

Book Review

Tun Abdul Razak's Role in Malaysia's Development, Edited by H. Osman-Rani, MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd,2010, 383pp

The late Tun Abdul Razak, the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, has always been associated and credited with Malaysia growth trajectory and development. No study or research on Malaysia's development progress will be complete without reference to the significant contributions made by Tun Razak. In fact, Tun Razak was admired for his work ethics who displayed traits of a born leader driven by destiny to lead the country from the backwaters into one that is respected worldwide for its rapid economic development and now on the brink of achieving high income nation status. The book is edited by the late Osman Rani when he was appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Poverty and Development Studies, Universiti Malaya. He edited more than 300 pages of articles contributed by 16 authors, practitioners and specialists in their respective areas of interest; the articles portray and discuss Malaysia's unique development experience. Osman Rani contributed Chapters 9 and 11 and from 345 and 347 are brief write ups on each contributor. The 11 chapters of this book unravel and discuss in detail the working plans, programmes and strategies developed by Tun Razak to enable a struggling agrarian nation address rural poverty and inherent ethnic biases in terms of socio economic status in post-colonial Malaysia. Tun Razak's gift to Malaysia is not limited to economic and social achievements but cuts across education and political planning and decisions.

Chapter 1 has a quote on Tun Razak as a six year old which sets the stage for his involvement with the people when he became a politician well-liked by the masses: "Sometimes he would walk barefooted, not that he had no shoes but to be at par with his friends who had no shoes." Always a man of the people, the chapter further describes Tun Razak as a person, his deeds, commitments and other early life experiences that influenced his poverty eradication policies and programmes paving the way for Malaysia's social and economic development.

The subsequent three chapters explain in detail Tun Razak's rural development plans and strategies. Given Malaysia's (then Malaya) pre-independence demographics where the majority of the Malays were confined to the rural areas and living below poverty line, it was befitting that actions taken were inclined towards arresting a most pressing issue. The First Five-

Year Malaya plan (1956-60) saw the formation of two important agencies. The Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) and the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) were established to boost the economic development of the Malays and to carry out projects for land development and settlement in Malaya respectively. The role of FELDA later changed from financing projects to developing land schemes, a strategy that has helped to improve the living standards of those living in poverty in rural areas. To ensure facilities and opportunities for the rural population were fully utilised, Tun Razak introduced relevant policies and programmes in the Second Five-Year Malaya Plan (1961-1965) when he was already appointed the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National and Rural Development.

In Chapter 3, L.J. Fredericks, the author of the chapter, evaluated *in situ* development and the integrated agricultural development project (IADP) approach adopted and implemented by the administration of Tun Razak. He was compelled to take such an approach as "...previous public investments had not dented the incidence and prevalence of poverty and may have contributed to greater intra-rural and rural-urban income disparities". The late Tun's mantra was to provide land to the poor and believed if they developed the land, productivity will improve and eventually the settlers income and livelihood will also see a turn for the better. The birth of many regional development plans under the reign of Tun Razak was to promote better income equality between states, regions and individuals in both rural and urban areas. Chapter 4 tackles the issues related to regional development, assesses its relevancy and justifies its implementation.

The chapter titled *The Razak Education Report, National Unity and Human Capital Development* examines how this watershed report served as a blueprint for the National Education Policy and subsequent education and nation building programmes in Malaysia though, as a comprehensive report, it did not cover tertiary education. Tun Razak was however, instrumental in the establishment of tertiary institutions such as the Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) Training College (later known as Universiti Teknologi Mara- UiTM) in 1956 and Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur campus in 1959. Development and the critical contributions of RIDA, MARA and UiTM are elaborated by the authors, Halimah Awang and Maniam Kaliannan, in the subsequent chapter.

The objectives of the New Economic Policy (NEP) with regard to poverty eradication irrespective of race, the restructuring of society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function and a more equitable distribution of income with the overriding objective of national unity and social integration are clearly outlined in the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1975).⁹ Whether these objectives of the NEP were met, and its impact in terms of employment

and poverty eradication during and after Tun Razak's time are discussed objectively and critically in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight traces and analyses the cooperative movement as a vehicle for rural entrepreneurial development to address and pool the limited resources owned by the rural and agrarian population.

Osman Rani in the first of his two chapters provides the readers with the economic background of Malaysia in the infant years of post-colonial rule. Malaysia was a commodity-driven economy open to market-determined fluctuation of prices and the inevitable depletion of finite resources. Thus, Tun Razak advocated the logical need for diversification and transformation towards industrialisation. The industrial strategies adopted and implemented during Tun Razak's rule and Tun Mahathir are discussed in-depth in this chapter. The next chapter deviates to a degree but elaborates on an issue of no less importance. Tun Razak's influence in foreign policy formulation from 1970 -1976 is substantial (or excessive as remarked by the author) and built on two main platforms of pursuing good relationship with all countries irrespective of ideologies and enhancing international economic cooperation and understanding among the Third World countries. The final chapter summarises Tun Razak's invaluable contributions to Malaysia, his development ideas, practices and policies before and during his premiership and how they helped to shape Malaysia's social and economic development. In conclusion, the book reinforces and justifies Tun Razak's legacy and his most deserving accolade as "The Father of Development". It is far from an autobiography but a serious discussion of dedication to Malaysia's development that it could easily have been bar the narration of his personal life. His role in formulation of rural and development policies, the education policy, the ever talked about New Economic Policy, other economic initiatives and international relations policies while doctored and amended to suit changing needs are to a large degree relevant and survived the test of time. One of the strategic thrusts of the 11th Malaysia Plan is to enhance inclusiveness to achieve an equitable society based on the fundamental goal of the NEP. The idea is for Malaysia to be a high income nation that is inclusive and sustainable in an endeavour to protect the welfare of its citizens.

The book is certainly an interesting read for readers, and especially for students interested in researching the socio-economic development of Malaysia. Readers will definitely benefit from the vibrant discussion and assessment of policy measures introduced by Tun Razak since Malaysia's independence in 1957. The book maybe inspirational to budding politicians and leaders as Tun Razak lived his early childhood days in the remote village of Jambu Langgar, Pahang known for its paddy fields as well as fishing and weaving.

References

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