

# Revisiting Vision 2020

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ALMOST a month has passed since the dawning of the new year. I was still feeling nostalgic about the old year and the good times that have passed when Vision 2020 came into my mind. We are, after all, supposed to realise the vision next year.

On Feb 28, 1991, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (in his earlier period) presented his working paper, "The Way Forward", at the inaugural meeting of the Malaysian Business Council and espoused his vision of Malaysia becoming a fully developed nation by 2020.

In his introduction, he wishfully proclaimed: "Hopefully, the Malaysian who is born today and in the years to come will be the last generation of our citizens who will be living in a country that is called 'developing'. The ultimate objective that we should aim for is a fully developed country by the year 2020."

The idea, which came to be known as Vision 2020, was later introduced into the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-1995) tabled by Dr Mahathir in the latter part of that year. He listed nine strategic challenges that must be achieved for the vision to materialise.

Countless meetings and seminars were held one after another, especially in government departments, to deliberate on the vision and how to get there. I was a relatively young government servant then, and I noticed that while the vision was simple and direct, the strategic challenges were more complex as they involved changing the mindset and culture of Malaysians.

I attended a seminar themed "Psychology and the 2020 Vision: Preparing for Manpower Needs" and listened to a keynote address delivered by the late Prof Awang Had Salleh, former vice-chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia. He made a most pertinent point by expressing that, "In order to fulfil the dreams of Dr Mahathir's Vision 2020, the socialisation of the younger generation must be done deliberately and not left to chance."

Yes, indeed, to realise Vision 2020, the development of our young people must not be "left to chance". But, alas, a generation of Malaysians has grown up since the introduction of Vision 2020, but I have not seen anything being done "deliberately" to inculcate them with the broad outlook befitting citizens of a developed and progressive nation.



Instead, what followed was a series of short-term and long-term national plans focused on economic and industrial development, without any meaningful policy changes in our education system going in tandem with them.

Yet, out of the nine strategic challenges for Vision 2020, only two involved the economy, the other seven touched on human values.

When I was teaching Maintenance Management at Open University Malaysia after my retirement from government service, I often cited a paper delivered by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, then acting prime minister, to the Oxford and Cambridge Society of Malaysia on March 6, 2003.

In his paper titled "Competing for Tomorrow", he lamented that "the malaise affecting Malaysia that may well jeopardise our way forward is a case of having First World infrastructure and Third World mentality".

From poor execution and inept management to shoddy maintenance and appalling customer service, Malaysia is in danger of possessing the "hardware", but little useful "software". I bantered with my students that a government that could not even manage a public toilet or bus stop properly would not be able to govern a country well. I was expressing my frustration at our incompetence and complacency.

Now fast forward to January

2019. Although the euphoria over last May's watershed general election results has faded with the new realities on the ground, many Malaysians are still hopeful that, given time and with political will from the new government, a new Malaysia with good governance will finally emerge.

The new government is facing a multitude of problems, some self-inflicted while others were inherited from the previous government. However, I think the biggest problem facing the country now is not the 1MDB financial scandal but the issues of race and religion that are being exploited by unscrupulous politicians in their bid to gain political mileage.

I was disappointed that the new government was unable to show adequate leadership in the face of challenges to the ratification of Icerd (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination). Instead of standing up for what is just and right, and explaining the real issues to the people, our leaders pandered to the demands of demagogues and their misguided followers.

I am revisiting and bringing up Vision 2020 again because I feel that most Malaysians think it's only about the country becoming a fully developed nation. I don't think most people know or remember the nine strategic challenges for Malaysia to get there.

Until now, the beautifully crafted

first challenge still rings in my mind: "The first of these is the challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be 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."

When Dr Mahathir mooted Vision 2020 in 1991, I am sure he did not envision in his wildest dreams that he would be the prime minister of Malaysia again and face the results of his vision at the end.

The challenges facing Malaysia now are, in fact, more arduous than before, as a generation of Malaysians has grown up in a society and in schools that have lost their quality of openness. We have made many false starts in trying to move the nation forward; hopefully, this time, Dr Mahathir and the new government can succeed in turning Malaysia into a developed and progressive nation.

Again, I would like to bring back the words of the late Prof Awang: "the socialisation of the younger generation must be done deliberately and not left to chance." He was talking about our education system and communal programmes.

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