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Prudence, sacrifice will see us through the difficult times

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IN his New Year message, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on all Malaysians to renew their commitment to national unity and make sacrifices to help steer the country out of its current economic difficulties.

The people must not despair. On the contrary, Malaysians must be united in their resolve to face this difficult period and make whatever sacrifices needed to defend our independence and dignity.

For example, we should continue to have faith in the ringgit and do our part to preserve the value of our currency and continue to invest in local banks.

Recently, the Government announced various austerity measures to deal with the economic slowdown.

For these measures to work, it is clear they must have the fullest support of all strata of society.

This year will bring more difficulties in many ways arising from the economic uncertainties. Rising inflation, lower consumption, some corporate failures and even retrenchments by firms.

As the Malaysian Trades Union Congress has pointed out, many workers may lose their jobs with the closure of companies badly affected by the economic slowdown.

The Government should heed the call by the trade unions that unscrupulous employers do not take advantage of the economic downturn to short-change or exploit their workers.

Prudence and sacrifice should be our guiding principles.

As consumers, the Malaysian public plays a vital role in helping the economy recover.

It is also heartening to note our local media have initiated a nationwide "Love Malaysia" campaign, initiated by the Chinese daily Nanyang Siang Pau, to promote local goods and services.

The media can also embark on an information exercise to make the people understand the magnitude and implications of the economic problems.

Such campaigns are very meaningful to help send the proper signals and messages to all Malaysians in this critical period.

In times of economic hardship, the people are reminded to reduce their dependence on imported food, more so when we are told that Malaysia spends about RM10 billion annually on such imports.

To overcome such dependence, a national food policy is needed to boost production of local foodstuff for local consumption.

Malaysians should also revive the "Green Book Plan" by using whatever land available to cultivate vegetables for their own consumption.

Idle land fronting homes in residential areas should be permitted by the local authorities for vegetable cultivation.

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