

MRT A VISIBLE SUCCESS



DR IRWAN
SHAH ZAINAL
ABIDIN

The impact of MRT on Malaysia's economic development is enormous

SINCE taking over the premiership in April 2009, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been endlessly pursuing two crucial agendas. One, to improve the growth rate which is both sustainable and inclusive, and the other, to enhance the wellbeing of the rakyat.

These are to ensure that the country gets out of the middle-income trap and transformed into a high-income and developed economy by the year 2020, eventually moving to greater heights among the world's top 20 nations by 2050. Apparently, after eight years, his transformational agenda seems to be grossly misunderstood and as a result, has not received the recognition and support it deserves.

Through the New Economic Model (NEM) and the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), for instance, he has laid down a clear economic plan and road map, where he started with an honest assessment on where things were when he began his premiership in 2009, and what needs to be done to achieve what we want moving forward. And, under the Transformasi Nasional 2050 (TN50) initiative, aspirations of all Malaysians, especially the youth, will be gathered to shape Malaysia's vision in the next 30 years starting from 2020.

This is, without a doubt, a stark difference from the opposition, which is until now merely offering some unrealistic economic wish lists, such as to abolish the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and to reinstate the old blanket subsidy system, which is both inefficient and unjust.

It appears that many have failed to recognise the scale of the success of the transformation brought to the country since 2009, via the overarching National Transformation Programme (NTP).

But with the launch of Malaysia's first Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system recently, people can directly see and feel the results of real economic trans-



The MRT is a project under ETP, as part of the 12 National Key Economic Areas under the Greater Kuala Lumpur geographical area. FILE PIC

formation to their lives and wellbeing. This is perhaps why it is called *infra-rakyat*, as the 51km Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) line is a mega project which is people-centric, as opposed to many of the previous mega projects, which are hardly trickling down to the general public.

What is important to note here is that, as Najib highlighted in his speech, the MRT is just the beginning. In other words, more focus on improving public transportation will be the main priority of his administration in the future. Already, MRT 3, Light Rail Transit (LRT) 3, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and even Kuala Lumpur water taxis are on the cards.

Indeed, becoming a high-income and developed country status is not just about achieving the gross national income (GNI) per capita target per se. It is also about having a modern, efficient, reliable and safe mode of public transportation.

And this is precisely what ETP has envisioned, as the MRT is a project under ETP, as part of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) under the Greater Kuala Lumpur geographical area.

I have always been perplexed by the previous approach of developing the public transportation in Malaysia.

The main reservation I have is this: why is it that so many entities are involved? And, of course, the next question would be on connectivity. It is, in my view, not properly connected, and those who have experienced the public transportation in Singapore would probably know what I mean.

This possibly explains why, de-

spite the development of Klang Valley public transportation in the past, such as LRT 1, LRT 2, Monorail and Intrakota, many Malaysians still prefer to opt for private transportation, which in the end burdens them with high living costs over time and unsustainably high household debt levels, which eventually drive many young Malaysians into bankruptcy.

In fact, studies by the World Bank has shown that in 2015, only 17 per cent of Malaysians in Kuala Lumpur used public transport, while other developed countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore showed higher usage rates of 89 and 62 per cent, respectively. Malaysians are not only burdened by the rise in cost of living, and high household debt levels, but are also getting more stressed due to the heavy traffic jams. This will affect their overall wellbeing and productivity.

Hence, Najib understands that if Malaysia wants to be in the category of a high-income and developed nation, public transport is key.

And it is also important to highlight that under the Najib administration, inclusivity is one of the main features of development.

Hence, the focus on public transportation is not just in the area of Klang Valley, but the rest of Malaysia, such as the High-Speed Rail (HSR), the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and the Pan Borneo Highway in Sabah and Sarawak.

The other important highlight of the MRT is its implementation, where it has been completed earlier than scheduled and thus, has saved billions of ringgit.

This is simply the epitome of the National Blue Ocean Strat-

egy, which makes it efficiently implemented without any concessions, without any issues of cronyism or nepotism.

The impact of the MRT or good public transportation on Malaysia's economic development is enormous through multiple channels, either directly, indirectly.

Through spatial agglomeration economies for instance, the MRT can possibly support gross domestic product (GDP) growth and income growth in the future, as efficiency can be improved and cost of doing business can be reduced.

More jobs are expected to be created and more importantly, the improvement of the overall productivity level of workers since hours wasted in heavy traffic can be eliminated. Furthermore, there are also positive impacts in terms of social and environmental dimensions, such as less air pollution, noise pollution, light pollution, congestion and also low risk of occurrence of accidents.

We are beginning to see our public transportation becoming more holistic, that is, both well connected and highly reliable. Efforts to improve first and last-mile connectivity through feeder buses and park and ride facilities are commendable. Having a frequency rate of 3.5 minutes is a great improvement.

But in the future, all modes of public transport must be seamlessly arranged and ultimately, can be reliable enough to go from anywhere to anywhere.

The writer is the director of the Asian Research Institute of Banking and Finance (ARIBF), Universiti Utara Malaysia

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