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Development (EMBARGO: Sept 25/Thursday - with pix)
STRONGER MORAL FIBRE TO UNDERPIN NEXT PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT

A News Focus by Cik Rashidah Abd Ghani

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians have certainly come a long way from the days of kerosene lamps and bicycles in the pre-Merdeka period to the conveniences of today.

The developments achieved during the last 46 years of independence, however, did not come easy. The tireless efforts of the leaders and rakyat had resulted in the country experiencing rapid development, testimony of which could be seen in the increase in the country's total exports, imports, roads, vehicle ownerships, incomes and so on.

Statistics speak volume on the progress, be it on health, life span, buildings, jobs and savings.

What about total exports having increased from RM3,204 million in 1968 to RM303,508 million in 2002 ?

While there were only 183,184 kilometres of roads in 1965, there were 1,034,976 kilometres in 1999 and they are still increasing.

Total private vehicle ownerships too have also increased from 191,398 in 1967 (excluding Sabah) to more than 4.5 million in 2001.

LARGER POPULATION TARGET

However, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out, a country hoping to progress need to have a large population to generate the nation's development so that it need not depend too much on foreign workers.

According to statistics from the Department of Statistics, the Malaysian population before independence was less than 7.5 million compared to 24.53 million in 2002.

The figures show an encouraging increase as it will enable the country to enjoy the economies of scale in production and its dream of becoming a developed nation by 2020.

The increase in population to around 60 million as suggested earlier, would enable the country to easily implement all kinds of development and indirectly enables it to curb the influx of foreign workers who have, thus far, been creating lots of social problems.

The fewer foreign workers there are, the more the country will be able to control the outflow of cash.

GASOLINE LAMP NOW A MEMORY

Basic amenities before independence like gasoline lamps, water from wells and rivers as well as dirt roads are now a distant memory.

Senior citizens who had gone through all inconveniences due to the lack of good infrastructure and basic amenities are thankful now that they have electricity supply and potable water as well as adequate and quality infrastructure.

Looking back to the times before becoming she became a Member of Parliament, former Deputy Transport Minister Datin Paduka Hajah Rahmah Osman said the times of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak and today are certainly different.

"I still remember the time when the Malays had to attend adult classes, when newspapers were so few...there was only Utusan Melayu if the Malays were to keep abreast with current happenings. Watching television was a luxury hence it was difficult for people then to acquire knowledge, while education opportunities were not many at that time," she said.

"But now, choices of newspapers are plenty, some homes even have more than one set of TV, school going children are carrying own handphones, driving cars and riding motobikes or taking the LRT, commuters and monorail," Rahmah said.

She said today, one can easily plan and move with speed and ease from one destination to another with the various cheap means of transport available.

VAST EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the Annual Bulletin Statistics Malaysia 1968-70, the number of public and private primary and secondary schools in 1967 stood at 7,396 while the figure for 2001 is 8,915.

The Malaysia Year Book 1971, on the other hand, stated that there was only one university in 1967, Universiti Malaya, compared to 16 public universities in 2001, excluding the scores of private colleges and universities.

Thus, Rahmah said, the universities provide vast opportunities for school leavers to further their studies without having to rush into the workforce with only a little knowledge.

"School is also an ideal place to educate and discipline the younger generations as well as equipping them with good morals so that they will not easily fall into such social ills as drug addiction," she explained.

Rahmah agreed that the decline in the morals of young Malaysians today is quite alarming compared to pre-Merdeka period as there are now many negative elements which the young are exposed to.

NATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY

While the nation is enjoying economic progress, rapid development and an improvement in living standard, it cannot avoid facing various other problems.

Hence, the National Social Policy was introduced to create a balance between development and social advancement through the creation of a Malaysian community which is advance and stable in the social, economic and technology areas.

This focus is underscored by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi when he declared, "the National Social Policy is a social development policy based on good values and an improvement on human skills to enable Malaysians to be strongly united, have social stability and strengthen national endurance."

Supporting Abdullah's suggestion is Minister of National Unity and Community Development Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman who said, "the National Social Policy provides guidelines for the implementation and management of social development so that the creation of an advanced community which is strong and stable can be realised."

In short, economic progress must go in tandem with noble moral fibre as befits an advanced society. -- Bernama

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