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The obsession with progress

For the last one hundred years the whole world has been obsessed with progress. There is no other subject which has created so much concern as progress and in the process it has lost its previous role as a means to attain a better quality of life.

We are now carried away by a torrent of progress, not knowing where it will take us, and it is not a progression towards something more sensible, intrinsically more valuable. It is merely progress for the sake of progress with no room for sentimentality or sensitivity. The clear expression of this mood is visible in all walks of modern life.

An ever increasing uniformity can be perceived everywhere: A standardization of the tastes and habits of dressing, eating, drinking, working, education and architecture. The overall impression that you encounter in New York you will also encounter in Brasilia and Buenos Aires, in Dakar and Nairobi, in Ankara and Athens, in Beijing and Tokyo, in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Despite drugs being forbidden in all countries, other hazardous stupefiers, such as golf, cricket, rugby, discotheques and disco music, an almost unlimited range of tourism and gutter press are incessantly enhanced. The possession of unlicensed arms is also forbidden in many countries, but the use of private vehicles, computers and the like is allowed and even encouraged.

In an ever more congested and environmentally spoiled world would it not make more sense to make use of our legs or at least bicycles, and for longer distances public transport? Nowadays it is common to find that in a family of say five, each person has his or her own car! Furthermore, what actual necessity is there for having a computer in the house? A house is not normally a center of astrophysical research, not a tax office or department of finances, not a registry of births or a public prosecutor's office; still it is common to come across 10-year-old children spending the whole day playing with their home computer. Another common sight is ladies and gentlemen sitting in limousines talking into a mobile telephone. These are some worldwide harmful trends. Then there are some even more destructive ones which have dealt a fatal blow to human dignity: "economism" and "sexism."

Since the day humans first appeared on the earth they have been engaged in production, consumption and reproduction. These are such commonplace facts that until the beginning of this century it never dawned on decent people to evoke them.

This most protuberant feature, this frantic pursuit of progress observable from one end of the globe to the other is a thoughtless, blindfold attempt to strive for things newly contrived, no matter how absurd. This can manifest itself as adherence to a crazy, criminal doctrine and the overriding personality who represents an ideological-political current, or to trivial fashions like mass tourism, vacation and touring follies, modes and manners of dressing, eating, drinking, dwelling, furnishing and so on and so forth. Stock ideas and attitudes sprout like mushrooms: libertarian child upbringing, human rights, women's lib, animal lib, single parenthood, computer literacy and a lot more.

The oldest and most widespread run-of-the-mill myths are, however, industrialization and prosperity. At the beginning these made sense resulting in a never-ending trend to "ward-off nature." Why?

Because since the days of the onset of the Renaissance and Humanism, Nature has been regarded as a realm that must be transformed into a man-serving domain.

This has been achieved through massive industrialization, where the unremitting systematic abuse of Nature has gone hand in hand with the organized exploitation of the majority of humanity by a minority.

This craze began in Northwest Europe and eventually cast its spell over the whole of humanity. Now industrial development together with the increase in prosperity have become to some extent a global obsession from which no one is immune. What can be done to modify and moderate this ominous trend? As already indicated, we cannot remove ourselves from this global process.

Such an attempt would mean suicide. Malaysia, for that matter, has achieved from the late 1950s onwards an ever increasing rate of growth in industrialization and welfare. This, it seems, being obtained in drastic defiance of Nature. Now there is visible remorse; although unfortunately somewhat belated. Henceforth, utter care and vigilance are necessary.

Nature-respecting industrial development is an important condition that leads people towards an equitable and healthy State. Nevertheless, industry in itself is an effect, an occurrence. Its driving dynamo hidden away from sight: philosophy-science. Any nation furnished with industry, even if highly technological, is still utterly vulnerable, unless it primarily possesses a philosophy-science system. Science is engendered by philosophy; and then again, science is the processor of technology; this, in turn, is the agent of industry. So, evidently enough, industry is the last

link in a long chain. To appropriate only industry without philosophy-science can be likened to a human being endowed with a body, but short of a brain.

Many nations are completely dependent on more dominant ones to do their thinking. In order to gain independence and be free they need to use their brains, that is, develop their own philosophy-science. The most sublime human products are those brought about by the combined efforts of intellect and imagination. The greatest human productivity is reflected by works of art and scientific research coupled with philosophical inquiries yielding hypotheses, nomologies, theories and ultimately systems.

Consequently, it is about time Malaysia, like certain other Muslim nations, which is presently endowed with a highly developed industry based on imported technology, attempts to jump from a mere imitation stage over to a creative phase. This will only become possible by combining creative ingeniousness with extensive and at the same serious knowledge.

This will require the acquisition of a number of cognitive dimensions. To name but a few: a genuine knowledge of the Muslim religion from which sprang Islamic civilization which has, in turn, brought forward a particular world view; and an expert knowledge and the modern philosophy that stands behind it.

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