

Ulusan Buku/Book Review

National Integrity Plan (Pelan Integriti Nasional). Kerajaan Malaysia. Putrajaya: April 2004. (152 muka surat).

AN INCLUSIVE PLAN TO TRANSFORM THE NATION

The *National Integrity Plan* (NIP) is a thin document, but with a huge mission. If its mission is successful, it will transform the political and business culture in Malaysia. It will restore public confidence in the various branches of the state machinery. It will reduce public cynicism about politics and politicians. It will literally transform Malaysia into a new country with a political and business culture of integrity, accountability and transparency. It is an *inclusive national movement* that deserves the support of the whole nation and people.

Several key words may be used to describe the NIP: frank, inclusive, ambitious, and forward looking. It is frank in admitting the gravity of the situation, and that the government alone cannot solve the problem of corruption in public and business life, that public services have been found wanting, and the people deserve a better deal.

The document is inclusive in at least two aspects. It recognizes the contributions to society and nation building by opposition parties, NGOs and a wide spectrum of other bodies. At the same time, it invites them to do their fair shares in implementing the plan.

It is ambitious and forward looking in setting a national agenda to transform Malaysian society along social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The NIP has been hailed by the President of the Malaysian Institute of Business Ethics as “the best document to have emerged since Malaysia’s independence.” Some may feel that this is an overstatement. But one thing is certain. The NIP grows out of a common desire and demand of the people for a better government and a better society. It resonates well with the wishes of the people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. It has a solid ethical and moral underpinning. It contributes to the nation building project in the historical sense. It serves the programme of economic development.

Malaysia is a young nation. The Malaysian people need common historical experiences to forge a stronger national identity. The integrity movement provides an appropriate occasion for the Malaysian people to strengthen and deepen their identity formation. All those who have contributed to the drafting of the NIP are certainly aware of the significance of this historical project. The challenge now is to carry out the plan in a systematic and organized manner, so that the movement would gather momentum and involve wider sections of the people

more actively. Achieving the goals of the NIP will ensure an important chapter for it in the annals of Malaysian history.

It is not difficult to envisage the benefits that will emerge as the NIP progresses. The cost of doing business would be cheaper. A number of international studies have confirmed that foreign investment is attracted by clean government as much as by low taxation. More important to note is that clean government tends to attract more desirable investment, namely direct foreign investment which sets up manufacturing facilities rather than speculative equity capital. With greater transparency, accountability and much reduced corruption, productivity and efficiency will increase across the board. The end result is two fold. The government coffers will swell, and the cost of living will go down. It may be a good idea for the government to increase the salary of the police, the armed forces, the teachers, and other employees in the public services. In the spirit of the NIP, this should not be seen as a generous act of a benevolent government, but an obligatory act of a responsible government.

More enduring than the pay rise will be the new ethos in the country. Imagine living in a place where honesty is cherished and practiced, where social cohesion is based on noble universal values expounded by the various spiritual traditions, where our young people are fired by lofty ideals rather than money and fame. When that day comes, Malaysia can present itself as a powerful alternative model of development to challenge the currently dominant western model.

Having looked at the positive aspects of the Plan, one may ask: Is it that wholesome? Has it no room for improvement? Here, some critical remarks may be in order. The weakest part of the NIP can be found in its Action Plan:

1. The Action Plan covers too many areas. In doing so, it runs the risk of losing focus.
2. There is no list that prioritizes the activities to be unfolded. Activities should be so organized as to provide the momentum to widen and deepen the movement.
3. The role of IT-based systems is restricted to promoting efficiency of public services, while they can be used to enhance accountability and transparency.

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