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Patriotism, hard work our best protection (HL)

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ONLY greater patriotism and hard work can protect Malaysia from direct or indirect colonialism in the era of Information Technology and a borderless world, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in his National Day address.

In his message, aired over radio and television, the Prime Minister said the borderless world could become a "wild forest" full of "ferocious animals" which had no respect for law and order.

The people, he said, should discard the mistaken notion that Malaysia's independence 40 years ago meant that it would remain free from foreign dominance.

"If we do not strive to protect our independence, directly or indirectly, colonialists will return to colonise us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people should accept the fact that in an era of IT and a borderless world, Malaysia could no longer hide behind its borders for protection.

"Today we have seen how easily foreigners deliberately bring down our economy by undermining our currency and stock exchange," he said. "What we have worked for in the past 40 years can be destroyed by them in a matter of weeks".

Dr Mahathir said the actions of rogue speculators over the past few weeks had not only increased the number of poor in Malaysia but made them 10 per cent poorer.

The Prime Minister said the people should be vigilant against negative elements within the country that could destroy all that had been built and achieved so far.

Malaysia's achievements over the last four decades would come to nought if the people were influenced by various claims and baseless allegations and if they adopted a fanatical attitude, he said.

"On the contrary, we must remain calm, rational," he said, "and willing to listen to explanations and discuss problems".

Dr Mahathir said it was understandable that there were foreigners who were bent on discrediting the country.

However, it was disappointing that there were also Malaysians who benefited from the country's economic growth made possible by the Government who were eager to see foreigners "assault our economy."

Dr Mahathir had earlier warned local banks involved in manipulation, causing the Malaysian ringgit and share prices to plunge.

"It is not easy to raise the living standards of the people or ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and achieving the eight per cent annual economic growth since 1988.

"Equal distribution of wealth was not carried out by taking from the rich and giving it to the poor. This was done through economic expansion and growth," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia attained success beyond anyone's dream when the country achieved independence 40 years ago.

These successes included building Malaysia's own car, having its own satellite in orbit, scaling Mount Everest, hosting next year's Commonwealth Games and having a Malaysian as the president of the United Nations General Assembly.

However, there is a possibility that Malaysia may not achieve the projected growth for this year due to the speculative attacks on the ringgit and the share market.

He said Malaysia's trade deficit was expected to increase as more ringgit would have to be paid for imports due to the lower value of the currency and the cheaper value of Malaysian exports.

Dr Mahathir also explained the Government's current focus on expanding the Bumiputera middle class society.

In many medium cost housing projects, he said developers were finding it difficult to sell houses to Bumiputeras, causing many housing estates to be occupied by only one race.

"This situation is unhealthy," he said. "If we can balance the percentage of Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera middle class society, the country's stability can be assured. This will also help to speed up the country's development".

On the 21st century, Dr Mahathir said it would be more challenging due to globalisation and sophisticated information technology.

If people stuck to their present methods, Malaysia would be left behind.

Urging Malaysians to equip themselves with varied knowledge and the latest skills, he said new technologies could be acquired provided Malaysians were willing to strive for it earnestly.

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