

01/09/1999

You ain't seen nothing yet

WHEN Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the RM1.8 billion Petronas Twin Towers during a glittering ceremony last night, those who once belittled the mega project as a waste of money - and made fun of a small country's big dream - either stayed away from the function or joined the triumphant group who had the last laugh. It is possible that some of the non-believers of Malaysia's capabilities were among the 1,200 guests invited to the ceremony, which coincided with the nation's 42nd Independence Day. Some foreigners, especially, had snubbed the project in a demeaning manner, describing the effort as just another opportunity by the Malaysian Government to show off, yet again.

Many would still remember the futile attempts by certain quarters who came out with various tactics to undermine the public's trust and pride in the project when it was already half-way completed. These included allegations that one of the two towers was not in a safe position and even more frightening, that the structure and foundation were weak. Some went to the extent of making statements that the Government might have to siphon off public savings in the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and Tabung Haji to finance the Twin Towers - part of what was then believed to be a foreign-and-opposition-led propaganda to create contention against the Government.

However, when the 88-storey-high towers which stand 452 metres above sea level - making it the tallest in the world - was ready, the critics were silenced. Instead they came up with complementary statements after realising the abundance of opportunities in store for them in other new projects. These critics must have also recognised the fact that it was no longer the domain of developed nations only to initiate and complete mega-projects on time. Being a developing country, Malaysia has had to undergo certain stages of infrastructural evolution to prepare itself for globalisation. The new millennium, just as the old, does not reward complacency, and Malaysia had to chart its own development agenda. In meeting the challenges of the next century, Dr Mahathir's Government has set out a well-balanced approach to ensure that future Malaysian generations are well-equipped with adequate infrastructural foundation to steer the country's economic engine.

But Malaysia has proven its capability in many areas. Once the world's largest tin and rubber producing country - before manufacturing took over the leading role in the early 1980s - this small nation has been in the forefront paving the way for South-South cooperation; making calls for the restructuring of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; leading the way in opening up new ties with smaller countries which include members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These are just some of the achievements that never crossed the minds of those who claim to be the champions of international realists. And it was Malaysia again which mooted the idea of an Asean-10 a few years ago resulting in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam embracing the Association of South-East Asean Nations.

However, this notion of wanting to become "first" has not led to over-zealous implementation. The fruits of heavy investments in the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang, the Formula One circuit, the Proton, Putrajaya and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), among others, are for the country and the people to reap. Let us not forget the

foreign investors who have and will continue to share the profits as long as they help maintain a conducive business environment in the country. Malaysians, in general, have every reason to be proud of this country which believes in multi-racial and multi-religious harmony. Malaysians also know very well that this country of theirs is well on the verge of taking a leading role in many other fields in the very near future. And just as they celebrated the return of record-breaking local hero Datuk Azhar Mansor, there will be many more achievements for us to celebrate.

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