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Prepare for the new information age, says King

Rosihan Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysians must ensure that the country is not destroyed by the waves of modernisation brought by the Internet, globalisation and other developments, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah said tonight.

"Not everything brought by development is good, and we must be wise in selecting what is good for us," he said in his official birthday address over Radio and Television Malaysia.

The King said the country was now entering a new era of a world filled with information.

He said the rich countries had made their economies wealthy by expertly exploiting information. While a country's economy was once driven by industrial development, in the era of globalisation, the West had taken advantage of the Internet for its own gains.

"In the future, information technology development, especially the Internet, will drive e-commerce in Asia, including Malaysia," he said. "The people must thus prepare themselves with all skills and knowledge related to IT."

"If we fail to make early preparations, Malaysia will be left behind. I hope the people will take urgent steps to become a highly IT society so that we are more competitive, efficient and productive."

On the k-economy planned by the Government to ensure the society adopted a culture of knowledge enrichment, he said such a policy would spur the nation's development.

Malaysians must heed the lesson of the financial crisis which plagued the region from 1997 till last year, he said. They must not be content with the current stable economy but must strive to ensure the country was safe from foreign threats.

He urged the people to be industrious and disciplined as this would drive the nation to excellence in all fields.

Expressing his happiness that his birthday was being celebrated at a time when the economy was showing a strong recovery, he said: "With such growth, the nation and our people no longer have to suffer difficulties as in 1998 and the previous year.

"The country has proven that the economic and financial measures we took were wise and correct. Now, Malaysia is not just praised, but is also a model nation."

He said Malaysia could be proud that it had overcome the worst financial crisis in its history without outside assistance.

The people must be grateful for having a responsible government, which was able and efficient in addressing their problems.

The King said he was happy the people showed their maturity during the financial crisis and maintained peace and security.

"I am happy to see that at the height of the crisis, the people stayed away from negative behaviour which could disrupt unity, such as rioting and street demonstrations," he added.

On the "unhealthy situation" among Muslims which was disrupting the unity of the ummah, he said: "As Muslims, we should faithfully follow the teachings of Islam which expects its followers to be united, work together and not insult or slander each other. The slander culture has caused confusion, and can hinder the development and strength of Muslims."

He urged Muslim intellectuals to find a solution to the current

confusion by providing an accurate picture of Islam. He also wanted Muslims to be united and to work together.

He said the people should be grateful for all that God had given but they must realise that development and progress needed careful and smart planning by a government chosen by the people.

Therefore the people should continue giving their support and cooperation to the Government, and should maintain peace and stability in the country.

He said a progressive and prosperous nation did not mean the people should practise negative culture like rioting, loitering and breaking the law.

"Such negative behaviour will hinder the Government's efforts to make this nation progressive and stable. An unstable country will not be able to attract foreign investors and tourists. Our people will lose out in terms of job opportunities and better income."

He said the people must strive to preserve the good name of the country.

He praised the Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for its ability and efficiency in facing numerous challenges the past two years.

"Displaying courage, fairness, assertiveness, responsibility and sensitivity to the rakyat, the Government has not only brought the country to recover to the pre-financial crisis days, but also raised us in the eyes of the world.

"Malaysia, due to its brave stand and outlook on international issues, is respected today."

He hoped the Government, led by the Prime Minister, would continue to guide the country with a spirit that was determined, dynamic and efficient to bring Malaysia to higher levels of excellence in the new millennium.

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