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Wawasan 2020 – Reforms Needed To Get Back On Track.

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2020 is 13 years away. If Malaysia is serious about achieving Wawasan 2020, far-reaching political and economic reforms are necessary.

Wawasan 2020 envisioned that “Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient” by the year 2020.

Wawasan 2020 requires the Malaysian economy to grow at 7.0% per annum. The 9th Malaysia Plan envisages an annual growth of 6.5%, while the Third Industrial Master Plan targets 6.3% growth for the plan period. However, these targets have all been missed since 1998 except in 2000. Regional competitors such as Vietnam are fast gaining on Malaysia let alone heavyweights such as China and India. Far-reaching political and economic reforms are the order of the day.

The administration, to its credit realises that Malaysia is in a state of flux. To put Malaysia back on the Wawasan 2020 track, the government must continue, hasten, broaden and deepen its current economic reforms. A top to bottom review of the whole economy is necessary to develop a proper sequence and time-line to liberalise the Malaysian economy.

Malaysia’s traditional development model of “picking the winners” by insulating selected domestic firms and/or sectors from international competition should be rethought as the experience has been far from satisfactory. Comprehensive independent and transparent studies should be undertaken of the various protected firms and sectors to determine the costs and benefits of these protections and to ascertain if they have made these firms internationally competitive. The government

should also systematically reduce its ownership and control of firms in the economy. Strategies to address adjustment challenges should be put in place to assist and/or phase out industries that are not internationally competitive.

Malaysia's affirmative action policies should be recast to one that is consistent with international norms. Affirmative action will have to be redefined and replaced with a comprehensive social safety net for all marginalised groups.

To ensure that Malaysia does not become an international outcast, the rule of law consistent with international standards must be upheld, protected and promoted. A key issue that must be addressed immediately in a just manner is religious and racial extremism. Inaction by the administration on this matter will derail Wawasan 2020.

Active citizenry is pre-requisite to a vibrant nation. As economic affluence increases, so does self-actualisation. The right to association and the freedom of expression are cornerstones to achieving Wawasan 2020. New forms of association and expression should be encouraged and experienced. These are essentially manifestations of a maturing nation.

Political reforms are important to reflect the rising expectations of society and to ensure that the administration is responsive to domestic and global demands. Key to political reforms is the independence of our institutions. The Judiciary, the civil service, the Royal Malaysian Police, Anti – Corruption Agency, Election Commission, academe, media, non – governmental organisations, religious bodies and other institutions that form the backbone of a healthy democracy should be allowed to function independently. At the same time, these institutions must be held accountable through due process of the law for their actions.

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