

Modernising Sabah's economy: The young

Hajiji has inherited this economic status quo. Sabah has been trapped in an economic rout [a black hole] for more than 30 years. The golden era that Tan Sri has given Sabah evaporated soon after he left office. Years later, Tan Sri Musa was able to resurrect the economy to 8pc growth in 2017. Unfortunately, he left office in 2018.

Sabah has been suffering from some of these economic sicknesses which are verifiable from the **Malaysian Department of Statistics**. [a] Lowest household income. [b] Highest unemployment, including largest number of jobless graduates. Thousands left Sabah for Klang Valley and Singapore to seek jobs. [d] Lowest GDP per capita. [e] Lowest ranking in economic performance. [f] 4th world infrastructure, schools, extremely bad medical facilities.

In sharp contrast to the hugely poor economic performance. Sabah is [a] 6th largest contributor to national GDP. [b] Largest producer of oil and gas. [c] Largest producer of palm oil. All these wealth has been siphoned off.

Hajiji has a humongous job to turn around Sabah's economy. Many countries in similar situation take years to recover. Some in Africa and middle east never made it. Their population is still mired in deep poverty traps.

Reasons for Sabah's economic performance.

Many Sabahan political leaders have been the biggest culprits. These are well-known [a] Bad economic leadership by too many Sabahan political leaders. [b] Failure to protect Sabah's rights. [c] Inability to prevent Petronas' discriminatory practices, especially in the lack of economic value chain and downstream for Sabah. [c] Failure to require oil palm plantation owners to establish downstream. [d] Failure to secure equitable federal funding for economic development in the national federal budgets and 5-year plans. The list is ad nauseum.

Good lessons from Singapore and China.

In many ways, Hajiji's problems in recovery are very similar to those that Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Deng Xiao Ping of China had to solve. LKY turned Singapore from a backwater/slum into the highest income country in the world. His approach was that every Singaporean had to work hard for Singapore to survive. Deng's was "it is glorious to get rich", "It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white so long as it catches the mouse." Both these great men succeeded to turn their countries into world class because of 1 reason only—the Singaporeans and Chinese populations embraced, with exceptional enthusiasm, their respective leaders' vision and policy initiatives to develop their countries.

Both LKY and Deng were confronted with no money, no capital and no investment, same like Sabah. Infrastructures were as bad as Sabah now. You name it, they don't have it. LKY and Deng [who admitted he had to learn from LKY] commenced their momentous struggle to develop their economies by [a] Adopting policies to open up their economies. [b] Making tremendous efforts to attract investments. LKY promoted MNCs [Multi-National Corporations] and Deng invited overseas Chinese investors. He never depended on the West. [c] After the investors have settled down, making profits, both introduced policies for the participations of Singaporeans and Chinese entrepreneurs. Singapore

required foreign investors to “piggy back” talented Singaporean entrepreneurs. This did not mean freebies. There was no free lunch. They were required work hard for it. Likewise in China.

Hajiji's strategy is on the right track.

Hajiji, since his installation as CM on 29th September 2020 [2 years at end of this September], has rapidly put in place many of the big-ticket items that are requisites to pluck Sabah out of the black hole. Given Sabah's poor financial situation and less than helpful federal government, his only option was to look for investments. He adopted, like LKY and Deng, open, investor friendly policies. He was convinced that “good policies attract reputable investors, bad policies attract con men”. The result is amazing. Some RM48 billions of investments have arrived in Sabah. More are desirous to come, despite Sabah's well-known problems of poor infrastructures.

Best recognition of Hajiji's success in his open investor-friendly policies is the accolades from the Council of Arab Ambassadors [9 of them] in their recent visit to Sabah. Some of these high-ranking diplomats are from powerful countries like Qatar, Saudi and Dubai. Their visits may snowball into more investments especially in to <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/08/823952/sabah-invites-investments-middle-east>

Attacking Sabah's economic problems on other fronts with fresh initiatives are Bung Moktar on infrastructure, Dr Jeffry on agriculture, especially his initiative on the new agriculture enactment and focus on food sufficiency and security and Dr Joachim on industrialization. Significantly, SKN Safar's digitalisation of Sabah is at an advance stage. This will create a widespread

Benefits from Hajiji's Sabahans First Policy.

The various components of Hajiji's economic strategy are coming together nicely for Sabahans to begin benefiting from his Sabahans First Policy especially in new businesses and investment opportunities and jobs. These can be found in [a] Hajiji's success in attracting investments into Sabah. Details are available in the public domain, like [i] New coconut industry. [ii] Oil and gas industry will need thousands of young Sabahans and entrepreneurs under the various newly established agreements with Petronas. O&G together with power generation will be huge. [iii] ITP [Industry Tree Plantations] and downstream. Hajiji's ITP policy is outstanding as there are companies whose staff from senior management, department heads to the nurseries are exclusively Sabahans. Estimated jobs in ITP will be 80,000 for skilled and unskilled. ITP downstream will produce numerous business opportunities for Sabahans too.

Calling young Sabahans to modernize Sabah's economy.

Sabah's model in the 1980s and 1990s of spoon-feeding is obsolete, archaic. It has not worked. Instead, it was disastrous. Sabah's economy must be modernized ASAP.

Time, opportunities wait for no man, especially for the pessimists, doubters, sceptics and whiners.

For Hajiji's Sabahans First Policy and economic strategy to yield maximum long-term result, they must be supported by a new generation of young Sabahans who are forward looking, educated, enterprising and courageous to venture out to grab the opportunities that Hajiji has created. These young Sabahans must be proud of their Sabahan heritage, unapologetic of the Sabahans First Policy and must regain control of our rightful economic resources and destiny in Malaysia. They must not again let Sabah's wealth to be carted away in the millions and billions to enrich non-Sabahans.

Most importantly, these young Sabahans are capable of contributing to modernize Sabah's economy.

Are there such young Sabahans to do these? Yes. There are many and the number is growing. Inspired by Hajiji's open policies, the newly formed SAYAP [Sabah Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals] by young Sabahans has grown impressively since January 2022. Some of its members are already participating in a few of the investments that Hajiji has brought in, while others are creating new businesses. No doubt their number will grow exponentially.

Sabah belongs to our young Sabahans. Sabah's future is in their hands. Imbued with a growing intensity of the Sabahan spirit, they will regain and protect Sabah's economic rights and dignity. They will create a new, economically strong, modern Sabah that Sabahans can be justly proud of. Sabah, which has all the prerequisites, can be a major high-income state [like Selangor] in Malaysia.

<https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/read/4865/modernising-sabah-s-economy-the-young/>