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For the benefit of all

IN the past three decades in particular, Malaysia has been charting its long-term development along the sustainable path, formulating and adapting policy strategies to suit the needs of the time. Although its growth potential is subject to the vagaries of macroeconomic conditions, relative stability in wages, imports, production and exchange rates have helped alleviate growth imbalances.

But more importantly, it is the willingness of major communities to compromise which has led to an equitable distribution of wealth and the maintenance of peace and security. This, in turn, has helped the smooth process of development. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out when opening the 54th MIC general assembly, development policies are meant to benefit all races.

The New Economic Policy and the National Development Policy, he says, have benefited the Indian community despite its smaller size in relation to the Bumiputeras and Chinese. And if an atmosphere of peace and stability were to prevail, and each and everyone chips in, the country can only progress and prosper.

The co-operation of the private sector with the civil service and the willingness of the rakyat to work efficiently has helped steer the process of nation-building on a productive path. This has been proven over the years as the Government mapped out strategies and refined them.

Among them were policies regarding privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation. The period between 1986 and 1997 in particular saw Malaysia treading the path of sustainable economic development. The turning point that triggered this growth was the economic slowdown of the mid-eighties during which fluctuations in commodity prices made the Malaysian economy more vulnerable to external factors.

Structural changes in 1986 saw the launching of the first Industrial Master Plan which shifted the country's emphasis on commodity exports to manufacturing, direct foreign investments and export-oriented industries. The manufacturing sector's sterling contributions to production, export earnings, employment and gross domestic product far exceed that of commodities.

As the progress of economies in the east Asia region leap-frogged, the country sharpened its competitiveness and more than doubled its efforts to ensure returns on investments paid off. The widening and deepening of its industrial base and financial system moved in tandem. Then came the financial crisis of 1997 which eroded all our development efforts.

We persevered and our recovery is gaining momentum, a recent indicator being the impressive 11.7 per cent showing in our first quarter GDP growth and 5.6 per cent last year. Just as Malaysians have rallied to this clarion call to re-build the economy, they have to work even harder now to keep pace with the changing landscape from a production economy to a knowledge economy.

With the emphasis on globalisation and liberalisation in recent years, competitiveness has taken on a broader meaning. The sharpening of skills and knowledge through enhanced networking and information technology is more relevant now than ever before. This is the Government's emphasis for everyone to continue enjoying the benefits of mainstream development. And it is up to each and everyone to play his part if he desires a more meaningful quality of life.

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