

# **Malaysia: Vision 2020 Road Map**

By Koon Yew Yin

## **Preface**

This book has been inspired by Vision 2020 and a speech given by Tengku Razaleigh eighteen months ago in Ipoh to the Perak Academy. Following his lecture titled “The Challenge of the Present” I was motivated to write an article which subsequently appeared in a number of websites. In my article which is reproduced in the book, I stated that I had discussed his speech with friends in the audience. Those of us present at the meeting, and I am sure many other Malaysians, agree with Ku Li that the nation is in crisis and that “a rebirth of the ideals of the Rukun Negara; of diversity and unity” has never been more urgently needed than today.

In his speech, Tengku Razaleigh called for “a movement of peoples, intellectuals and political parties for a national consensus or compact which should include key political principles that can provide an important foundation for rebuilding our fragile Malaysian unity and solidarity.” This book is a response to the call from a respected statesman and one of our most eminent political leaders for the urgent task of putting in place principles, ideas and ideals that can comprise the national consensus and compact necessary for our survival as a nation. The book provides not only an analysis of how and why the old road map has failed us in some of the most critical aspects of life but it also outlines the new road map and the new directions needed to rebuild our fragile Malaysian unity and solidarity and move our country towards a progressive and cohesive society as envisaged in Vision 2020.

Besides responding to Tengku Razaleigh’s call – a call which he has brilliantly and succinctly elaborated on in the foreword that he has kindly provided for the book - my writing is also a response to public concerns that the country is in danger of falling behind in reaching the 2020 timeline for achieving key goals and targets for the country’s development. When first introduced by Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister, during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991, the vision called for the country to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020. Although it was a plan which encompasses all aspects of life - from economic prosperity to social well-being to political maturity - it is important to note that the original 2020 plan gave equal if not more emphasis to the soft ware of development. Hence the challenges outlined were not merely economic targets but also the less physically tangible goals of a society that is ‘psychological liberated and secure’, ‘democratically mature’, ‘liberal and tolerant’, ‘caring and progressive’, ‘moral and ethical’, ‘fair and equitable’ and ‘robust and dynamic’.

## **MALAYSIA'S VISION 2020 CHALLENGES**

**Challenge 1: Establishing a united Malaysian nation made up of one Bangsa Malaysia (Malaysian Race).**

**Challenge 2: Creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society.**

**Challenge 3: Fostering and developing a mature democratic society.**

**Challenge 4: Establishing a fully moral and ethical society.**

**Challenge 5: Establishing a matured liberal and tolerant society.**

**Challenge 6: Establishing a scientific and progressive society.**

**Challenge 7: Establishing a fully caring society.**

**Challenge 8: Ensuring an economically just society, in which there is a fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation.**

**Challenge 9: Establishing a prosperous society with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.**

How near or how far away are we from achievement of Vision 2020? No less a person than Dr. Mahathir has expressed strong doubts on the ability of the country to attain the goal. Putting the blame on the economic crises that have hit the nation (1997/98 and 2008) in the two decades since the Vision was unveiled, Dr. Mahathir in a widely reported speech at the Perdana Leadership Foundation's CEO Forum 2010 on 29 September, 2010, was pessimistic that the attainment of both economic and non-economic goals could be achieved.

On the slow progress with achieving a united Malaysian nation or Bangsa Malaysia, he has explained that he had envisioned in 1991 that economic progress and general prosperity would be able to overcome race-based mindsets and concerns. However, talk of racial rights, privileges and opportunities, attributed partly to Malaysia's more modest economic progress,

and partly also to the fact that the government is not as “strong” as it used to be, has been taken advantage of and pressured by racial-interest groups according to Dr. Mahathir, and this in turn has undermined Vision 2020.

During the Question and Answer session of his presentation, Dr. Mahathir elaborated on leadership and corruption – stating that Malaysia was in danger of having this moral turpitude move from “under the table” (a crime that needs to be hidden) to “above the table” (where corruption is accepted as the norm), unless the leadership takes strong action against graft. The key twin issues of corruption and governance are given much attention in the book, although my diagnosis and proposed solutions in eradicating corruption and instilling good governance differs markedly from those that were pursued by Dr. Mahathir during his more than two decades of ruling the country.

In addressing the concerns of Tengku Razaleigh and Dr. Mahathir, the book may be seen as a source of ideas and suggestions for the general public as well as for politicians and policy makers to whom the book is principally addressed. It is intended to challenge them to think outside the conventional political box for the road map and solutions that can help the country get out of the vicious circle of narrow race and crony-ridden development that has damaged our present and future prospects.

The book is also aimed at our Malaysian diaspora. During my frequent trips abroad, I have come across many Malaysians who have emigrated in search of a better life and fairer opportunities. These migrant Malaysians comprise a formidable and unique pool of talent and expertise that can enable us to attain our economic and developed nation status ambitions more quickly if they can be persuaded to return. I know that skepticism and cynicism is very prevalent amongst the community of émigrés, especially in relation to the Government’s commitment to a meritocratic and racially non-discriminatory society. However I would like to urge them to come back so that Malaysia and they themselves can have another opportunity at making use of their special skills and entrepreneurship for the betterment of the nation.

The book does not claim to any new or startling solutions or answers to the country’s problems. In fact, it draws on some of my earlier writings on key issues and problems prior to and following the March 2008 elections which many, including from within the Government, acknowledge as a watershed in the country’s political history. Many of these commentaries on subjects such as the contracting industry, the New Economic Policy, Perak politics, educational development and others controversial issues of public concern have generated considerable feedback from readers in the web and blog sites where the commentaries initially appeared. Some of these readers’ comments are reproduced in the book since they provide additional insights into the opinions and views of the concerned man-in-the-street on the subject matter of our future direction.

In addition to the articles that have been written based on my own experiences and knowledge and some of the responses to them from interested members of the public, the book includes excerpts from the writings of various political leaders and personalities from a wide range of professions as well as key relevant excerpts of country analysis provided by national and international organizations. The reason for inclusion of these materials – selected from a wide range of sources including published books and internet websites - is simple. It is to acknowledge that many thinking Malaysians are equally concerned with the topics that form the subject matter of this volume just as I am. There is much that is useful to be gleaned from uncensored and honest feedback not only in understanding the problems of the country but also in finding solutions if the Government and its policy makers have an open mind and are prepared to engage in open discourse and debate with a larger group of concerned citizenry beyond its own immediate coterie of supporters and consultants. I hope that in highlighting these non-conventional sources, which have been blanked out from the official media, this will encourage readers, especially from our political system and officialdom, to look outside the box for new wisdom to help resolve long standing problems.

When selecting the quotations and excerpts from the enormous literature available on the country's recent development, the book has prioritized two types of directional materials: one which can help us to identify and understand the wrong turns, detours and cul de sacs that have delayed or impeded our arrival as a fully developed nation; and two, materials related to the new strategies and processes that are needed to drive the country forward in attaining the goals and targets of Vision 2020. An extended statistical appendix has also been included so that the reader can have access to more neutral empirical data and trends of development found in important sectors of the economy and society.

One of the key pointers as to how we are doing as a nation can be found in the large body of statistical material generated on practically every aspect of life today. When reading the development literature available on Malaysia, I was shocked to find that the gap in our per capita standing compared with various neighbouring countries such as South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan - which were at more or less at the same level as Malaysia in the 1970s - had widened tremendously during the last 30 years. According to the 2009 data, our per capita income stands at US\$7,468 compared with South Korea's US\$16,450; Taiwan's US\$15,373 and Singapore's US\$34,346. This enormous difference shows how far we are lagging behind countries which are less well endowed and how past policies have served us badly. As the statistical data comes from official international sources there is no reason to doubt it.

More than 20 statistical tables have been included in this volume ranging from economic aspects to governance and human resource development. They offer a worrying – in some ways, alarming – confirmation of the lack of progress made not only in per capita income but

also in diverse areas of education, race relations, religious harmony and economic growth. Despite the drawbacks that are associated with over-reliance on statistical data, the statistical tables provided here offer a wealth of empirical data for policy makers and politicians to digest, especially for those who are still stubbornly clinging to their belief that the country has made immense strides in reform and change, and is progressing well. The statistical evidence which provides a contrary of this rosy picture is just too compelling to ignore.

To ensure a more inclusive selection and to avoid charges that this is a politically partisan road map, readers will note that materials have been culled from both sides of the political divide. No party in the country – neither from the Barisan or Pakatan side - has a monopoly on knowledge or understanding of the complex issues of development or of the challenges that have and continue to bog us down. Besides my own work, preference in the selection has been given to assessments emanating from the younger generation of Malaysians as well as to those voices that have been marginalized or neglected by the official and mainstream media. Some of these voices are of ordinary Malaysians writing under pseudonyms in response to the articles that I have written.

It is necessary to point out that one of the main intentions of the book is to show that whilst the national consensus and compact for national unity and solidarity may appear to be “an impossible dream” or “a distant rainbow” as sometimes lamented by my friends, there is at the same time a commonality that is discernible in terms of our understanding of the dangerous path of development that lies ahead and the pitfalls that we have to avoid if we are to ensure our future progress and prosperity. This commonality of knowledge of the broad configuration of the country’s weaknesses and problems in governance, economy, social cohesion and race and religious relations is - in fact - shared by both Barisan Nasional government and Pakatan Rakyat opposition parties as well as by independent commentators and analysts. It has, however, been obscured and overlooked in the hectic political posturing and politicking that has been prevalent during the last three years.

Not only is there a growing convergence in the analysis of what is ailing our society and its politics and economy but there is also a higher level of tacit agreement on what is needed to get the country moving again than is publicly conceded to by politicians. Of course, the extremists and ethno-nationalists will continue to engage in new stunts aimed at dividing our nation but we should not be distracted from our common purpose of achieving Vision 2020. It is my hope that by rising above the angry rhetoric and emphasizing this commonality of knowledge and views on key aspects of the country’s development, the book can play a bridging role in reconciling bitterly opposed political camps towards the same mission goal which is to galvanize the country out of the doldrums.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the younger generation of Malaysians who will bear the main brunt of efforts in building our nation to its full potential as well as will have to pay the price of whatever failure or failings in reaching Vision 2020. Hopefully, the road map provided by this book will make the path to our brighter and sustainable future clearer and easier to pursue.