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The right to a future of our choice

THE destiny of a nation is in the hands of its people. The people of the then Malaya fought for and won the right to chart their country's course in August 1957. Independence was and is sweet. With its abundant resources, and diversity of races, the peninsula had the capacity to move ahead and it did. It became Malaysia on September 16 1963 and in the years that followed, the economy was transformed from largely being commodity-based to a vibrant, dynamic home of a whole spectrum of industries - ranging from labour-intensive, low-technology operations to those that utilise the highest levels of capital input and cutting-edge technologies. The Portuguese, Dutch and English, and for a short time the Japanese, had at one time or another in the nation's history held the reins that determined the very well-being of the people. Now these past colonial masters are mostly faded memories, on which we rightly continue to remind our new generations through the history books.

The former colonial outpost is no more. In its place is a highly competitive and industrious country on the fast-forward mode, one that has perhaps become too competitive and progressing too fast for some people's comfort. The Multimedia Super Corridor is merely one example of the vision and foresight of the leaders to not only recognise global trends but also capitalise on them. Malaysia certainly had no qualms about taking its place on the world stage, economically and in other areas. It has spoken out time and again when others preferred to remain meekly silent in the face of injustice and blatantly unfair treatment of developing countries by the rich and powerful. It has also shown it believes in action, not just talk, having sent its troops to Angola and Bosnia, for example, to keep peace.

The years of plenty which have been accompanied by rapid development were of course no accident. Hard work, resolve and vision have combined to place the country where it is today. Thanks to privatization and other ground-breaking policies, the economy is on a stable footing and the people are enjoying growing affluence. Coupled with good, level-headed economic management, a growth rate averaging above 8 per cent was recorded for nearly a decade.

Guarded as the leadership was of the country's success, it however has little control over external forces, which in the past three months have threatened to negate the work of three decades. Pressures from without on the economy and on the country's leadership and sovereignty are disturbing signs that once again the freedom of Malaysia and its people is being challenged. Never since the communist menace has Malaysia encountered a bigger threat of having a dark cloud cast over its future. Malaysians have enjoyed 40 years of independence and it is time for the people to reassert the right to self-determination, as many in the country have come to take their freedom for granted, and unknowingly placed their future in the hands of others. An over-dependence on imported goods and services, the sizeable foreign workforce and the so-called influential overseas financial analysts whom many Malaysians have elected to do the thinking for them are all signs of this growing complacency.

The national drive which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday he would launch to ensure that Malaysians continue to take charge of their own destiny is therefore not just timely, but also crucial. The attack on the economy has the potential of derailing the

nation's Vision 2020, which holds more than just the promise of a better future. It is about achieving the right and only future - of an industrialised nation which is steadfast in its subscription to the traditional values of a caring society. Through the campaign, Dr Mahathir said, the role of each and every Malaysian will be spelled out so that everybody will be clear about how he can contribute to the betterment of the nation. It shall be more than a drive to ward off an external threat. It is a concerted effort to regain control of the future.

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