

25/02/2000

`Our success from wise management of finances'

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THE progress achieved by this nation since Independence is the result of the prevailing peace, strong ethnic unity and support of the people for the Government as well as the good and effective implementation machinery.

Our success did not come easy. We find that many countries in Africa and Asia which gained Independence the same time as ours, but have not been able to be developed properly.

Although they were once at the same level with us, now they are either left far behind or worse off than at the time of Independence. Some countries face various social and political problems, chaos and civil strife which have not enabled them to focus on development efforts.

This situation seems to continue as if there is no end to it. One government after another was formed and toppled, giving them no time to implement any development programmes.

Development is given low priority and instead a big portion of the national budgets go to buying firearms.

As a result, the countries become poor and have to beg for foreign aid while their people are forced to migrate to other countries.

This situation clearly shows us that the development we have achieved did not come rolling in just like that. It has been due to an efficient, professional government machinery, understanding of its use for the good of the nation, identifying priorities in the use of financial resources, good planning and continuous efficiency enhancement of the implementation machinery.

Nevertheless, all this will not bear fruit if there is political instability and no peace and if there is always ethnic unrest and the country's laws are violated arbitrarily.

It is evident that a lot of matters must be dealt with efficiently before we can develop the nation. At the time of Independence, the country depended on only two major sources of wealth, which were tin and rubber.

But today if we continue to depend on these two resources, we will be as poor as the poorest countries of the world.

Besides the challenges of building peace, improving national development and well-being of the people, today we are faced with various new challenges, which we have to deal with together so that our vision to become a developed nation by 2020 will be met.

We are aware that not all countries are happy with our achievements. They prefer to see us less developed and always asking for aid from them. If we ask for aid, we will be bound by certain conditions and will have to bow to their demands as we have become indebted and dependent on them.

But since we are able to develop our country without such aid, we are free to determine our own policies and free to voice our opinions on the injustices we see being committed around the world.

In this era of globalisation, which is expedited by the rapid development in information and communication technology, we are exposed to new threats from the superpowers and giant corporations, which all see this as a big opportunity for them.

Their intention is that globalisation and technological advancement should enable them to conquer the whole world all over again. This time arms warfare is not required.

What is needed is unlimited wealth. Corporations and banks will acquire more capital from most countries. With strong support from their

governments and international institutions, these banks and corporations can enter all countries, taking over all the businesses and industries and eventually influencing politics and the country's administration.

At that time, Independence has no meaning as all policies and planning will require their blessings. Easily, they can reduce government revenue and in fact impoverish the country if we do something they do not approve of.

What I am saying here is not aimed at instilling fear in you so that the government will gain political support. Instead, what has been said has already happened.

Merely by depreciating the value of the currency, a rich country can become poor, peace threatened, riots taking place and the government toppled. Perhaps those wishing for certain governments be removed will see the downfall of these governments as a good thing.

But do not think that the new governments will be safe. If the new governments do not bow to the demands of the foreign powers, they will also be threatened and toppled. In other words, these countries are being colonised. It is because of this that we have to be careful and not "burn the mosquito net if we are angry with the mosquitoes".

Leaders of international institutions stress that globalisation is not planned by the West to conquer the world. Instead, it is aimed at helping developing nations. So far we have not seen any developing country benefiting from globalisation being carried out now.

What we see is that the rich countries of the West are becoming richer and the income gap between the rich and developing nations widening.

We have succeeded in warding off attempts at taking possession of our economy and finances because we have internal strength.

Firstly, our people do not panic and riot. Secondly, we do not borrow too much from abroad. Thirdly, we manage our finances carefully. There have been a lot of accusations that the Malaysian Government was extravagant and wasted money on so-called mega projects.

If such accusations were true, we would certainly not have the financial strength to the extent we do not need to borrow from the IMF to revive our economy.

Extravagant or not depends on our affordability. If we spend less than our income, we are not extravagant. But even if our expenditure is small but is still beyond our means, that is being extravagant.

Foreigners who accuse us of being extravagant have a certain agenda. Do not fulfil their agenda by giving in to their accusations. The reality is that we manage our finances wisely that until today, besides Singapore, our credit rating is the best in Asia and banks are competing to give us loans.

Our success in saving this country through our own efforts and ways should make us confident we are capable of dealing with the problems that will be brought about by globalisation and perhaps we will even benefit from it.

Since we are not under the patronage of the IMF, we are still able to prevent invasion by giant corporations which have been established for this purpose. However, to ensure success, we need an efficient and disciplined civil service.

Alhamdulillah (God willing), Malaysia has this kind of civil service. What is required of the civil service is the awareness of the dangers and changes in the world environment, needing a different service system.

We live in the information technology era where information flows like a flood, which brings with it the good and useful as well as the untruthful and dangerous and which can bring us adverse effects.

We are exposed to good and evil. If we are inefficient at sieving the

information, we will act wrongly as we are guided by false information.

We have seen how the foreign television programmes could erode our morals. But what is more dangerous is the promotion of lifestyles and activities driven by lust and whims more than rationale thinking.

If we succumb to our lust and emotions, our decisions and actions will definitely be unwise. We will be angry at something without first investigating and this will influence our attitudes and actions.

Perhaps this will result in us not giving good service and will adversely affect the country's development. It is therefore important for us not to accept all information via information technology as true.

Conversely, if we are efficient at filtering and using the correct information, our performance in providing services will improve, we will be more productive while national development will be carried out smoothly.

Electronic government is a way to increase government productivity. Hence, it is vital for every civil servant to master the use of computers and the Internet so as to upgrade performance and government productivity as well as service to the public and clients of the government.

We practise the Malaysia Incorporated concept. Previously, we separated public service from the private sector. At times we behaved as though we were enemies. We did not regard our duties as having anything to do with them and because of that, we did not try to help them.

This attitude is said to be in practice during the colonial administration. But actually the colonial administration did help the private sector. The only difference was that the private sector was limited to their own race.

That was why during the colonial period, it was so easy for them to acquire large tracts of land for their plantations at very cheap prices and low taxes. That was why they created the Imperial Preference so that only British goods could be bought by the government and its staff.

Their practice of cronyism was clear-cut. They met at their clubs and this was where they attended to their cronies. It was only at that time that they did not introduce the word crony.

When we implemented the Malaysia Incorporated concept, the service we must provide to the private sector is because government revenue comes from this sector.

When they reap bigger profits, the bigger will be government revenue. And government revenue determines our salaries as well as national development. We will not lose if the private sector reaps huge profits.

But we will lose if they lose. The thinking that no matter what happens to the private sector, our income remains, is wrong. During the recent economic downturn, we were forced to cut certain allowances and salary increments. This was because of the reduced corporate taxes collected by the government.

Our relationship with the private sector because of Malaysia Incorporated has exposed us to accusations and possibility that we were bribed. Corruption is not easily detected but sooner or later, it will be and the actions taken against us are far heavier than what we received.

We may be jailed and our future shattered. If we continue to remind ourselves of all these, we can avoid getting involved in corruption while our work is carried out speedily and smoothly.

Indeed, avoiding ourselves from corruption depends on the values we uphold. Alhamdulillah, our culture still regards the acceptance of bribes as wrong and shameful.

As long as corruption does not become our culture, we have hope in ensuring that our service is corruption-free. With that, our country's administration will continue to be smooth and productive.

I believe we have visited countries where corruption is part of the culture and way of life. We can certainly observe that these countries, though rich in natural resources and have potential, are not properly developed.

No progress can be seen. Businesses and industries are neither developed nor profitable. The governments do not earn enough revenue and do not pay reasonable amount of wages to their staff.

As a result, government servants are forced to depend on bribery. For employees who do not have the opportunity to obtain bribes, they are forced to seek a second job to supplement their income.

I am confident we all do not like to see accepting bribes as part of the culture in our country. Therefore, although we interact with the private sector, we will certainly not allow ourselves to be involved in corruption.

We may believe that our corruption will not be discovered. But we should not be too confident because many have already received heavy penalties.

Professionalism is important to determine that the administration functions effectively. Professionalism means giving non-partisan service without siding with anyone.

On the contrary, it is only meant to enable us to succeed in our jobs. As an example, consultants comprising other races must study and present a report without taking into consideration his race but give priority to the interests of those who give them the contract as consultants.

Meanwhile, reports to be done must be based on the truth although the truth is not in line with the clients' requirements and they may not want to remain as clients anymore.

In Malaysia, all Government services are professional. The army, for example, will take orders from the Government of the day. It is not the role of the army to formulate national policy in or outside the country.

The army also does not side any political party and neither does it have any stand of its own. The army's loyalty is not towards its commanders or army officers but to the Government of the day.

It is definite if the commanders or officers give orders to oppose the Government, it will not reflect the army's professionalism and as professionals, such orders will not be binding on the army. Alhamdulillah, the Malaysian army is a professional body. With that, we do not have the problems faced by some other countries which have seen power struggles initiated by the army.

It is the same with this country's administration which does not face any problem because of the professionalism of the civil service.

However, every civil servant is sure to have his own stand on the country's politics. They may side or are sympathetic towards the struggles of certain parties.

However, in carrying out their duties, the question of their personal stand cannot be taken into account - the same with the foreign consultant who cannot take into consideration his country or race' interests when giving his views.

We have been independent for 42 years. During that period, the public services have doubled in size. That the public service is professional and efficient can be seen from the rapid development achieved by our country, Malaysia.

That is the extent of the good performance and professionalism of Malaysia's public service so much so that many developing countries look to its public service as an example. We do not only receive visits from public service officers from other countries but they also ask us to give them training.

The record of the Malaysian public service is excellent and I believe

there will be no one from the public service who wishes to tarnish this record.

Although we all work because of the wages that we receive but the reward that we must appreciate more is seeing the outcome of our good service.

The Malaysian public service can be satisfied and be proud to see how our country has progressed since Independence. This is the biggest reward and which is more meaningful than what we get as wages or other benefits.

I believe and am confident that we are capable. In fact, we have proven that we are capable of developing rapidly for the country's development and the people's prosperity.

On my part and the Barisan Nasional Government, I like to thank all members of the public service who have since Independence given their professional and efficient service to ensure that our country's development could be carried out rapidly.