

EQUALITY

BET is crucial for Madani economic vision

EVERY time the Bumiputera Economic Congress is held, there will be critics and cynics who argue that it is obsolete and no longer relevant.

These naysayers and self-appointed cheerleaders of what they understand, or rather misunderstand, of the concept of equality and justice miss the point.

Fairness is about understanding the differences we inherit. In economics, affirmative action policies are designed to address injustices in society.

In Malaysia, it is in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The issue of it being discriminatory is irrelevant. What is important the policy is temporary and cannot be implemented in perpetuity.

Today, it would be preposterous to argue that the Bumiputeras are already competent economically. Thus, the recently concluded 2024 Bumiputera Economic Congress is more crucial than ever in the history of economic development, more so in the framework of the Madani economy.

At the closing ceremony, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim announced a RM2 billion allocation to create new Bumiputera entrepreneurs.

As a result, Malaysia is now transitioning from the NEP to



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what is coined by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as the Bumiputera Economic Transformation (BET).

The divide and rule policy of the British colonial authorities is causing problems in our society until today.

Thus, a corrective measure is needed. We neglected this issue until the May 13 incident in 1969. The response was the NEP; it was formulated to prevent racial riots and to foster national unity.

The two-pronged objective of the NEP was addressing poverty regardless of race and restructuring society so that races are no longer linked to specific economic function.

The philosophy behind the NEP is great and is still relevant. The NEP is about expanding the economic cake and distributing it in a fair and just manner.

That was the vision of our second prime minister Tun Abdul



The 2024 Bumiputera Economic Congress was an opportune time to embark on a new approach to affirmative action policies so that past mistakes are not repeated. PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

Razak. That is why the spirit and philosophy of the NEP, which should have ended in 1990, are still part of the economic policies in the post-NEP era.

We can see the NEP in action if we read the Second Malaysia Plan and the Third Malaysia Plan.

One chapter of the Third Malaysia Plan was devoted to the NEP, which evolved into the First Outline Perspective Plan (OPPI). It spelt out how the objectives of the NEP would be achieved.

The OPPI showed the extent to which the Bumiputera were lagging behind economically.

While the NEP no doubt had successes, we cannot turn a blind eye to its failures, which reduced our economic competitiveness over time.

As a result of poor implementation of the NEP, the culture of cronyism, nepotism, corruption

and money politics flourished.

The creation of a Bumiputera commercial and industrial community did not materialise. The Ali Baba culture emerged instead in the business relationship between Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

Rather than focusing on full economic partnership "within one generation", the preoccupation was more with the 30 per cent equity ownership.

Instead of eradicating poverty regardless of race, the approach was more about creating a new class of rich Malays, causing income inequality.

Therefore, the 2024 Bumiputera Economic Congress was an opportune time to embark on a new approach to affirmative action policies so that past mistakes are not repeated.

One crucial aspect is having a clear timeframe. The other is to

have continuous reporting, either a mid-term review or even quarterly reporting.

There must be clear key performance indicators and metrics for ministries and agencies.

My hope is that a new Bumiputera economic blueprint will be launched soon as part of the Madani economic framework, together with the New Industrial Master Plan 2030, National Energy Transition Roadmap and the mid-term review of the 12th Malaysia Plan.

We cannot afford any missteps moving forward. The stakes are high and the BET initiative must be seen as an important national agenda in realising the Madani economic vision.

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