

# Vision 2020 must not be a pipe dream

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AS, in all probability, I wouldn't be around in 2020, I can only indulge in the luxury of speculation that there will be lavish year-long, country-wide celebrations to usher in the dawn of a new Malaysia that has had conferred upon her, by our leaders, according to their yardstick and on their terms, "developed nation status" — whatever that might mean to you and me.

However described, that new economic status which seems to have dominated our reason for being has also taken a heavy toll on the ethical development of our people, their values and value systems.

In the relentless drive to our cornucopian goal, achieved largely by the all too simple expedient of cutting corners and sacrificing long-held traditional virtues of honour and honesty of purpose in all our dealings, we have encouraged Malaysians to believe that the end always justifies the means. The practical effects of this unethical behaviour are to be seen around us.

I am not against development. I am only against gimmicks.

I am for balanced, sustainable development that will narrow the already yawning gap between the rich and the poor.

Despite all the talk of the economy growing by leaps and bounds, large sections of our rural communities, particularly those in Sabah and Sarawak, are still trapped in the cycle of perpetual poverty and degradation. Is this what Vision 2020 is all about?

Wealth creation at the expense of wholesome human development, in a country such as ours, is not only meaningless but also dangerously short-sighted. There are critical aspects of nation and confidence building that need to be addressed if race issues are not to detract from our achievements to date.

These, as we all know, have a tendency to develop an existence or life of their own and run the risk of being manipulated and exploited. There are Malaysians, unfortunately, to whom racial hatred is not anathema. It is not in their interest to see the country prosperous and united.

National integration, the antithesis of polarisation, holds the key to our true greatness. In practical terms, this means developing a process of broad



consultations, including academic studies, to establish what weaknesses are standing in the way of justice, equity and equal opportunity.

I know many of my Chinese and Indian friends are not questioning the need for the New Economic Policy (NEP), however we dress it to render it more palatable. They accept in good faith the political, social and economic imperatives, but they do question its implementation.

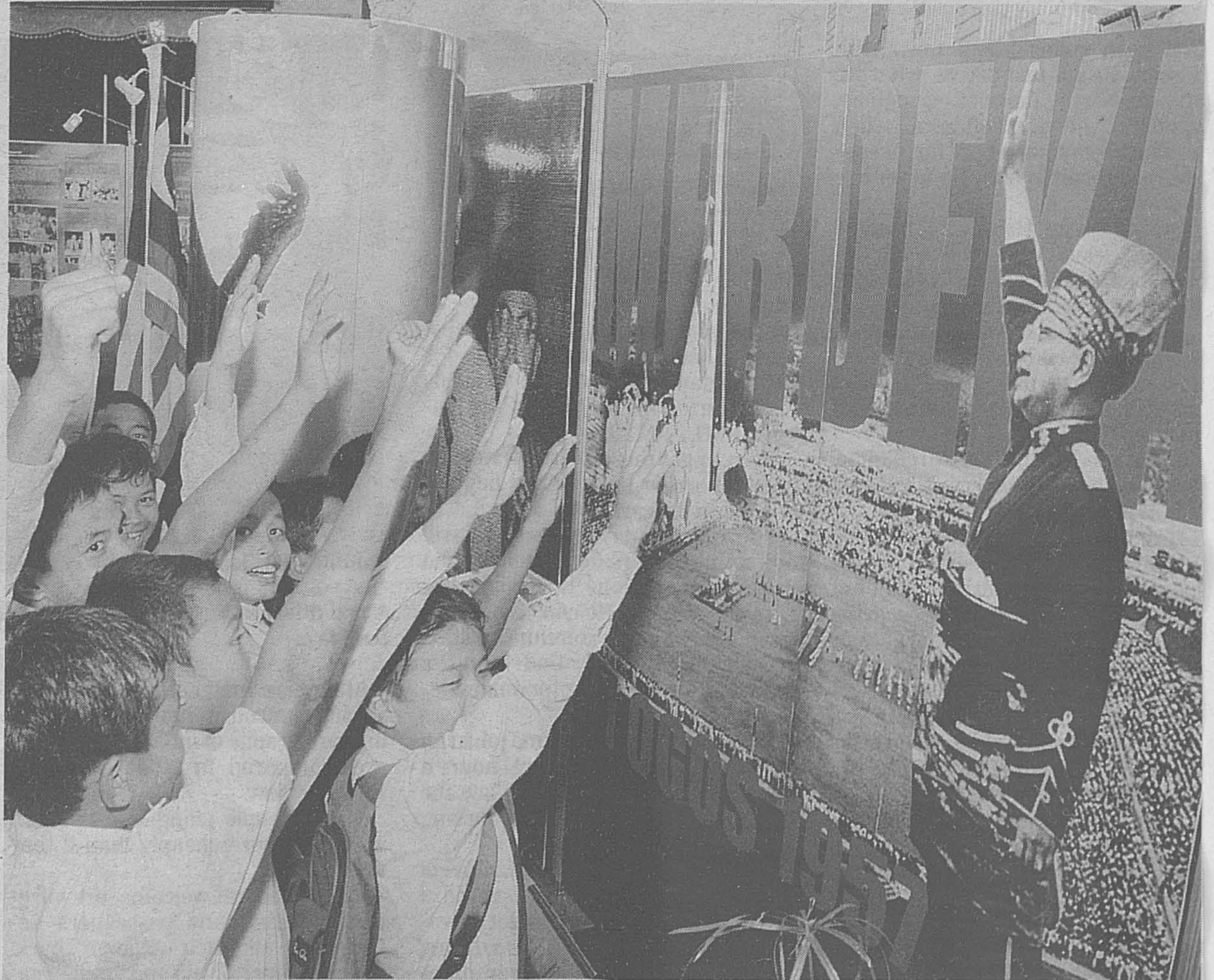
In this, there is a complete convergence of views with many Malays. Although I take pride in not demeaning myself by demanding my pound of flesh, my "rights" as a Malay, I am not about to propose the abandonment of the NEP.

I believe there is a place for it in the restructuring of this complex and potentially combustible society of ours, with one simple proviso that it is not abused for the interests of the few over those of the millions in whose name its introduction has been justified.

Whether the government agrees or not, the overwhelming sense I have from my Malay friends is that of betrayal of a mechanism for the alleviation of poverty of all Malaysians. It is time for confidence building by reviewing the implementation processes and thereby restoring its legitimacy.

Issues affecting human rights, that are central to the whole spirit and legitimacy of the Malaysian constitution, must be addressed seriously because if the Constitution is seen as a political plaything, what recourse has an ordinary citizen in time of need to assert his rights as granted under the law?

Should we not return to the spirit of the Merdeka (Malaysian) Constitution as a basis for developing and nurturing a truly cohesive and united Bangsa Malaysia, without reference to ethnicity in official business transactions and dealing? That would add substance and meaning to our celebrating developed nation status in 2020.



Malaysia should be an object of all Malaysians' 'love and loyalty' as Tunku Abdul Rahman used to say.

The time for rhetoric is well past. Resources must be invested in studies to determine the areas that need to be looked at, and programmes developed accordingly. All agencies of government and civil society organisations must be involved in the process of drawing up a plan for national unity.

Raising awareness on a systematic long-term basis is crucial for a proper understanding of the need for unity through integration. Malaysia's survival as a nation depends on our goodwill and willingness to give and take.

We must never lose sight of the fact that diversity for us is not simply a fact of life; it is our way of life. We really have no choice but to make the best of this situation.

The government has a formal re-

sponsibility to set the tone by creating and fostering an environment that enables and encourages all Malaysians to feel a sense of "Malaysian-ness", of belonging to a caring and just nation.

While citizens do not expect complete rectitude of their political leaders, they have a right to demand leadership by example, one that is underpinned by ethical public behaviour, honour and integrity. Anything else falls short of the unspoken social contract between the people and their elected representatives.

The overarching aims of the great Vision 2020 are not to be circumscribed, surely, to material achievements alone. The nation that we expect all Malaysians to be proud of as an "object of their love and loyalty", as Tunku Abdul Rahman often used

to say, must show that the interests and well-being of all her citizens come first.

As we prepare to celebrate our 50th anniversary of Merdeka this August, and 2020 in a decade and a bit, we have our work cut out to find innovative ways of creating a new environment for giving effect to the dream of a united Bangsa Malaysia.

It may seem like an impossible dream, but we have, as a people, huge reserves of inner strength and goodwill to sustain us in the years ahead. I believe we can pull this dream off.

■ Tunku Abdul Aziz is a former president of Transparency International and former special adviser to the UN secretary-general on ethics

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