

A success story 'Made in Malaysia'
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There are countries that want to learn from Malaysia, to emulate what it has achieved since its independence in 1957, writes DON McKINNON.

SQUALLS of lashing rain gave way to brilliant sunshine at the Padang on Saturday, Aug 31, 1957, as Tunku Abdul Rahman famously called out "Merdeka!" seven times, each to a thunderous repetition from the many thousands of people in the stadium.

A star of Southeast Asia, one of the region's most vibrant economies, the product of decades of industrial growth and political stability, Malaysia's independence is indelible, its achievements acclaimed, its momentum immense.

The Commonwealth joins the rest of the world in saluting Malaysia's 50 years of nationhood, and in standing alongside it to face the new challenges that might never have seemed possible to an excited — if drenched — crowd, that day half a century ago.

When Commonwealth heads of government meet in Kampala, Uganda, in November, their focus will be on "Transforming societies". Other countries around the world want to learn from the examples of places like Malaysia, whose 50-year transformation has been based on the democratic solidity which has allowed for its economic dynamism.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke recently of the "Malaysian way" of development, bringing together political stability, pragmatic policy-making, the building of skills and the co-ordination of the way plans are implemented.

The March 2004 general election revealed a new and substantial Malaysian middle class which had begun to recognise the organic link between the two pillars of the modern Commonwealth: Democracy and development.

The two can and should go hand in hand: Democracy is a journey that requires the commitment and the creativity which is reflected, for instance, in Malaysia's rotating constitutional monarchy. Born of considered change and continuity, it succeeds in allying traditional structures with the contemporary institutions of parliament, senate and house of representatives.

Malaysia's economic growth is in no small measure due to the foreign investors' confidence that it is a place that is safe to invest in. It is also due to the endeavour and ingenuity of Malaysian citizens, who have harnessed the power and potential of industry and technology to turn raw materials into compound products for export, and to use human skills to assemble the electronic components that drive so many of the world's computers. Petroleum and liquefied gas; chemicals and additives; rubber, wood and textile products; disk drives: All bear the reputable stamp, "Made in Malaysia".

Malaysia joined the Commonwealth in the year of Merdeka. It has since been one of its stalwarts in Southeast Asia, alongside Singapore and Brunei. Its contribution to the Commonwealth, and in turn the Commonwealth's contribution to Malaysia, is again built around those two pillars of democracy and development. Malaysia has given, received and shared in both of these communal enterprises, and both continue as works in progress.

Malaysia's commitment saw it host a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1989, sit on the first Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) set up in 1995 to address those member countries which flout the organisation's most deeply-held principles, and host the Commonwealth Games in 1998.

Malaysia's international credentials are not in doubt: From supporting the Commonwealth office in New York designed to give a voice to 11 of our smallest members at the UN, to bringing good practice to its membership of Asean (especially the new Charter) and Apec.

Malaysia was also elected as one of 13 Commonwealth countries on the new UN Human Rights Council, and has served three terms on the UN Security Council. When Malaysia takes its seat at these important international meetings, it speaks with its own and with a Commonwealth voice.

Malaysia and the Commonwealth also give and receive in promoting human and economic development in the country and the region. Malaysia is one of the largest contributors to Commonwealth funds. Since 2002, it has contributed RM10.5 million, and benefited directly to the tune of some RM2.7 million, and indirectly in its share of an RM11.2 million Commonwealth regional programme for Asia. Commonwealth projects are under way to support the Professional Services Development Corporation in evaluating the export potential of Malaysia's teaching, engineering, health, business and legal skills. The Commonwealth is also assisting Malaysia in bringing its HIV/AIDS policy into its gender and education policies.

Recent Commonwealth programmes have advised on new and improved methods of cocoa production, on implementing international environmental conventions on biodiversity and trade in flora and fauna, while training Malaysians in areas of public administration such as corporate governance.

Corporate governance training has also been a Malaysian export. The Commonwealth continues to make extensive use of Malaysia's outstanding and cost-effective training centres. Over the last five years, nearly 250 Commonwealth nationals — mostly from Asian countries — have been trained in aspects of public administration at eight Malaysian institutes, including the National Institute of Public Administration, the Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Royal Customs Academy in Malacca.

Malaysian experts bring their expertise to Commonwealth programmes in Asia and beyond, particularly in the fight against corruption and terrorism. Meanwhile, a new Commonwealth Tourism Centre opened in Kuala Lumpur last year, with the vision of professional and socially - and environmentally-conscious tourism as a vehicle for new growth, especially in the smaller Commonwealth states.

Binding societies together in both diversity and sometimes adversity, it is Malaysia's and the Commonwealth's task to continue to build bridges, literal and metaphorical.

At Kampala in November, Commonwealth heads of government will be presented with the report of a Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, with its vision of defusing tensions between communities, faiths and ethnicities in the Commonwealth and beyond, by sharing the best of the ways in which our societies function.

All Commonwealth countries, especially multiethnic and multiracial Malaysia, will be given food for thought from the experiences of others. That is the Commonwealth way. The modern Commonwealth is only eight years older than Malaysia. Each, I believe, is good for

the other. Echoing those cries of "Merdeka!", we add our congratulations and best wishes:
Syabas!

Don McKinnon is the secretary-general of the Commonwealth.

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