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## Sustained growth despite problems

MALAYSIA'S economy will still be growing at a respectable rate despite the problems that we have had to grapple with. For that, we have to be thankful.

We may not be able to achieve the higher growth rate forecast earlier, but Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the Malaysian economy this year was expected to grow faster than the 4.2 per cent rate for last year. This is no mean achievement given the difficult external situation.

There had been fears of the adverse economic effects of a prolonged Iraq war. As it turned out, the war was mercifully a short one, lasting about a month. But no sooner had the invasion ended than there was another, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which has devastated the travel, tourism, hotel and retail sectors. Even without SARS, which hit mainly Asian countries, the United States' and the global economy were already sluggish, which will affect our exports.

The much-awaited economic stimulus package to be unveiled by the Prime Minister this week will be a key factor in the economy's steady growth, apart from the resilience of the country's political, financial and economic institutions. The package is expected to provide much needed relief to the worst-hit sectors, reinvigorating activities in such sectors as property and housing and stimulating growth in new areas.

However, for the stimulus package to have the maximum effect on the economy, the private sector must do its part. Entrepreneurs must scout for opportunities at home and abroad to enhance their businesses. They must find ways to cut costs, be more efficient and competitive. In addition, they must be quick-footed to keep up with the latest technology, market trends and fight tenaciously for new markets. They must not be over-reliant on the Government.

In a more difficult economic environment, Malaysians will have to be realistic and prepared to revise their expectations. However, the Vision 2020 goal of becoming a developed nation is still within reach but we must redouble our efforts at adaptability, competitiveness and self-reliance.