, we should explore areas that are not yet developed.

There are disparities not only between the Malays and the non-Malays, the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras, but also between sectors; between urban and rural areas.

There is disparity between the haves and the have-nots. So if we are able to address all these it will be easier for us...

Q: You have voiced disappointment on environmental issues and water quality. Is this not part of the development backlash?

A: These issues touch my heart... I am disappointed, angry... we cannot blame development... the blame should fall on the manner in which the development is being carried out.

The (destruction of the) environment is due to human action.

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