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Feature-Centennial

MALAYSIA'S CENTENNIAL PROGRAMME TO REMINISCE ON PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

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KUALA LUMPUR: The two-year celebration, Malaysia's Centennial Towards a New Millennium, is a timely programme to not only reminisce on the nation's achievements and successes of the past 100 years but also to showcase the progress made to date.

What is being enjoyed today is the result of the unrelenting commitment of the government and people towards nation-building. This was not an easy task.

The country's achievements should be the pride of every Malaysian. From being a country that depended mainly on the agriculture sector, Malaysia is on the road to industrialisation and developed status.

The progress made thus far proves that the nation has been well administered by the four Prime Ministers who have been at the helm of the nation with each of them giving sufficient priority to the teachings of Islam, language, standard of living, housing, infrastructure facilities, development etc.

A century has passed. Various important events, which took place from the time of Independence on Aug 31, 1957 up to now, have helped the nation mature and endure political, social and economic challenges.

Indonesia's declaration of confrontation against Malaysia on Jan 20, 1963 and Singapore's separation from Malaysia on Aug 9, 1965 were among the obstacles Malaysia faced after the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963.

The British colonialists besides encouraging a plural society through a "divide and rule" policy, also brought in workers from China and India for their own economic interests in the tin, commercial and plantation sectors.

As a result, the population and economy expanded while the various races were identified according to certain economic activities.

To narrow the economic gap between the various races and the rural and urban communities, five-year development plans were introduced. Strategy weaknesses emerged as a result of the continued existence of the colonial system.

These weaknesses were among the causes for the outbreak of the May 13 tragedy in 1969. The racial riots resulted in the government creating the integrated New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970.

Launched during the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1975), the NEP had the two-pronged strategy of eradicating poverty and narrowing the socio-economic gap among the races and restructure society to eliminate the identification of races according to their economic activities.

The NEP also proposed to allocate 30 percent of the economic cake for the Bumiputeras, 40 for non-bumiputeras and 30 percent for foreign investors.

In the effort to create a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community with a 30 percent ownership of the economy by the year 1990, agencies such as the Majlis Amanah Rakyat Malaysia (MARA), Bank Pembangunan, Bank Bumiputera and Amanah Saham Nasional were set up.

States and areas which were considered backward were developed through regional development agencies such as DARA, KEJORA, KESEDAR, JENGKA etc.

To accelerate the achievement of the NEP targets, several policies such as the Look East Policy, Privatisation, Malaysia Incorporated, Heavy Industries, Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy and Leadership by Example were implemented.

The Look East Policy for example was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's

idea which was aimed at raising the performance of management and productivity of the nation besides creating a Malaysian community with positive, dynamic and progressive work ethics.

To expand the heavy industries sector, the Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia Berhad (HICOM) was set up in 1980. It resulted in the creation of heavy industries such as the national car project, cement kilns, steel mills and petrochemical complexes.

The national car manufacturing project by Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Sdn Bhd (PROTON), which was announced in 1982, is among the important developments aimed at achieving Vision 2020.

The project became a reality on July 9, 1985 when the Proton Saga car was produced, followed by the Kancil mini car and the Rusa van by Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua (Perodua) in March, 1994.

Success after success followed. Motosikal dan Enjin Nasional Sdn Bhd (MODENAS) produced the KRISS cub motorcycle on May 14, 1996 and the latest is the JAGUH motorcycle.

In the sports arena, an historical event was the capture of the Thomas Cup by the Malaysian Thomas Cup squad in 1992 at Stadium Negara.

To achieve academic excellence, the Education Ministry in 1996 initiated efforts to make Malaysia's education system world class and to make the country an centre of education.

The setting up of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) is a well-planned government measure to ensure Malaysia is not left behind by the developed countries.

The year 1997 was a testing time for Malaysia which was not exempted from the economic crisis that severely hit the region.

Fortunately, the government's success in salvaging the economy without resorting to assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) proved that it would not allow the people to suffer like what happened in the neighbouring countries.

The episode tested the government leadership. Dr Mahathir's leadership proved that he is not only a medical doctor but also a doctor for the nation's economy.

Government statistics showed that in August 1998 the national reserves stood at RM76.76 billion, enough to pay for 3.8 months of retained imports.

But, in March 1999, reserves increased to RM105.26 billion, sufficient to finance imports for 6.1 months.

The Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) composite index which plunged to 261.33 points in Sept, 1998, also rebounded to 870.39 points in July this year.

More interesting is the analysis of international economic analysts. Goldman Sachs, for instance, estimated a two percent growth, while Merrill Lynch forecast a 3.1 percent growth.

Clearly, the government's economic recovery measures have earned the country respect and is even the target of envy by outside quarters who had painted a negative picture of Malaysia earlier.

In terms of individual achievements, the slogan, "Malaysia Boleh" drove two mountaineers, M. Magendran, 33, and N.Mohandas, 35, to conquer Mount Everest on May 23, 1997, which is Malaysia's first assault of the world's highest mountain.

Another milestone was reached on April 18, 1998, when Nordziah Mohamed Noor, 39, became the first Asian woman to jump from a height of 3,500 metres in the North Pole. Nordziah and 14 others in the expedition landed at the Ais airport, owned by the Russian army.

The Read brothers, Justin, 19, and Gerald, 25, brought glory to the country when they succeeded in walking 111km in -10 to -30 degrees Celsius in one of the coldest places on earth in the arctic.

And most recently, the Malaysian Book of Records recognised local mariner Azhar Mansor, 40, as the first Malaysia to sail solo non-stop from Tanjung Malai in Langkawi to Cape Horn, South America.

Malaysia boasts a long list of achievements. The Petronas Twin Towers are the world's tallest towers while the ultra-modern Kuala Lumpur International Airport is another symbol of pride to the country.

The achievements of the past century has positioned Malaysia to become a modern and developed nation, ready to step into the era of high technology by the year 2020.

The Malaysia's Centennial Towards a New Millennium programme, apart from instilling in the people love and a sense of pride for the country, would also encourage foreign and domestic tourism.

To signal the start of this programme, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed will launch it at a grand ceremony at 8pm on Aug 30 at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

The official launch will also be simultaneously held at states representing the North, East and South zones as well as Sabah and Sarawak. The zone celebrations will be telecast "live" to the capital in cross-over services arranged by RTM.

The Prime Minister will launch the programme together with menteriis besar and chief ministers via teleconferencing services provided by Telekom Malaysia.

The Prime Minister will plant a "Time Chip" which will only be opened in Aug 30, 2099.

Some 100,000 people are expected to converge at the stadium to participate in the programme to celebrate the successes of Malaysia as well as to unanimously show determination and loyalty to the country.

The Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry is confident of attracting 7.6 million tourists, bringing in a revenue of RM15.7 billion in the year 2000, during the two-year programme from Sept 1, 1999 to Aug 31, 2001.

The events in the programme include Malaysia Fest, The Colours of Malaysia, Shopping Carnival, Malaysia World Grandprix Formula One, Le Tour de Langkawi and The Asia-Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA).

As the programme, which will take stock of all the important achievements and successes of the country, it is only appropriate that every citizen gives his or her best to make it a roaring success. --

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