

Dissecting the Shared Prosperity Vision

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"We have just introduced a new policy called Equal Sharing of Prosperity but it needs the Malays to respond to the efforts we are putting in. If they don't respond and they abuse it then of course we will not achieve our target."

- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his interview with Sydney Morning Herald reporter, James Massola, on Nov 7, 2019.

COINCIDENTALLY, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's response to the final question posed by Massola, "What's your greatest regret in your career, in the 25-26 years you were prime minister, and how are you trying to fix it?" appears to voice the same concerns over the latest development roadmap envisaged for the nation that I expressed in my article, "Drop that myth", on Nov 4.

However there are key differences in our two approaches. I had written that the Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV) of the Pakatan government needed to be put in the public limelight so that it did not repeat the ideological and implementation failings of earlier national development plans.

I had also posed the following questions:

- How different is it from the ethno-nationalist NEP developmental approach that ended up with the Malay elite and upper middle class being the primary beneficiaries?
- Can it provide the answer to the corruption, leakages and abuse of power that have been among the main stumbling blocks to Malay and national advancement?
- Will it address or reinforce the negative self stereotyping and external stereotyping that comes with an outcomes strategy rooted in a narrow ethnic nationalistic paradigm?

For now this commentary will discuss the unsettling questions relating to how the SPV has rather suddenly and surprisingly emerged as the nation's socio-economic blueprint for the next 10 years.

Comparing the SPV with the New Economic Model

How does the SPV which is replacing Vision 2020 and the New Economic Model (NEM) of the previous Barisan government compare with the previous visions?

All around the world except possibly in the most authoritarian countries, the buzzword in public policymaking is to be open and inclusive. Any public policy - even at local or micro level - to be successful has to be free from bias of any kind and not result in abuse or injustice.

This means that it has to be transparent, evidence-driven, accessible and responsive to as wide a range of citizens as possible. Also to be successful, these elements must be applied at all stages of the design and delivery of public policies and services.

If we simply assess the SPV and NEM from these important dimensions of participation and rigour in the policymaking process, *Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030* or SPV is not just inferior. It also appears to be almost entirely a mono-ethnic drafted policy document favouring a mono-ethnic driven agenda.

Although the findings and targets are claimed to have arisen from a comprehensive and consultative process involving "rakyat Malaysia daripada pelbagai lapisan masyarakat", there is no evidence that

there was extensive consultations held with "pakar industri, ahli akademik, badan bukan kerajaan dan pemegang taruh dalam sektor awam dan swasta".

In fact, the research and analytical work for the SPV was done in a very short time as the committee provided with the task of drafting the 2030 vision was only set up in July 2019 with the announcement of the details in early October. Not only was the SPV put together in a short

period of 2-3 months - possibly a Guinness Book record candidate for the fastest ever drafted national socio-economic plan - but the responsibility of preparation was assigned to a new, untested and unproven

"think-tank", Institut Masa Depan Malaysia (Masa) which does not have any track record in socio-economic research or policymaking to speak of.

From what's available on its website, it is obvious that Masa is a politically-driven business concern set up with assistance from Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) - in its words - to advance Malay and bumiputera interests:

➤ *Memantau dan menganalisa situasi dan data ekonomi, perniagaan, industri dan indikator sosial untuk Malaysia dan Bumiputera serta keberkesanan penghasilan institusi dan polisi.*

➤ *Menasihati, berkerjasama dan mudah-cara langkah penyelesaian, inisiatif dan polisi berkait perkara ekonomi dan sosial untuk Malaysia dan Bumiputera bersama pihak-pihak berkepentingan, kepada kepimpinan, organisasi dan rakyat pada peringkat antarabangsa, serantau dan nasional.*



➤ *Mengembleng dan menggerakkan segala sumber, upaya, jaringan dan pelbagai inisiatif bagi menjayakan matlamat kemakmuran bersama and penambahbaikan status serta masa depan Malaysia dan Bumiputera khususnya.*

To craft the direction and content of the nation's economic future during the next 10 years, Masa has drawn inputs from a team of 47 assessors, researchers, experts and associates. The great majority in the team are "unknowns" in the world of Malaysian economic analysis and it is not evident what skills or specialisations they have brought into the drafting work. All except for two in the team are Malays. It could be there were some East Malaysian bumiputera contributors. But even their inclusion would not convince many that Masa has engaged in a policymaking process that is independent, open, inclusive and beyond reproach in integrity. There also does not appear to have been inputs drawn from any of the nation's leading economists, policy analysts and reputable think-tanks.

In contrast, Barisan's NEM was formulated over 15 months. Led by the National Economic Advisory Council (NEAC) whose membership included three international experts with proven capabilities in development planning, the report of the council was prepared by a much smaller and leaner group of experts (15) with a Malay majority but not dominance. Because the NEAC was more open, inclusive and independent, it was able to chart a more genuinely Malaysian agenda.

Freudian slip?

In both the summary English and Malay print copies of *Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030*, the front of the two volumes contains a

pasted *pembetulan/errata* page which reads that the phrase "equality of outcome" is to be replaced by "equitability of outcome" in all the parts of the document where the phrase is used.

Whether it is the "equality of outcomes" or "equitability of outcomes" along ethnic lines that forms the real agenda of the SPV all stakeholders of the new Malaysia concept - including the Pakatan Harapan parties which have been silent so far - should not remain on the sidelines or give it a free pass.

Perhaps the most important lesson to take away from the NEP, Vision 2020 and NEM is that policies of bumiputra, but in effect, mainly Malay entitlement, preference and handouts should not apply to the middle and upper class Malays who have benefited for the past 50 years or more in education, enterprise, and in the other sectors where the racial preference imperative has been applied.

Instead they should sparingly and selectively be made available to recipients from the bottom 40% households. Unfortunately there is nothing in the SPV that addresses this fatal flaw.

Instead it is highly probable that we will see a further augmentation and expansion of a long discredited racial preferential policy that can only end up with unpenalised and unpunished abuse, exploitation by the unscrupulous, connected and rich and powerful, and the greater marginalisation of the bottom strata of Malaysian society - including Malays.

This article is the 14th in the series on the state of Malay dominance. Lim Teck Ghee's "Another Take" is aimed at demystifying status quo orthodoxy.