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Dr M a man ahead of his time, thus most misunderstood

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I AM not equating Islam with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad or vice versa but if you were to feel as such you are entitled to. With the latest trend affecting our nation, I feel it is within my right and duty to say a few words as "an interested party", being a Malaysian citizen.

Since time immemorial, man has attached himself to something he feels is greater than himself. Primitive man worshipped trees, lightning, fire and other elements of nature because he knew that those things shaped or influenced his life.

He could not understand what they were or how they operated but he was convinced they were greater than he and therefore required some respect and devotion. As he became more civilised, he was able to understand the world around better and started to create images to display the manifestations of this unseen supreme being.

As knowledge increased, religions evolved, each with their norms and rituals. Sacred texts were written containing the dos and don'ts of these religions and hierarchies were created to administer these beliefs.

The "revealed religions" namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam had different types of texts for worship and conduct for everyday living. All religions except Islam have the birthdays of their main proponents as the most important day.

Some had images to represent their foci of worship, while some opted for symbols. Islam chose neither. To Muslims there should be no representation of the focus of worship nor the conveyor of the religion.

This is the main point of contention between the followers of Islam and others. Islam's ways seem to be fit only for the past where its don'ts are more than its dos and this leads to the presumption that it inhibits growth and progress.

Besides, its compromising stand on certain religious issues are taken for granted by some followers who feel free to express opinions according to their whims and fancies. They do quote reliable sources but interpret them to suit their needs.

Dr Mahathir could probably be the most remarkable man on this planet. He has been described by countless adjectives, mostly in the superlatives. And these superlatives range from the positive to the ultra-negative.

Like his faith, he is a man ahead of his time and thus, a victim of scorn and ridicule. As a politician, he has more than his share of enemies but as a man, much can be said about him.

How do you describe a person who chose a man from a rival camp as his deputy? All of us remember the accusations hurled at him during the Umno elections in 1987. The country was literally split down the middle and 22 delegates made all the difference, and because of them, we have had 12 years of prosperity.

How many of us would forget that episode and forgive as if nothing had happened and promote our sworn enemies?

This characteristic of Dr Mahathir is what irks most of his political opponents. This man thrives on criticisms and makes his adversaries unable to fathom the kind of stuff he is made of.

Whatever changes he has brought are there for all to see. He has made many eat their words and swallow their pride because he believes in himself.

But like all great leaders, he will only be appreciated when he is no more. This is because many choose to be perpetually in their adolescence, where being pro-establishment is not supposed to be the norm.

A so-called religiously-inclined political party has named him the biggest enemy to the State and religion. It is willing to forgo its political philosophy to support a novice planning to contest against him in the coming general election not because it believes in that person but out of spite. It is doing this despite the religion being one which advocates compassion and tolerance.

That political novice is not out to bring any benefit to the people but is waging a personal vendetta. Since they do not have much faith in the courts, they want the people to decide. This is because the Malays have a weakness - and that is religion.

Scheming politicians know this. By quoting religion, they know they can sell anything. But, if we were to be a bit rational and think about the recent events we would be able to see the correct picture and the cause of the present problem.

Changes were made only when there was no way out and the country had to be saved. Many of us would recall that within days of the fall of the Indonesian Government, we had an unwelcome visitor in the guise of the main proponent of the reformation movement of that country, to lecture us on good governance. Now we know that the person had gone begging to a foreign country to make him President.

Was the person who thanked the Prime Minister for saving our country from evil wrong?

For all his successes, Dr Mahathir could not be forgiven for a colossal mistake he made. His greatest venture was the greatest failure.

For he picked somebody from outside the system and groomed him for the most coveted post in the nation, making countless enemies in the process and finding out much later that he was wrong from the very beginning.

For that he has our sympathies. He has only proven that he is also human.

But how many people would forgive him that easily? Everyone is after his throat and calling for his blood.

Whatever differences we have on this man, all of us agree he is remarkable (the word remarkable goes either way).

I wish to conclude with a remark by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan during the Sabah election. When there was talk about Parti Bersatu Sabah wanting to join the Barisan Nasional after the election, and that the BN had said the door was closed, Pairin was very sure there was still some avenue because "Dr Mahathir is not that kind of man".

If this could come from a political opponent, how else would you describe Dr Mahathir?