

TARIKH : 22 MEI 2023  
AKHBAR : THE SUN  
MUKA SURAT : 9

## Economic reform requires big, bold ideas

# Economic reform requires big, bold ideas

**COMMENT**  
by Muhammad Ammir Haron

**I**N pursuing economic reform, Malaysia has found itself at a crucial crossroad, which demands bold and innovative ideas to drive meaningful change.

The path to a prosperous future lies in embracing ambitious and unconventional ideas, challenging the status quo and possessing an unwavering determination to transform these ideas into tangible reality.

Similar to a ship navigating uncharted waters, Malaysia's pursuit of economic reform requires a bold captain who dares to chart a new course. It calls for the courage to depart from the familiar and venture into unexplored territories, paving the way for a transformative journey.

Like a skilled navigator relying on a compass, the nation must embrace big and bold ideas as its guiding force, steering it towards new horizons of prosperity.

Without this, economic reform risks becoming a mere exercise in incremental change, resulting in stagnant growth and missed opportunities.

Conversely, it is through this embrace that Malaysia can break free from the constraints of the past and forge a path towards a dynamic and thriving economy.

To unlock Malaysia's true economic potential, big and bold ideas must take centre stage in five key areas: empowering entrepreneurship and small businesses, harnessing the power of a green economy, driving digital transformation and innovation, nurturing human capital through education, and building resilient infrastructure and enhancing connectivity.

### **I. Empowering entrepreneurship and small businesses:**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been crucial economic growth drivers. Research reveals that SMEs contribute over 40% to Malaysia's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and employ more than 70% of the workforce.

However, to unlock the full potential of entrepreneurship, Malaysia can draw inspiration from countries like the US and Singapore, which have fostered a thriving startup ecosystem. For instance, the Swedish

government's unwavering support for entrepreneurs led to the birth of global giants like Spotify and Skype.

To replicate this success, Malaysia can establish entrepreneur hubs that provide a supportive environment for startups, offer tax incentives to encourage investments and facilitate collaborations between academia and industry.

As a result, the nation can generate employment opportunities, foster innovation and diversify its economy, thus creating a vibrant ecosystem, where bold ideas can flourish.

### **II. Harnessing the power of green economy:**

By addressing the pressing environmental concerns, opportunities for both growth and sustainability can be opened up.

Costa Rica's remarkable achievement of producing 99% of its electricity from renewable sources is a beacon of inspiration.

Malaysia can follow suit by embracing a green economy and unlocking new job prospects, and attracting sustainable investments.

Investing in renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind, will not only reduce reliance on fossil fuels but also cut carbon emissions. Furthermore, this move will position Malaysia as an attractive destination for international investors seeking environmentally conscious ventures.

Additionally, supporting sustainable agriculture practices and promoting eco-tourism will enhance food security, open new markets for Malaysian agricultural products and attract visitors seeking immersive and eco-friendly experiences.

### **III. Driving digital transformation and innovation:**

Digital transformation has become an essential catalyst for economic progress worldwide. Malaysia can leverage digital technologies to enhance competitiveness, create jobs and

boost productivity. By embracing e-commerce, fintech and automation, the nation can revolutionise industries and tap into the global market.

Forecasts indicate Malaysia's e-commerce sector to reach RM170 billion by 2024. This potential presents a significant opportunity for local entrepreneurs to expand their businesses globally.

However, realising this potential requires strategic investments in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity and skills development programmes.

Prioritising digital literacy and offering comprehensive training will equip the Malaysian workforce with the necessary tools to thrive in the digital age.

### **IV. Nurturing human capital through education:**

Investing in human capital development is the cornerstone of unlocking Malaysia's economic potential.

Finland's renowned education system, known for its emphasis on innovation and critical thinking, provides valuable insights. Malaysia can emulate Finland's approach and focus on fostering relevant skills for the job market.

Initiatives, such as vocational training digital literacy programmes and entrepreneurship education, will empower Malaysians with the necessary competencies to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.

In addition, bridging the academia-industry gap through quadruple helix collaboration will create a talent pipeline to meet the demands of an increasingly complex society. By nurturing a

skilled and adaptable workforce, Malaysia can seize new opportunities and drive economic growth.

### **V. Building resilient infrastructure and enhancing connectivity**

Robust infrastructure is vital for economic progress and regional integration. While Malaysia has made significant strides with projects like the Mass Rapid Transit system,

further advancements are required to unlock the nation's potential.

The high-speed rail project connecting Kuala Lumpur and Singapore holds immense promise for tourism, trade and investment.

Additionally, Malaysia's ports play a crucial role in facilitating international trade. By expanding and modernising port facilities, Malaysia can attract more shipping lines and position itself as a major logistics hub in the region. This move will enhance trade connectivity, create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth.

Moreover, embracing the concept of smart cities can revolutionise Malaysia's economic landscape. Cities like Singapore and Barcelona have successfully integrated smart technologies to optimise efficiency, sustainability and quality of life. By incorporating Internet of Things sensors, data analytics and smart grid systems, Malaysian cities can enhance resource management, reduce congestion and provide a superior urban experience for residents and visitors alike.

Imagine a sculptor attempting to create a masterpiece with timid strokes of a brush. The result would be an uninspiring work of art. Similarly, without the bold strokes of big ideas, Malaysia's economic reform will lack the depth and impact needed to propel the nation forward.

Just as the Wright brothers dared to envision human flight or Steve Jobs revolutionising the way of interacting with technology, Malaysia must embrace the spirit of innovation to pioneer new frontiers of economic growth.

However, the road to converting these ideas into reality is not without challenges. It requires a collective effort from all stakeholders - the government, businesses, the academia and citizens - to work hand in hand, to overcome the obstacles, and forging ahead with unwavering commitment.

In conclusion, the need for economic reform in Malaysia is undeniable, but achieving meaningful change requires us to dream big, have the determination to challenge legacy thinking, and the ability to convert these big and bold ideas into concrete actions.

Let us embark on a life-changing journey, where the pursuit of prosperity is fuelled by the power of imagination, innovation and the collective will to turn bold ideas into reality.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com