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Author 1	Malaysiakini
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Imagine ... no NEP

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Imagine this. We have hit the 30 percent bumiputera corporate equity ownership target. All ethnic quotas are abolished. Political parties are no longer racially-based. We see ourselves as Malaysians first and everything else, second.

Indeed, the impact of a Malaysia minus the New Economic Policy will be nothing short of revolutionary. To remain relevant, racial parties will need to open their membership to all Malaysians. Racial discrimination will be outlawed. We can, at long last, become a normal country.

Perhaps for the NEP generation, this is truly unthinkable. Having known nothing else, all they can imagine is more of the same. But do try to imagine a Malaysia without the NEP. As John Lennon said, '... it isn't hard to do'.

Much has been said about the controversy arising from think-tank Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute's (Asli) report. While the report was originally published in February this year, it didn't make headlines until *malaysiakini* [reported it last month](#).

Whatever one feels about Asli's methodology in computing the size of the bumiputera slice of the corporate equity pie, some of the questions mooted by the report are valid. Take for example the difference between the par value of company shares (as tallied by the government) and market value (as used by Asli).

Clearly, even a three-year-old kid knows the government's methodology is akin to comparing apples with oranges, or for that matter, two car-owners. They both have a car, one a Mercedes, the other a Proton. Surely, they can't possibly be taken as equal.

This alone requires a review of the NEP's 35-year-old yardstick.

And if indeed we have yet to achieve the target, then there should be a re-examination into the implementation of the policy. After all, the architects of the NEP had originally set 1990 as the target date. We blithely sailed passed that by 15 years.

Now we are told that the new target is 2020. Yes, another 15 years.

But before we persist with what is essentially a failed policy, shouldn't we ask ourselves where we have gone wrong? How was it that despite the investment of billions of ringgit, we are no where near the target? Who is to blame? Should there be another yardstick which can better reflect the wealth, and poverty, of Malaysians?

Let's keep talking

Few beneficiaries of the policy have spoken out against the NEP. That's understandable given the tremendous perks and benefits they derive from it - and this includes both the rich and poor.

A rare exception is former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim. Despite his chequered past, he shows himself as a politician who can imagine a very different Malaysia.

While [Anwar argued](#) that the policy was necessary in the 70s, it is no longer relevant in our rapidly globalising world. He, and his Parti Keadilan Rakyat colleague, [Khalid Ibrahim](#) - once a key promoter of the policy - believe that the NEP must go. They persevere despite being labeled traitors to their own race.

That doesn't mean that they don't give a hoot about their poor Malay brethren. They do. But not just the plight of poor Malays, but other poor Malaysians too.

It's clear NEP cannot continue in its present form. It breeds too much bitterness among the

marginalised, and an arrogant sense of entitlement among the freeloaders.

Given this, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's call for Malaysians to end the NEP debate is premature, unwise and wrong.

The problems we face as Malaysians are so complex that the solution shouldn't be left to a handful of bureaucrats, much less ruling politicians. The government doesn't know best, especially when the politicians themselves are caught in their own racial prison they built themselves.

To solve our problems we need the active involvement of all 26 million Malaysians.

But before we do that, we need to talk to one another. It is only through talking that we know where our differences lie and from there, negotiate the necessary compromises. We may not agree in everything. Some, we will have to agree to disagree.

But most important is that we need to keep talking. The moment we stop talking, problems begin.

In this, *malaysiakini* aims to offer Malaysians the forum to do just that, to keep on talking. And in so doing, perhaps we can begin to imagine a Malaysia without the NEP.

Yes, imagine - it isn't hard to do.