

Headline **Malaysia can show the way**
Date **24 Sep 2010**
MediaTitle **New Straits Times**
Section **Local News**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **136,530 / 330,000**

Language **English**
Page No **19**
Article Size **367 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **5,082**
PRValue **15,245**



Malaysia can show the way

AT the 65th United Nations General Assembly session in New York, themed "Reaffirming the Central Role of the United Nations in Global Governance", world leaders will be participating in a summit aimed at helping to realise the collective aspirations of its 192 member nations "to build a world without poverty".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is leading the Malaysian delegation, is scheduled to deliver his keynote address on Sept 27.

"Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger", the first of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will be central to the summit which will assess progress on the MDGs and discuss how to accelerate the process towards meeting the 2015 deadline.

Principal among the actions to progressively eliminate poverty is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people affected by extreme poverty and hunger. An essential means to that end is to actively promote the achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The other complementary thrusts of the MDGs are: achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

As a former UN International Labour Organisation regional deputy director for Asia and the Pacific, I know that though there have been bold efforts globally to reduce poverty, more than one billion people still live in extreme poverty.

Despite school enrolments being up, millions still lack access to adequate schooling, ending up as child workers or worse as slave labour. As they mature into adulthood, they are easy prey to fall into anti-social behaviour.

While substantial progress has been made to increase educational access for girls, discrimination against women and girls continues unabated at various levels of society, depriving them of the essential benefits and rights to a de-

cent life and livelihood.

Child mortality rates, maternal health and the fight against deadly epidemics and diseases have all shown signs of improvement and success, but only in pockets and in small increments.

Worldwide, these concerns persist and need a much greater and better coordinated effort if real and lasting improvements are to be realised.

Environmental depletion and pollution around the world are increasing at an alarming rate and need to be addressed quickly.

The international partnership to focus on the MDGs and, in particular, to help those who lack the resources and means to fulfil these goals has proved invaluable in the

progress achieved to date. However, due to the global financial and economic crises, much of the gains made have been reversed.

Fulfilling the MDGs by 2015 now appears to be unachievable unless there is a serious and concerted rethinking and a practical action plan that will considerably accelerate and have the necessary support for the attainment of these vital goals.

Worse still, we have been rudely reminded that the deleterious effects of climate change and the destructive forces of nature, evinced by the recent devastating floods in Pakistan and the earlier disasters in Haiti and Chile, can totally erode all the progress made in achieving developmental goals.

Malaysia, on its part, has come a long way towards achieving the MDGs and is perhaps one of the countries that will successfully fulfil meeting all the goals by 2015 or even earlier.

However, there are still a number of challenges that Malaysia faces if its development is to be both people-centred and sustain-

able in the long term and its goal of a high-income developed nation is to be realised by 2020.

Through the New Economic Model and the 10th Malaysia Plan, the cornerstones of the nation's development policy, Malaysia is well poised to continue on a successful growth-oriented development path. All Malaysians must have full access and be enabled to

participate in, contribute to and be the beneficiaries of the gains of development.

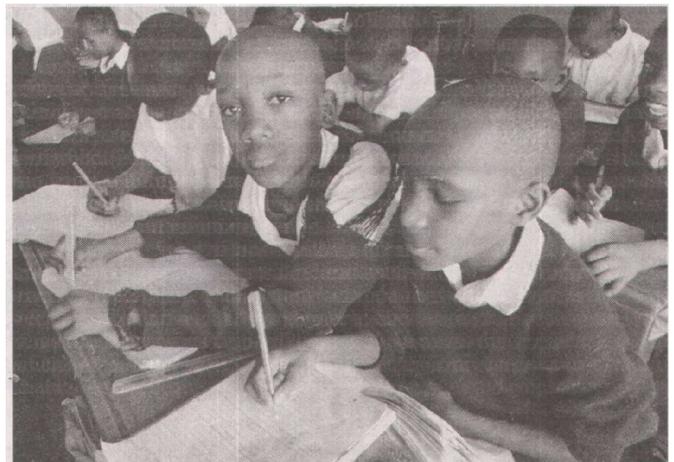
In addition to sound policies, good governance and inventive strategies are also necessary. The recently announced Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) is a welcome step in the right direction and should complement and support crucial areas such as human capital development in a knowledge economy.

In line with overall policies, the ETP should act as the engine to formulate relevant projects and approaches with the full participation of the people, including the private sector and civil society, so as to move the country forward not only to meet people's basic needs and add value to their quality of life but also to help achieve a united, peaceful, progressive and prosperous 1Malaysia.

The UN summit is an excellent opportunity for Malaysia to share with the international community its experiences in facing challenges and creating and utilising opportunities for the benefit of its people.

We live in a globalised world which is closely integrated and in which all nations are interdependent. Let us measure up to our commitments, sharing in our nation's efforts for the benefit of all our people and as a nation let us be an effective global partner for peace, security and development.

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Providing access to education is the key to eradicating poverty in most poor and developing countries.