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Our race has only just begun, says Dr M (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in saying that Malaysia's race to attain a better economic future had only just begun, today called on Malaysians to act forcefully to make Vision 2020 a reality.

"Having succeeded so well, so fast and so resoundingly, this is not the time to falter, to call a halt. Now is not the time to stop our massive economic momentum," Dr Mahathir said in a speech which mapped out strategies of Vision 2020 to put Malaysia in the rungs of developed nations while ensuring a fully moral and ethical society.

Dr Mahathir was delivering his keynote address "The Way Forward" at the National Congress on Vision 2020 at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Menteri Besar, Chief Ministers, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, economists, policy-makers, academicians and corporate leaders.

Dr Mahathir said at no "moment in time" should Malaysians take for granted the need to progress with the task of creating a matured liberal and tolerant society which could appreciate and celebrate the ways of others.

"In the early 1990s, we had the unique opportunity to make giant strides with regard to our economic agenda. We put our heart and soul into our economic agenda.

"Let me be perfectly clear: the massive commitment to the pursuit of our economic agenda of the past, must be sustained into the future. Indeed, we must proceed with even greater tenacity, even greater creativity, and even greater effectiveness."

Dr Mahathir said Vision 2020 also made it abundantly and explicitly clear that Malaysia should be developed in the economic sense.

It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions - economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally.

Dr Mahathir said Vision 2020 articulated the best aspirations of the people and was in harmony with the Malaysian way of life.

"It laid to rest the gremlins that lurked within the darkest corridors of our history. It settled many of the unresolved issues of the past. It took from our backs some very heavy baggage of history which had greatly hindered us in the past.

"It made perfectly clear what we needed to do in our second generation as an independent country, so that this present generation of Malaysians will be the last generation of Malaysians to live in a society that is called 'developing'."

The Prime Minister said a nation which did not constantly reform itself and try new ideas and strategies, and was unable to quickly re-invent itself and re-invent again, would be left behind in today's fast-moving world.

This, he said, was because the world was now buffeted by new ideas and concepts such as globalisation, borderless economies, disregard for sovereignty of nations and unlimited as well as confusing information.

"Our national market is not continental in size. It certainly is not big enough to enable us to grow at a pace to catch up with the developed world. We need the world market but we have to pay a price to gain access to it.

"We have to stop protecting our market. We have to open it up in order to gain reciprocal access. If we are not going to be overwhelmed by the economic giants from outside, we have to learn to be very competitive. Our corporations will have to grow big and think big," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir gave a stern reminder that the political agenda set out in Vision 2020, which was to maintain a united Malaysian nation and a developed and mature democratic society, should not be forgotten.

"Massive and rapid growth is a wonderful buffer. Like a river in flood, it hides the rocks in the river bed. We must never be complacent, for a united nation is the foundation on which the Malaysian house is built.

"If we are disunited and at odds with each other, all that we have done will come to nought," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians must also resolve to take giant steps forward on the social agenda.

He added that it was time to move forward to ensure a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens were strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards.

Dr Mahathir also warned about the dangers of corruption, saying that Malaysians need to stand guard against such diseases.

"But at this particular moment in time what seems particularly pressing is the need to ensure the correct balance between material and spiritual development.

"We must make sure we do not fall into the dark hole that many countries which are called 'developed' have fallen into."

Urbanisation, he said, had brought with it drastic changes including the weakening of the family institution and the increase in drug addiction, crimes, promiscuity, high divorce rate, broken homes and abandoned babies.

Dr Mahathir said although the developed nations considered social breakdowns as inevitable and accepted them, Malaysians could not.

He added that they should retain their values and fight these social evils.

"We must not politicise. We must not ethnicise. We must not finger point. Generational outrage is not the answer. Generational prejudice will not point the way. The old must not denounce the young. The young must not blame the old."

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