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## Becoming better Malaysians with Dr M's prescription

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MERDEKA month began last Sunday with elaborate plans to "reminisce on Malaysia's success" under Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's 22-year leadership.

For a whole month, the public will be caught up in a frenzy celebrating the many tangible benefits Dr Mahathir has bestowed upon the country. Benefits such as our beautiful network of highways, medical and educational facilities, an enviable transport system, world-class buildings, airports and so on.

In the midst of it all, let us not forget the good doctor's prescription, repeated many times over the past two decades - to make us better human beings. He has done his ut-most to inculcate in us values that will prevail long after he steps down.

He has talked to or even chastised sections of society about its lackadaisical ways and couldn't-careless attitude. He has preached integrity, roundly condemned corruption, encouraged moral and ethical values, propagated self-discipline and even prayed for us to become more caring, law abiding citizens.

The underlying message in his speeches is for us to be able to balance personal success with social responsibility. He has made it very plain that true freedom exists firmly within the bounds of natural laws and changing needs of our lives.

The records show that the most miserable people throughout history have been kings, queens, emperors and dictators who became so wealthy or powerful that they fancied they were above the laws of nature and the laws of humankind.

Freedom is a great thing. Unchecked freedom, however, is a different proposition. Dr M has time and again reminded us that we exist in relation to one another despite our racial or religious differences.

We cannot separate real freedom from responsiveness to others. To be free means to be able to respond to the needs of the moment within the basic rules of a good life. This takes skills, capability, goodwill and common sense.

One example: say you were sipping soda at the sea front of a holiday resort and you spotted a child in difficulty in the water. You may have a strong desire to save the kid but you don't have the freedom to do it simply because you cannot swim. You may be the CEO of your company, but if you have not acquired swimming skills that child will still drown.

Motivation is great. It is the essence of life. But it is just one part of freedom. Dr M has said it in a variety of ways: If you are unskilled, greedy or self-centered, you will never be free. "Let's stop being carpenters and become architects," was one of his earlier quotes.

You will also not enjoy freedom if you do what you want in a manner that ignores your connections with others or is not in the best interests of society.

As one commentator observed:

"Your values have validity if you adhere to them and they don't infringe on the rights of others."

In the Prime Minister's own words (quotes from his speeches), let us recap some of his views on matters vital for our well being.

On Vision 2020: "We are now moving into the post-industrial age. We are, in fact, shifting from the industrial age to a borderless information age,

a globalised economy where borders can no longer protect us from the predatory economics of the world.

"We must proceed and not falter over our economic agenda. We must resolve to take giant steps forward in our social agenda. A nation that does not constantly reform itself and be willing to try new ideas and strategies will soon be left behind in today's fast-moving world."

On eradicating corruption: "We must always be on guard against corruption. Today, as ever, we should take not an ounce of comfort from surveys which show that by so-called "Asian developing countries" or "world standards" we are not badly off; or that we are said to be no more corrupt than quite a few "developed" countries. Thank God corruption in Malaysia is not, as it is in many countries, a way of life.

"But, we must make sure that we do not fall into the dark hole that many countries which are called "developed" have fallen into. We do not want to be a wasteful consumer society where unbridled materialism runs riot."

On acquiring knowledge and skills: "If we truly want to progress - because we believe development on earth is as important as peace in the after life - then we must have the ability to become masters. For this, we need to have the necessary skills and knowledge as well as the right approach.

"Now we have communication technology. This means faster movement of information, people and goods. These will change the lives of people. If we cannot handle these changes, obviously we will not benefit from them."

As we reminisce on the many material successes the nation has enjoyed over the past two decades, let us ever be mindful of the many intangible gifts our energetic doctor has prescribed for us.

Gifts such as self-discipline, tolerance, charity, caring attitude and, above all, high moral and ethical standards. Hopefully, these values will be passed on from generation to generation.

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