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Masters of our own destiny (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Malaysians may not be able to change the world but they

are masters of their own destiny, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today, while warning that those who threaten the country's sovereignty would risk a "bloody nose".

"Malaysia is our country, we are born here, we grow up here, make a living here and here we will die. Whether this country is good or bad is because of us. We can choose.

Choose wisely because our lives are at stake," Dr Mahathir said in his New Year's address to the nation, expected to be his last before he steps

down from office in October.

"We will defend our beloved country against any foreign intrusion.

There

are already arrogant countries claiming they have the right to take `preemptive action' or `forward defence' that would affect Malaysia.

"We promise that if anyone violates our freedom, they will get what they

(Westerners) call a `bloody nose'," he said, pointing out that such injustice and arrogance was the main reason why the weak turned to terrorism

against their detractors.

Dr Mahathir said that although Malaysia could not shake the world or make it right, it could ensure the relative security, development and well-being of its own citizens.

In his strongly worded message aired over RTM tonight, Dr Mahathir pledged to defend Malaysia against all possible "attacks" and pointed out

that Malaysians had everything necessary to prove their critics wrong and

emerge a successful nation, as long as the prevailing unity, peace, hard work and self-confidence were not abandoned.

"We did not struggle for our freedom to enable others to do what they want to our country," he said, adding that Malaysians must act wisely to ensure their continued prosperity.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, predicted that the world and

domestic economies would grow slightly in 2003, provided there were no calamities such as a war in Iraq.

"But it depends on us; on the Government and the people.

"If we are wise, if we maintain our peace, if we manage our funds prudently and, most importantly, if we continue to work hard, then we can

ensure our continued growth and prosperity."

He also urged employees and employers not to engage in confrontations to

resolve their differences as such "tests of power" would only ruin the economy.

He said such actions in some Western nations had reduced their competitiveness.

"In the final analysis, both sides end up losing as a confrontation ruins everything."

Touching on the scourge of terrorism, Dr Mahathir reiterated that unless the root causes were identified and eliminated, the end to terrorism would not be in sight in the near future.

He also reminded those in Malaysia who intended to resort to terrorism that this country was unlike other nations with Governments that had failed to bring about development or overcome poverty, nor had the Malaysian Government used violence to retain power.

He said that in Malaysia, as the people could change the Government through the ballot, violence to seize power was unnecessary and would only breed more violence.

Dr Mahathir said as Malaysia was recognised as an Islamic country and the majority of its Muslim population was satisfied with the status quo, there was no need for anyone to resort to violence to topple the legitimate Government of the day.

"Ostensibly they want to set up an Islamic country. This is just a ploy to fool the people, to gain the people's support and sympathy before coming into power."

The Prime Minister also warned extremists to stop their unacceptable demands, which risked destabilising the country.

Dr Mahathir also advised society against the detrimental trait of Malaysians demanding first-class facilities for third-class prices.

"Actually, the charges for public services and facilities in Malaysia are very low.

"We pay less than RM10 for a return trip on the Penang Bridge while in Japan a one-way trip along a shorter bridge costs RM250."

Dr Mahathir said it was illogical for the people to demand more than what they could afford, as any payment must commensurate with the facilities or level of service.

He said the Government was not extravagant because it spent the people's money wisely.

The construction of landmarks such as the Petronas Twin Towers and the Putrajaya administrative centre was within the country's means.

"This is how we do things in Malaysia. That is why our financial status is healthy and our economy is in good condition.

"As long as all of us, the Government and the people, don't ask for more than we can afford, as long as we are prepared to pay reasonable taxes, fees and tolls, our country will continue to be safe and colonisation by foreign powers will not take place."

Dr Mahathir said that although some foreigners and a minute fraction of Malaysians doubted the nation's and the Government's capabilities, the world had recognised Malaysia's ability in many ways.

"We heard negative voices over the national car project, the Penang

Bridge, our North-South Expressway, our airports, capital controls and the pegging of the ringgit, the development of Langkawi as a tourist hub and the introduction of Labuan as an offshore financial centre.

"The shift from an agricultural nation to an industrial one was also viewed negatively, but the fact today is that we have proven them wrong and succeeded with our own approach and planning.

"So we Malaysians have all the reason to be proud and confident of ourselves. Together, we can."