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Malaysians' exemplary call for World Peace

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AS the beating of war drums gets louder and louder, heard not only from far away places but also closer to home, the initiative taken to launch the People's Alliance for Peace Malaysia or Peace Malaysia campaign is timely and commendable.

The project is highly symbolic coming from citizens of Malaysia well-known for their tolerant culture given the multi-dimensional society we live in.

To quote the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his Chinese New Year message, "We can take pride that such a culture has become part of the civilisation of our beloved nation".

Not surprisingly, more than 1,000 organisations including, NGOs, youth and voluntary organisations have come forward to support the campaign.

It aims to collect at least one million signatures to support its petition for world peace and avert war in Iraq.

It also calls for the ban on weapons of mass destruction everywhere. The Universiti Sains Malaysia community joined the campaign in conjunction with its International Day 2003, on Feb 6 and 7.

As stated by Dr Mahathir, Malaysians are indeed "truly lucky and blessed".

Malaysians thus, while remaining proud of their societal achievements in comparison to the record of so-called homogenous nations among the more developed economies, must not rest on their laurels.

This is with the view that the real meaning of peace goes beyond the usual notion of the absence of violence and the mere demonstration of civil behaviour.

Instead like health, it is has everything to do with the state of mind and its finer balance with the larger societal predicament.

The preservation of such harmonious balance is of utmost importance for a truly lasting peace.

The sooner we realise this the better it is, because of late, subconsciously, we have been lured into a kind of psychological warfare, marked by the aggressive war of words.

Ever since Sept 11, this seems to be the trend, notably coming from hawkish nations. The American State of the Union address is the latest in the series where President Bush tried hard to make some sense on his "monomaniacal focus on Iraq" even when the US "economy is sputtering", to quote a New York Times writer, Maureen Dowd (NST, Jan 30).

According to Dowd, the "Bush team thinks the way to galvanise the public is with fear". This could be done "by coupling Saddam to 9/11 and by building him up into a Hitler who could threaten the world".

In fact, the White House Chief of Staff reportedly went as far as likening it to a "Holocaust".

Fear, or scaremongering, has often been an effective rhetorical tool to sway public opinion and support, especially when it is based on unbridled sentiment.

A clear indication of this perhaps is the apparent nervousness mirrored by the stock market globally just last week, following Bush's State of the Union speech.

The use of scare tactics however is not the exclusive privilege of just the superpowers. Late last year, hawkish Australian politicians did a copycat by threatening pre-emptive unilateral strikes on its Asian

neighbours (Poison Control, New Sunday Times, Dec 15, 2002).

Such unilateral approaches of late were given a historic thumb-down by the Australian Senate (NST, Feb 6).

More recently, a neighbouring country, tried to sound as belligerent as Uncle Sam, given it too is facing a "sputtering economy". Being the closest neighbour, Malaysia cautioned such stance that tries to make others convenient scapegoats (NST, Jan 31).

Such consequences may be unintended, but the risks of unguarded and callous talk about war are always high.

In this respect, the Prime Minister's assurance that "we are not going to out-argue and have a war of words" is indeed most exemplary of a peace-loving Malaysia.

More specifically he made it clear that there is "no quarrel" with the citizens of the said country and on the contrary they are indeed welcome to Malaysia.

As peace-loving Malaysians we should show unreserving support for the Peace Malaysia campaign.

Please contact 03-2300 0700 or fax 03-2300 071 today.

* Note: More than 100,000 representatives from the various organisations are expected to attend the Malaysian Peace Rally on Feb 23 at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil. Turn up and show your support.