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## Independence offers no easy alternatives

IN his farewell Merdeka Day address, the Prime Minister apologised for speaking longer than usual and for focusing on the problems of the Malays. None was needed. The liberty Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad took once again to express the many concerns on his mind were matters of paramount importance and national interest. He also need not apologise for dwelling on the Malays for not having caught up with the other races despite many years of affirmative action. Indeed, it needed to be highlighted, so crucial is the question of the economic parity of the Malays vis-a-vis the non-Malays to the well-being of the nation in future.

As Dr Mahathir put it four years ago, "Tracing the cause of racial animosity to the extreme disparity in the distribution of wealth between the races, an affirmative action policy, the New Economic Policy was formulated, by which special effort would be made to help the Malays and other indigenous people catch up with the Chinese in the economic field. This was to be achieved by stimulating economic growth so that from the growth portion a greater amount could be allocated to the indigenous people." If the massive economic inequality between the races had been allowed to persist, it would have undermined unity and led to political and social instability.

The facts and figures attest that while the Malays have increased their share of the economic cake since 1970, this has not been at the expense of anyone else, but because of economic growth and new opportunities. Yet despite herculean efforts, the Malays continue to underachieve.

Dr Mahathir's last Merdeka address contained a warning: that the protection of independence and continued socio-economic development required a level of commitment that brooked no easy way out. Since the restructuring objective of the NEP remains unfinished, the Malays were urged again to reflect on their shortcomings, to acquire positive values and attitudes such as determination, patience, discipline and hard work, and, above all, to practise the true teachings of Islam. As he has said before, "Allah does not help those who do not help themselves, tie the camel and then leave it to Him. We have indeed to help ourselves, to tie our camels." Neither Allah nor the world owes the Malays a living. They must rise to take up Dr Mahathir's latest challenge.