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A time to take stock, not carp or criticise

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IT amazed me to see how quickly the foreign media and their supporters, in general, turned against our Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Overnight the man held to be responsible for turning Malaysia into an "economic powerhouse" (I borrow their expression) with the world's second highest growth rate became the anti-Semitic disaster who is a danger to his country.

Common sense will tell us this cannot be true. The man who gave us all jobs - beneficiaries of this legacy, by the way, extend beyond Malaysian shores, well into the developed economies - cannot also be the destroyer of our hopes!

Mahathir bashing was, once upon a time, all the rage in the West because he had the audacity to see himself as their equal and the nation he led as able. He voiced his unhappiness about unfavourable terms of trade openly. He spoke loudly against the bully boys in the United Nations. He knew that the Japanese success was not an aberration but rather a beacon of hope against the vested interest of the West.

But it was difficult to sustain the attack when all he touched turned to gold. And, when Malaysia became rich economic pickings there was nothing to do but give the man his due.

Nevertheless, a success story does not make sensational copy. No blood, no gore. The pummelling of the Prime Minister and the country was a blood-letting waiting to happen.

The US Congressmen asking for his resignation have conveniently forgotten that if the Middle East peace process had not been scuttled by those lacking the vision of Rabin and Peres, Malaysia, led by Dr Mahathir, would have been among the first non-Arab Muslim nation to recognise Israel.

Is this the act of an anti-Semite? He did all he could to urge the success of the peace process.

I am proud that Malaysians from all walks of life have rallied around the Prime Minister and were not beguiled by the dishonest ranting and ravings of foreigners who purport to have the people's interest at heart, yet are bent on doing everything to undermine confidence in our economy. Are they trying to do a Saddam on us?

As a former Cabinet Minister, I have first-hand knowledge of how the Prime Minister ticks. He is a well-read, well-travelled, man of vision. Many have fallen by the wayside for not being able to keep up. Much of what he sees is not your standard text-book fare, more so his "message from the sponsor" remark before convening the weekly Cabinet deliberations.

If it were, we would not be where we are today having recovered from a mild recession - that could have been worse if it had not been properly managed - and, within less than a decade, develop into a respected international player.

If we take the line that the Government's caution of hard times to come is an admission of defeat then we do not deserve this country and its leaders.

But if we understand the message for what it is, a time to take stock, then we will come out of this crisis stronger: a nation united and economically robust.

