

Building a better Malaysia

COMMENT
by Neville Joel Lamech

It has been eight months since Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim took office in Malaysia. Preserving this unity government, where leaders were once adversaries, has presented its challenges.

Nonetheless, the prime minister has successfully implemented impactful changes in the country. Below are some suggestions for improvements.

Education

To ensure long-term improvements in the education system, several initiatives need to be undertaken. One essential step is for the government to invest in teacher training.

This can involve bringing in retired exemplary teachers or hiring teacher trainers from the UK, akin to the practice in the past when we sent teachers for training to Kirkby, England. The goal is to provide comprehensive training for all teachers to enhance their capabilities and skills.

It is imperative for teachers to possess a strong command of the subjects they teach. This is a critical step in narrowing the education quality gap between individuals in rural and urban areas, ensuring that every child, irrespective of their social class, gains equitable access to quality education.

To further incentivise individuals to join the

teaching force in the government, why not offer additional benefits and slightly higher pay compared with other civil jobs? This will attract more talented individuals to pursue teaching careers and contribute to the enhancement of education in the country.

Secondly, it is essential to conduct a thorough review of the current syllabus to eliminate subjects that do not bring significant value to students.

Additionally, adopting a strategy of keeping examination questions simple and straightforward can contribute to a more effective and student-friendly assessment process.

Finally, in order to nurture a generation of civilised and well-mannered citizens for a future first-world country, it is imperative to incorporate first-world habits into our textbooks, syllabus and education system from primary school.

Teaching behaviours like recycling, refraining from spitting in public, disposing of rubbish in designated bins and exhibiting courteous conduct, such as waiting for people to exit trains or lifts before entering, all play a crucial role in fostering a civilised and respectable society. It is these small yet significant aspects that truly matter in shaping the character and values of our society.

To ensure the relevancy of our education and to align with the current times, it is crucial to introduce subjects related to Industry 4.0 from an early stage.

Equipping the next generation with essential life skills and knowledge is essential for them to become proactive and contributing citizens.

Incorporating subjects like constitutional rights, basic life-

saving techniques, basic car maintenance, taxes, personal finance, consumer rights and the structure of our government (federal, state and local) will empower students to navigate through everyday life as responsible adults. These are areas that I wish I had been taught in school as they hold immense significance in life.

Economy

In 1982, the government adopted the "Look East Policy" as a means to boost the economy. However, I propose a more pragmatic approach called the "Look Down South" policy.

Unlike Japan, Singapore shares numerous similarities with us, such as culture, values, historical ties, geography and demographics among others. These shared attributes can provide significant advantages for us to follow and grow.

Having attained first-world country status by the end of the 20th century, Singapore provides us with a rich pool of tried and tested methods to draw inspiration from.

As a nation, it is imperative for us to examine the factors that have contributed to Singapore's success in attracting foreign investment and fostering domestic growth. This entails a careful study of its business regulations, policies, processes, systems, practices and incentives within the business and economic domains.

Analysing and learning from these aspects can provide valuable insights to help enhance our own economic landscape.

A good illustration of this is Singapore's consistent ability to attract foreign artists, turning the country into a hub for live performances that draw people from across the Asean region to attend these events.

This results in an influx of tourists who contribute to the country's hotel and food industry, bolstering the overall tourism sector.

The question arises: What is it about Singapore that makes it so

appealing for artists to perform there?

Is it the simpler and more attractive application process, and approval process,

coupled with well-established hospitality infrastructure, such as hotels and transportation? Or is it because the country experiences less bureaucratic hurdles compared with others?

What are the key factors that entice foreign companies to establish manufacturing hubs and financial centres in Singapore? Why do start-ups find it easier to flourish in Singapore compared with Malaysia? Thoroughly examining these factors is essential.

While the writer is not advocating a blanket "copy all that Singapore does" strategy, a more pragmatic approach involves learning from the successful implementations while avoiding the pitfalls it has encountered.

We are fortunate to have a nation with numerous similarities to ours, which has already tested and implemented various policies and strategies.

Instead of treading our own path and going through trial and error, it is wise to learn from Singapore's experiences - understanding what works and what does not.

By adopting its successful strategies, we can not only compete with Singapore in terms of their currency but also in human capital and Gross Domestic Product, creating a brighter future for our country.

Public housing

The People's Housing Programme (PHP) is widely known to have numerous issues. Many of these housing areas have become unsuitable for living due to inadequate maintenance, congestion caused by parked vehicles and poor waste management.

To address this problem, I have two suggestions. Firstly, future PHP projects should undergo better planning. The government can learn from Singapore's successful implementation of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) programme, initiated in 1960 to address the living conditions of poor individuals residing in informal settlements, cramped shophouses and slums.

Conducting a comprehensive study on how Singapore has successfully provided a well-designed and planned housing under the HDB system is crucial. Their model shows high quality, instilling a sense of responsible home ownership, offering comprehensive amenities and fostering intentional social cohesion.

Additionally, the government should focus on implementing reskilling programmes targeted at communities residing in PHPs. By providing these communities with this opportunity, we can empower individuals with new skills and open doors to better economic prospects.

During my parents' generation, the belief was that a good education will serve as a passport to a better life. However, times have significantly changed, especially with the revolutionary impact of Industry 4.0 and other advancements through the internet.

In today's employment industry, the emphasis has shifted from certificates or degrees to the importance of acquiring relevant skills.

I hope that the prime minister will successfully execute the necessary national reforms.



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