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Government and people must persevere together

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IN good times, we tend to take things for granted. Far from our thoughts, as we enjoy the good years, are the efforts and sacrifices made and the commitments needed for the long-term well-being of our country.

We rarely ask why times are good, and are slow to appreciate what it takes to build a nation. In bad times, we are quick to criticise and even apportion blame. Often, a bit too quick.

Where we do not criticise nor apportion blame, we find ourselves gullible when bombarded daily with theories and analyses on what went wrong and where the country is heading.

Reacting to word of mouth and foreign news reports that many wrongly presume to be the gospel truth, we tend to take counter-productive actions.

It is during difficult periods that we become sensitive, if not hypersensitive, to what we hear and learn about the state of the nation, its economy and politics without trying to ascertain the facts.

We can help the country more by staying calm and being rational. Foremost in our minds is our country. Towards this, we should not ignore the call by our Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, for everyone to be prepared and be willing to make sacrifices in the larger interest of the country.

For instance, we can begin to discard selfish attitude and acts, as reflected by the queues in some financial institutions. Many may be reacting to foreign reports on the state of the nation. Without clear and timely information, the people will turn to other sources that are more easily accessible. In this case, the foreign media, rumour mills and the Internet.

Obviously, something positive must be done, particularly when even the more educated are joining the queues in banks.

The present situation is an excellent time to change our mind-set. We need to accord better respect for our ability to manufacture quality things. At the same time, we must also learn to take pride in all things Malaysian and discard the mentality that they are either inferior or cheap substitutes.

It is good for the Government to encourage the people to buy local products, but we must buy them for the right reason. Ideally, we opt for local goods not because they are cheap substitutes but because it makes good sense.

In tourism, we can promote vacation spots as equally attractive, with facilities that meet international standards. We should avoid creating the impression that to holiday at home is a cheap substitute. Our tourism spots are certainly no cheap substitutes. They are of international standards; otherwise, how can tourism be the second largest income earner after manufacturing?

Our weakness can also be our strength. In manufacturing, we can take full advantage of the exchange rate to add value to our products and stay ahead of the competitors. We must not shy away from adding local content, but should instead strive for product origination to turn the Made-in-Malaysia label into a benchmark for good value.

To survive, we must be united and resilient and remain focused on Vision 2020. The journey ahead will be difficult. There is always light at the end of the tunnel. It is while in the tunnel that we must also have full

confidence in our nation, leaders and ourselves.

Together, we have taken the nation into good times and out of bad times before. It is the sum total of a nation working together, or as Dr Mahathir rightly says: "If everyone co-operates fully, we can overcome all the difficulties that have come upon us today."

There should be no doubt that together we can take the country out of the economic troubles and nearer Vision 2020. As in every stage of nation building, in good times or bad, the Government and the people must persevere together as a nation and continue to move forward.

The state of the nation depends on every individual citizen and the Government working as a team. Effective and meaningful teamwork needs effective communications which, in turn, means everyone should know and ought to know what is going on.

In the dark, we panic. To avoid this we need good, effective and timely information so that the sum total of responses, actions and efforts are based on facts, not rumours. We need to know what to expect, what to do and where we are heading.

We are like a ship in troubled waters. The captain must assess the situation carefully and quickly before working out an action plan. He will need information from his crew and, at the same time, keep his passengers well informed and guide them on what to do because he knows the co-operation of every crew member and passenger is vital. When communications break down, chaos is the order of the day.

Likewise, the Government and the people need one another to pull through this difficult period. We are all in the same boat.

The Government, on its part, has put in place policies to ensure medium- and long-term prospects of the economy, which our Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is confident will increase the resilience of the economy and financial system in adjusting to this difficult period.

We need to be cohesive and united to overcome the problems and must not lose faith in ourselves, our Government and our country. Only then can we move ahead.