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Racing towards Vision 2020

IT may seem like a marathon to many, but Malaysia's race to its economic future - to the finishing tape waiting in the year 2020 - is also a 100-metre dash. The developed countries of today, took the better part of a century, sometimes more, before to achieve full industrialisation. Trying to do what they did in merely 29 years (from the time Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the Vision 2020 on February 28, 1991) is, therefore, very ambitious. Not surprisingly, many have thought it quite impossible.

It is even more challenging for Malaysia because Vision 2020 is not just about economic expansion but about striking a balance between material and spiritual growth. It is about being developed without falling into the "dark hole" that many developed countries have dissapeared into. The Vision is about a developed Malaysia minus the moral decadence, free of corruption and social breakdowns, away from life's ills that take the form of unemployment, homelessness, disrespect for elders and the death of the family unit. If it is just economic targets that Malaysia is concerned about, everything seems to be on course. As Dr Mahathir reported, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the first six years since the Vision was 8.6 per cent, higher than the targeted growth of 7 per cent a year. The economy has also enjoyed more than full employment. Wealth has not just trickled down, but has spread and permeated every stratum of the society. Poverty has been almost completely eradicated and incomes have increased. Without having to resort to industrial action, wages have risen and even doubled in many cases. And inflation has remained low.

But does Malaysia want to be a wasteful consumer society where unbridled materialism runs riot? Certainly not, if Malaysians are at all learning from the negative effects of material development without sufficient moral and spiritual accompaniment. Which is why the Prime Minister's reminder - that Malaysians not fall victim to the pursuit of becoming a developed society - is timely, even if there is still almost a generation to go before 2020. Malaysians must ensure that there is a correct balance between material and spiritual development as they are not just pursuing economic wealth but also waging a war against poverty, social ills and drug addiction. As most developed countries are already plagued with negative elements that come alongside with development and modernisation, Malaysia has a lot to learn, and preparation to make prior to joining the group of elite nations by the year 2020.

What is clear is that the march towards 2020 is already bringing drastic changes to Malaysians' way of life. Not all of them good, though. Even as we put the finishing touches to the tallest towers in the world, one of the most modern airports in the region, and arguably the most ambitious multimedia project anywhere, society is still grappling for answers to broken homes and abandoned babies, the disintegration of family ties and a drug problem. This is why Dr Mahathir stressed that Malaysians need to resolve to take giant steps towards the social agenda, towards ensuring a fully caring society and a caring culture founded on a strong and resilient family system. In the coming years under the Vision, Malaysia needs to guard against corruption, social breakdowns and moral decadence.

The people should not forget for a moment the political agenda set out in Vision 2020 - a united Malaysian nation and a developed and mature democratic society. As the Prime Minister said, massive and rapid is a

wonderful buffer. "Like a river in flood, it hides the rocks on the river bed." The message is Malaysians must never be complacent; 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. As in the 100-metre dash, Malaysians will need power and speed to surge ahead; and as in a marathon, which is what the pursuit to 2020 also is, Malaysia needs the stamina, tactical superiority and consistency to finish the race.

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