

Malaysia at 50: Looking Back and Looking Forward*

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1. Introduction.

Malaysia celebrated its 50th Anniversary of independence on 31 August, 2007 with great fanfare and ceremony. Fifty years may be short in the life of a nation but for Malaysia it seems to be a reasonably long time. The rapid pace of development that the country has gone through during the last half a century seems to belie its chronological age. Many other developing countries which became independent around the same time as Malaysia like Sudan (1956), Nigeria (1960), Kenya (1963) or Algeria (1962) or even earlier, like Burma (1948), Pakistan (1947), Sri Lanka (1947) or Indonesia (1945) still appear to be struggling to reach a level of respectability that Malaysia seems to have already acquired especially in the field of economic, political and social development. Malaysia's economic transformation in the last five decades from the status of a mainly poor, agricultural and underdeveloped country which was dependent almost wholly on the production and export of raw materials, to one that has grown to become one of the most dynamic economies in the developing world is now readily and widely acknowledged.

Malaysia's ability to maintain its political stability and sustain its parliamentary democracy while creatively undertaking a massive socio-economic engineering exercise has also been remarkable by any standard. Malaysia seems to have matured as a nation much faster than it has taken many others in its category. There is another reason which makes Malaysia's last fifty years appear much more meaningful and fulfilling especially when compared to others and that is its uniqueness as a nation. Often this fact seems to be little appreciated or even conveniently ignored. In this sense it is a nation with characteristics that are often not associated with a normal nation and yet it has been able to consistently demonstrate its viability through a sustained period of inter-ethnic harmony and political stability. Nevertheless, Malaysia's experiment in nation-building, has not been without problems. Malaysia's relative 'success' has its costs too. This paper is a modest attempt to review Malaysia's performance as a new nation in the last fifty

years and to identify the challenges that it is likely to countenance in the next phase of its existence. There are three basic objectives of the paper. The first is to identify and highlight the transformation of Malaysia as a nation. The second is to examine critically the costs and implications of that transformation. The third and final objective of the paper is to identify the emerging fault-lines and hurdles that are likely to constitute the biggest challenges to the nation as it moves into the next stage of its evolution.

2. The Transformation of Malaysia.

In order to be able to appreciate how Malaysia has really changed we need to look at what it was like fifty years ago and compare it with the situation today. We can do this in two ways. First we can try to selectively look at the basic features of the country then and now. Then we can examine some of the observations and analyses that have been made on the different situations that the country has gone through.

To begin with, there was no Federation of Malaysia in 1957 but only the Federation of Malaya which was made up of 11 states. Malaysia was only formed in 1963 when Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah were added to the Federation of Malaya. Strictly speaking, Malaysia was formed on 16 September, 1963 and not 31 August, which is currently used as the official date of the independence anniversary. Singapore's association with Malaysia was short-lived when it was booted out of the Federation in 1965 to become an independent country. The Federation of Malaysia today comprises 13 states and three Federal territories. The population of Malaya in 1957 was around 7 million which swelled to almost 10 million in 1963 when the federation was enlarged but shrank again with the departure of Singapore. The estimated population of Malaysia in 2007 was more than 27 million people, which is almost four times more than that at the time of independence fifty years ago. It is also significant to note that over 85 percent of Malaysia's population today is born after independence in 1957. In terms of ethnic composition, although the Malays only made up slightly more than half of the Malayan population in 1957 today they constitute over 60 percent. In 1957, the Malays were essentially a rural people, while the Chinese dominated the urban centres of the country or lived in nearby New Villages especially in the West coast of the Malay peninsula while the Indians were mainly concentrated in the estates. Today as a result of planned policies more than half of all Malaysians live in urban areas and the Malays have become much more

visible in towns and cities. The rate of urbanization in Malaysia outperforms every other country in Southeast Asia except Singapore which is basically a city-state.

In 1957 poverty and illiteracy were widespread. More than half of the population lived below the poverty line at the time of independence but today only about 5.7 per cent is classified as absolutely poor. Education was essentially a colonial legacy, elitist and tended to favour people from the urban areas. There was not a single university in Malaya at the time of independence and the country's first university, the University of Malaya, was still based in Singapore then. It was only two years later that a branch campus was established in Kuala Lumpur which soon evolved to become a full-fledged university in 1962. Until the late 1960s the Malays were a marginal group in the nation's only university whether as students or faculty members. Today the Malays dominate the teaching positions in all the 20 public universities that have been established. Every state in Malaysia now has at least one university. The Malay student population at all these institutions has also increased greatly as more higher educational opportunities were created. At the time of independence tertiary private education was almost non-existent but today there are more than 600 private colleges and universities. In 1980 only 3 per cent of Malaysians had access to tertiary education but by 2005 this figure had grown to 30 per cent for the relevant age cohort. [Mohd Najib: 7-8] Today about 700,000 Malaysians attend private and public institutions of learning. [Mustapha: 34] In 1957 only a handful of Malaysians had been educated abroad but fifty years later a few hundred thousand Malaysians have already graduated from foreign universities spread across many continents and countries. The primary emphasis of the national educational goal in the early years of independence as outlined in the Razak Report of 1956 had been to develop an educational system which would help forge a new Malayan national identity without undermining the prevailing status of vernacular education then. The Rahman Talib Report of 1960 emphasized the need to cultivate national identity through the national education system with the Malay language assuming the definitive role but without disregarding the rights of the other communities to vernacular education. [Rosnani: 43] The emphasis in the First Development Plan which was introduced in 1955, was to build more schools and train more teachers extend the basic educational amenities to a wider population. Malaysia's Ninth Development Plan, (2006-2010) now aspires to enhance the quality of the country's tertiary education to be of international standing by benchmarking them against international standards. Malaysia has also declared its intention to

become an attractive educational hub for the region and the world. Over the last decade or so alone we have seen Malaysian education going through the processes of nationalization, privatization and internationalization in an unprecedented way.

Economically, the real gross domestic product (GDP) of Malaysia grew by an average of 6.5 per cent per annum between 1957 to 2005.. [*Ninth*: 3] This constitutes one of the highest growth rates achieved by any sovereign nation of Malaysia's size. The per capita income of the people has also grown significantly since independence. At the time of independence it was a meager figure but in 2007 it was estimated to be around US\$12,800. There were not many good roads at the time of independence and although there were railway lines, these were simply one-tracked. Today Malaysia boasts a network of highways which are comparable to those in the developed countries and has started the modernization of its railway services which includes double-tracking. If modern architecture is considered an expression of modernity, then the contemporary architectural landscape in Malaysia, especially in Kuala Lumpur, symbolized by the Petronas Twin Towers which were known, at least for a period of time, as the world's tallest buildings, the new International Airport at Sepang, the new administrative capital at Putrajaya, the Blue Mosque in Shah Alam, the Putrajaya Mosque, the Kuala Lumpur Tower, just to mention a few, all contribute to project Malaysia as a modern and developed country.

There have also been major advances in health, infrastructure, communication and industry. Malaysians now live longer and healthier and seem to enjoy a higher quality of life. Today about 97 percent of the entire population has access to primary health care. Perhaps one of the most important changes that has occurred in Malaysia is that 50 years ago when independence was achieved, emergency rule was in place and there was an on-going communist rebellion. British and Commonwealth forces especially from Australia still constituted the core of the nation's defense establishment. The emergency ended in 1960 and Malaysia was able to enjoy an almost uninterrupted period of peace and political stability after that. The first general election was held in 1955 in Malaya, two years before independence and since then eleven other general elections have been held according to the provisions of the constitution, the latest being in 2008. Thus, parliamentary democracy has been the bedrock of the Malaysian political system and every Malaysian government from the very beginning has been democratically elected and constituted.

Malaysia's parliamentary democracy has demonstrated its viability, longevity and sustainability in a way that can hardly be matched by any other country in Southeast

Asia and those of the developing world. According to Andrew Harding and H. P. Lee, Malaysia has enjoyed three times more constitutional stability than the average nation-state since “a recent comparative study of written constitutions concludes that the average life of a written constitution world-wide since 1789, is about 16 years, or 19 years in Asia.” [Andrew and Lee: 292] The consolidation of the political party system and the smooth and peaceful leadership transitions that have taken place in Malaysia have helped create a stable and predictable political climate. Malaysia is also a federal state which means that its structure in itself helps facilitate the sharing of political power between the state and federal governments. The federal structure of the country with its practical power-sharing mechanisms in place at various levels has also played a role in ensuring Malaysia’s viability as a new constitutional democracy. Although conditions are still imperfect there seems to be space for all Malaysians to aggregate and articulate their grievances, hopes and fears. It might be useful at this juncture to examine how Malaysia’s first five decades have been evaluated by some of its own leading citizens.

Writing a few years before Malaysia celebrated its 50th Independence Anniversary, Dr. M. K. Rajakumar, the former leader of the Labour Party and a highly respected NGO activist, offers this frank observation about Malaysia: “Malaysians share a wonder and gratitude that this is their country: a green land of breathtaking vistas, not subject to typhoons or earthquakes, without volcanoes, or deserts. We are rich in natural resources, and richer still in talented people. No great mountains and no great rivers, but we do have the greatest cuisine in the world. Our region has centuries of history as the home of trading nations. Malacca is the original free market of the world, where traders from many nations came to buy and sell.” [Rajakumar: 143-144]

He goes on to remark that “Malaysia’s strength is its cultural diversity, our common inheritances that give this country its distinctive character. We are a nation of nations and we are discovering our shared destiny as one people. Our people bring complementary talents to the tasks of growing up together as a nation.” [Rajakumar: 144]

He concedes that Malaysia has made astonishing economic progress and can look forward to enjoying a higher quality of life in future. But he also stresses that it is the common humanity that binds Malaysians together as a people that is remarkable, noting that “If your car breaks down anywhere in this country even in the most remote parts, irrespective of your ethnicity, you may confidently go to the nearest

home and be certain of receiving help and hospitality.” [Rajakumar: 145] In addition to this he observes that “in the midst of an economic recession and unprecedented political conflict, it is still possible for a prime minister of Malaysia to hold open house, to greet thousands of visitors to the home. This is universally our custom, that on festive days, anyone can walk in unannounced to any home, and will be made to feel welcome.” [Rajakumar: 145]

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the current Prime Minister of Malaysia has given an upbeat summary of Malaysia’s accomplishments pointing out that the country has managed to tackle the threat of backwardness, poverty and illiteracy and even the United Nations has acknowledged it as “the most successful nation in the world in the area of poverty eradication.” He adds that: “We have managed to transform our economy from one that was overly reliant on commodities to one that has made Malaysia a centre for low-cost manufacturing, and we are now well on our way to becoming a knowledge based economy by services and high value added activities. Our infrastructure compares with the best in the world. We have a broad band of middle class professionals who have contributed and continue to contribute to the development of our country — a testament to our education system and our investment in human capital development. Malaysian companies are beginning to spread their wings and leave their imprint on the region and beyond.” [Abdulah: 2-3]

His deputy, Mohd. Najib Tun Hj Abdul Razak, echoes his positive sentiment: “Looking back at the last 50 years, there can be no doubt that Malaysia has done well. The quality of life has improved: life expectancies have increased. Malaysians nowadays are better educated. We are enjoying greater wealth than we did a generation ago. Malaysians have acquired a more global outlook. While many did not give us much of a chance half a century ago when we gained independence, Malaysia today has become a shining example of a modern, stable and progressive nation.” [Mohd Najib: 7]

Chandra Muzaffar, President of the International Movement for a Just World, a highly-respected scholar and a professor at the Science University of Malaysia in Penang suggests that the greatest achievement in the last fifty years of Merdeka has been the ability to maintain a remarkable degree of peace by which he means “a minimum of communal violence over five decades of Independence and a maximum of tolerance, compromise and adjustment among the different communities that constitute the Malaysian nation.” [Chandra: 1] He goes to suggest that “Most other

multi-ethnic societies, even those that are far less complex than Malaysia, in demographic, cultural, religious, political and economic terms cannot boast of such a record.” [Chandra: 1]

He attributes the above achievement to five factors. The first was the social contract between the Malays and the Chinese and Indians in which the Malay elite in the 1950s were willing to accommodate a sizeable non-indigenous population into what was essentially a Malay polity through the conferment of a common citizenship which guaranteed the Chinese and Indians their economic, political, cultural, social and religious rights. The Non-Malays reciprocated by acknowledging the special position of the Malays in addition to accepting the status of Malay as the national and official language; Islam as the religion of the Federation and the Malay Rulers as the constitutional heads of the various states in the Federation and the Federation itself. Second, as a result of the inter-ethnic peace there has been continuous political stability which is manifested by a peaceful and orderly political succession. Third, Malaysia has been a “functioning, constitutional state which upholds to a certain extent the basic principles of democratic, civilian rule.” Fourth, it is the “stupendous performance in the economic and social spheres” that has made the above possible. Finally, in conclusion, Chandra gives credit both to “the core within the national leadership” that has acted with a sense of responsibility and pragmatism in its approach to nation-building as well as the “pragmatism and good sense, coupled with a commitment to the ‘middle path’ of the Malaysian people as a whole.” [Chandra: 2-3]

3. The Costs and Implications of the Transformation.

The foregoing description of Malaysia’s accomplishments and underlying reasons for them is indeed a fair and accurate assessment of the whole transformation process that it has gone through. The statistics and the facts speak for themselves. But the drastic changes that have taken place within Malaysia as a result of government policies coupled with the internal socio-political dynamics within Malaysian society and the increasing impact of globalization have also not been without costs. Malaysia is basically a political experiment. It is basically a legal regime which is shaped and structured by the constitution. It was the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Malaya) that had created the structure and political system of the independent Malayan/Malaysian state but it was up to the

Malayan/Malaysian leaders and members of the public to make it work. This is significant because the constitution was seen and accepted as a binding social contract for all Malayan/Malaysians. The transformation of Malaya/Malaysia should be seen as a by-product of the experiment in Malaysian nationhood along the lines prescribed by the Federal Constitution and in the spirit of the social contract. This is extremely significant because Malaysian society is a plural society and therefore the experiment in nationhood in Malaysia also means an experiment in diversity management. How Malaysia manages its diverse ethnic population and helps reconcile their sometimes conflicting interests constitutes one of the most important challenges to the Malaysian experiment in nationhood. In its 50-year history major issues and events have revolved around this theme of how to build a viable nation out of a population which is diverse and disparate in so many ways. Thus issues such as, national identity, national culture, national language and education, economic policies and wealth distribution, religious freedom and political rights and participation have always been potent issues. The changes that were attempted or brought about by government policies in the last five decades have been basically in response to the above problems.

The most comprehensive and pervasive instrument of change which was introduced to try to deal with the above issues structurally was the New Economic Policy. The twin-pronged aims of the New Economic Policy were to correct the then prevailing socio-economic disparities between the various races with a view to removing ethnic identification with vocation and to eliminate poverty irrespective of ethnic background. In the implementation of the policy, however, it was the Bumiputeras or indigenous Malaysians of the Malay stock who were favoured in practically every way at the expense of the Non-Bumiputeras especially the Chinese. Hence the NEP came to be identified as the Bumiputera policy. It was within the 20-year time-span of the NEP that the socio-economic and educational empowerment of the Bumiputeras, principally the Malays, took place on an unprecedented scale. The thrust of the policy was not just to create new opportunities for the Bumiputeras in education and job placements but also to increase their stake in the economy of the country to 30 per cent from what used to be just a few per cent. The NEP expired in 1990 and was succeeded by the National Development Plan which was, in principle, supposed to be fairer to all the races, but which continued to be regarded just like the NEP.

There is no doubt that the Bumiputeras, especially the Malays became the

principal beneficiaries of the NEP. Most of the goals of the NEP have been met but at the time of its introduction tens of thousands of Chinese especially those who felt that they would have no real place in Malaysia and tempted by imagined greener pastures elsewhere, especially Singapore and Australia, migrated abroad robbing it of some of its most skilled and educated manpower. There was also an outflow of Chinese capital again especially to Singapore. Because of the conflicting perceptions of its role, regardless of what its original motivations were, the NEP era was accompanied by a rise in inter-ethnic tensions and suspicions. The most visible area of impact was in the field of education. Schools emerged as new venues for the resuscitation of ethnic identities and universities and colleges became more visibly polarized along ethnic lines. There was a proliferation of enrolment in Chinese schools and Chinese education, which is constitutionally guaranteed, became more popular among the Chinese. Even national schools which used to be fairly mixed before began to lose their multi-racial character. The affirmative action policy of the government to give more places to Bumiputera students in tertiary institutions of learning was successful in increasing their numbers but the increased enrolment at these institutions also contributed to polarizing students along ethnic lines in an unprecedented manner. There was also a massive attempt in sending Bumiputera students to study abroad from as early as the pre-university level. Throughout the NEP era the number of government-sponsored students was unprecedented running into tens of thousands. But again, these students were also denied the prospect of interacting with Malaysian students of other races in Malaysia. They were in a sense superficially insulated from the realities back home. Although there was also an even larger number of Malaysian students of other races abroad, again because of the bitter feelings of resentment arising out of a perceived sense of being discriminated against, there was very little or no contact at all with the Bumiputeras while overseas.

In Malaysia, at the management and teaching staff level, most public universities became dominated by the Bumiputeras especially the Malays. In 2007 there was not a single Chinese or Indian Vice-Chancellor in any of the public universities in the country. This glaring anomaly has reinforced the general perception of the Non-Malays that they have been unfairly discriminated against.

The mass expansion of education or the provision of educational opportunities for all the ordinary Malaysians may have enabled a wider range of Malaysians to pursue their education at whatever level they wish to but has not really helped bring about

greater integration among the various ethnic groups. In addition to this, it is most likely that the rapid quantitative expansion of education in Malaysia has been achieved at the expense of quality. A common complaint often heard these days is that while many Malaysians may now have certificates, diplomas, degrees and other paper qualifications their relevance to the needs of the job market or the nation and even general employability is far from certain.

On another level, as a compromise to the dominance of the Malays in the public universities the government has supported the establishment of Chinese and other private universities. The proliferation of private universities and colleges, while on the one hand helping to provide alternative educational opportunities for many students, has on the other hand contributed to reinforce the trend of ethnic polarization further. It is so easy to identify private tertiary institutions in Malaysia along ethnic lines. Even the so-called internationalization of education in Malaysia, while appearing successful in attracting an increasing number of foreign students, is not necessarily a positive contribution to helping either improve the quality of Malaysian education or facilitating a more global outlook among the local students.

Perhaps more significantly, the unseen costs involved in helping provide the Bumiputeras with good educational foundations have also been great. The setting up of boarding schools all over the country to cater to the educational needs of the Bumiputeras and prepare them for tertiary education, while apparently successful in terms of numbers as the failure or drop-out rate from these institutions is extremely low or non-existent, is potentially problematic for having created a whole new generation of Bumiputeras who, in the most critical years of their adolescence have been brought up by and at institutions rather than at proper homes under the care of their own parents. The ramifications for this have yet to be fully felt.

Besides education, the other most important area in which the NEP has had a great impact is business and entrepreneurship. The government has directly supported the creation of many public companies and corporations at various levels which are now almost wholly run by the Malays. A new pool of Malay contractors, businessmen, entrepreneurs and executives has also been created with direct government support either through legislation or through government policies. In order to expand the economic cake for all Malaysians many new infrastructure projects have been embarked upon. While on the whole this has had a positive impact on the country in terms of generating more wealth and creating more jobs for all, the sudden upsurge of business opportunities coupled with the privileged position

of the Bumiputeras in terms of winning contracts, getting bank loans and government approval has led to rampant corruption. Its consequences continue to be felt to this day. Money politics too which feeds corrupt practices has also threatened to become the norm of Malaysian politics. Abuses of power driven by greed have also not been uncommon. There has indeed been an incredible amount of wealth generated by the private sector in Malaysia during the NEP era and beyond but this wealth has not necessarily been fairly or equitably redistributed. Thus, while many Bumiputeras have indeed benefited from the wealth that the NEP had generated, not all Bumiputeras have really gained from this. The scourge of corruption continues to haunt Malaysians today and this problem constitutes one of the biggest concerns of the population today.

It was also during and following the NEP era that all kinds of serious social ills appeared to surface. Among the Malays, drug-abuses, loafing, unruly behaviour as exemplified by the 'Mat Rempit' phenomenon, juvenile delinquency, high divorce rate, infanticide, rape, (which has gone up by 70% this year alone), and domestic violence have occurred on a level which was previously unknown. The Indians, especially the Hindus, who are probably the most disadvantaged and marginalized group in Malaysia today also suffer from a long list of social ills which include a high crime rate, alcoholism, poor health, unemployment and domestic violence. The Indians are the heaviest drinkers in Malaysia which is ranked as the 10th largest consumer of alcohol in the world with an annual bill of US\$500 million. It has also been reported that almost 30 per cent of all accidents in Malaysia are due to drinking and driving. Even the Chinese have not been spared from many of the above social problems including domestic violence and crime.

The environmental problems of Malaysia have never been more acute than the last two decades largely as a result of rapid or uncontrolled development. Deforestation and its negative consequences are now a big issue. The pollution of rivers, inland waters and marine waters has also been serious. The United Nations reported that the carbon emissions in Malaysia have increased by 221 per cent since 1990 which is the highest growth rate among the world's top polluters. [*Human Development Report*: 69] Pollution is now a major problem in Malaysia especially in the big cities. With so many vehicles on the road and so much construction work taking place everywhere it seems inevitable that the air in Malaysia has become polluted. Flash floods are now much more common than ever before.

One other major by-product of the so-called success of Malaysia that the country

has developed is the increasing dependence on foreigners. Guest workers now constitute a significant element of the Malaysian labour force. Foreign labour was initially engaged in the construction industry in the initial years of the NEP era but now includes domestic help, factory workers, restaurant staff and skilled labour of all kinds. As the economy shifts to cater to the service industry Malaysia has also become dependent on foreign tourists as well as foreign students. Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) are seen as critical in order to sustain the economic growth of the country. Today the Malaysian economy remains dependent on the US, China, and Japan — as its top export destinations as well as key sources of investment.

4. Emerging Fault-Lines and Hurdles.

The emerging fault-lines and hurdles in Malaysia are too glaring to escape notice. While outwardly the country seems to have progressed a great deal as manifested by the changing physical landscape of cities and towns, the physical growth of an incredible range of educational institutions which ostensibly aspire to respond to the needs of the people and the emergence of a growing middle class population, in reality, there are still unresolved fundamental problems which need to be addressed and overcome. There is ample evidence that racial problems are brewing in Malaysia. Similarly, there seems to be a growing restlessness among the Non-Muslims on the perceived invasiveness of Islam. The Muslims, on the other hand, have begun to feel that there is an unwarranted and unnecessary provocation towards their religion by the Non-Muslims. The religious fault-lines in Malaysia are emerging at an alarming rate.

Chandra Muzaffar thinks that the most formidable challenge that awaits Malaysia is forging a durable interethnic unity arguing that “Only when the love for unity is deeply rooted in our hearts will the future of this country be secure. For this to happen, all Malaysians of whatever ethnic background should feel that the nation is capable of delivering justice to all its citizens.” [Chandra: 3]

Dr. M. K. Rajakumar has identified three major failures of the country which must be remedied to steer it towards success and he listed them as, the politics of race, the failure of the educational system especially to advance the Malays and the pervasive moral decline and corruption. [Rajakumar: 145-149]

The street demonstrations that were attempted first by *Bersih* and subsequently by *Hindraf* in Kuala Lumpur to highlight their anxieties, concerns and frustration are

actually just the tip of the ice-berg. Regardless of their grievances the message that was put across was that they believed that their legitimate channels of political expression and communication have been severely so constricted. The mainstream media does not seem sympathetic at all to their plight. Anyone familiar with Youtube and blogging on the internet will immediately realize that there is a lot of dirt under the carpet which has not been openly shown to the Malaysian public by mainstream media. As Malaysians become more empowered either through education or exposure through the alternative media which includes *Youtube*, the internet and the cell-phone, there will be a clamour for greater transparency and with it, accountability. The above, however, are just the channels through which grievances or facts can be expressed; the fault-lines and hurdles are a different matter. The issue of the manipulation of ethnicity is going to be perpetually relevant in a multi-ethnic nation like Malaysia which practises a form of participatory democracy and whose politics is so deeply embedded in race. Another easily noticeable fault-line is the issue of religion especially the role of Islam and inter-religious as well as intra-religious freedom. The explosive potential of religion in Malaysia should not be underestimated. The other emerging fault-line is the growing contempt that Malaysians across the religious and ethnic divide hold against corruption. The cancerous nature of corruption is recognized by more and more Malaysians and it is unlikely that they will allow themselves to be blinded by racial or religious arguments in their desire to combat this evil.

The Malaysian political system itself runs the prospect of facing serious problems if certain negative trends like the recent controversy surrounding the appointment of judges are not immediately arrested. The independence of the Malaysian judiciary is absolutely crucial in ensuring a just and workable political system and the fact that doubts have now emerged on the integrity of that institution, a lot of work has to be done to regain the trust of the Malaysian public on the country's justice system.

Another fault-line that is already visible is that which has appeared in the form of social ills affecting all the communities in Malaysia. How these are going to be handled will determine their potential outcome. Malaysians will have to begin thinking of how to resolve the issues of the breakdown of the institution of the family, the plight of single parents, the problem of drug addiction, violent crime, perceptions of gender inequality, lack of meaningful political freedom, human rights abuses, inadequate health care and how to achieve a truly higher quality of life which is not just measured in material terms.

5. Conclusion

The launching of Malaysia's Vision 2020 in 2000 by the then Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was actually an attempt to re-focus the priorities in Malaysia's development plan to ensure that the full potential that was available to the country would be fully utilized and that the Non-Bumiputeras would not feel left out and marginalized. It was also a recognition that the policies of affirmative action which were initiated two decades ago could not be sustained forever especially given that the Malays have already made significant progress following their educational and economic empowerment. As Malaysia gears itself towards pursuing the goals of a developed nation status it has to be able to tap every available resource to sustain its effort and to avoid growing ethnic dissatisfaction among both the Bumiputeras as well as the Non-Bumiputeras.

Abdullah Badawi, the Prime Minister of Malaysia and President of UMNO, in his presidential address to the 58th UMNO General Assembly on November 7, 2007 struck a reassuring note which reinforced his predecessor's vision of creating a Malaysia for all Malaysians when he emphasized that "The harmony between the various communities and religions in Malaysia is not an optional luxury — it is a necessity. We have no other choice. Fifty years ago, our independence movement was successful because of the wisdom of Tunku Abdul Rahman (Almarhum) and his colleagues who introduced the concept of power sharing. We have been independent for fifty years. Now, those who are born in Malaysia are Malaysians citizens. They were born and have grown up knowing only Malaysia as their homeland. The time for championing parochial interests is over. Issues must be addressed on the basis of the interests of the nation and the Malaysian people as a whole." [Abdullah, Full Speech in *The Star*]

There is still hope for the country.

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