

Emulating Malaysia

Mahathir Mohamad, popularly known as ‘Father of Modern Malaysia’ for transforming the Southeastern Asian nation from a sleepy backwater to a modern industrialised economy, was in Pakistan last week.

During his three day visit, undertaken on the invitation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, Mahathir was the guest of honor at the Pakistan Day parade on March 23. Besides, he also held wide ranging talks with the Khan and his team about how to strengthen commercial ties between the two countries.

The Malaysian Prime Minister was accompanied by a business delegation which explored possibility of joint ventures. The Board of Investment had arranged a Malaysia-Pakistan Business Forum where entrepreneurs from the two countries exchanged ideas for launching business partnerships in diverse fields particularly in telecommunication, information technology, and car manufacturing. Six memorandums of understandings were signed during the visit in this regard.

According to Finance Minister Asad Umar, the Malaysian side showed interest in buying JF-17 Thunder jets and a presentation was given to the Malaysian leader and his delegation before their departure.

Our Prime Minister Imran Khan has been a great admirer of the nonagenarian Malaysian leader long before he came into power and he has been touting Malaysia as a role model for Pakistan to follow for becoming an economic powerhouse. Speaking at the business forum, Khan said besides Malaysia, Islamic world could also follow the suit of present day Turkey, led by Tayyip Erdogan, to achieve economic progress.

Khan highlighted corruption as one of the main reasons for backwardness of the Muslim countries in the field of economic development, arguing that Muslims countries are not poor but rampant corruption has made them.

Mahathir, who came into power last year in a stunning election victory after defeating a ruling coalition he himself once led, had exploited anti-corruption anger among his countrymen to his favour to win polls. He endorsed Prime Minister Imran Khan’s firm stand against corruption but he also made few important points, he deemed as necessary for a nation to progress.

Just as Koreans became a developed nation after winning independence from Japan, he said his nation wanted to show British colonialists that it could do wonders without them and proved it.

Mahathir said Malaysia focused more attention on industrialisation than on agriculture development in order to generate more employment opportunities for its people. For this purpose, he said Malaysia invited foreign investors in big numbers.

Interestingly, Mahathir said his country invited investors from all over the world, including Britain, which once colonised Malaysia .

“As a result of investment, money flowed in, technology was acquired, knowledge was built about business and markets and very soon Malaysians became able to run their own business.”

But in order to lure foreign investment, they gave tax holiday to the overseas investors for ten years and then extended these incentives for another ten years.

The 92-year-old leader in his speech at the business forum extensively referred to his nation's relentless efforts to achieve internal stability before gaining economic progress.

"The most important thing for a nation for developing...is peace and stability. We need peace, we need stability. Without that there will be no one to invest, nobody will come to invest."

He said Malaysia is a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural nation made up of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. However, he said, there has been no incidents of ethnic violence in his country since the 1960s.

Moreover, he said his nation very successfully put down armed insurgencies not only through military might but by winning the hearts and minds of people to dissuade them from joining any militant movement.

Mahathir also indicated that Malaysia's friendly relations with its neighbours as well as with the regional countries extensively contributed to its economic progress.

"Diplomatically, we tried to be friendly with all countries...Malaysia officially has no enemy," he said adding that Israel is the only exception with which Malaysia does not have diplomatic relations," he said.

The points raised by the Malaysian leader in his discourse provide a good opportunity for Pakistan and its leaders for introspection and to ponder that how far can we emulate the Malaysian model for economic progress.

Though because of its unique geostrategic location Pakistan can become a hub for regional economic connectivity, but lack of political stability inside the country and its thorny ties with neighbours, particularly India, are major factors hampering its economic development. Though after 17 years of relentless war against terrorists, there has been no terrorist sanctuaries in the country yet the problem of extremism still exists.

Though the state has recently vowed that it would no more allow any armed group to operate in the country, the result of its commitment has yet to be seen as they have become a constant source of hostility for the country with its neighbors.

Moreover, congenial political atmosphere is a must for the country to develop. Though pluralistic approach for resolving problems of a country is the essence of a democratic system but efforts should be made that political differences should not morph into political hostilities.

Though, a political system has been working uninterrupted in the country for the past 11 years, there has hardly been any good working relations between the government and the opposition since elections were held in the country in June last year. While, it is the joint responsibility of all political parties to ensure political stability in the country, the onus of bringing down political temperature primarily lies with the government.

At present, the government and opposition need to evolve a consensus strategy about how to deal with extremist groups as it would not only help bring stability in the country but would also contribute towards improving Pakistan's image abroad, which is the first step towards luring foreign investors to the country.

At a time when we are trying to emulate Malaysian model for economic development, we need to ponder patiently on the important advices given by the Malaysian leader who put his country to the path to progress by working on these lines.

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