

02/07/2001

For the love of her children

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I LISTENED to his speech on television and I read it in the newspapers. I was able to identify with the humane elements in it.

As a mother who loves her children, I felt the concern, the anxiety and the desperation in the speech. I understand that feeling. It is not about power, position or prestige - it is about love and responsibility.

For the nation that he built!

I am talking about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech at last week's Umno General Assembly. Dr Mahathir spoke like a father who cares for his children.

When you talk from the depths of your heart, you do not hesitate to take a stand.

The deepest and most lasting leadership comes from the inside. No cosmetic touch up. No saying what people want to hear. It is authentic. It is real.

And Dr Mahathir defined reality!

It is tough being a leader. People just do not become leaders overnight. It is years of hard work, sacrifices, discipline, determination and perseverance.

And to be a leader while sustaining this energy for more than two decades is legendary.

My husband and I head a small family of three children. We try to mould them, shape their future and set a vision for them.

There are times when the children protest because of what "everyone else has" or when they want more freedom because "all the other parents allow it".

It hurts sometimes when the children question our motives in refusing to yield to their pressures. As parents, we take a stand based on what we believe is right, because we love our children.

How difficult it must be to be the head of a country of about 20 million of different ethnicity, culture, religion and backgrounds.

How tough it must be for a leader to keep the country in stability when he also has to set the economy back on track.

The only safe ship in a storm is one with a strong captain. He has to make quick decisions. If the leader is weak, it will reflect poorly on the country.

The strength of a leader is measured by his convictions, ambitions and vision. Dr Mahathir has shown a remarkable ability of being forward-looking.

He has built a 21st Century Malaysia that matches up to the standards of developed countries, especially Kuala Lumpur. I agree that Kuala Lumpur is not Malaysia but such development is spreading and spilling throughout Malaysia.

Once Dr Mahathir was clear about his vision for the future, he set strategies for getting there, to make that change. In keeping up with times, he has warned, "We missed the industrial revolution entirely.

Now we are faced with the technological revolution. If we miss it, I don't think we will ever recover this time.

Even under the worst anticipated downturns, we have done well. Imports have picked up, along with consumer demand and with export figures remaining strong, the economy is still growing.

The PM is also a champion of Third World issues on human rights and

monetary reforms. He has been forthright with his views of developing nations and has campaigned for a more equitable, humane and just world.

He has also transformed the country to one of the most dynamic economies in Asia.

Going against conventional wisdom and apprehensions in the financial crisis at the turn of the century, he introduced currency controls, defying the IMF route and western monetary policies.

While other leaders offered little hope, this man made a difference.

Once again, he showed that he is a statesman who stood upright in spite of all the pressures.

I have followed the Prime Minister's hectic schedule several times and I get exhausted just watching him.

The worse thing is, at the end of the day, is the scrutiny and criticism levelled at him by those who have not done anything towards the development of the country, but have enjoyed the benefits of his development policies.

I write this as a mother who tries hard to ensure that her children's dreams are fulfilled.

I may make a few mistakes in the process but in the larger sense, whatever I do, is in the best of intentions. Because, no mother would want to see the downfall of her children. So shall we thank the Prime Minister?