

16/06/2002

We need to change our mindset and attitudes to become an advanced country

Nuraina A. Samad

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had one regret at the end of his two-day official visit to Luxembourg - not to have visited the country earlier because he was so impressed with the many unique features of this tiny European country.

His visit was to enhance trade and bilateral ties with Europe, which in the words of its Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, were "already excellent".

But, for Dr Mahathir, it was also a learning experience because there was a lot to learn from Luxembourg, a country that has made rapid progress from being traditionally steel-based to become an international financial centre and a central industrial location with highly developed infrastructure in transportation, telecommunication and energy.

Luxembourg is now further developing its communication, media and information industry.

Malaysia, after all, makes no apologies about being a copycat, taking of course, the best from any country, be it Japan, Switzerland, Luxembourg or even the United States.

While in Luxembourg, which followed his Swiss visit, Dr Mahathir held meetings with Ministers, bankers and businessmen and visited International Electronic Engineering, a company specialising in the production of force sensing resistors for the automotive industry.

But, despite his packed business schedule, there was no way the beauty of the country could escape the Prime Minister. Neither could the fact that the country is clean and the people, courteous and disciplined, even.

Indeed, Luxembourg could not have reached this level of success without the solid co-operation between the Government, business and banking community and the people.

Its development programme could have gone wrong. But, as Dr Mahathir said, Luxembourg "must be doing something right" because this lilliputian country of 440,000 people is rich. So rich that a man gets an allowance for his wife, and more, if they have a child, and much more if they have more children. But, that is another story.

For Luxembourg leaders, it must be an honour to have Dr Mahathir, for whom they have deep respect and regard as a financial architect who successfully took Malaysia out of the mire in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, appeared pleased with his visit, describing it as fruitful, as he was with his Swiss visit.

Both Swiss President Kaspar Villiger and Juncker were quick to remind Dr Mahathir that their countries shared similar backgrounds with Malaysia with regard to multi-ethnicity and a healthy political and social climate which have helped in their socio-economic advancement.

This, Dr Mahathir acknowledged. In fact, at a gathering of Malaysians in Zurich, he told them he was inspired by the development of Switzerland when he wrote his Malay Dilemma, a fact not many people were privy to.

There is very little difference between Luxembourg and Switzerland in terms of its level of advancement, save for the fact that Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, something the Swiss are not apologetic about. They are proud of their "Sviss Franc", they will not hesitate to tell you.

In Luxembourg, it is difficult not to admire the country in general and

how it has got this far. For Malaysians to emulate the country, as hoped by Dr Mahathir, will not be easy.

A former diplomat who is now back home in Luxembourg said that it is a shared responsibility between the Government, the private sector and the people that has made the country what it is today.

You can see a tangible sense of pride among the people as they walk or drive around their country. They love their country.

Perhaps Malaysians would have to work hard at making tremendous improvement in their attitude, changing their mindset and developing a sense of responsibility and pride before they can become an advanced people whose discipline and civic-consciousness are their culture and way of life.

Malaysia, as depicted in a video clipping at a luncheon jointly hosted by Luxembourg Transport and Economic Minister Henri Grethen and the country's businessmen and bankers on Wednesday, is undoubtedly a successful Asian country - home to the world's tallest building, the Petronas twin towers.

Malaysia has gone on the high-end of hi-tech and at par with many developed countries.

But what Luxembourg businessmen and bankers do not see is the social and socio-economic problems primarily evident in Kuala Lumpur and other cities. And these are where they will generally be when they come to play a big part in our economy.

The improvement of our lot is a two-way process between Government bureaucrats and the people. Sometimes the Government, its agencies as well as local authorities win. Sometimes, the people. Most times, we hope, everyone does because the country benefits in a win-win situation.

The groundwork is there. The foundation has been built. So it is not a silent whimper when Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could emulate Luxembourg if "we want to". And given the admiration the Swiss and Luxembourg people have for Malaysia, it would be a shame if Malaysians do not share his sentiment.

(END)