

Malaysia—a blessed nation, says Tun Mahathir
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HAVING lived since the early 19th century when the country was known as Malaya, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has a unique perspective on how Malaysia has been fortunate in many ways.

The man who helmed the country for 22 years in the late 19th century and early 20th century has seen much of the country's remarkable transformation and sterling achievements.

From a British colony to an independent nation and from an agrarian economy to a highly diversified one, Malaysia has made a smooth transition in social, political and economic spheres with the exception of some minor hiccups.

Malaysia has been relatively peaceful over the years. The only significant period of turbulence came with the Japanese Occupation during World War II and the May 13, 1969, incident.

This was the basis of a speech on Malaysia's legacy, conveyed to Parliamentarians by Dr Mahathir during a recent dinner function.

The parallel

All Malaysians already know about these historical events. However, Dr Mahathir believes the country's 28 million people should be reminded of them every now and again so that they have every reason to be proud of their country.

"I always make comparisons between the past and present. During the country's days under British rule, 70 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line," he pointed out.

However, today, after 55 years of independence, the majority of Malaysians live as comfortably as their counterparts in developed nations.

Dr Mahathir described Malaysia's economic transformation as something extraordinary when compared with many other nations that had gained independence during the same period, including Uganda in Africa.

"Uganda was once considered by the British to be far more developed than Malaysia, yet when I was there, the country's leader asked me how Uganda had ended up 50 years behind Malaysia," he said.

Many European nations such as Greece, Portugal and Italy were once considered economically superior. But now, they are facing a deep economic crisis and have to be bailed out.

The world's superpower, the United States, has also ended up in an economic malaise with high unemployment rates.

Malaysia continues to triumph

However, Malaysia has fared much better than these nations, even from the perspective of humanitarian and political issues—something that Dr Mahathir feels Malaysians have yet to fully appreciate.

The three major races, Malays, Chinese and Indians, and the 29 ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak, despite their different religious affiliations and political ideologies, have been living in harmony.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that this is in stark contrast with the situation in many other homogenous societies such as Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan, where conflicts among the different ideologies and sects (the Sunni and Syiah) are the order of the day.

"The Arab world too has its own share of problems. There were uprisings that brought down the Libyan and Egyptian governments, and the same is happening in Syria and Bahrain.

"Closer to home, our ASEAN neighbours, such as Thailand and the Philippines, have witnessed street demonstrations," he said.

Geographical advantage

Dr Mahathir noted that Malaysians should count their blessings since the country is strategically located and the land is free from natural calamities such as earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions.

"We have to be thankful for the fact that we are protected from the strong winds of the Philippines in the east, and in the west, we are protected from tsunamis by Sumatra," he said.

Without such natural calamities, he pointed out, Malaysia was able to build the world's third-highest skyscraper, the Petronas Twin Towers, at a cost of RM3 billion, which is one-third the amount that earthquake-prone countries would have to pay.

Like other Malaysians, Dr Mahathir is proud of the country's achievements and is optimistic that with prevailing societal harmony and economic growth, Malaysia will continue its positive transformation even beyond 2020.-*Bernama*

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