

FROM an optimistic dream to a recurring nightmare. That's the misfortune of Malaysia's Vision 2020.

Ironically, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the man who mooted the idea in 1991 – 10 years into his first tenure as head of government – is back at the helm as Prime Minister and giving reasons for the failure.

With only three weeks to go before the start of 2020, let us revisit the grand blueprint meant to make Malaysia a fully developed country and see how far we have veered off course.

It may sound like a Utopian fantasy today, but the broader aim of Vision 2020 was to shape a progressive, just and equitable democratic society infused with strong moral and ethical values, and thriving under a dynamic and resilient economy.

At the top of its nine key challenges was building true national unity and a sense of shared destiny.

As Dr Mahathir (then a Datuk Seri) said in a February 1991 working paper outlining Vision 2020, it was to create a "nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one 'Bangsa Malaysia' with political loyalty and dedication to the nation."

After 28 years, we are nowhere near that ideal.

"Bangsa Malaysia" has become anathema to Umno and PAS, whose leaders have forged the new Muslim-focused Muafakat Nasional (national consensus) pact, which seems to have gained support in the

# Vision and wilful blindness

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## Shared prosperity will continue to elude us if nothing is done about the fundamental political problems obstructing Malaysia's progress.

Malay heartland.

As voiced by Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, the party would reject any concept that does not have Islam and Malay culture at its heart.

Khaled urged the government to revert to the resolutions of the 1971 National Cultural Congress.

That was when calls were made for national culture to be based on the region's original people, acceptance of other suitable cultures and Islam to be a key element.

In other words, contrary to any semblance of national unity, we have regressed by 48 years – to the post-May 13 era when the country was under National Operations Council rule and faced with threatening ethnic divisions.

Just a year before that, the government had introduced the Rukunegara (National Principles).

Similar to the objectives of Vision 2020, the Rukunegara was meant to achieve greater unity of the people, a democratic way of life, a just society in which wealth is equitably shared, a liberal approach to the diverse cultural traditions and a progressive society geared towards modern science and technology.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Rukunegara's five guiding prin-

ciples – belief in God, loyalty to King and country, upholding the Constitution, rule of law, and good behaviour and morality – have either been forgotten or ignored by those in power over the years.

The Rukunegara and the National Culture Policy were initiated as part of the economic and social restructuring of the New Economic Policy, which was meant to last for 20 years but morphed into the National Development Policy in 1991 and extended under various forms until now.

Today, we have the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV 2030), which has set a 10-year time frame for Malaysia to be a developed nation.

When launching SPV 2030 in October, Dr Mahathir blamed the wrong strategies of the previous government over the past 15 years for the failure of Vision 2020.

Looking at it objectively, Vision 2020 was more than its ultimate target of achieving 'developed nation status.

In essence, only three of its nine challenges – covering the aims of a scientific, progressive, equitable and prosperous society – were linked to economic matters.

The other six were about reshaping society, that is, creating a psy-

chologically liberated, secure and developed democratic country with high moral, ethical and religious strength and the creation of a mature, liberal and tolerant society.

These were not effectually addressed by Dr Mahathir before his first tenure as prime minister ended in 2003, nor by his two other successors.

There was wilful blindness to the importance of these aspirations.

Our education system, for example, has remained largely the same but with more emphasis on religion than on science and technology.

And instead of instilling human values, there was a lot of political manipulation of racial and religious issues for short-term gains, resulting in the creation of ethno-religious silos.

Sadly, the 17-month old Pakatan Harapan government does not appear to be any different.

Perhaps the coalition's diverse parties make it difficult to undertake real changes, but it has no other choice but do so with just three years left.

Eleven years ago, in his Che Det blog, Dr Mahathir lamented the nation's trajectory then.

In a post titled "Whither Malaysia", he wrote, "We have lost our direc-

tion. And we get no guidance. We can withdraw into ourselves and merely wish our problems would go away or would solve themselves.

"But that is wishful thinking. They will not solve themselves, they will not go away. If at all they will become worse, become much more difficult to resolve, as our people become more deeply divided."

He ended with this rallying cry: "It is time the silent majority stop being silent. It is time to speak up and be counted. If we love our country, we must not allow crooks and charlatans to rape and steal it from us. It is ours, this country of many races and religions. We must stand together we the concerned Malaysians, and defend our heritage."

With these words of his more applicable now than ever, Malaysians expect Dr Mahathir and the Pakatan government to show real leadership and set the country back on course.

**Media consultant M. Veera Pandiyan likes this quote by humorist Arnold Glasgow: A good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit. The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.**