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Peace, passion and prosperity reign

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IT is the right of every Malaysian to feel melancholic and nostalgic whenever Aug 31 comes. Events which led to independence are so important that it is necessary for the people, particularly the young, to remember and treasure them. Unlike some countries, we achieved ours without spilling blood.

It may have happened 45 years ago, yet the consequences of the actions taken then are still being felt.

For example, the decision to choose a supreme ruler on a rotational basis among the Malay rulers by the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and his advisers has become a tradition that we should revere and preserve.

That decision was a logical one as there are nine Malay rulers, thus, the rotation was a compromise.

Under the Constitution, the supreme ruler, that is Yang di-Pertuan Agong, on the advice of the Cabinet, enjoys discretionary powers over the appointment of the prime minister and can withhold his consent to any request to dissolve Parliament.

Last November, the people saw an exercise of this unique constitutional monarchical system.

The passing of the 11th King, Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Al-haj ibni Almarhum Sultan Hishamuddin Alam Shah, on Nov 21 paved the way for the ascension of Perlis ruler Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin ibni Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail to the throne.

Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu is the deputy king.

The Sandhurst-trained Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, 59, was installed on April 25 for a five-year term.

He has shown he understands the constitutional scope of his duties well; as a ruler with a humble disposition and held in high esteem by the people, he has endeared himself to the rakyat.

Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah's demise also resulted in Selangor appointing a new ruler.

The Regent of Selangor, Tengku Idris Shah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, was proclaimed the ninth Sultan. He took the title Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah.

On the economic front, Malaysia is in good shape.

Recently, Bank Negara Malaysia governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz announced the country's economy grew by 3.8 per cent in the second quarter of this year and prospects for the second half of this year remain favourable.

"This growth is determined from domestic sources, mainly strong consumption demand, fiscal stimulus and the export performance of markets other than industrial economies," she said.

The country no longer depends on "traditional" export markets and can now rely upon its domestic consumption to boost the economy. So, even though the United States' economy is expected to post a slower growth in the second half, the country should not be too worried.

At the same time, its industrial base has also deepened and strengthened while the rate of domestic savings is still high. What the people should look forward to are measures that will focus on further boosting the domestic economy in the upcoming budget, slated to be presented on Sept 20.

Bank Negara also said inflows of funds for investment were higher, with gross inflows of foreign direct investment amounting to RM3.3 billion where the bulk of the fund was funneled into the oil and financial services sectors.

Indeed, the oil sector has been the backbone of our country's economy since it was discovered in Terengganu in the early 1970s. Kertih has been transformed from a fishing village into a 4,000ha concentration of heavy industry.

Kertih and its surrounding area, now known as the Petronas Petroleum Industry Complex, handles 360,000 barrels per day, exporting RM6.6 billion of crude and RM2.5 billion of refined products last year.

It has also attracted some RM70 billion in investment, the largest in the country, in everything from crude storage to downstream petrochemical plants.

It was in May officially opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohama, nearly 30 years since the national oil company Petronas was founded.

It has a presence in 27 countries and appears on course to source half its earnings from outside Malaysia by 2005. Tenaga Nasional Bhd, Malaysia's premier utility company, has also been expanding.

In June, it celebrated the official opening and renaming of its youngest hydroelectric facility, the former Pergau dam and power station. It is now known as the Sultan Ismail Petra Power Station, Pergau, after its opening by Sultan of Kelantan Sultan Ismail Petra on June 15.

The station is located in the northwestern part of Kelantan, about 125km southwest of Kota Baru.

Indeed, Tenaga Nasional has come a long way since its beginnings as the Central Electricity Board of the Federation of Malay States in 1949. Then, although given the mandate to bring electricity to all regions in the country, the CEB did so with limited resources.

Pergau was Tenaga Nasional's first hydroelectric project since its corporatisation in 1990; the rest were built and commissioned when it was still a governmental department.

The project was awarded to a consortium of local and British companies, Kerjaya Balfour Beatty Cementation Sdn Bhd, on Jan 14, 1991 with a contract price of RM1.82 billion that included a price escalation provision and a provisional sum.

The beauty of Pergau, a 600 MegaWatt peaking station, is its ability to respond quickly to any dip in the frequency of the national grid system and can, thus, help in maintaining and stabilising the frequency at 50 Hertz at any given time.

The result? To avert any future national blackout.

While the people reflect on the achievements of these conglomerates that have contributed to the well being of the country, they should also count their blessings that they are living in a prosperous country.

Being patriotic is more than just flying the Jalur Gemilang from the top of buildings or the rooftops of cars.

Being patriotic is more than taking part in the National Day parade or watching its live telecast at home.

Being patriotic is making sure that in whatever role people play, it should boil down to doing it for the good of the country.

The late Tunku Abdul Rahman once said this prayer: "One thing I ask God and men is to make Malaysia a haven of peace, where all Malaysians of whatever race and creed can live together in peace and harmony for the good of the country."

Has this prayer been answered?

By the look of things, we should answer: "Yes!"

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