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We need to be consistent

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I HAVE been to many international conferences in Kuala Lumpur including those attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. I find his views and perspective to be sharp and original, befitting a statesman.

I normally cringe when speakers and politicians quote others, including some obscure thinkers, but cannot present their own views.

Some engage writers who, in their desperation to be seen as intellectuals, use obscure words and terribly long sentences.

On the contrary, the Prime Minister has never failed to impress me. But some of those who attend these conferences are guilty of showering excessive praise on the Prime Minister, which I am sure has made him uncomfortable.

When they ask him questions, they acquire a sycophantic tone, indulge in long, florid speeches filled with platitudes. Malaysians have become very discerning and are able to tell when a person loses his objectivity in order to please.

As a nation, we have sprinted and sped ahead since Independence. Now, we are at a stage where we are refining our ways, and improving our competence. This will see enhancement of standards and qualities as the demands and expectations of a discerning public grow.

Those who lavish praise needlessly may want to add more finesse for a change.

At the same time, critics will no longer get away with sweeping, half-baked comments. One critic that I see as formidable is Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam. He writes without fear or favour. That he too has been proved wrong and gone off tangent many times showed that how badly we all need to improve consistency.

A case in point - a few days before the tabling of the 2001 Budget Navaratnam appeared in a Money Matters edition that discussed the Budget. He articulated the need to convince Malaysians that the system rewards the best.

Then, I listened to the Budget speech that provided various incentives to returning Malaysian professionals, and spelt out the rewards for hardworking Malaysians in the K-economy. The Budget warned about the dangers awaiting the laggards, and the dangers of mediocrity.

On Nov 4, writing in his NST column, Navaratnam said the Budget "falls short of expectations". I am glad that he will be the first to admit that while he demands the highest standards for others, there are flaws in his armoury too.