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Towards a garden nation

LEADERS and their peoples the world over want to be remembered by posterity for the decisions they made. In the Malaysian context, it is no exception and today's leaders and the people do not want to be blamed for the wrong moves due to the lack of foresight. In our pursuit of industrialisation and materialistic wealth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, have been in the forefront stressing the need for balanced growth.

The nation's top leaders want "balanced" development in both the physical and spiritual sense. Hence, they have often said the preservation of culture and heritage is of utmost importance, for progress without it is meaningless. The populace could not agree with them more. We shudder to read and see how some of the lesser developing nations have been plundered and laid bare by unconscionable investors. At home, unprecedented rapid national development this decade has undoubtedly exacted a price, affecting the environment and the people's quality of life. Monday's launching of the nationwide tree-planting campaign by Dr Mahathir is not only a right step towards preserving the nation's rich flora and fauna heritage but also symbolic of the myriad moves to thwart deterioration of the environment. Indeed our forests, wetlands, hills and rivers are our environmental heritage which we should jealously guard. As they form the eco-system, any abuse will be detrimental to the environment and the people's well-being.

The Government's commitment to the long-term target of three million trees by the year 2000 and 20 million in 2020 is in line with Malaysia's subscription to greening the globe. This has been lauded by the World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia which says that trees will encourage wildlife such as some forest birds to return to the cities. A point worth noting in Dr Mahathir's speech is his call on Malaysians not just to increase the number but consciously choose the right species to prevent damage to the surroundings, and make sure they are maintained well. Idle land near roads and rivers should not be allowed to turn into eyesores but be planted with trees to provide the supply and contribute to a more pleasant environment. Such a reminder is always helpful for it is no exaggeration to say that Malaysians are notorious in maintenance.

In a further move towards the objective of a "Garden Nation", Dr Mahathir wants States and local authorities to make landscaping mandatory in all development projects. Apart from housing estates, urban development, tourist spots and industrial parks should also adhere to this new guideline. In Malaysia's inexorable march towards developed nation status, the creation of more towns and cities is inevitable. With construction being the fastest growing sector of the economy, estimated to be worth a whopping RM200 billion under the Seventh Malaysia Plan, orderly development with the creation of a beautiful Malaysia in mind, is absolutely necessary. We already decry modern development with its functional buildings devoid of the fine craftsmanship and design of old. Lack of landscaping to cut costs will make the situation worse and turn new towns and cities into hideous concrete jungles. The Government has now set the pace for a scenic Malaysia amid rapid development. It is imperative that the citizenry take up the challenge if they really care for the environment.

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