

NIMP 2030

The revitalising challenge

INDUSTRIAL master plans are headline-grabbers. It has been so since the first in 1986. Unfortunately, they are news of the day — here today and gone tomorrow — when they should be developing stories, almost always in the eyes of the public. Otherwise, it would be a post-hoc story, like reading the auditor general's "whodunnit" report. No doubt there are many things to be excited about the New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP), but the test will be in its implementation. No, do not go rushing to set up a delivery unit in the shape of Pemandu as we did in 2009. To say Pemandu was all failure and no success will be unjust. The reality was that the delivery unit, packed with consultants, did deliver some results, but it was overshadowed by poor performance. True, there was much hype then about what Pemandu was doing to Malaysia. Even the World Bank was recommending other countries to follow the example of Malaysia. However, Pemandu had cost the government a bomb. PowerPoints and consultant-speak don't come cheap, and according to Pemandu then, it was the most expensive delivery unit in the world. One wonders how big a hole Pemandu had left in the coffers of the government then and now.

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Implementation isn't the only challenge. Getting the ecosystem ready is equally important. Do we have it all for the NIMP 2030? Not all, but we are on the way. Take connectivity, the be-all and end-all of the digital world. Our mobile speed index (24.8Mbps) is ranked 74th in the world while broadband connectivity (90.86Mbps) is a better, but distant 34th. We are too slow for the NIMP 2030 that comes tagged as the 4th Industrial Master Plan. If Malaysia wants NIMP 2030 to revitalise the country's industries, it must first boost our digital connectivity. We don't want some investors to climb trees to get an Internet connection as some of our students do on occasions. In remote areas, that is. NIMP 2030 tells us it is aiming for a value-added turnaround of RM587.5 billion in seven years. This is more of a "brain" story than it is a "brawn" one. We do not dispute that Malaysia has a decently educated population, with a tertiary enrolment rate of 43 per cent. Impressive, especially when we could beat the world average of 40 per cent. But, yes, there is a "but". Most of our industries are not employing them. They just don't have the jobs for them. Rather, they have plenty for foreign labour. If our industries are stuck on "brawn", then Malaysia may find it hard to meet the value-added turnaround of RM587.5 billion, even in 14 years.

Finally, we are not really regulations-ready, opines AIMST University Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr John Xavier. In 2020, the World Bank ranked Malaysia 12th in terms of ease of doing business. We may have become complacent given the ranking was among 190 countries. Currently, our neighbours have advanced, making it easy, not only for foreign investors but also local ones, to do business. Let's not forget. Investments flow to wherever it is easy to do business. We must work on our regulations if we want to be the world's top 10 destinations where investors rush to do business. It's not difficult. We once did even better at No 7.