

Thrusting Malaysia into becoming a high-income nation

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MALAYSIA has, over the last 60 years, witnessed a spectrum of transformation, from economic development to social transformation, in various sectors.

Among others, Malaysia has a world-class public transportation system and is globally recognised for its medical tourism.

Healthcare facilities here has the right ecosystem and infrastructure in place for end-to-end healthcare service.

Last year, the medical tourism industry grew by 25 per cent, raking in an estimated RM1.12 billion in hospital revenues. This is an increase from RM914 million in 2015.

In terms of education, the country is fast becoming a higher education hub in the Asian region due to its affordable top-class education, cost of living, good food, tropical climate, culture and diversity, and proximity to other Asean countries.

The country had also surpassed its neighbours in terms of development as well as economic resilience, despite being a smaller nation with a population of about 31 million.

This would not have been possible without capable and visionary leaders, who foresaw the future and enacted policies and programmes geared towards developing a better Malaysia.

Malaysia's first prime minister, Tun-ku Abdul Rahman (1963-1970), was a fix-

ture in the country's history, acclaimed for gaining Independence from the British in 1957 and forming the Federation of Malaysia (which consolidated Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak under one umbrella) in 1963.

Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Malaysia's second prime minister (1970-1976), was renowned for his contributions towards the nation's economy and in rural development.

He is known for launching the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 upon realising the need to tackle economic and social disparities among the community. The NEP set two basic goals — to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and the identification of economic function with race.

Tun Hussein Onn, who succeeded Razak as the third prime minister (1976-1981), was acclaimed for stressing on unity through policies aimed at rectifying economic imbalances between the communities.

Malaysia reached its peak under the leadership of the country's longest ruling prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003), who gave us tremendous development and economic progress in a short span of time.

He shifted the nation's focus from agriculture and natural resources to manufacturing and exporting, which doubled Malaysia's per capita income from 1990 to 1996.

He introduced Vision 2020, offering a sense of direction to the nation in achieving a developed nation status

by 2020. Dr Mahathir is also notable for the North-South Expressway project, a highway that runs from the Thai border to Singapore.

He placed Malaysia on the map with Kuala Lumpur's tallest building, the Petronas Twin Towers.

Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the fifth prime minister (2003-2009), focused on modernising the agriculture sector and initiated plans for various economic hubs, including the Iskandar Development Region in Johor, the East Coast Economic Region and the Sabah Development Corridor.

But more needed to be done for Malaysia to become a high-income advanced economy.

Realising this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the National Transformation Programme (NTP) in 2009 with specific goals. It comprises the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) and the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP).

The GTP aimed at addressing seven key areas concerning the people, ranging from fighting corruption to addressing the cost of living, while the ETP aims to lift the country to the high-income status by 2020 through 12 National Key Economic Areas.

The Najib-led government undertook bold action and tough decisions in implementing the programmes, which saw positive results, such as the NTP creating some 2.26 million new jobs and Malaysia's gross national income per capita standing at US\$10,010 (only



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18 per cent short of the World Bank's benchmark of US\$12,275 for a developed nation).

Besides that, Najib, as the "people's leader", had implemented various initiatives to uplift the country's socio-economy and ease the public's burden.

One such example was his continuous effort to enhance and improve the urban public transportation network particularly in the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley region.

Under his leadership, the rakyat experienced integrated network of public transportation at a cheaper price.

The recently launched second phase of the Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line, for instance, was said to be better than the MRTs in London, New York and Hong Kong and at a par with that of Singapore.

The MRT, a proposed three-line Mass Rapid system, was said to transform Kuala Lumpur into a public-transport friendly city, alleviating

traffic congestion in the city and changing the lifestyle of its residents.

With the completion of the MRT SBK Line and the upcoming MRT 2 (Sungai Buloh-Serdang-Putrajaya) and MRT 3, as well as the new LRT 3 (Bandar Utama-Klang), train travel's market share of public transport is expected to increase from 60 to 70 per cent.

Besides that, the East Coast Rail Link, which is expected to be completed in 2024, is Najib's brainchild. He had described it as a "game changer" for Malaysia, which would significantly cut travel time to and from the east coast of the peninsula.

The government has forecast the gross domestic product for the three east coast states to grow by 1.5 per cent at the current rate with the implementation of the project.

The prime minister had also worked towards boosting state economy.

Johor is set to become an economic powerhouse following several mega projects that were underway, including the multibillion-ringgit Forest City project, the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail project, the Double Tracking project between Gemas and Johor Baru, and Pengerang oil and gas.

With proper implementation, Malaysia is certainly moving in the right direction and is set to be a globalised and fully developed nation in the years to come.



The Mass Rapid Transit will transform Kuala Lumpur into a public-transport friendly city and alleviate traffic congestion.